Get your finances in order ahead of the new year

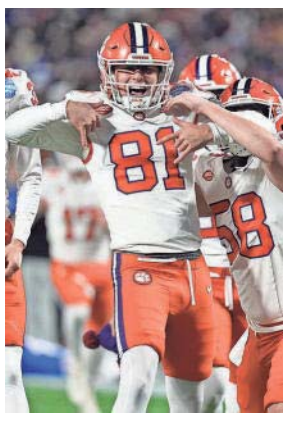
Planners suggest reinforcing retirement savings, adjusting insurance and more. **In Money**

Best TV shows of 2024: Do our picks match yours?

Romantic "Nobody Wants This," transcendent "Disclaimer," epic "Shogun make the list. **In Life**

USA TODAY

THE NATION'S NEWS | $3 | MONDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2024



JIM DEDMON/IMAGN IMAGES

SMU edges Alabama for at-large spot in CFP field

Loss to Clemson in ACC title game gives SMU, left, enough juice to get bid. Check out other winners and losers in the CFP rankings. **In Sports**

E2

Assad flees Syria as regime collapses

Syrian President Bashar Assad was granted asylum in Russia.

Rebels seize capital; US strikes ISIS targets

John Bacon, Kim Hjelmgaard and Swapna Venugopal Ramaswamy
USA TODAY

Syrian rebels seized Damascus on Sunday and long-time President Bashar Assad fled the battle-scarred country amid the stunning collapse of his regime after 13 years of war.

Assad and his family have arrived in Russia, granted asylum "on humanitarian grounds," Russian news agencies reported on Sunday, citing a Kremlin source. Rebel forces led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, an Islamist movement that was once an al-Qaida affiliate, declared in a statement on state-owned TV that Syria was "free from the tyrant" Assad.

The rebel coalition said it was working to complete the transfer of power to a transitional governing body with executive powers to rule the ancient nation of more than 23 million people.

"The great Syrian revolution has moved from the stage of struggle to overthrow the Assad regime to the struggle to build a Syria together that befits the sacrifices of its people," it added in a statement.

Assad's downfall marks the latest development in one of the deadliest civil wars of the 21st century. The war began amid the 2011 "Arab Spring" pro-democracy protests that quickly led to the fall of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi.

See SYRIA, Page 2A

Trump calls on Russia, Ukraine to end 'madness'

Russian and Ukrainian leaders lay out what it would take for their countries to come to reach a ceasefire. **3A**

Democrat Kamala Harris shakes hands with Republican Donald Trump on Sept. 10 in Philadelphia at their only presidential debate. SAUL LOEB/AFP

FEC filings add fodder for critics of Harris

How candidates spent in campaigns' final dash

Sarah D. Wire
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – Kamala Harris' presidential campaign spent a quarter-billion dollars during the final weeks of the 2024 White House race on advertising, travel, canvassing and rallies with big-name celebrities like Ricky Martin, Lady Gaga and Oprah Winfrey, according to new federal records.

The Democratic nominee's financial report filed Thursday evening with the Federal Election Commission shows Harris raised and spent roughly twice as much as Donald Trump in the final weeks of a race that had appeared tight in the polls across all the critical battleground states but that ultimately broke hard for the Republican.

Overall, the Harris campaign raised $160 million and spent $277 million from Oct. 25 through Nov. 25, the period covered by the new financial reports, while the Trump campaign brought in $87 million and spent $113 million.

The largest shares of both campaigns' spending went to media buys on television, online and on ad production in an effort to reach the broadest swath of potential voters in the last days of the race. But the new federal records submitted from the Democratic nominee's campaign include a variety of other expenses that are sure to provide fodder for post-election autopsies into how Harris' presidential campaign spent more than $1 billion but nonetheless lost to Trump.

Among the most notable items involving a bold-faced name is the confirmation that Harris' campaign paid

See FEC FILINGS, Page 2A

0 89505 01005 9 50

PLEASE RECYCLE

©COPYRIGHT 2024 USA TODAY, A division of Gannett Co., Inc.

HOME DELIVERY
1-800-872-0001, USATODAYSERVICE.COM

End of an Era

As Taylor Swift wraps record-shattering tour, history will remember more than just a billionaire musician

Taylor Swift performs Friday in Vancouver, British Columbia, in the first of her final three concerts of the Eras Tour. Swift ended the record-breaking world tour Sunday. PHOTOS BY JENNIFER GAUTHIER/REUTERS

Emily Feng and Tiffany Law wear Taylor Swift-inspired friendship bracelets Friday in Vancouver where the Eras Tour ended over the weekend. The tour is the highest-grossing of all time.

Melissa Ruggieri
USA TODAY

VANCOUVER, British Columbia – When Taylor Swift sings definitively and defiantly, "Try and come for my job" at the end of "I Can Do It With a Broken Heart," it's more than a closing shot. Invincibility is her mantra.

Who in entertainment could match Swift's achievements on the "most fun, joyful, exciting, intense, powerful tour" she's ever done, as she referred to her billion-dollar-earning exhaust-a-thon Eras stadium tour during its final trio of shows in Vancouver?

Not even Michael Jackson or Madonna in their prime circled five continents throughout 21 months, playing 149 shows stocked with 45 songs,

See TAYLOR SWIFT, Page 6A

Michelle Muñoz was tapped to help design the 2024 "Holiday Joy" stamp series. PROVIDED BY MICHELLE MUÑOZ

2024 holiday postage stamps highlight culture, art, diversity

Marc Ramirez
USA TODAY

As a youngster, Los Angeles-area artist Michelle Muñoz loved communicating with her cousins via cards and letters sent through the mail before the family members adapted to social media.

The approaching holidays offer a way to revive that tradition. Snail mail, Muñoz said, "is a nice thing. It reminds me of growing up. It's like, when is the letter going to arrive? When you write a letter, it takes time and it's more personal."

The holiday cards she and countless others across the country will mail this year will bear the U.S. Postal Service's 2024 "Holiday Joy" series, a set of four stamps featuring flowers and ornaments. For Muñoz, this year's series is more special than most, not only because they echo her Mexican American

See STAMPS, Page 3A

FEC filings

Continued from Page 1A

$1 million to Oprah Winfrey's production company, Harpo Productions Inc. Other highlights include advertising for a 90-second spot on the Las Vegas Sphere ahead of a rally Harris had in the city right before Election Day, which came with a $575,000 price tag. A final November rally on the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art featuring the likes of Fat Joe, Lady Gaga, Ricky Martin and Oprah Winfrey cost the Harris campaign $50,000 to rent the space.

Some Democrats have criticized the millions of dollars Harris' team spent on the large-scale rallies featuring major celebrities, arguing that the money could have been used elsewhere in the party's bid to hang onto the White House.

"The damage that the 2024 campaign has done – the damage that this decade has done to a Democratic brand – is almost unfathomable," political strategist James Carville said last month during his "Politics War Room" podcast. He called for an audit of Harris' 2024 campaign spending as Democrats look beyond their loss to Trump, and as the party considers whether their defeat this November will equal trouble raising money for other liberal causes in the future.

In a post-election interview last month on "Pod Save America," a liberal podcast hosted by former Obama staffers, Harris campaign chairwoman Jen O'Malley Dillon said the splashier events coupled with local promotions like murals painted in Philadelphia were an effort to build the feeling among voters that the campaign was something they could connect with beyond politics.

"We believed as we were closing the race that it was really important for people to feel like they were part of something bigger and that we were trying to identify opportunities to culturally reach people, not just politically reach people," she said.

Patti Solis Doyle, a longtime Democratic operative not affiliated with the Harris campaign, told USA TODAY that second guessing of the Harris campaign should be expected.

"I think that in a race where Democrats lost ground in every single county in the country, I think you have to look at everything; at your message, at your messengers, at the tactics, at the money. I think that we need to really do some serious introspection and look at everything," said Solis, who managed Hillary Clinton's 2008 presidential campaign during that cycle's primaries before shifting over to Barack Obama's team as it went on to win the White House.

'We had to choose'

In the end, Trump won 312 votes in the electoral college to Harris' 226 votes. The former and future president won the popular vote by a smaller margin. While vote totals have not yet been certified in every state, Trump's current lead over Harris nationally is about 2.28 million votes.

"People are like, 'how do you spend a billion dollars in a hundred days?' It was necessary. How do you introduce somebody to the public as vice president? This was just a different set of facts," Democratic political commentator Bakari Sellers told USA TODAY. "She lost the closest race since Bush v. Gore (by) less than a point and a half. It's not as if she got Mondaled."

He's referring to Walter Mondale's 1984 loss to President Ronald Reagan, where the Democrat won only Washington, D.C., and his home state of Minnesota en route to the largest electoral college loss in party history.

In 2024, Harris didn't lack financial support.

Donors large and small who stayed on the sidelines when President Joe Biden was the party's presumptive nominee suddenly opened their checkbooks after the incumbent bowed out over concerns about his age and political prospects, with Harris entering the race 107 days before Election Day. They flooded her campaign with millions of dollars to spend, largely without her having to do the grinding work that most presidential candidates must do of crisscrossing the country to attend fundraisers, most of which occur outside of swing states she needed to campaign in, Solis said.

"It's mind boggling. It really is," Solis said. "They had the luxury of playing everywhere that they needed to play, which is a dream scenario."

Those donations allowed Harris to keep all seven of the expected swing states in play, opening additional campaign offices and paying hundreds of millions of dollars for canvassers and staff in areas where Biden's campaign had not been as active. Trump by contrast relied heavily on political action committees for canvassing and ground operations, polling and advertising. That includes Elon Musk's America PAC, one of the major political action committees that supported Trump's campaign and that received $238.5 million in contributions from Musk, according to records filed Thursday with the FEC.

Harris' principal deputy campaign manager, Quentin Fulks, told the hosts of "Pod Save America," that the 2024 Democratic campaign chose to focus its advertising dollars on attacking Trump and defining Harris. They opted to do that rather than counter Trump's claims on controversial topics like transgender rights.

"It is easy to say with the kind of resources that we raised, we should have been able to do everything, but that's not the case," he said. "You have to make decisions in the time frame that we were in in this race. We had to choose."

A spokesperson for Trump's campaign did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the latest FEC spending report. The Harris campaign declined to comment.

Walmart vs. Target

The final reports from Harris and Trump show many of the same expenses: reimbursements to staff for parking or food deliveries, final payroll checks, postage and rally location rentals.

Trump's campaign staff stopped at Walmart and Home Depot for event supplies. Harris' team made many of their purchases at Target or party supply stores. Her report shows $92.98 for a Hulu subscription and multiple subscriptions for YouTube TV. Trump's spending report includes a car wash.

On the food front, the Harris report reveals her staff spent more than $6,800 at Churros Locos in Glendale, Arizona, in the final weeks of the campaign. Harris' staff and Rep. Greg Stanton, D-Ariz., handed out churros from the restaurant on Election Day.

Trump's campaign ended the filing period with about $10,000 in debt. Harris reported having no debt.

Harris' spending in the final weeks of the 2024 campaign also included more than $5 million in contributions to groups targeting voting blocs that the Democrats saw as vital to their victory strategy, and on donations to swing state Democratic committees.

Mi Familia Vota, a national organization aimed at building political power within Latino and immigrant communities, received $465,000. Black Voters Matter Fund, a nonprofit voting rights group aimed at Black voters, received $150,000. Unite Here Action Fund, a hospitality workers union, received $105,000. The Harris campaign had previously donated about $5.7 million to similar groups, including $2 million to the National Urban League, on Sept. 30.

It isn't unusual for a presidential campaign with a lot of money to give money to help state parties, which often times are promoting the White House candidate as well as local candidates.

The largest state donations were $1.1 million to the Arizona Democratic Party and $1.4 million to the Michigan Democratic State Central Committee.

Syria

Continued from Page 1A

Assad, aided by his own brutal tactics and Russian support, held on until now.

"I can't believe I'm living this moment," Damascus resident Amer Batha told AFP. "We've been waiting a long time for this day. We are starting a new history for Syria."

US hits 75 ISIS targets in Syria

President Joe Biden said Sunday the fall of Damascus has heralded a period of "risk and uncertainty," and that the United States will work with its partners and the stakeholders to "seize an opportunity" and manage the risk. He said the Islamic State – ISIS – might try to take advantage of the political chaos to create a safe haven for terrorists.

"We will not let that happen," Biden said. He said U.S. forces on Sunday conducted a dozen precision strikes within Syria, targeting ISIS camps and ISIS operatives. The strike on a "significant gathering" of ISIS fighters hit 75 targets and dropped 140 munitions on the site, a senior administration official said during a National Security Council call Sunday with reporters.

The official did not offer precise details of the targets saying an assessment of the strike had not been completed yet.

ISIS has been trying to reconstitute in a broad area known as the Badiya Desert in Syria, according the official. "We have worked to make sure they cannot do that. And so, when they try to gather, when they try to train, and we see it, which we do, we take them out," he said.

Meanwhile, President-elect Donald Trump said the U.S. should not get involved. "THIS IS NOT OUR FIGHT," he wrote in a post on X. "LET IT PLAY OUT. DO NOT GET INVOLVED." Trump later followed that post up by saying Assad had fled Syria because Russia was no longer willing to protect him. Russia, he said "lost all interest because of (its war in) Ukraine."

Calls for return of Austin Tice

In the wake of Assad fleeing Syria, the U.S. government is doing everything possible to return Austin Tice, a former U.S. Marine who was kidnapped in Syria in 2012, to his family, a senior administration official said during the National Security Council call Sunday.

A man holds the Syrian opposition flag celebrates in Aleppo, Syria, on Sunday as rebels announce they have seized Damascus. KARAM AL-MASRI/REUTERS

The official also pointed out the $1 million reward that was put out by the FBI in 2022, recognizing the 10th anniversary of his kidnapping.

Biden said his administration remains committed to returning Tice to his family.

"We think we can get him back, but we have no direct evidence of that," Biden said.

Tice, now 43, was in Syria ahead of his final year at Georgetown Law School and was kidnapped while reporting in Darayya, a Damascus suburb.

Tice's parents, Marc and Debra Tice, said in a statement Sunday: "We are eagerly anticipating seeing Austin walk free. We are asking anyone who can do so to please assist Austin so he can safely return home to his family."

Fate of chemical weapons unclear

Assad's regime repeatedly used chemical weapons against the rebels and his own people during the civil war, according to human rights monitors and U.S. officials. Syria says it has destroyed its stocks, but if the munitions remain, it is unclear who will gain control over them.

At a U.N. Security Council briefing Thursday on Syria's claim, U.N. disarmament chief Izumi Nakamitsu said Syria's assertion could not be fully verified. Nakamitsu cited 19 "unresolved issues" in the country's declaration.

Nidal Shikhani, director general of the Chemical Violations Documentation Center of Syria, reported that his organization has recorded 262 chemical weapons uses by Syrian forces that killed 3,423 and injured around 14,000 civilians.

"Chemical weapons have turned the lives of Syrians into hell," Shikhani said.

United States to maintain presence in eastern Syria

U.S. National Security Council spokesperson Sean Savett said Biden was "closely monitoring the extraordinary events in Syria and staying in constant touch with regional partners."

Daniel Shapiro, deputy assistant secretary of Defense for the Middle East, said Sunday that the United States will take measures necessary to prevent a resurgence of ISIS, which had gained a foothold in Syria before essentially being driven out by U.S. and coalition forces in 2019.

Shapiro said the U.S. plans to maintain its presence in eastern Syria, and he called on all parties to protect civilians, particularly minorities, and to respect international norms.

"We remain focused on ensuring that ISIS cannot regroup and pose a threat again, either regionally or globally," Shapiro said.

PM offers olive branch to rebels

Unverified footage published on social media appeared to show residents of Damascus and other cities pouring onto the streets, dancing and chanting, "Assad is gone." Rebels said they would swiftly free political prisoners.

Syria's Prime Minister Mohammed Ghazi al-Jalali said he wants Syria to be a "normal country that builds good relations with its neighbors and the world." He said he won't flee, wants to peacefully transfer power and is willing to work with any new leadership chosen by the people.

"I am in my home. I did not leave it because I belong to this country," he said.

Hours earlier, rebels announced they had gained full control of the key city of Homs after only a day of fighting.

The fall of Homs came after a new Syrian rebel offensive that started about 10 days ago. It gave insurgents control over Syria's strategic heartland and a key highway crossroads, severing Damascus from a coastal region that's key to the power of Assad's Alawite sect. The Alawites are a Muslim minority group who have ruled Syria for decades.

Homs is also where Assad's Russian allies, who enabled him to stay in power during the civil war that has killed an estimated 300,000 civilians, have a naval base and air base. Russia provided Assad's government with vital air cover. Assad was also propped up by Iranian-backed militants including Hezbollah fighters.

However, analysts say that Assad was effectively left to fend for himself because Russia was distracted by its war in Ukraine and Lebanon-based Hezbollah has been under intense pressure from an Oct. 7-related conflict with Israel.

Contributing: Reuters

USA TODAY

Volume 43, No. 60

Customer service
To view important information related to your subscription, visit **aboutyoursubscription.usatoday.com**. You can also manage your subscription at **account.usatoday.com.**
Contact USA TODAY for questions or to report issues call 1-800-872-0001.
Operating hours are: Monday-Friday: 8:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m. EST

Available subscriptions
Subscribe and save today by visiting **subscribe.usatoday.com.** The subscription below is billed monthly and includes 24/7 access to usatoday.com, breaking news on our tablet and smartphone apps, subscriber benefits at usatoday.com/subscriberguide and the eNewspaper, a digital replica of the print edition.
● Delivery of the Monday through Friday print editions: $34.00
**Plus applicable taxes*

Contact us
Customer Service 1-800-872-0001
Newsroom .....703-854-3400, ext. 5
Classified advertising 1-800-397-0070
National, regional advertising 703-854-3400

Corrections and clarifications
Our goal is to promptly correct errors. Contact Standards Editor Michael McCarter at accuracy@usatoday.com to report a mistake. Describe the error, where you saw it, the date, page number or the URL.

Postal information
USA TODAY, ISSN 0734-7456, is published daily except for Saturday, Sunday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving (Observed), Christmas (Observed) and New Years Day (Observed), by Gannett Media Corp, 1575 Eye Street, NW, Suite 350, Washington, DC, 20005. Periodicals Postage at Washington, DC and additional mailing offices. **Postmaster:** Send all UAA to CFS. (See DMM 507.1.5.2); NON-POSTAL ONE AND MILITARY FACILITIES: Please send address corrections to USA Today, Customer Service, PO Box 1387, Fort Smith, AR 72902.

French President Emmanuel Macron, center, accompanies President-elect Donald Trump, right, and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy after a meeting at the Elysee Palace in Paris. CHRISTIAN HARTMANN/REUTERS

Pentagon announces new aid package of nearly $1B for Ukraine

Zelenskyy thanks Trump after meeting in Paris

Fernando Cervantes Jr.
USA TODAY

The Pentagon announced over the weekend a new $988 million aid package for Ukraine, including new arms and equipment for use in its ongoing war with Russia.

The Pentagon said Saturday the money from the package will be put toward buying ammunition for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), which are made by Lockheed Martin. Other items in the package include drones, equipment and spare artillery parts used for maintenance.

The aid package almost halves the more than $2 billion available through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, which aims to further buy weapons for Ukraine rather than taking from U.S. weapon stocks, as Reuters reported.

The announcement comes as President Joe Biden's administration enters its final days and as President-elect Donald Trump met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Paris on Saturday. Zelenskyy calling the talk "good and productive" in a tweet posted Saturday afternoon.

"President Trump is, as always, resolute. I thank him," Zelenskyy said in the post. "We all want this war to end as soon as possible and in a just way. ... We agreed to continue working together and keep in contact. Peace through strength is possible."

The news came as Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin spoke Saturday in front of defense industry leaders and policymakers at the Reagan National Defense Forum in California.

Since the start of the war in 2022, the United States has given more than $62 billion to Ukraine in security assistance, according to Reuters.

Contributing: Reuters

Trump: 'Stop the madness' in Russia-Ukraine war

Sarah D. Wire and Francesca Chambers
USA TODAY

Donald Trump on Sunday called for an immediate ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia to end "the madness" in the region.

The president-elect's message, which he shared on Truth Social, came hours after Trump met with Ukrainian President Volodymr Zelenskyy in Paris. Trump vowed during the presidential campaign to bring an end to the conflict, which he said he could do before his inauguration, but he has provided few details as to how he intends to do so.

"Zelenskyy and Ukraine would like to make a deal and stop the madness," Trump wrote on Truth Social. "There should be an immediate ceasefire and negotiations should begin."

Trump named a special envoy to address the war late last month, who previously proposed a negotiated end to the invasion that would begin with a ceasefire and include a delay in NATO membership for Ukraine. The president-elect's transition team did not immediately respond to a request for comment whether that was reflective of the ceasefire proposal Trump shared Sunday.

"I know Vladimir well. This is his time to act. China can help. The World is waiting!" Trump said in his post, referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin, whom he reportedly spoke to last month. Russia has denied that a call took place.

The comments came in a post that said that the rebel forces that ousted Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime overnight were successful because Russia lost interest in protecting Assad because the country was focused on winning in Ukraine.

Trump also said in a "Meet the Press" interview that was taped Friday, just before he left for France, that was set to on Sunday morning, that he would end the war "if I can" and that Ukraine could "possibly" receive less military assistance from the U.S. when he is in office.

He also said the U.S. would remain in NATO if other countries step up their contributions. "If they pay their bills, absolutely," he said.

Currently, 23 of the alliance's 32 members meet the minimum 2% GDP defense spending guideline, which is a target and not a requirement. That is up from the three countries, including the U.S., who met the baseline a decade ago. It would take an act of Congress to withdrawal the U.S. from NATO.

Russia, Ukraine name conditions

Zelenskyy and the Kremlin responded that a ceasefire must come with conditions to ensure it lasts.

"When we talk about effective peace with Russia, we must first and foremost talk about effective guarantees for peace. Ukrainians want peace more than anyone else. Russia brought war to our land, and it is Russia that most seeks to disrupt the possibility of peace," Zelenskyy said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

"It cannot simply end with a piece of paper and a few signatures. A ceasefire without guarantees can be reignited at any moment, as Putin has already done before," he said. "To ensure that Ukrainians no longer suffer losses, we must guarantee the reliability of peace and not turn a blind eye to occupation."

Reuters reported Sunday that Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia was open to talks, if they are based on agreements Putin says were reached in Istanbul in 2022 shortly after Russia invaded its neighboring country and on current battlefield realities.

Trump has not said publicly what a cease-fire would entail. But his special envoy for Russia and Ukraine, Keith Kellogg, previously proposed providing weapons to Ukraine during the negotiation process to ensure that Putin's army did not capture additional territory.

Kellogg has been working on a peace plan for months. How much of it Trump agrees with is unclear, although his selection of the retired U.S. Army lieutenant general for the post suggests they are in alignment.

Stamps

Continued from Page 1A

upbringing – but because she herself helped design them.

Reflections of underrepresented communities have become a regular feature of postage stamps, such as the postal service's Black Heritage and Lunar New Year collections. Artists like Muñoz and Antonio Alcalá, the U.S. Postal Service art director who recruited her to help create the holiday stamp, are another way the agency indirectly promotes such efforts.

"It's important to me to try to bring in a more diverse representation of artists," said Alcalá, a graphic designer in Washington, D.C., who joined the agency part-time after serving on its citizens' stamp advisory committee, which recommends subjects for future consideration as stamp images.

For example, Alcalá worked with Alaskan Native and Native American artists to create images for last year's Art of the Skateboard series and with Mississippi State University art professor Alex Bostic to produce a 2022 postage stamp honoring Edmonia Lewis, a late 19th-century sculptor of Black and Native American background. He also created this year's Hanukkah stamp.

Muñoz, whose family is from Jalisco, Mexico, grew up in Southern California, where she majored in studio art at California State University, San Bernardino, despite discouragement from her high school teachers about art as a career path.

Her freelance artwork, inspired by her Mexican American culture and love for nature, picked up during the pandemic, she said, and she's collaborated with brands like Target and Amazon Music.

One day a random email appeared in her inbox. It was from Alcalá, who said he had seen her work on Instagram and thought she'd be a great fit for an upcoming holiday stamp series.

"It was such a big and important project," said Muñoz, 29. "I wasn't sure it was real. But it was very easy to say yes."

This image of a poinsettia that California-based artist Michelle Muñoz created for "Holiday Joy" series was inspired by her childhood memories of growing up in a Mexican American household. PROVIDED BY USPS

A country's national narrative

Laura Goldblatt, an assistant professor of English who studies state messaging and propaganda at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, said postage stamps are a way to understand a country's chosen narrative for its citizens, an index of historical moments.

Early U.S. stamps sported symbols such as flags and landmark figures like George Washington and Benjamin Franklin before the introduction of special-issue and larger-parcel stamps opened the doors to greater representation. In 1893, in conjunction with the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the postal service issued its first commemorative series noting the event.

Those stamps were the first U.S. postage stamps to feature a woman, Queen Isabella of Spain. In 1902, Martha Washington became the first American woman to be depicted on a stamp; five years later, Pocahontas became the first Native American to be honored.

"You started to see increasing diversity," said Goldblatt, co-author of "The American Stamp: Postal Iconography, Democratic Citizenship and Consumerism in the United States." "The government was wrestling with the fact that the body politic was shifting and that those people were representative of the nation."

Richard Handler, a professor of anthropology at the University of Virginia and Goldblatt's co-author, said the postal service in the 1940s began to recognize that its images of Americans could be drawn from fields other than politics or the military such as science, education, medicine or the arts.

"After World War II, this diversification of imagery grew exponentially," Handler said, as various constituencies pressured the postal service to honor people representing their communities. That would eventually lead to creation in 1957 of the agency's citizens' stamp advisory committee, he said, to both bring order to the process and shield the postal service from lobbying from interest groups.

Jared Bahir Browsh, a cultural historian at the University of Colorado Boulder, said the postal service has generally shied away from figures or themes deemed more controversial. For instance, the first Black American to be featured on a stamp was educator Booker T. Washington in 1940, but nearly six decades would pass before Washington's contemporary, sociologist and civil rights leader W.E.B. Dubois, would be so recognized in 1998.

"He was considered more radical," Browsh said.

The postal service issued its first Kwanzaa stamp in 1997 and its first Diwali stamp in 2016. In more recent years it has honored Harvey Milk, one of the nation's first openly gay elected officials before he was assassinated in 1978 as well as deaf studies pioneer Robert Panara. Some communities are reflected through their culture, such as the postal service's Delicioso series, which featured images of tamales, ceviche and other Latino foods that have become part of the American fabric.

"The Postal Service's goal is to create stamps that resonate with people from all walks of life," Roderick Sallay, USPS' director of legislative policy and strategy development, said in a news release announcing the agency's 2024 Kwanzaa stamp earlier this year.

That mission has thrived even as DEI and diversity education efforts have come under attack from political conservatives. Incoming President Donald Trump even campaigned on the issue, claiming discrimination against white Americans and threatening to undo federal racial equity efforts.

Goldblatt, of the University of Virginia, said that while she doubts diversity in postage stamps would be seriously threatened given the income that such stamps produce for the postal service, "I could see someone saying we should just have flags, or presidents."

For the often underrepresented communities represented, recognition on postage stamps can offer a sense of validation.

"They are a material object universally used and seen by all Americans and even people internationally," said historian and policy analyst Christopher Shaw, author of "First Class: The U.S. Postal Service, Democracy and the Corporate Threat." "They're a shared representation of the nation. If something is on a postage stamp, that shows it's being acknowledged as being part of the American story."

Alcalá agreed.

"Stamps are a way that the government says, this is who we are, this is who we represent and what we think is important for everyone to know about," he said. "It's exciting when someone sees something on a stamp that reflects them."

How Muñoz's designs came to be

While the 2024 Holiday Joy series isn't explicitly Latino, the designs evoke Mexican folk art and artist Muñoz's unique style and influences.

The process of bringing stamp designs from concept to fruition takes two to three years, Alcalá said. Committee recommendations are submitted for approval, then assigned to one of the agency's four art directors. Directors then create the designs, often in collaboration with an outside illustrator or photographer.

Final designs are submitted to the Postmaster General for approval and reviewed for cultural insensitivity or potential legal liability. If a stamp honors a particular individual, for instance, "there's legal review that needs to be done with the person's estate," Alcalá said. "Or – if the person is wearing a certain hat, we need to make sure it's OK with the manufacturer."

Once Muñoz agreed to take on the project, the two went back and forth – Muñoz submitting her designs, Alcalá recommending color changes or adjustments such as enlarging or removing details that would be too small to be visible in stamp size.

Muñoz said that while she wanted the project to reflect her Latina roots, she wanted the work to resonate with everyone, driven by ideals of family and table gatherings.

"There's little elements I incorporated indirectly," she said. For instance, her image of a poinsettia – a flower associated with Christmas and native to Southern Mexico – for her brought to mind visions of her childhood, when her mother would place poinsettias around the house and hang poinsettia ornaments on the family Christmas tree.

"I wanted to make it so that whenever someone sees it they feel happiness and joy," Muñoz said. "But growing up in a Mexican household, I also wanted Mexican people to feel that connection and pride, that there's a Latina representing stamps that will be used nationwide."

One charge is dismissed in Penny verdict

Jury in subway killing deliberates lesser charge

Claire Thornton
USA TODAY

NEW YORK – The jury in Daniel Penny's case on Monday will continue deliberating a lesser charge of criminally negligent homicide in the death of Jordan Neely after the judge in the case dismissed a charge of second-degree manslaughter last week.

Prosecutors asked the judge to dismiss the more-serious count after jurors remained deadlocked Friday afternoon.

Neely, an unarmed homeless man, died after Penny, a former Marine, placed him in a chokehold on a crowded subway car last year. Neely had been screaming at passengers.

A jury began deliberations last week after hearing more than a month's worth of witness testimonies and evidence presented by lawyers. They sent a note to the judge Friday morning saying they could not reach a unanimous verdict on the charge of manslaughter, defense attorney Steve Raiser said. The judge responded with instructions to keep deliberating, he said.

Court was adjourned late Friday afternoon, Raiser said.

Video of Neely's death gained national attention and sparked days of protest in New York after police questioned Penny and initially released him from custody after the killing on May 1, 2023. Neely, a Michael Jackson tribute artist, was well-known in and around Times Square, where he danced dressed up like the pop icon.

Penny told responding officers that Neely, 30, "came on the train threatening people. I put him out" to keep him from harming fellow subway riders, according to court documents.

During the trial, which began with jury selection Oct. 21, Penny, 26, was accused of recklessly disregarding the risk that his chokehold would lead to Neely's death that day on the train car floor.

Penny's charge of second-degree manslaughter would have carried a prison sentence of up to 15 years, and the conviction of criminally negligent homicide could carry a sentence of up to four years, the Manhattan District Attorney's Office said. But there is no minimum prison sentence, and if he's found guilty, the judge could decide on a sentence that involves no prison time, the DA's Office said.

Daniel Penny arrives at Manhattan Criminal Court for jury selection in his trial for the death of Jordan Neely on Oct. 21. EDUARDO MUNOZ/REUTERS

Jordan Neely started yelling on a New York subway in 2023, and died after a passenger put him in a chokehold. PROVIDED BY MILLS & EDWARDS LLP

Prosecutor Dafna Yoran argued Penny should have known Neely's life was at risk as the approximately 6-minute-long chokehold starved the 30-year-old Black man of oxygen. Yoran also said Penny was unnecessarily reckless when he continued to hold Neely's neck long after Neely stopped posing a threat to passengers.

A jury began deliberations last week. They sent a note to the judge Friday morning saying they could not reach a unanimous verdict on the charge of manslaughter, defense attorney Steve Raiser told USA TODAY.

Penny's defense argued Neely was acting "psychotic" and threatened to kill people in the subway car. Penny stepped in to protect all the people onboard, several of whom Neely lunged at before Penny placed him in the chokehold, defense attorney Thomas Kenniff said. Passengers had no way of knowing Neely did not have a weapon on him, Kenniff said, and several passengers feared for their lives.

The defense team also argued Penny's chokehold alone could not have caused Neely's death, and that Neely's blood suffered an extreme sickle cell crisis, blocking the flow of oxygen. However, a medical examiner testified Neely's death was caused by "compression of the neck," and not other health issues.

The prosecution argued Penny did not hesitate before placing Neely in a chokehold and failed to try to defuse the situation another way. Another bystander who came to Penny's aid offered to hold Neely's arms down so Penny could let go of Neely's neck, but instead, Penny kept a tight hold even after Neely's body went limp, Yoran told jurors.

"He used far too much force for far too long," Yoran said.

Throughout the trial, about a dozen protesters gathered outside the Manhattan Criminal Court most mornings, demanding justice for Neely and his family. The demonstrators' chants could be heard inside the 13th floor courtroom, and on the first day of the trial, Judge Max Wiley instructed the jury to ignore the noise and focus on the evidence presented by lawyers.

Mental health, drug use front and center in trial

Neely experienced mental health problems throughout his life, according to court records. He was homeless off and on since he was a teenager, when his mother was brutally murdered by her boyfriend in the family's home in New Jersey, records show.

On May 1, 2023, Neely entered the F subway train in Lower Manhattan and immediately began yelling, saying he was ready to go to jail for life, court records show. Kenniff also pointed to evidence that Neely was schizophrenic and was high on K2, a synthetic cannabinoid, at the time of the incident.

Jurors' personal experiences with violent crime, mental illness and drug use in the nation's largest city – particularly on the subway – likely played a major role in their deliberations, said David Barnard, a lawyer and director of jury selection at Magna Legal Services who has studied the case.

During jury selection, prospective jurors were asked about their experiences riding the transit system. Some who were selected said they ride the subway regularly and saw outbursts like that of Neely's, said Barnard, who was not involved in the case.

"Some people can see outbursts and say this is typical, run-of-the-mill New York City," said Barnard, who lives in Brooklyn. At the same time, many New Yorkers may feel the massive subway system is unsafe and out of control, Barnard said.

Cracker Barrel 'refused service' to special ed students

Greta Cross
USA TODAY

A field trip for special education students to a Cracker Barrel in Maryland last week has resulted in outcry from teachers and parents.

A group of 11 students and seven staff members from Maryland's Charles County Public Schools District were "refused service" at the Cracker Barrel restaurant in Waldorf, Maryland, on Tuesday, Superintendent Maria Navarro said in a statement. The outing was a part of community-based instruction for students at the district's Dr. James Craik Elementary School. The instruction allows students in special education programs to perform practical skills and socialize with the public.

The Cracker Barrel general manager told teaching staff the restaurant "cannot accommodate to your group" and that the restaurant should be removed from the approved list of restaurants for community-based instruction, Charles County Public Schools special education teacher Katie Schneider told parents in an email, which has been shared online.

Stacey Campbell told USA TODAY that her autistic, nonspeaking 9-year-old son, who goes by "JoJo," attended the outing Tuesday.

"I saw red," Campbell said about when she read Schneider's email.

JoJo attends Charles County Public Schools' ACHIEVE, a regional program that serves students in kindergarten through age 21 who have "significant cognitive disabilities." Students in ACHIEVE and SOAR, a regional program for students with autism, attend community-based instruction outings once a month between November and May, Campbell said.

What happened at Cracker Barrel?

In her statement, Navarro said Charles County Public Schools staff notified the Waldorf Cracker Barrel of the group's size and purpose of its visit, but they were told reservations were unnecessary.

Though the group did not ultimately dine in, the restaurant did permit the students and staff to place a carryout to-go order, Schneider said in her email to parents.

"During this time, the servers were blatantly rude to our staff and ignored all of our students, Schneider continued in her email. "Refusing to serve them, they did not even ask if our students wanted a drink or anything. Our students were so well behaved and sat at the tables patiently, which you know can be hard, waiting for their food and drinks to go."

After about an hour of waiting, Schneider said the students were moved to wait outside on the school bus. They ate the lunch back at the elementary school. Schneider did not immediately respond for comment about the experience when contacted on Friday afternoon.

In a statement provided to USA TODAY, Cracker Barrel said a "staffing challenge" led to affecting the group's experience.

"At Cracker Barrel, we strive to create a welcoming environment for all our guests, and we understand that a recent visit by this group to our Waldorf location fell short of those expectations," the statement reads. "A staffing challenge that day led to the closure of part of our second dining room, creating confusion that impacted the group's experience. We take this matter seriously and are working directly with the group's leadership to better understand what happened, extend our apologies and make things right."

Parent organizes protest

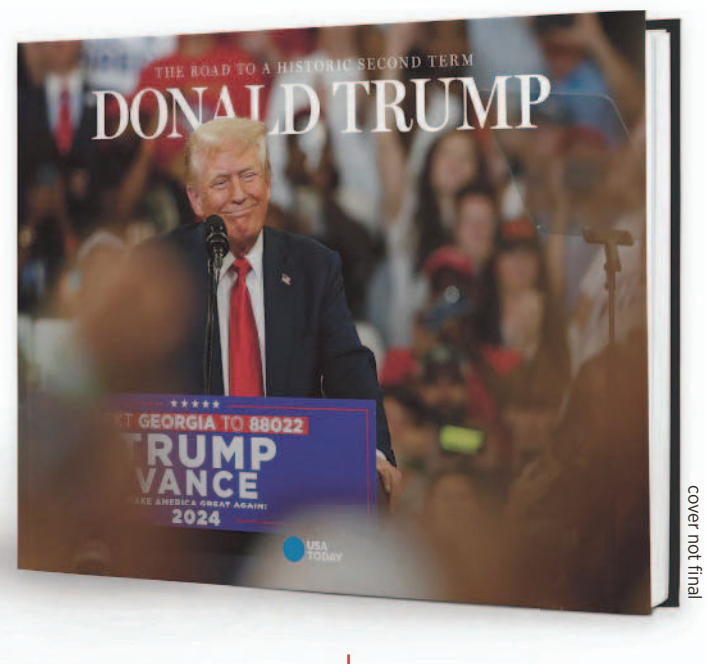
In response, Dustin Reed, whose 7-year-old daughter Madelynn was part of the outing, has organized a protest to occur at the Waldorf Cracker Barrel on Dec. 15. Madelynn attends the SOAR program.

"I can't put into words how I felt – anger, sadness and worry," Reed said about learning of what happened. "I've battled wanting to protect (and) shield her from the world but not forgetting why we're doing this. I've spent more time crying over her and praying she never has to experience this again."

Reed said he hopes the protest sheds light on the fact that just because some children have different abilities, it doesn't make them less than anyone else.

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

Commemorate President Trump's historic second term
with this hardcover collector's book



cover not final

20% off
for a limited time

$31.95 reg. $39.95
offer expires Feb. 16, 2025
books ship Feb. 28, 2025

Experience history in the making with "**Donald Trump: The Road to a Historic Second Term**." This stunning 160-page hardcover volume captures the electrifying journey of President Trump's unprecedented return to the White House. From the campaign trail to the debates, multiple assassination attempts to Inauguration Day, every pivotal moment is immortalized in vivid detail and striking photography. Own a piece of American history — a collector's item to save for future generations. Order now and secure your front-row seat to one of the most remarkable political comebacks in U.S. history.

Pre-order online at
Trump.PictorialBook.com

USA TODAY

scan and save!

Officials ramp up testing of milk on farms

Raw milk is not safe from bird flu threat, they say

Eduardo Cuevas
USA TODAY

Federal and state officials say pasteurized milk available in grocery stores is safe from bird flu but caution that raw milk is not.

So how do you know what you're drinking is safe?

The H5N1 bird flu virus was first identified in America's milk supply earlier this year – but the virus researchers found was dead, killed by the rapid heating of pasteurization.

That's when officials began warning people to avoid raw milk, which is touted by some as healthier.

On Friday, officials decided to step up testing of milk on farms, both to keep the public from swallowing the virus and to more quickly identify its spread among farms.

There is no doubt that some unpasteurized milk contains H5N1 virus. Last week, California public health officials announced a voluntary recall by Raw Farm LLC after detecting the virus in raw milk and cream at company bottling and storage sites.

Although no one has yet caught bird flu from their morning cereal or latte, there is strong evidence that the virus can be transmitted through raw milk.

Raw Farm CEO and founder Mark McAfee questioned why state officials were asking him to pull his products from shelves, saying they were over-reacting since no one has yet gotten sick.

"That's because this is just the latest convenient platform to attack legal raw milk in California!" he wrote in an email to USA TODAY. "Protect consumers from what???"

Here are some things to consider as you decide what milk to buy and drink:

What is raw milk?

Raw milk doesn't go through pasteurization, a process developed more than a century ago to kill viruses, bacteria and other pathogens. Cheese made with raw milk can also contain pathogens that are harmful to health, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Raw milk is legal for retail sale within California, which is the nation's largest dairy producer and has had more than 500 herds infected with bird flu. Several states ban the sale of raw milk entirely.

Since 1987, there's been a federal ban of its sale across state lines.

Raw milk supporters say it contains more enzymes, probiotics (or the "good bacteria"), proteins and vitamins than pasteurized milk.

They also say it helps prevent chronic health issues such as asthma and allergies, as well as ear and respiratory infections and fever, citing studies of European children living on farms.

There's little scientific evidence to support these claims, said John Lucey, director of the University of Wisconsin's Center for Dairy Research and a food science professor.

"The short answer is no, there are no proven benefits," he told USA TODAY.

What raw milk does contain, he said, is a lot of bacteria, viruses and other pathogens that can make people sick.

Before pasteurization, people routinely were sickened and died from drinking raw milk, catching diseases like tuberculosis, and raw milk is still far more likely than pasteurized milk to contain bacteria including salmonella, E. coli and listeria.

Who can get sick from raw milk?

Pathogens in raw milk can cause diarrhea, stomach cramps, vomiting and fever. These may not be serious for some people, but they can lead to serious, even life-threatening illnesses for people with weakened immune systems, such as babies, young children, older adults and pregnant people, said Lucey, who has analyzed risks and benefits of raw milk consumption.

In 2023 and 2024, more than 100 people fell ill from salmonella linked to raw milk from Raw Farm, the same company now at the center of raw milk recalls for bird flu. At least seven people were hospitalized, and 40% of cases were in children. Findings only came to light from court records released in the summer, USA TODAY reported.

In a July 11 blog post, Raw Farm called the probe the result of a "corrupt, biased agenda" including from the Food and Drug Administration and the media.

The H5N1 bird flu virus was first identified in America's milk supply this year, but the virus was killed by pasteurization. LISA BAERTLEIN/REUTERS

"This is just the most recent of a long history of dirty tricks," the post said. "If you see concerning and questionable headlines, please be very clear we are in a war zone with a corrupt system that hates raw milk."

Before that, the company's products were linked to several outbreaks of E. coli, salmonella and campylobacter, according to the University of Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research.

Combating pathogens

Bacteria and viruses that can make people sick are found throughout farms.

Bacteria like E. coli are present in poop or in the dirt, so cows can lie down and get contaminated material on their udders, said Dr. Meghan Davis, an associate professor of environmental health and engineering at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Typically, the milking process has standards to wipe down udders and equipment before milking begins. But some bacteria can remain, contaminating milk. Pasteurization kills the pathogens, but they can persist in raw milk.

Research has shown the highest traces of bird flu virus detected on the cow are around its mammary glands and in the milk itself, said Davis, a former dairy veterinarian.

Milk samples test positive for bird flu long before cows show symptoms, according to Dr. K. Fred Gingrich II, executive director of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners, an organization representing veterinarians who treat cows.

When bird flu was first identified in cows in Texas this year, barn cats on infected dairy farms were dying from drinking raw milk, Davis said.

Human cases of bird flu have been mostly among dairy and poultry workers. In dairies, officials say transmission to workers happens when they're in close contact with infected animals. This includes when people are working near udders and raw milk. They can then become infected if they touch contaminated equipment or milk splashes on them and they touch their face.

For now, infections have been relatively mild in dairy workers, including with eye redness. No one has spread it to another person, so far.

However, viruses are constantly mutating, so officials worry changes to bird flu can make it more transmissible or cause more severe illness.

Buying 'less processed' products

Just because raw milk has high levels of bacteria, it doesn't mean those bacteria are beneficial or "probiotic," Davis said. Probiotics must be non-pathogenic, whereas raw milk can contain bacteria that make people sick, the FDA said in its warning.

By comparison, pasteurized products like yogurt or kefir, do have probiotics from the fermentation process and have measurable health benefits, including strengthening the immune systems, Davis said.

In terms of taste, if people want a "less processed" milk experience, she recommends they purchase pasteurized whole milk or cream.

Trump administration on raw milk

Raw milk has been in the spotlight lately because of bird flu, but also because Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is a strong proponent. Trump has nominated Kennedy to become secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees most of the government's health-related agencies.

Kennedy's support for raw milk has driven up demand, McAfee said in a Nov. 30 interview.

Kennedy, who lives in California, is a longtime Raw Farm customer, McAfee added.

The NYPD released this image of "a person of interest" in the Dec. 4 killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson. PROVIDED BY NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

New photos released of suspect in CEO's death

John Bacon
USA TODAY

The manhunt for the killer of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson intensified Sunday after New York authorities released new photos of the widely sought suspect and hinted the killer's identity may have been determined.

The photos appear to have been taken from a camera in a cab and show the man wearing a blue medical mask. In one photo, he appears to be looking through the partition from the back seat; in the other photo, he is on the street. Previously released photos have provided a relatively clear view of his face.

On Saturday, police said the killer's backpack, found in Central Park, contained a jacket and fake money from a Monopoly game.

Thompson, 50, was shot Wednesday on a Midtown Manhattan street outside a Hilton hotel where he was set to speak at an investment conference. Surveillance cameras show a man firing multiple times from behind Thompson at close range at about 6:45 a.m. Police said the assailant – wearing a hooded jacket, balaclava and gray backpack – fled on foot before mounting an electric bike and riding into Central Park.

The shooter is believed to have left the city by bus soon after. The suspect was seen on video at an uptown bus station about 45 minutes later, New York Police Department Chief of Detectives Joseph Kenny said.

Kenny said the suspect arrived in the city Nov. 24 on a bus from Atlanta, though it's unclear where he caught the bus along its route. No motive has been revealed for the attack, but police said the words "delay," "depose" and "deny" were written on bullet casings found at the murder scene.

On Saturday, New York City Mayor Eric Adams said the "net was tightening" in the effort to find the killer. But he declined to say whether the identity of the gunman had been determined.

"We don't want to release that now," Adams said. "If you do, you're basically giving a tip to the person we are seeking, and we do not want to give him an upper hand at all. Let him continue to believe he can hide behind the mask."

The killing unleashed social media scorn at Thompson's company and a U.S. health insurance industry that serves as gatekeeper to the nation's $4.5 trillion health care system. Trying to file an insurance claim at UnitedHealthcare, among the nation's largest insurance companies, is a "humiliating and godawful slog," one social mediacommenter wrote. "Guessing this (shooter) might be a disgruntled policy holder."

Another poster complained, "CEOs are making money hand over fist by DENYING care. I feel terrible for his family, but can't say I'm surprised."

Wendell Potter, a former CIGNA executive who became a whistleblower against the health insurance industry, said the shooting served as an "opportunity for people to vent and to take out their anger against someone who just became known to them all of a sudden."

Contributing: Ken Alltucker, Jeanine Santucci, N'dea Yancey-Bragg

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

News Flash:
Bunnies Demand Equal Recognition
By Dr. Barbara ten Brink

It has come to my attention
The bunnies demand mention
As to their contributions
To the holiday preparations.

In no effort to discredit
And no surprise Santa gets the credit
For he embarks on the journey to spread it
The joy and cheer. After all, he is the Christmas becket.

They simply ask the audience,
"Please look beyond the obvious.
Consider the bunnies' abundance
In Toyland our work to advance

The manufacture of gifts and toys
For the satisfaction of girls and boys.
In all aspects of the factory noise,
We deliver the goods with upmost poise.

Now, the many bunny parties are fun.
Miss Claus's assignments to tasks are spot on.
The care of the Clauses keeps us on the run.
Sadly, the reindeer games cannot be won.

We don't petition to be leaders;
We are just good little workers.
We ask you, Dear Reader,
'Will you be our cheerleader?' "

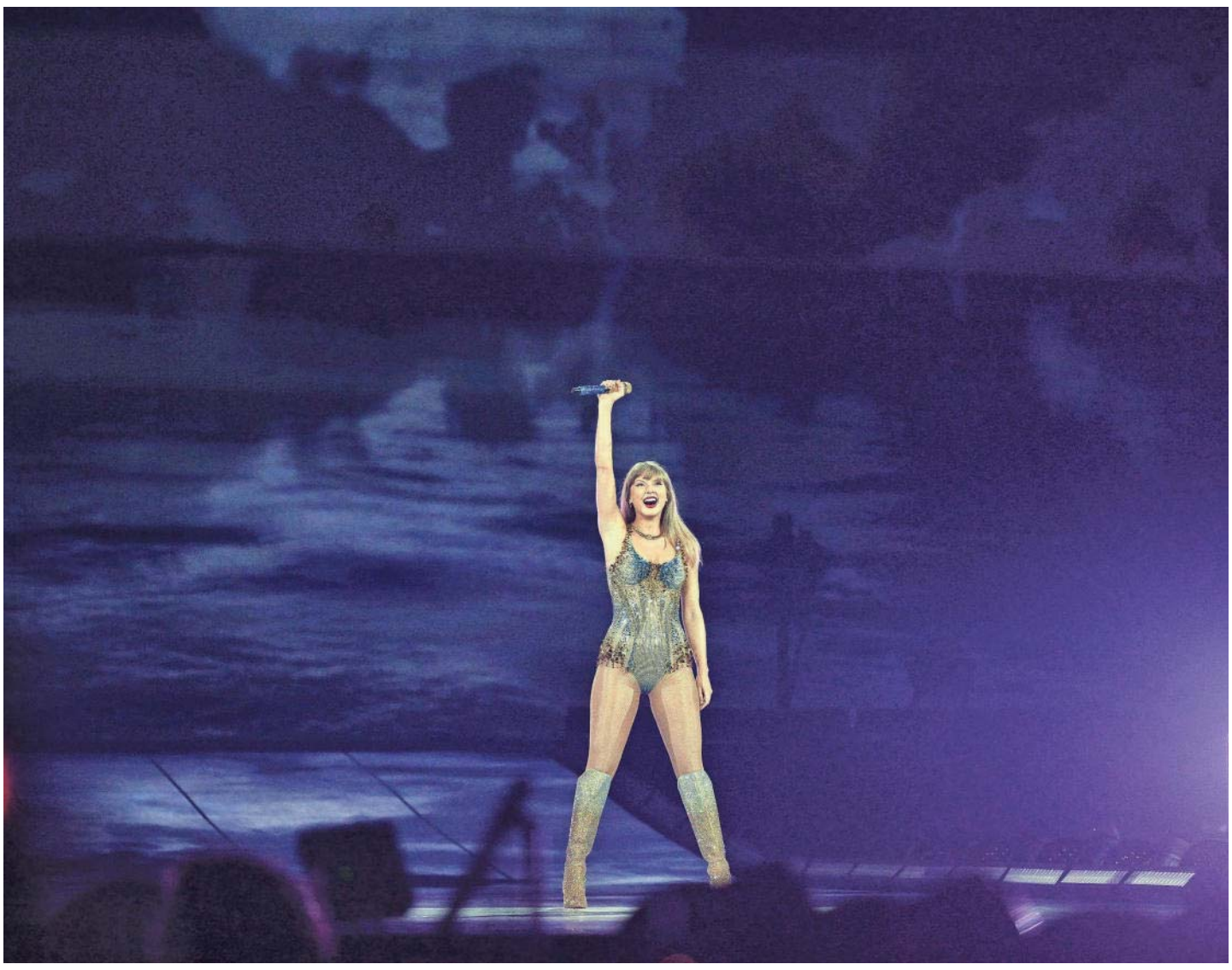
Miss Claus and Her Bunnies is at:
www.author-barbaratenbrink.com
YouTube Dr. Barbara ten Brink
Amazon Barnes & Noble Target Walmart BAM!
See Dr. ten Brink in 2025 at Impact Gala;
LA Times 30th anniversary book festival.
Charlie.garcia@writersprimemedia.com

Taylor Swift

Continued from Page 1A

including special acoustic "surprises" at every gig. Her epic concerts gift-wrapped fans nearly 3½-hours of heartfelt music, clever lyrics, sparkly costumes, glistening production and, most importantly, unpretentious charm.

Swift has set records in the touring, film and book industries with the highest-grossing tour of all time, highest-grossing concert film ever and fastest-selling book of 2024.



Taylor Swift performs Friday in Vancouver, British Columbia, in the first of three final concerts of the Eras Tour. The record-breaking tour visited five continents over 21 months, playing 149 shows featuring 45 songs. JENNIFER GAUTHIER/REUTERS

Taylor Swift's ambition is limitless

Sunday's finale at BC Place in Vancouver was a dichotomous bookend: Swift launched the sprawling Eras Tour in March 2023 in the blazing Arizona desert and brought this chapter to its conclusion during damp, chilly winter in Canada.

During the tour's tenure, she engaged with as many weather elements as she did eras. She performed in soaked costumes in a Nashville downpour, made a joke about her frizzy hair on a humid Singapore night and braved the frigid cold in Edinburgh, Scotland.

While romping through the type of grueling shows that would level mere mortals after nearly two years, Swift, who turns 35 on Friday, earned a trio of Grammys (including a record-breaking fourth album of the year nod with "Midnights"); became a billionaire; landed on the cover of Time with one of her beloved cats, Benjamin Button, as the magazine's 2023 Person of the Year; and in her spare time, dropped a 30-song album in April, "The Tortured Poets Department," which is nominated for album of the year at the 2025 Grammys.

Swift is so prolific that she couldn't even get through a tour without having to add another era.

She also unwittingly sparked a fringe market for fan-crafted outfits that painstakingly replicate the pastel-speckled leotard she wears during the "Lover" era, her regal and sparkly red coat donned for "All Too Well" and her white Vivienne Westwood dress decorated with song lyrics that is spotlighted during "The Tortured Poets Department" segment, which she added in May.

Friendship bracelets and the art of devotion

Her zealous fans earned their own spotlight in this Eras gallop around the world when they started a grassroots trend by making and swapping friendship bracelets. The braided and beaded trinkets are woven with messages of kindness, song lyrics or inside jokes among her devotees, who cluster in venue aisles and interminable merchandise lines at concerts to trade as part of their own secret society.

Even Swift marveled at the movement, saying at Saturday's concert, "I have one line in one song ('You're On Your Own, Kid') about a friendship bracelet and you made that idea synonymous with 'The Eras Tour.' "

It's but one symbol of the unusual intimacy cultivated among her fans, which span generations and cultures.

Kaitlyn Mark, 26, and her mom, Casey, 55, from Blaine, Washington, caught the Eras Tour twice in 2023 and decided to dole out $2,400 for a pair of resale tickets in the 400-level for Saturday's Vancouver show just to share the experience one final time.

"We saw the second set of dates in Las Vegas in 2023, so I feel like it's cool for us to share this (at the end of the tour)," Casey said.

Kaitlyn, who teaches third grade, is already spreading her love of Swift to her young charges.

"I have a quote on the classroom wall that says 'You make the whole class shimmer,' " she said, citing a modified lyric from Swift's song "Bejeweled." "I'm, like, the Taylor Swift teacher."

When it comes to dedication to Swift, there is seemingly no limit on the amount of money or time her fans will invest.

Molly Menounos, a fifth grade teacher in the Boston area, flew standby Friday after her Thursday flight into Vancouver was canceled.

She and three friends initially bought $68 presale tickets in November 2023 for Friday's show. But after the travel snafu, they sold their tickets on StubHub and purchased resale tickets for Saturday in a similar section for $1,300 each. The Swift supporters also split a hotel room within walking distance of the stadium for $4,000 per night.

"She cares so much, and that's why we have to get there, because we care so much," Menounos, 24, said of Swift, while on her flight to Vancouver. "Yeah, I'm losing money and I'm only going to be there for a little more than 24 hours, but it's still worth it."

Menounos, who had seen Swift on her tours behind the "Red," "1989" and "Reputation" albums but not yet the Eras spectacle, recalled listening to Swift since she was in eighth grade.

Kaitlyn Mark, left, and her mom, Casey, of Blaine, Wash., have seen two other stops on Taylor Swift's Eras Tour and wanted one more outing. The pair caught Swift's show Saturday in Vancouver. MELISSA RUGGIERI/USA TODAY

Adam Carver and girlfriend T'Lene Hayes, of Seattle, attended their first Taylor Swift concert Saturday in Vancouver. MELISSA RUGGIERI/USA TODAY

Her love of Swift helped forge enduring friendships in high school and among her college roommates and stretches to her family, including her Swiftie dad, who urged her to make the trip after an anxiety-riddled day of travel uncertainty.

Though she was eager to finally witness the Eras marathon, Menounos expected warring emotions when it's over.

"I know I'm going to cry," she said. "But I think it will be a catharsis."

> **"There seems to be a real sense of younger people that if the person on the other end is authentic, they're more than happy to support them. ... Taylor's whole life is out there and there is no way for her to be inauthentic."**
>
> **Adam Gustafson**
> Associate teaching professor of music at Penn State's School of Humanities

Taylor Swift is generating enough money 'to be a small country'

The money spent by Menounos and her friends is one of literally millions of examples of the Swift effect on the 51 cities she's played on tour.

Between boosts to the airline industry – Southwest Airlines used signature numbers in her music to add flights with designations including #1989 and #22 for her fall U.S. dates – and the tourism dollars generated at restaurants and hotels, a Swift weekend of shows produces nearly as much money for a city as a Super Bowl.

A Bank of America study earlier this year compared spending during the Super Bowl in Glendale, Arizona, and a weekend of Swift shows in Pittsburgh and found similar increases. Fans spent $96 more in restaurants and $74 more in bars for Super Bowl weekend compared to $77 and $56 more, respectively, during an Eras weekend.

It's an unparalleled phenomenon in the music industry.

"If you look at the global impact of her concerts outside of ticket sales, she's generating enough money to be a small country at this point," said Adam Gustafson, associate teaching professor of music at Penn State's School of Humanities, who has given several presentations about Swift. "It's not even just a regional thing. People have traveled across the world to see her, and multiple times."

Gustafson attributes that devotion and willingness to spend money – whether on concert tickets, T-shirts, coffee table books or movie screenings – to Swift's genuine rapport with fans.

"There seems to be a real sense of younger people that if the person on the other end is authentic, they're more than happy to support them. If they feel it's inauthentic or overly corporate, they'll get leery. But Taylor's whole life is out there and there is no way for her to be inauthentic," Gustafson said.

Taylor Swift's generosity also deserves admiration

Swift's altruism is frequently tagged as a reason for respect and admiration, even from those with a cursory interest in her.

Gustafson notes the $100,000 bonus checks Swift presented to her trucking staff in 2023 as not only an indicator of her generosity, but how it reminds people – as she often does – that this level of success in a fluid live production cannot be achieved alone.

"It draws attention to the dancers in the background, the musicians playing with her, the production crew, all of it, and how she's often showing people that this is a team effort," he said.

Swift's humanity is the reason T'Lene Hayes became a fan – and enough of one to spend $735 each on the obscenely marked-up $13.99 behind-the-stage tickets, which offer fans a view of the screens beside the stage but not the stage itself, Swift released last week.

"Once I saw the positive impact she was having on cities (where she performed) I began to respect her more as a human and then became a fan of her music," Hayes, 36, said. The Seattle-based nurse and her boyfriend, Adam Carver, 29, bought their tickets to Saturday's show on the resale market that morning and promptly drove the three hours to Vancouver, listening, of course, to a Spotify playlist of Swift songs.

While Hayes now also appreciates Swift's music – especially "Folklore" and "Evermore" – she's still most impressed with Swift's benevolence.

"The donations she made to food banks (on every stop of 'The Eras Tour') and the bonuses she gave her staff, it just warmed my heart that the people pulling off probably the biggest tour ever were being appreciated," Hayes said. "She saw those people as humans."

Carver added that he's most impressed by Swift's business savvy.

"She's such a powerful woman. It's like witnessing an historical figure, like Alexander the Great or something, in action," he said.

How Taylor Swift became her own brand

Indeed, even with her 14 Grammy Awards, billions of streams and millions of albums sold, Swift has rocketed her career from admired singer-songwriter to an inescapable brand like a shot of adrenaline to the heart. Only she doesn't need flashy logos or cutesy names as marketing tools because *she* is the brand.

Alyse Lancaster, vice dean for Academic Affairs at the University of Miami School of Communication started teaching "The Mastermind of the Taylor Swift Brand" this semester, an idea influenced by her 17-year-old Swift fan daughter.

For 16 weeks, 189 students pile into an auditorium to discuss and debate Swift's ascension to billionaire status and how she "created her own economy," as Lancaster put it.

"It's not just becoming a billionaire, but how that branding gives back," Lancaster said. "The way she treats her employees, the handwritten notes, she always puts a personal touch on everything she does and that's what differentiates her from other celebrities. She never forgets that the fans are the ones who continue to put her where she is."

Swift's effect on the NFL, an inadvertent byproduct of her giddily public relationship with Kansas City Chiefs player Travis Kelce – whose already-high profile has escalated to ubiquity – is indisputable.

Menounos said the kids in her class are always asking about the Chiefs, while Lancaster remarked her daughter, who "didn't even know what a touchdown was before (Swift and Kelce)," has a Chiefs sweatshirt on her holiday gift list.

"Think about the number of advertisers if Kansas City goes back to the Super Bowl, all of the female-centered products like makeup companies that might consider advertising," Lancaster said. "Taylor has changed the entire marketing strategy even for an event like that."

Lancaster plans to teach her course again in the fall, especially after fully understanding the Swiftian vibe when she caught "The Eras Tour" with her daughter in October in Miami. Though she had an inkling of what to expect from seeing clips of the show online, she was engulfed by the nearly tangible feeling of togetherness at Hard Rock Stadium.

"Her shows are a beautiful place to be and create that kind of space for women," Lancaster said. "But for men, too. You see dads who have little girls putting sparkles on their heads and they're fine with that. My daughter, who is very shy, was walking up to strangers asking if they wanted to trade friendship bracelets. Taylor has created an environment that feels loving and safe."

OPINION

WANT TO COMMENT?
We're on Facebook (USA TODAY Opinion) and Instagram and X, formerly Twitter (@usatodayopinion). You can also comment directly on columns.

Biden, don't stand by South Korean tyrant

Christine Ahn
Opinion contributor

South Koreans protest in Seoul against President Yoon Suk Yeol on Friday, days after he declared martial law then called it off overnight. EZRA ACAYAN/GETTY IMAGES

On Tuesday, South Korean President Yoon Seok Yeol – who hosted a "Summit for Democracy" just months ago – shocked the world by declaring martial law on national television, making bizarre claims about threats from "North Korea's communist forces" and "anti-state elements."

Yoon ordered nearly 300 armed elite assassins to storm the National Assembly to arrest lawmakers, but legislative aides and citizens blocked the troops with their bodies, furniture and fire extinguishers as lawmakers climbed walls to get into the building to vote, 190-0, to revoke Yoon's unconstitutional order.

By dawn, Yoon called off martial law.

While Yoon's outburst caught many off guard in the United States, it was much less surprising to those of us who have tracked his increasingly autocratic rule in South Korea, a crucial U.S. ally.

Celebrated abroad by the Biden administration as a champion of democratic values and a visionary diplomat, Yoon has revealed himself to be a petty tyrant at home.

I know, because I was just on the receiving end of Yoon's anti-democratic policies.

Why did Yoon regime ban me from entering South Korea?

In October, Yoon's government banned me from entering South Korea, where I was to address an international youth peace summit, with no explanation or due process.

I had been banned before by former President Park Geun-hye's administration as retribution for the 2015 women's peace walk I led across the Demilitarized Zone, but in 2017 the newly elected liberal Moon Jae-in administration reversed it.

I have since traveled to South Korea to visit family and meet civil society leaders, journalists and diplomats, including in 2022 when I went to accept an award from Nobel Peace laureates.

When I awoke last week to news of Yoon's attempted coup, I wasn't surprised.

"This late night assault left the nation restless, driving countless people to the streets and to the National Assembly to confront abuse of power," Youngmi Cho, executive director of the Korean Women's Movement for Peace, told me. "The damage to South Korean democracy is profound."

Memories of the last martial law and dictator's bloody repression

Martial law was last declared 44 years ago by military dictator Chun Doo Hwan, whose bloody massacre of hundreds of pro-democracy activists in Gwangju brought down his dictatorship. To South Koreans, a return to martial law triggers traumatic memories of decades of dictatorship that was marked by mass beatings, detentions and torture.

One Korean journalist, Kap Seol, recalled how during the dictatorship, military police beat him with a baton and nearly cracked open his skull for exercising his democratic rights.

"The physical and emotional scars are still fresh," he said.

It explains why this time, South Koreans gathered in the dark cold night to defend their hard-won democracy. They see Yoon's absurd declaration for what it is – a coup attempt by a deeply unpopular and embattled politician.

Last month, only 17% of South Koreans approved of Yoon's rule.

Yoon, a former prosecutor, was elected in 2022 by the narrowest margin in South Korean history of less than 1%.

Ever since, he has been embroiled in endless scandals, including political corruption and alleged election interference. Under Yoon's reign, South Korea has also undergone serious democratic backsliding as his administration has targeted women, critics, journalists, labor unions, and peace and reunification activists. Weeks before Yoon's call for martial law, more than 100,000 South Koreans took to the streets demanding his impeachment.

South Koreans are outraged by his tax cuts for the wealthy while slashing social spending for the poor and working class, his exacerbating the problems of an already overburdened health care system and his incompetent response after more than 150 people were crushed on Halloween.

Since Yoon's attempted coup, the Biden administration – which proclaims that its foreign policy champions democracy and fights autocracy – has not issued a single condemnation. Instead of praising the South Korean people and parliamentarians, the administration perversely gave Yoon credit for calming the situation.

Despite Yoon's many transgressions against democracy, why has President Joe Biden hail him as a defender of freedom and a model ally?

Yoon, a foreign policy hawk, eagerly overrode fierce domestic opposition to accept unjust forced reconciliation with Japan, Korea's brutal former colonizer, in order to participate in Biden's trilateral alliance designed to contain China.

Before Yoon further exploits tensions to deal more damage to South Korean democracy or put the peninsula at further risk of war, world leaders must support the South Korean people and their elected officials calling for Yoon's ouster.

'Fight for democracy at any cost'

Meanwhile, Americans can learn from South Korea's pro-democracy movements on how to fight back against authoritarian strong men. President-elect Donald Trump has promised to target "radical left lunatics" whom he considers "the enemy from within," threatening to deploy the U.S. military against American citizens.

Even Mark Esper, Trump's former Defense secretary, warned that such threats should be taken seriously because he witnessed firsthand Trump's desire to use troops to squash the 2020 nationwide racial justice protests.

As news spread of Yoon's martial law, Youkyung Ko, a longtime democracy and peace activist, described how netizens urged South Koreans to immediately go to the National Assembly to protect the parliamentarians.

Although they feared military violence, Youkyung told me, they chose to sacrifice their own personal safety to "fight for democracy at any cost."

Christine Ahn is the founder and co-director of Women Cross DMZ, a women-led global movement mobilizing for peace in Korea.

What happened to the Trump I interviewed on vaccines?

Dr. Marc Siegel
Opinion contributor

In April 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic raging, I wistfully asked Dr. Anthony Fauci, then head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases: "What about a vaccine?"

Fauci, a guest on my radio show on SiriusXM, surprised me: "Yes, we have one in the works. It looks promising."

That sounded to me like a pipe dream, especially when Fauci said he thought a vaccine might hit the market within a year and could work better than the flu vaccine.

Operation Warp Speed was born soon after. Several branches of government – including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health and the military – pulled together with Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, McKenzie and others to work on developing vaccines and planning the logistics of vaccinating hundreds of millions of people.

This level of public-private partnership, led by President Donald Trump, hadn't been seen since the Manhattan Project developed nuclear weapons in World War II.

When I interviewed President Trump at the White House in July 2020, he was very proud of Operation Warp Speed, and he promised to be among the first to take the shots when they came out.

Trump also said, "Wait until you see the therapeutics."

It was another prophetic statement as both monoclonal antibodies and the antiviral Paxlovid proved to be game changers in treating COVID-19.

Operation Warp Speed ended up being one of the greatest accomplishments in public health history. But now, Trump's choices for key health positions in his second term have a history of vaccine skepticism, at the least. A common thread among the Trump nominees is a hyper focus on potential vaccine side effects as opposed to the dangers of viruses, which vaccines work to lessen.

RFK Jr. not the only vaccine skeptic Trump is nominating

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., nominated Health and Human Services secretary, has claimed that the public is not getting full information about potential side effects and that common vaccines have not been well enough studied.

He's not the only vaccine skeptic tapped to serve in the incoming administration. Trump has nominated former Florida congressman and physician Dave Weldon to lead the CDC.

Weldon has promoted false claims that vaccines are linked to autism.

Dr. Paul Offit, head of the Vaccine Education Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and a member of the FDA Advisory Committee on vaccines, told me that the benefits and the risks of commonly available vaccines have been thoroughly studied.

"(Companies) by law present all data regarding vaccines to the FDA," Dr. Offit said. "All those data are available to the public. Nothing is being hidden. Also, systems are in place post-marketing to detect any rear side effects. So there is no hiding."

When vaccine skeptics play to patient fears and present vaccinations as a personal choice with potential serious risk, fewer people are willing to take them. And that jeopardizes the main purpose of vaccines – community immunity. The more people take a vaccine, the ability of a virus to spread is reduced and the more lives are saved.

In the case of COVID-19, studies have shown that the vaccines have prevented millions of deaths and hospitalizations.

Unfortunately, vaccine fears are spilling over to tried-and-true immunizations like MMR (against measles, mumps and rubella) and DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis), which depend on herd immunity to protect those who aren't able to take them.

The MMR vaccination rate in the United States is dipping below 93% for the fourth consecutive year, with the herd immunity target at 95%.

A resurgence of pertussis – also known as whooping cough – is now hitting Americans, with a spike in highly contagious measles sure to follow.

Body bags vs. lifesaving vaccines

It is natural for patients to be nervous about a needle being jabbed into their arm and less afraid of an invisible virus, but it is the job of public health officials to put this in perspective, not exploit patients' fears for political advantage.

It's certainly reasonable to carefully monitor and study the safety and effectiveness of all vaccines, but it is important to do so responsibly with public well-being in mind.

I remember the cold, rainy day in December 2020 when the first Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines rolled up to New York University Langone Health in cold storage trucks. I recorded on camera the first patient (a nurse) taking it and proudly received it myself a week later.

We cried because the images of body bags over so many months were being replaced by images of lifesaving vaccines. Those images should never be tarnished by our health leaders.

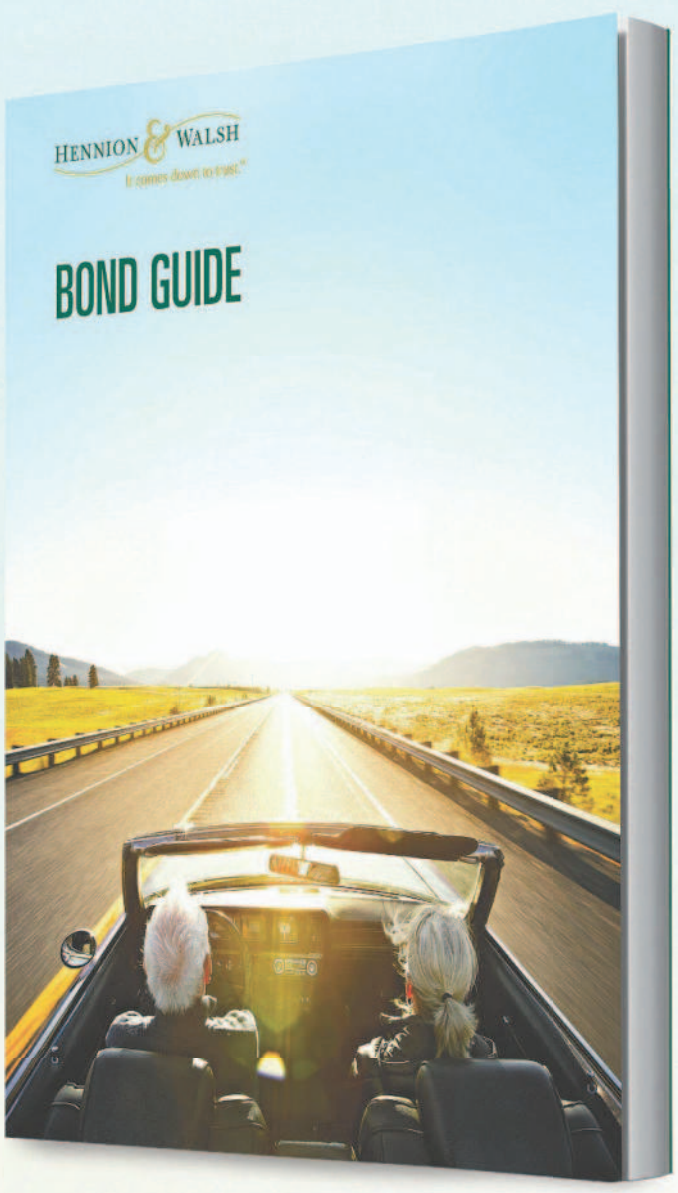
Dr. Marc Siegel is a professor of medicine and medical director of Doctor Radio at New York University Langone Health. His latest book is "COVID: The Politics of Fear and the Power of Science." Follow him on X: @DrMarcSiegel

USA TODAY

"USA TODAY hopes to serve as a forum for better understanding and unity to help make the USA truly one nation." – Allen H. Neuharth, Founder, Sept. 15, 1982

Chairman and CEO Gannett Co. **Michael Reed**
Chief Financial Officer: **Doug Horne**
Chief Content Officer: **Kristin Roberts**
Editor in Chief, USA TODAY **Caren Bohan**
Vice President/Group Editor, Gannett Opinion **Michael McCarter**
Vice President/Executive Editor, Sports **Roxanna Scott**

TO PICK UP THIS BOND GUIDE FOR FREE PICK UP THE PHONE.



Municipal bonds have historically been a low-risk way to invest.* Particularly if you're after the potential for tax-free and regular investment income. Investment-grade, rated Municipal bonds from Hennion & Walsh? Well, that might be even better. We've studied them from every angle, for more than 30 years. So we know how to use them to help you reach your financial goals.

HERE'S WHAT YOU'LL LEARN:

- ✓ **The benefits and risks of municipal bonds.**
- ✓ **How municipal bonds provide federally tax-free income.**
- ✓ **Why municipal bonds offer the potential for regular income.**
- ✓ **Strategies for smart bond investing.**
- ✓ **Municipal bond facts every investor should know.**

About Hennion & Walsh
Since 1990 Hennion & Walsh has specialized in investment grade tax-free municipal bonds. The company supervises over $3 billion in assets in over 16,000 accounts, providing individual investors with institutional quality service and personal attention.

AND HERE'S WHAT IT COSTS: $0

HENNION & WALSH
It comes down to trust.®

CALL (800) 316-1837
to get your copy of the Hennion & Walsh Bond Guide.

There's **no obligation** and it's
COMPLETELY FREE

© 2024 Hennion & Walsh. Securities offered through Hennion & Walsh Inc. Member of FINRA, SIPC. Investing in bonds involves risk including possible loss of principal. Income may be subject to state, local or federal alternative minimum tax. When interest rates rise, bond prices fall, and when interest rates fall, bond prices rise. If sold or called prior to maturity the amount received may be less than the amount paid, and the yield received may be less than the yield calculated at purchase. Past performance is not a guarantee of future results. *Investment grade municipal bonds had a cumulative 10-year default rate of 0.09% between 1970 and 2021 according to Moody's Investor Service, April 21, 2022 "US Municipal Bond Defaults and Recoveries", 1970–2021.

Jobs report shows labor market is bouncing back

U.S. hiring recovered in November with employers adding 227,000 more jobs. **Page 3B**

You can check out headlines from your home state or city

We survey and compile the top news stories from all 50 states plus Washington, D.C. **Page 4B**

On Travel
Christopher Elliott
USA TODAY

Oh, the things we do to avoid travel fees!

What would you do to avoid an annoying travel fee? ● Jodi Blodgett is so sick of all the extras that she's stopped flying. ● "I avoid travel fees by driving," she says. Not only can she skirt ridiculous fees for luggage, but she also doesn't have to pony up more cash for the seat assignment and other junk fees the airlines charge her. ● How far would you go? Would you pack less? Skip a nice hotel? ● Would you lie?

After an exhausting record year of travel, maybe we're all suffering from a little fee fatigue. Travelers are furious – and it's not just people like Blodgett who have sworn off flying.

Inflated fees put a damper on summer travel, with more people either staying with friends or family or not traveling at all. Bad service can be costly to a business. The latest National Customer Rage Survey, citing record consumer dissatisfaction, estimates that companies are risking $887 billion a year in future revenue, up from $494 billion in 2020.

You can't always avoid flying. Blodgett, who works as a photographer in Webster, Massachusetts, said it's easy to reach a client in the tri-state area by car. But for longer distances, you have to head to the airport.

"Still," she said, "I go to great lengths."

Actually, many of us are going to great lengths to avoid these preposterous surcharges.

"People are fed up with being nickel-and-dimed, and they're pushing back in the only ways they know how. It's about taking back control."

Ramzy Ladah
An attorney and frequent air traveler from Las Vegas

The things we do to avoid fees!

Here are some of the creative ways travelers have been sidestepping fees:

● **Avoiding luggage fees by packing like a minimalist.** This year, with almost every major U.S. airline jacking up their checked luggage fees, the response from passengers was predictable. "I'm packing minimally and efficiently," said Daniel Rivera, who runs a property management company in East Rutherford, New Jersey. "I put everything in a single bag that I can stow under the seat in front of me."

● **Not paying seat selection fees – and ending up in a middle seat.** Kevin Mercier, a project manager for an auto manufacturer in Paris, said he's taken "extreme" measures to avoid seat selection fees. Not paying them means he ends up in a middle seat, but he's fine with that."

See TRAVEL, Page 2B

ILLUSTRATION BY DUSTIN ELLIOTT/FOR USA TODAY

In Miami, groceries cost up to $300

The high prices helped Trump to win votes

Rebecca Morin
USA TODAY

MIAMI – Larry Milian makes it a habit not to talk about politics. Milian, a high school teacher who helps manage the only student-run radio station on SiriusXM, usually sticks to sports or offers up life advice for students.

But on a recent Saturday, he broke that rule and shared that he had "absolutely" voted for President-elect Donald Trump.

"I actually don't like Donald Trump," said Milian, who lives in Hialeah, a blue-collar manufacturing enclave in Miami where Trump is so popular a city council candidate put the former reality star and commander-in-chief's image on her campaign signs.

Milian said he made his decision based "not so much (on) who I want to go have a beer with – but who I think can run the country better."

The main problem that he thought Trump could fix? The economy.

"The cost of living in Miami is really tall, and there's no reason for it because it's Miami," he said. "It's not New York; it's not Chicago."

Many longtime Miamians say they've felt this way since the pandemic transformed much of their city. As New Yorkers and Californians faced lockdown orders and restrictions, many flocked to Florida, with the largest increase of New Yorkers moving to Miami where they could benefit from tax and mandate breaks while working remotely. But along with having the largest net population gain of any state in the country came exploding living and housing costs. Housing prices have risen almost 50%, according to the UBS Global Real Estate Bubble Index released last month.

Grocery prices shot up. (An average household spent about $327 per trip). So did electric bills. A carton of eggs last year cost $5.

Milian, whose relatives immigrated from Cuba and the Dominican Republic, has had enough. He is part of a growing constituency of Latino voters – especially men – who supported Trump in the 2024 presidential election. And in presumably purple Miami-Dade County where Democrats had won every presidential election for 36 years, Latino voters flipped the county red.

High prices and inflation were among the top issues for Latino voters, according to pre- and post-election polling. And among Latino men, Trump peeled away longtime supporters of the Democratic Party.

In Miami-Dade County, Trump got 55.4% of the vote while Kamala Harris

See MIAMI, Page 2B

Financial steps you should take by Dec. 31

Daniel de Visé
USA TODAY

We're nearing the end of 2024. So it's an especially good time to assess what financial moves you should make before the clock runs out.

Luckily, financial planners spend the final weeks of the year thinking about just such things.

Back in 2023, we asked several experts for their thoughts, and we made a list of six key financial steps to take by Dec. 31. Readers responded, so we reached out to the same experts again this year, along with one or two new ones, to see if their advice had changed. The answer: Not really.

Here are their suggestions, which include bolstering retirement savings, tweaking insurance coverage and seeking savvy tax shelters.

Salvation Army bell ringer Caroline Barrett stands outside Hobby Lobby on Robert C. Daniel Jr. Parkway on Dec. 2. Barrett has been a bell ringer for 30 years. Charitable giving is a big part of the holidays.
KATIE GOODALE/USA TODAY NETWORK VIA IMAGN IMAGES

Update beneficiaries

A typical investment account or life insurance policy requires you to name beneficiaries, the loved ones who will get the money upon your demise. For many of us, beneficiary designations function as an estate plan: they're legally binding and dictate what happens to a large portion of your assets.

Some people don't get around to naming beneficiaries. Births, deaths and family feuds can change the estate-planning landscape. The end of the year is a good time to take stock.

"I suggest making sure your beneficiaries are up to date on your investment accounts," said Colin Day, a certified financial planner in St. Louis.

"It might not be the first thing people think of, but you will be surrounded by loved ones during the holiday season," Day said. "It's a great reminder that you love and support these people, and you want to make sure your hard-earned dollars will get to them if something were to happen."

See STEPS, Page 2B

Miami

Continued from Page 1B

got 43.9%. Democrats Joe Biden in 2020 and Hillary Clinton in 2016 both won the majority of votes in the county when they ran for president.

Fernan Amandi, a political consultant who has done polling for Democrats in the past, said the party neglected to make inroads with communities that supported them in the past.

"They have, in essence, just ceded the county and ceded the state to the Republicans," he said. "So it's not surprising that the Republicans would then quickly overrun the county."

Milian, the teacher and radio host, said Florida voters' shift to the right is also about everyday luxuries. Four years ago, he said, he could buy a 12-pack of Coke Zero for about $4.50 and three 12-packs for about $13 at Publix, a local grocery chain. Now, he can't get a 12-pack of Coke Zero for under $9.

"I love Coke Zero, he said. "It makes me wonder what happened."

Supporters of former president Donald Trump wave Cuban and U.S. flags as they await election results outside Versailles Cuban restaurant in Miami on Nov. 5.
SILVIO CAMPOS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Expanding the GOP's reach

Sebastian Villa didn't always support Republicans. The 37-year-old sales representative voted for Democrat Barack Obama in the 2012 election. But in recent years, Villa said he shifted away from the party. He grew up as a Democrat but began doing his "own research" and found he connected more with Republicans and Trump.

"Looking at what has happened and what continues to go on in the world and just in the country, I figured I was making a mistake in being a Democrat," Villa said.

Obama won a record level of support among Latino voters after he invested in community outreach efforts and also because he promised to enact comprehensive immigration reform – garnering more than 70% of support among Latinos nationwide, according to Pew Research Center. The former president also made historic inroads with a longtime Republican stronghold: Cuban American voters. During his 2012 reelection campaign, Obama earned the largest share of support of any Democratic presidential candidate since Bill Clinton.

The majority of Miami-Dade County residents are Hispanic and Cuban Americans make up the largest percentage of that demographic, according to the U.S. Census. A growing number of Venezuelans, Colombians and Nicaraguans have also settled in the area.

Republicans in the past decade have focused on appealing to more Latino voters across Florida, beyond their party's existing support from most Cuban American voters. In recent election cycles, the GOP began to reap the rewards of that outreach.

In 2020, Trump beat Biden among Latino voters in Miami-Dade County by a 2 to 1 margin, even though Biden won the majority of Florida's Latino votes. In the 2022 midterms, Gov. Ron DeSantis made even more gains – becoming the first Republican governor in 20 years to win Miami-Dade County. DeSantis, who ran against Trump in the 2024 Republican presidential primary, is reportedly under consideration to replace the president-elect's controversial pick for defense secretary if that nomination falls through.

In 2024, Trump wasn't the only Republican to win big in Miami-Dade. GOP Sen. Rick Scott also won the majority of votes in the county, flipping his electoral outcome six years prior. In 2018, Democratic senate candidate Bill Nelson held the county over Scott by roughly 20 percentage points. Scott still won the state that midterm cycle.

In this election cycle, Scott leapfrogged over Democratic Senate candidate Debbie Mucarsel-Powell in Miami-Dade, winning the county by nearly 10 percentage points.

Employing a combination of grassroots and community organizing, including informational events, door knocking, phone banking and digital ads, Republicans consistently reached out to Latino voters, focusing their efforts on voters who were not affiliated with a party.

Cesar Grajales, director of public affairs for the LIBRE Initiative, a conservative advocacy group that targets Hispanic voters, said Democrats didn't continue their local networking and took the once-Democratic stronghold for granted.

The other problem for Democrats was their message for voters in the area, added Grajales, 43.

"You have to, regardless of party affiliation, you have to knock on the door, you have to talk to people," he said.

The message Latino voters were looking for was a promise to address the high prices that everyday Americans were experiencing, Grajales said.

"They were pushing for the political agenda that is completely disconnected from the needs and the reality of the Latinos, and I think that was put in this election cycle," said Grajales, who also hosts a morning radio show on Spanish station La Nueva Poderosa.

As a father of two, Villa said it's gotten harder to live in Miami, where the cost of his weekly grocery run has doubled, from $150 to nearly $300. These skyrocketing prices drove him to stick with and continue to support GOP candidates.

"It's hard to live right now, to be honest with you," Villa said. "Everybody decided to migrate from their different closed states, and since we're so open that it kind of made it hard for people that live here to be able to afford a house, be able to afford living."

In the end, voters said it comes down to who can make change for the better.

Milian doesn't feel any particular loyalty to Trump. He didn't vote for Trump in 2016, although he did support him in 2020. He's voted for both parties, he said. The real test will be whether Trump does what he says he would do: bring down prices.

"If in four years, Trump didn't do what he said he was gonna do with the economy, we'll vote for somebody else who we think will," Milian said.

Steps

Continued from Page 1B

Review estate plan and insurance coverage

More broadly, the year's end is a good time to review your estate plan, powers of attorney and insurance coverage, said Paul Mendelsohn, a certified public accountant in Livingston, New Jersey.

"Do you have life insurance, long-term disability insurance and long-term care insurance?" Mendelsohn said. If not, should you consider getting them? Long-term care insurance, perhaps the least-known of these three, helps cover the costs of assisted living and nursing homes.

Keep in mind, Mendelsohn said, that if one spouse has an insurance policy through work, "it does not cover the other spouse."

If you haven't done so recently, "schedule a meeting with an estate planning attorney to create or update your will, health care directives and other legal documents," said Niv Persaud, a certified financial planner in Atlanta.

Make charitable donations, gifts

Charitable giving is a big part of the holidays. And the IRS allows you to deduct cash donations to qualified charities, potentially up to 60% of your income.

Donations are tax-deductible only if they go to recognized charities. You'll need documentation for larger donations, NerdWallet says.

Charitable giving works as a tax shelter only if you itemize your deductions, rather than claim the standard deduction, at tax time. (Most of us don't itemize.)

"Charitable gifts should be made before the end of the year if one wants the deduction" for 2024, said Seth Benjamin Mullikin, a certified financial planner in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The holiday season is also a great time to make financial gifts to loved ones, Mullikin said. Individuals can gift up to $18,000 per recipient in 2024 without filing a gift tax return.

The gift tax is a federal levy on transfers of money or property to someone who doesn't give you something of equal value in return, according to NerdWallet.

If you give more than the annual gift tax limit, you must report it to the IRS.

Maximize pretax retirement savings

December is a good time to "make sure you've maxed out your retirement planning contributions," said Catherine Valega, a certified financial planner in Winchester, Massachusetts.

Tax-advantaged retirement accounts allow investors to save a portion of their income before taxes are taken out.

But there's a limit. For individual retirement accounts, or IRAs, the annual contribution limit is $7,000, or $8,000 for anyone 50 or older.

For employer-sponsored 401(k) plans, the maximum employee contribution is higher: $23,000, or $30,500 for people 50 and over.

"It's particularly important to take steps now to max out the 401(k)," said Robert Brokamp, a certified financial planner and senior adviser at The Motley Fool. "Because, in most cases, you can't just send in a check." Contributions generally go through your employer's payroll system, and you'll have to make any adjustments before the last checks of the year go out.

Contribution limits go up in 2025. So, now is also a good time to update your payroll deductions and IRA contributions to reflect the new caps, said Rob Schultz, a certified financial planner in Encino, California.

Even higher "catch-up" limits will be available for people 60 to 63 in 2025.

"I'm guessing most people have no idea about that new capability," Valega said.

Over 73? Take required minimum distribution on retirement account

A required minimum distribution, or RMD, is an amount you must withdraw from an IRA or 401(k) once you turn 73.

"If you haven't already, you need to complete your required minimum distributions from your IRA by December 31," said Devin Pope, a certified financial planner in Salt Lake City.

In exchange for the tax perks, the IRS requires that savers begin withdrawing from retirement plans when they reach a certain age. The RMD is a way for taxing authorities to take their cut from your retirement account.

A financial adviser can tell you how much you need to withdraw by year's end, or you can consult an RMD table. If you fail to withdraw the funds, you will face a 25% excise tax on the total you didn't cash out.

Harvest tax losses

The end of another year is an ideal time for an investment strategy called tax-loss harvesting. The technique, a tax-time staple for the wealthy, turns an investment loser into a tax winner.

You sell an investment that is down, replace it with something similar and leverage the losses to offset gains you have made by selling other investments.

"Harvest tax losses, if you have them," Mullikin said. And that completes the list. See how many items you can check off between now and New Year's Eve.

Travel

Continued from Page 1B

I was willing to endure the cramped conditions and lack of privacy because the cost of selecting a preferred seat was substantial," said Mercier, who also is a travel photographer.

• **Avoiding hotel resort fees by booking somewhere else.** Hotel resort fees are mandatory fees added to your hotel bill after the hotel quotes you a room rate, and sometimes much later. Christian Strange, an insurance agent from Virginia Beach, Virginia, said he won't darken the door of a hotel that charges a "gotcha" resort fee. On a recent trip to Miami, he skipped the large chain hotel with a resort fee and stayed at a boutique hotel a few blocks from the beach. "The location still allowed me to enjoy the area – but at a fraction of the cost," he said. He's not alone. I hear from travelers all the time who say they'll never stay at a hotel with a resort fee.

These strategies reflect a broader shift in traveler behavior, said Ramzy Ladah, an attorney and frequent air traveler from Las Vegas.

"People are fed up with being nickel-and-dimed, and they're pushing back in the only ways they know how," he said. "It's about taking back control."

Would you lie or cheat to avoid a fee?

One of the most intriguing questions is whether travelers would lie or cheat to avoid a fee. What's a cheat? For a few years, passengers could game Southwest Airlines' "Early Bird" access to its seats. One traveler would pay extra to board early and then save seats for the rest of the party. That infuriated some passengers. (Southwest closed that loophole and is moving to assigned seating, so no more Early Bird cheat-cheats.)

If the Department of Transportation gets its way, airlines would soon be barred from charging fees to assign seats for kids 13 or younger next to their parent or accompanying adult. And although passengers must give their birthdays when they buy an airline ticket, I've also met plenty of air travelers who have lied about their kids' ages to bypass these fees.

Resort fees also are easy to avoid with a little insider knowledge. You can use a corporate booking code that allows you to avoid paying the fee. That's right, corporate travel managers have negotiated these nuisance fees away – but only for their employees. And those with the booking code. (I'm not endorsing this strategy in any way.)

So will passengers bend a fact or two to avoid paying a bill? No doubt about it. And the reason is simple: People feel the fees are unfair, and often charged after a travel company quotes them a rate. It's basically a lie. And they feel that if they're being lied to, they have a license to lie right back.

But two wrongs don't make a right. You're better off avoiding these airlines and hotels than giving them your business.

What happens to these fees?

We're not in a good place, observers say.

"The proliferation of fees has led to a more complex and less transparent booking process, where the initial price seen by the traveler can be misleading," said Raymond Yorke, a spokesman for Redpoint Travel Protection. "This has fueled a rise in fee-avoidance behavior as travelers seek to control costs."

Yorke said it also points to a broader issue within the travel industry where the emphasis on ancillary revenue has overshadowed customer satisfaction. In other words, travel companies care more about money than they do about you. I know, *big* surprise.

And despite your creative avoidance strategies, travel companies – particularly airlines – seem more addicted to fees than ever. And they don't have to stop. There are no laws to prevent them from inventing new surcharges or from increasing existing ones. They don't have to justify the increases, either.

Unfortunately, since many travel companies dominate their markets, there's no meaningful competition. (Again, that's especially true for U.S. airlines.) So travelers may go to extremes to avoid fees. But in the end, if they want to travel, they'll have to pay up.

Our fee-avoidance is more than a few money-saving tricks. It's a form of silent protest against an industry that's lost its way. Travel should expand our horizons, not shrink our wallets.

Report shows labor market bouncing back

US employers added 227K jobs in November

Paul Davidson
USA TODAY

U.S. hiring bounced back in November with employers adding 227,000 jobs as the adverse toll on payrolls from two Southeast hurricanes and worker strikes largely reversed.

The unemployment rate rose from 4.1% to 4.2%, the Labor Department said Friday.

Economists surveyed by Bloomberg had forecast 215,000 job gains.

Also encouraging: Job gains for September and October were revised up by a total 56,000. September's tally was upgraded from 223,000 to 255,000 and October's, from 12,000 to 36,000. The changes paint a modestly brighter picture of the job market in late summer and early fall than previously believed.

"The November jobs report should assuage fears of recession," Jason Schenker, president of Prestige Economics, wrote in a note to clients.

Employers added just 36,000 jobs in October as Hurricanes Helene and Milton idled about 70,000 workers, according to Goldman Sachs estimates. About 50,000 of those employees were likely back at work last month, the research firm said.

Meanwhile, strikes at Boeing and a smaller aircraft maker reduced October employment by 38,000 and the return of those workers should have boosted last month's payrolls by a similar number, according to Goldman and Oxford Economics.

Bank of America expected a somewhat larger bump to November job gains of about 100,000 or more.

Yet uncertainty about the storms' precise effects could make it challenging for the Federal Reserve to gauge the labor market's underlying health as it weighs another interest rate cut at a meeting this month.

Most, but not all, of the weather effects likely unwound last month, Goldman said. And just 47% of employers responded to the Labor Department's October jobs survey.

Manufacturing payrolls reversed only about half of October's decline due to the aircraft strikes, said economist Stephen Brown of Capital Economics. That suggests the total boost to November payrolls from the unwinding of the impact from the storms and walkouts was about 70,000, below the 90,000 anticipated, he said. And that would mean job gains, excluding the one-time rebound effects, totaled a sturdy 157,000, Brown said.

Others took a more dour view. Employment gains averaged just 132,000 in October and November – a period that theoretically includes the hurricanes and strikes as well as the recovery – a pronounced downshift from the average 159,000 monthly jobs added in the third quarter, said Julia Pollak, chief economist of ZipRecruiter, a top jobs board.

Average hourly pay rose 13 cents to $35.61, keeping the yearly increase at 4%.

Pay increases have slowed as pandemic-related worker shortages have eased. Economists have said yearly wage growth needs to fall to 3.5% to align with the Fed's 2% inflation goal.

But strong growth in productivity – or output per worker – could allow companies to give raises closer to 4% without passing their higher costs to consumers through higher prices, economists have said.

The report leaves the Federal Reserve on course to cut its key interest rate by a quarter percentage point again this month, as most economists have expected, amid a generally cooling labor market and easing inflation.

But because of the storm and strike effects, Fed Governor Christopher Waller said this week that November's report could be misleading. And Barclays said officials likely would focus on average job gains the past three months rather than the November total. The three-month average was a solid, but not too hot, 172,000.

With a key inflation measure staying elevated in recent months, the Fed is expected to look even more closely at next week's report on November price increases.

In 2022 and 2023, the Fed hiked its key interest rate to a 23-year high of 5.25% to 5.5% to fight inflation. With annual inflation falling from 9.1% in mid-2022 to less than 3% recently - closer to the Fed's 2% goal – officials lowered the benchmark rate by a total three-quarters of a percentage point in September and November.

Another decrease is likely this month as the central bank brings the rate closer to historically normal levels. But futures markets expect the Fed to slow the pace of cuts next year because of a more gradual inflation drop-off, and President-elect Donald Trump's promised new tariffs and immigration crackdowns, which are likely to constrain the labor supply and push up wage growth.

Health care led the job gains with 54,000. Leisure and hospitality, a sector clobbered by the hurricanes, bounced back with 54,000 new jobs. Federal, state and local governments added 33,000; professional business services, 26,000; and manufacturing, 22,000.

But retail lost 28,000 jobs after seasonal adjustments, a sign that holiday hiring was weak compared to previous years.

More broadly, even before the hurricanes and strikes, U.S. job growth was slowing from a monthly average of 267,000 in the first quarter. An immigration surge fueling labor force growth has downshifted substantially following a Biden administration clampdown at the southern border.

And inflation and high interest rates have squeezed low- and middle-income Americans, leading those households to drive record U.S. credit card debt and elevated delinquencies.

At the same time, higher-income consumers continue to spend briskly amid solid wage growth, underpinning an economy that most forecasters say should avoid a recession.

Still, Trump's threats to impose 25% tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada and deport millions of immigrants who lack permanent legal status will push up inflation and weaken the economy and job market next year, according to Pantheon Macroeconomics and Nomura.

Travelers would rather be away than home for the holidays

Kathleen Wong
USA TODAY

Cassandra Sheridan spent Thanksgiving at the house of a woman whom she had never met before with a group of new people she knew from the web.

"I plan on staying all day," Sheridan, 41, said a few days before the gathering. "I'm excited to connect and play and build on what's already kind of started to build, even just online."

After living her entire life near Memphis, Sheridan moved to Port Richey, Florida, in July following a divorce and coming out as a queer woman. It's been tough leaving familiarity behind, but this chosen family is making the transition a little less difficult, she said.

"Coming here, someplace new and not having a family – you have a friend or two, but they have their own family – and doing something with a community-minded group who accept you and they've actively shown they want to be a part of your life (has made all the difference)," Sheridan said.

Sheridan is part of the growing number of Americans who are skipping the tradition of going home for the holidays in place of something that better aligns with their values. In a May 2024 survey, the majority of the 2,000 American respondents said they prefer to avoid going home for the holidays, with 85% coming up with a reason not to. Whether finding a chosen family who is more accepting of how they identify or going on a solo trip, these travelers are redefining what it means to celebrate the holidays. Sheridan met her Floridian support system through Stand in Pride, a nonprofit that matches LGBTQ+ individuals who have been rejected by their own network to allies wanting to step in as their chosen families. The organization started in 2021 as a series of Facebook groups but has grown into over 300,000 members in 26 countries and is now transitioning to a location-based mobile app.

"What we do is give people the space to put that invitation out or ask for that support," said Daniel Blevins, founder of Stand in Pride, who was inspired by Free Mom Hugs. The platform acts as a "starting point" for people to get connected and "start those family traditions with their new family" when the holidays come around.

"I think it makes all the difference because it can be very lonely; not just lonely, it can be almost impossible making a transition of anything," said Sheridan. "They're family-minded; that's the way it is for a lot of people. People don't always have that, especially when they come into a new place or their friends or family or what's supposed to be their support group aren't there for them because of how they identify or who they choose to have relationships with."

Cassandra Sheridan, middle, spent Thanksgiving with her new chosen family, the first time she met them offline. PROVIDED BY CASSANDRA SHERIDAN

Mikala took a solo trip last Christmas and New Year's Day to Mount Kilimanjaro. PROVIDED BY MIKALA WHITAKER

Fewer than 40% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning or another non-heterosexual identity or nonbinary youth said their home has been affirming of their identity, according to a 2023 survey by The Trevor Project, a nonprofit that focuses on suicide and crisis prevention among LGBTQ+ youth. Blevins added that Stand in Pride has older members who come out later in life and are estranged from their entire network. The emotional toll of being rejected by your family can be profound, with 41% of LGBTQ+ youth having seriously considered attempting suicide. That number is even higher among people of color and transgender individuals.

The holidays are an especially "overwhelming" time for the organization, as many members around the world are either opening their homes or looking for havens, Blevins said.

"From everything I've gotten from talking to our members, it's a sense of normalcy," Blevins said. "A lot of times, we grow up with certain traditions with our family, and when we're estranged, we lose those. It gives us a sense of belonging, and everybody deserves that."

There are also more travelers who are venturing out on their own for the holidays on solo trips. Vacation rental management platform Beyond found that a growing number of travelers are booking solo stays for Thanksgiving and Christmas this year. Last Thanksgiving, 11.3% of bookings were for single guests, but this year, the figure has risen to 20.6%. Some are taking advantage of their extended time off or the rise in remote work to use the holidays as a time for themselves. "What's been going on for the past few years ... with COVID and the lockdown ... there are no more rules anymore," said Beyond CEO Julie Brinkman.

"The holidays are incredibly stressful, and the ability to get away from that stress (is appealing)," she added.

Last year, for the first time, Mikala Whitaker skipped Christmas with her friends and family in exchange for crossing a major trip off her bucket list: hiking Mount Kilimanjaro. The North Carolina-based public relations professional had been looking for ways to revive her sense of self following the unexpected ending of her engagement. "I was like, you know I need to give myself something to look forward to, do something really exciting, something to heal from this experience," she said.

The idea came to her toward the end of the year, and with her office closed around Christmas, she thought, "I'm not going to wait anymore." Her family supported her decision, she said, adding that "they know that travel is important to me."

Whitaker, 29, arrived in Tanzania on Christmas Eve and spent Christmas unwinding by the hotel pool, appreciating how quiet the atmosphere was. A few days later, she embarked on the expedition with a group tour, spending New Year's with her fellow hikers. "It was definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience," she said.

Dollar Tree may raise prices due to tariff plans

Fernando Cervantes Jr.
USA TODAY

The current price of Dollar Tree's products may increase again because of President-elect Donald Trump's tariff plans, Dollar Tree executives said.

Apart from increased prices, the discount retailer said that the proposed tariffs could also change what products customers could find at Dollar Tree stores. During an earnings call on Wednesday, Dollar Tree CEO Michael Creedon said that Trump's plans to tax imported goods may lead to altered product sizes, or in some cases removing them from stores altogether if they become too expensive.

"We believe there is a wide range of potential actions that we can take to help mitigate additional tariffs if and when they materialize," Creedon said during the call.

Creedon did not say during the earnings call what products could be affected by the proposed tariffs, which could also affect Family Dollar stores, also owned by Dollar Tree.

What tariffs are proposed?

President-elect Trump has threatened to enact 25% tariffs on products from Mexico and Canada. In addition to these, Trump has also threatened a 10% tariff on products from China.

An analysis done by KeyBanc Capital Markets estimated that 40% of Dollar Tree's sales rely on imported goods, many of which come from China. In response to this, Dollar Tree said it would negotiate with vendors and change which countries with which it would be importing goods.

The same tactic was used by the company the last time Trump imposed tariffs during his first administration.

"Back in 2018 and 2019 when we last dealt with this issue, we were able to mitigate the majority of the potential impact by negotiating lower costs with our suppliers, changing product specs or pack sizes, or dropping noneconomical items. Today, all three of those options are still at our disposal," Creedon said.

Dollar Tree not the only company that could raise prices

Other retailers like Walmart and Best Buy have said they could be forced to raise prices because of the proposed tariffs.

"We're concerned that significantly increased tariffs could lead to increased costs for our customers at a time when they are still feeling the remnants of inflation," a Walmart spokesperson told Reuters.

50★States

News from across the USA

ALABAMA Montgomery: A recent report shows that the housing market in Alabama has seen a decrease in recent home sales, specifically over the last year, but this could prove opportunistic for buyers – especially during seasonal drops.

ALASKA Anchorage: The Anchorage Police Department said it will not move forward with using artificial intelligence to help write police reports for now after a three-month trial, Alaska Public Media reported.

ARIZONA Phoenix: A 15-year-old Chihuahua named Lucy is safe and reunited with her family after spending three days trapped in a deep tortoise den in her owners' backyard.

ARKANSAS Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas announced that the local Phi Gamma Delta fraternity has been suspended for a minimum of three years after hazing and other violations, KNWA reported.

CALIFORNIA San Francisco: San Francisco, Santa Barbara, and Thousand Oaks are home to California companies with the state's best pay and/or work environments, according to a U.S. News & World Report study.

COLORADO Denver: Colorado's wolves have not had a confirmed livestock depredation in nearly three months, the longest stretch since the beginning of the year. But the controversy over reintroducing wolves continues to fester with opposing groups of the issue taking their fight to Canada, where the next 15 wolves are scheduled to be captured for release in Colorado early next year.

CONNECTICUT Hartford: Plans for Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield to implement a new policy next year that would have capped anesthesia coverage for insurance holders in Connecticut will not go forward.

DELAWARE Wilmington: Following dozens of comments for and against short-term rentals in Delaware's largest city, Wilmington lawmakers opted to table plans to regulate the industry and develop a more agreeable approach in the new year.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA Washington: Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority said the agency is cracking down on bus fare evasion, which is causing the agency to lose about $50 million in revenue, DC News Now reported.

FLORIDA Miami: Alphabet's Waymo said it will expand its autonomous ride-hailing services to Miami, adding another city to its operations as it seeks to gain an edge in an increasingly competitive market. The company plans to introduce its vehicles to Miami's streets next year and aims to launch services to riders in 2026.

GEORGIA Atlanta: Last week, senators on the Study Committee on Artificial Intelligence met for the eighth and final time to release their recommendations for the upcoming session, seeking to balance necessary AI regulations with policies that allow for innovation and growth.

HAWAII Honolulu: The Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism said that the state is projected to see its economy grow by 2% in 2025, KHON2 reported.

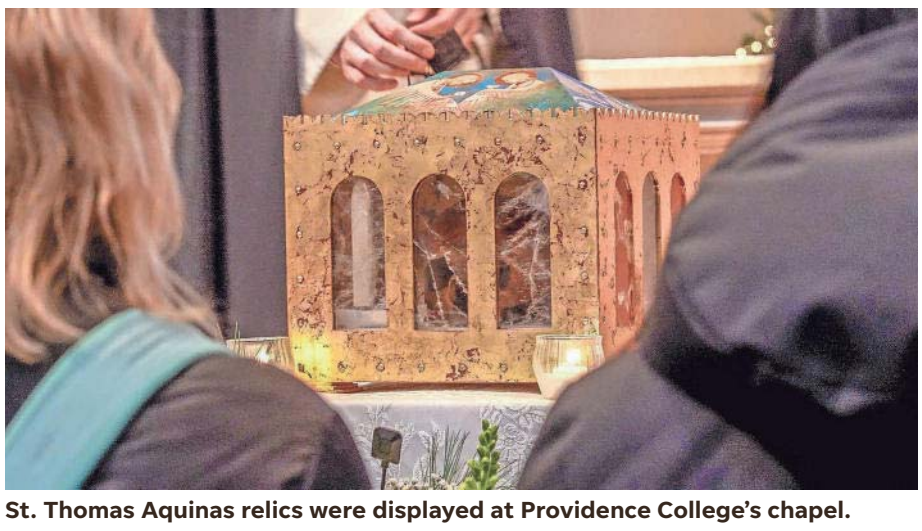
IDAHO Meridian: Central District Health has launched an investigation after a Treasure Valley resident was diagnosed with tuberculosis, Idaho Press reported.

ILLINOIS Springfield: Boys & Girls Clubs programming could soon end at eight Springfield elementary schools as a result of a state agency not renewing a grant. The Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Illinois announced last week the Illinois State Board of Education declined to renew a $1.2 million grant made available through the federal government.

INDIANA Indianapolis: The Federal Aviation Administration approved closing the downtown Indianapolis heliport, capping off a yearslong decommissioning process and clearing a hurdle for the Major League Soccer stadium that Mayor Joe Hogsett hopes to develop on the site.

IOWA Iowa City: Devastated by the 2008 floods, the old University of Iowa Art Building is getting a new lease on life. The Iowa Board of Regents approved plans for a $37 million renovation that will transform the 88-year-old building into the new home of the UI's Graduate College, the College of Education – Art Education and Maker Space, and the School of Planning and Public Affairs.

HIGHLIGHT: RHODE ISLAND



St. Thomas Aquinas relics were displayed at Providence College's chapel.
DAVID DELPOIO/USA TODAY NETWORK

Providence: Providence College had an unusual visitor last week – one of two skulls that may have belonged to the celebrated Catholic theologian St. Thomas Aquinas. The relics spent the past year on tour in Europe, and are being displayed in the U.S. for the first time in living memory, if not longer, said the Rev. Simon Teller, the college's chaplain and director of campus ministry. Providence is one of just 10 stops on their American tour. "It's a very big deal for us," Teller said. The Catholic church is currently celebrating Aquinas' jubilee. To mark the occasion, his purported skull is traveling the world in a gilded reliquary box.

KANSAS Topeka: Topeka had the eighth-highest air quality among U.S. cities in a recent study conducted by Auto Trader, an online vehicle marketplace based in Great Britain.

KENTUCKY Lexington: Lexington was ranked in the top 20 of two U.S. News & World Report lists of the 150 best cities in the country to live and to retire. Lexington is No. 15 in "Best Places to Live in the U.S. in 2025-2026," and No. 16 in the "2025 Best Places to Retire" list.

LOUISIANA Richland Parish: Gov. Jeff Landry and Meta executives officially announced the company will build its largest artificial intelligence data center in rural northeastern Louisiana, promising what Landry said will bring "generational transformation" to the state and region.

MAINE Portland: The Maine Recovery Council has distributed $13.9 million to 43 organizations across the state, its largest funding allocation since it began operations two years ago, News Center Maine reported.

MARYLAND Ocean City: The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management announced last week its approval of the Construction and Operations Plan for the Maryland Offshore Wind project off the coast of Ocean City. This is the final approval from BOEM needed for the project that has been opposed by Ocean City's mayor and many residents.

MASSACHUSETTS Boston: Is Boston the best sports city in America? According to a new ranking, it's up there, but not No. 1. Personal finance company WalletHub released its list of best sports cities in America, and Boston came in second.

MICHIGAN Ann Arbor: Researchers at the University of Michigan's Rogel and Blondy Pancreatic Cancer Center are believed to be the first in the world to study the pancreases of organ donors, giving unique insight into the triggers of one of the world's deadliest cancers.

MINNESOTA St. Paul: The Minnesota Department of Health announced that all municipal water systems have completed an inventory of their service lines, an important milestone in the state's effort to replace all lead services lines by 2033, Minnesota Reformer reported.

MISSISSIPPI Hattiesburg: Sometimes what seems too good to be true really is true. At least, that was the case for ASC-Hattiesburg, which received a $1.25 million grant to help alleviate homelessness in and around the Hub City.

MISSOURI Vernon County: Vernon County has received the lowest possible rating during a regularly scheduled state audit, with findings pointing to misuse of taxpayer money on gifts, an unconstitutional salary increase and overtaxing properties.

MONTANA Great Falls: Officials said a six-month-long enforcement initiative into drug trafficking on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation led by the federal Drug Enforcement Administration has resulted in the indictments of 11 people, KPAX reported.

NEBRASKA Grand Island: Grand Island Public Schools administration is recommending the closure of Seedling Mile Elementary School after the 2024-25 academic year due to financial and operational inefficiencies, KSNB reported.

NEVADA Las Vegas: The Clark County School Board of Trustees voted to reopen and repair Mount Charleston's Lundy Elementary School, which has been closed for more than a year after it it was damaged by Tropical Storm Hilary, KSNV and KLAS reported.

NEW HAMPSHIRE Rochester: Josh Levy, principal of Waterstone Properties, is assuring the public The Ridge phase 2 development is going to happen. He acknowledged years of delays and projected a 2025 groundbreaking for the mix of commercial and residential spaces.

NEW JERSEY Trenton: Federal immigration authorities want to expand immigration detention in New Jersey, alarming advocates who say it will help pave the way for President-elect Donald Trump to carry out mass deportations.

NEW MEXICO Bernalillo County: PNM announced that the Atrisco Solar and Energy Storage Project, which is one of the biggest solar panel and energy storage projects in the nation and has been years in the making, is finally online and now providing clean energy to PNM customers, KRQE reported.

NEW YORK New York: The American Museum of Natural History revealed the identity of its latest resident on Thursday – "Apex," one of the most complete specimens ever discovered of the plant-eating dinosaur Stegosaurus, known for the upright plates on its back and a spiky tail. To excited gasps from an audience of school children, the museum pulled back a beige curtain to reveal the 11-foot tall, 20-foot long skeleton of the Jurassic Period dinosaur.

NORTH CAROLINA Wilmington: Wilmington was named the "drunkest city" in North Carolina by 24/7 Wall St, a financial news website. The report is based on 2023 data compiled by the University of Wisconsin Public Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The survey measures excessive drinking, which was found in 20.3% of Wilmington's adult population.

NORTH DAKOTA Bismarck: A bill recently submitted by Rep. Mike Nathe proposes to spend $15 million to replace drones used by state agencies that were manufactured in China, North Dakota Monitor reported.

OHIO Upper Arlington: It might be a few years before Fancyburg Park, one of the largest city-run parks in Upper Arlington, is on the schedule for capital improvements. But city staff are already figuring out how to plan any potential improvements. An online survey garnered over 900 responses from people, most of whom live in Upper Arlington and are regular visitors to the park. While the exact improvements have yet to be decided, the city has already budgeted up to $6 million for the project in the capital improvement budget.

OKLAHOMA Oklahoma City: The key to solving Lela Johnston's violent death sat in evidence for nearly 50 years before police had the means to identify her killer. But DNA alone wasn't enough to find out who assaulted and murdered Johnston, a 68-year-old woman who lived alone in May 1976. Detectives with the Oklahoma City Police Department Cold Case Unit announced last week that for the first time, they used genealogy research to solve a homicide case.

OREGON Marion County: For nearly four decades, most of Marion County's garbage has gone to an incinerator in Brooks to be burned. That ends in a few weeks. Reworld, the New Jersey-based company that now owns the incinerator, said it will stop taking the county's waste on Dec. 31, and the facility's future is unclear.

PENNSYLVANIA Bucks County: More than two years after it passed, an "advocacy activities" policy widely criticized as a tool to quash discussion about racism and LGBTQ+ topics has been repealed by officials in the Pennridge School District.

SOUTH CAROLINA Columbia: In 2025, the South Carolina Department of Transportation will replace 10 bridges damaged by Tropical Storms Debby and Helene. Construction on these bridge replacements will begin in the winter of 2025. Each project is estimated to take approximately eight months to complete.

SOUTH DAKOTA Sioux Falls: The Sioux Falls City Council's vote on a massive bond to replace two of the community's aging pools appears to have been once again delayed, even as councilors appeared publicly supportive of the project at their last meeting.

TENNESSEE Nashville: More than 67,000 students applied for a Tennessee Promise scholarship this year, marking the most applicants since the program began in 2015. The state-funded scholarship covers tuition and mandatory fees for recent high school graduates pursuing an associate degree certificate or diploma program.

TEXAS El Paso: El Paso County's Migrant Support Services Center is set to shutter at the end of December, amidst uncertainty over future Trump administration funding support for the program.

UTAH Salt Lake City: A recent WalletHub report found that Utah is one of the states with the lowest vulnerability to identity theft and fraud, ranking 44th in the nation, KUTV reported.

VERMONT Burlington: A Vermont judge has ruled that Burlington has the legal authority to regulate short-term rental properties in the city. The ruling comes a year after an initial lawsuit was filed by multiple property owners who argued that a 2022 ordinance seeking to regulate short-term rentals represented government overreach.

VIRGINIA Harrisonburg: It's been three years since federal authorities charged an Augusta County businessman with tax fraud, but the government will have to wait at least another month to try former Nexus Services Inc. executive Richard Moore after his federal trial was postponed once again.

WASHINGTON Olympia: With the state facing a multi-billion dollar budget gap, Gov. Jay Inslee has ordered state agencies to freeze "most non-discretionary and non-essential" hiring, service contracts, purchasing and travel, Washington State Standard reported.

WEST VIRGINIA Morgantown: Federal Bureau of Prisons officials announced that operations at FPC Morgantown will be suspended, WDTV reported.

WISCONSIN Madison: Wetlands save Wisconsin and the upper Midwest almost $23 billion per year that would otherwise be spent combating flooding, a new report has found. And that comes as the loss of wetlands has accelerated, and critical protections have eased.

WYOMING Cheyenne: A new study conducted by personal finance website WalletHub ranks two Wyoming towns in the top 100 on its best and worst cities for singles, KGAB reported. Casper is ranked 48th, while Cheyenne is ranked 68th, according to the news outlet.

From USA TODAY Network and wire reports

Bengals-Cowboys MNF game gets special treatment, 2C

Galaxy capture 6th MLS championship, **5C**
Norris wins F1 final in Abu Dhabi, **5C**

Latest news, results, opinions 24/7 at sports.usatoday.com

See who won and who lost Sunday as Week 14 continued in the NFL

10-2 Tennessee and defensive back Jermod McCoy (3) defends Alabama wide receiver Ryan Williams (2). ALAN POIZNER/IMAGN IMAGES

ACC big winner revealed

CFP WINNERS AND LOSERS

Paul Myerberg USA TODAY

The debut 12-team College Football Playoff field is set, but not without a late dose of controversy.

SMU earned an at-large bid ahead of Alabama after losing 34-31 to Clemson in the ACC championship game Saturday. Trailing 31-14 entering the fourth quarter, the Mustangs went on a 17-0 run to tie the game with 16 seconds left. The Tigers drilled a 56-yard field goal as time expired to earn an automatic playoff bid.

That was the lone source of debate in what is otherwise a predictable bracket. The top four seeds, as expected, were No. 1 Oregon, No. 2 Georgia, No. 3 Boise State and No. 4 Arizona State. Those teams will host the winning teams from the opening round in the quarterfinals.

The at-large teams are No. 5 seed Texas, No. 6 Penn State, No. 7 Notre Dame, No. 8 Ohio State, No. 9 Tennessee, No. 10 Indiana and No. 11 SMU. Clemson comes in at No. 12 as the fifth conference champion.

SMU and Alabama lead the winners and losers from the final playoff rankings:

WINNERS

SMU

There's reason to think SMU would've been left out in favor of Alabama had Clemson maintained the 17-point lead it held at halftime and again in the third quarter of the ACC title game. A convincing loss to the Tigers would've forced the committee to look closer at the Mustangs' résumé of wins compared to Alabama. But the late comeback and competitive defeat were enough to bolster SMU's case. And it's not like the Mustangs are backdooring into the 12-team field; they beat six bowl teams in the

See ACC, Page 7C

SMU LB Kobe Wilson reacts after a win over California. JEROME MIRON/IMAGN IMAGES

US LBM Coaches Poll

Rank, team (1sts)	W-L	Pts	LW
1 Oregon (54)	13-0	1350	1
2 Georgia	11-2	1281	5
3 Notre Dame	11-1	1214	4
4 Texas	11-2	1178	2
5 Penn State	11-2	1080	3
6 Tennessee	10-2	1069	6
7 Ohio State	10-2	1037	8
8 Boise State	12-1	929	10
9 Indiana	11-1	925	9
10 Arizona State	11-2	856	13
11 Alabama	9-3	749	11
12 SMU	11-2	741	7
13 Clemson	10-3	707	17
14 South Carolina	9-3	668	12
15 Ole Miss	9-3	631	15
16 Miami (FL)	10-2	611	14
17 BYU	10-2	423	18
18 Army West Point	11-1	361	23
19 Iowa State	10-3	355	16
20 Missouri	9-3	282	20
21 Illinois	9-3	275	21
22 Colorado	9-3	228	22
23 Memphis	10-2	166	24
24 UNLV	10-3	140	19
25 Syracuse	9-3	129	25

Others receiving votes: Texas A&M 8-4 50; Duke 9-3 40; Louisville 8-4 17; Kansas State 8-4 16; Marshall 10-3 14; Ohio 10-3 8; Tulane 9-4 6; Louisiana 10-3 6; Georgia Tech 7-5 3; Jacksonville State 9-4 3; Iowa 8-4 1; and LSU 8-4 1.

CFP BRACKET, SCHEDULE

College Football Playoff bracket matchups set

Staff reports
USA TODAY

After a tense weekend of conference championship games made things even tougher, the College Football Playoff committee has rendered its decision on which 12 teams will continue their quest for a national title.

The top four seeds were given to conference champions Oregon of the Big Ten, Georgia of the SEC, Boise State of the Mountain West and Arizona State of the Big 12. Those schools will receive first-round byes, allowing them to watch whatever chaos unfolds and take advantage of an extra week of rest before they play again.

Following much deliberation, here's who else the committee chose to round out this year's playoff field:

College Football Playoff matchups, schedule

All first-round games will take place at the home field of the higher-seeded team and will be played on either Friday, Dec. 20 or Saturday, Dec. 21.

See BRACKET, Page 7C

Shortstop Adames signed by SF to $182 million deal

Gabe Lacques
USA TODAY

The San Francisco Giants swung big and missed on Aaron Judge and Shohei Ohtani, making runs at but failing to reel in the biggest free agent the past two winters.

This time they tried a different tactic, sitting out the Juan Soto sweepstakes – yet still doled out the biggest contract in franchise history.

The Giants and shortstop Willy Adames have agreed to a seven-year, $182 million contract, according to a person with direct knowledge of the agreement. The person spoke to USA TODAY Sports on condition of anonymity because the deal has not yet been finalized.

Adames, 29, slugged 32 home runs last year for the Milwaukee Brewers, his second 30-homer season in the past three. The starting shortstop for the Tampa Bay Rays in the 2020 World Series, he was traded to Milwaukee a year later and has emerged as one of the most reliable sources of middle infield power in the game.

Willy Adames set career highs with 32 home runs and 112 RBI in 2024. CHARLES LECLAIRE/IMAGN IMAGES

That does come with some cost. Adames is strikeout-prone – he whiffed 173 times last season – and his strikeout rate has never dipped below 25%.

His production can be volatile from year-to-year, as his adjusted OPS has ranged from 121 to 110 to 94 to 118 between 2021 and 2024.

But he'll add a significant dimension to the largely punchless Giants, who have hovered in the 80-win range ever since winning a franchise-high 107 games in 2021.

Three years of mediocrity resulted in the firing of baseball operations chief Farhan Zaidi, who was replaced by future Hall of Famer Buster Posey. Posey was the previous recipient of the Giants' biggest contract ever, a $167 million extension that took him to the end of his playing career in 2022.

Now, it is Adames who holds that distinction. Whether he can maintain his prodigious power numbers as he ages is open to question.

But there's no denying the immediate punch he gives the Giants up the middle and alleviating the pressure on young slugging infielder Tyler Fitzgerald, who socked 15 home runs last season and presumably would move to second base.

Contributing: Bob Nightengale

NFL WEEK 14 BOLD PREDICTION

Expect another Monday night shootout

Nate Davis
USA TODAY

You're decidedly forgiven if you failed to make Browns at Broncos appointment viewing on "Monday Night Football" last week … but your bad if that was the case, and I'd advise not making the same mistake this Monday.

While there are almost zero playoff implications for the Bengals-Cowboys matchup – both teams have about a 2% chance to qualify at this point amid highly disappointing seasons – don't discount the allure of the prime-time stage, even for players who are basically running out the clock on their season.

Cincy QB Joe Burrow is good for 300-plus yards and 3-plus TDs a week – a good chunk of that earmarked for WR Ja'Marr Chase.

Conversely, the Bengals have surrendered nearly 35 points per game over their past five, so every reason to expect the Cowboys offense – even with QB2 Cooper Rush in the lineup – has a big night as they try to run their winning streak to three.

Perhaps not a so-called big game, but quite possibly *the* one you won't want to miss in Week 14, especially if you have a fantasy investment.

+: ESPN, NFL, Disney set MNF in Springfield

Nick Brinkerhoff
USA TODAY

Fans of the Cincinnati Bengals and Dallas Cowboys have been desperate to escape reality in 2024. Luckily for them, ESPN and the NFL have a way to make that happen.

The game has been moved to Springfield, the site of the famous nuclear power plant in the long-running sitcom "The Simpsons."

It's being dubbed "Simpsons Funday Football," although it's a mystery how much fun these two fan bases will have if their struggles keep up. Both squads came into the campaign with great expectations and have fallen short time and time again. In the words of Homer Simpson, "Kids, you tried your best, and you failed miserably. The lesson is, never try."

While that won't happen in the NFL, the Cowboys and Bengals are at a crossroads. Dallas made the decision to pay big money to Dak Prescott, CeeDee Lamb and other stars, leaving them short on cash in terms of the salary cap. Those contracts have seemingly put a cap on this core's ability to win moving forward.

The Bengals are stuck in a familiar spot. The bill is coming due for some of their top talent, but Cincinnati isn't a team that typically pays up in those spots. That's only cast a cloud over them in 2024, leaving their future up in the air.

It's fitting that this is the matchup that makes its way to Atoms Stadium in Springfield. Here's everything you need to know about the alt-cast.

Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott, shown playing air guitar during warm-ups Oct. 6, is out with a hamstring injury. CHARLES LECLAIRE/IMAGN IMAGES

What is the Simpsons' NFL broadcast?

Inspired by the success of alternate broadcasts in sports, "The Simpsons" game is just the latest installment. In an ongoing effort to expand and find new ways to entertain an audience, the NFL previously turned to Nickelodeon and Disney Pixar's "Toy Story."

While the "Toy Story" version ended up being a one-time thing for the 2023 season's Week 4 matchup between the Jaguars and Falcons in London, the Nickelodeon gimmick is here to stay. The slime-inspired alt-cast has been a hit, earning a spot in the Super Bowl 58 broadcast lineup. Disney and ESPN even tested their animation capabilities with a "Big City Greens" version of an NHL game, which looks like it'll become a yearly tradition.

After acquiring "The Simpsons" in their acquisition of 21st Century Fox in 2019, the stage for this Week 14 game to become a reality was set. According to a news release, the live animation will feature Bart as a member of the Bengals and Homer with the Cowboys. Marge and Lisa will interview players while Maggie operates the SkyCam.

Voice actors from the show Hank Azaria, Nancy Cartwright, Dan Castellaneta, Julie Kavner and Yeardley Smith are also set to participate. The broadcast will feature skits and other prerecorded content, with some custom scenes from the shows' producers. ESPN's Drew Carter, Mina Kimes and Dan Orlovsky are set to call the action.

When is the Simpsons' NFL broadcast?

Fans eager to catch a glimpse of the action in Springfield will have to wait until Dec. 9 for the Week 14 matchup. Anyone looking for the Atoms Stadium experience can view it on ESPN+, Disney+, and NFL+.

Fans who want a traditional viewing experience can still tune into ESPN to hear Joe Buck, Troy Aikman and Lisa Salters. The Week 14 matchup will feature a "ManningCast" with Peyton and Eli Manning.

Who will play in the Simpsons' game?

The Dallas Cowboys will host the Cincinnati Bengals in the first edition of "The Simpsons" game. While the actual contest will be played at AT&T Stadium in Dallas, this version will have the teams dueling at their hometown in Springfield.

While the teams hope their fortunes change, it's been coming up anything but Millhouse this season.

Bill Belichick as … Rodney Dangerfield?

Jarrett Bell
Columnist
USA TODAY

Needing just 15 victories to surpass Don Shula as the winningest coach in NFL history, it's hard to fathom the notion that Bill Belichick's next job could be on the college level.

Yet according to multiple reports, Belichick spoke last week with the University of North Carolina about the opening created with the firing of head coach Mack Brown.

Would B.B. go back to school?

I'd have to see this to believe it.

Then again, it was stunning that Belichick was shut out during the last NFL hiring cycle, interviewing only with the Atlanta Falcons for the seven openings beyond the New England Patriots job.

Maybe Belichick, 72, is pondering whether the college level could become a legitimate option for him if no other NFL team comes calling.

If it were to be an option, the time isn't now. With perhaps as many as seven NFL teams projected to be in the market for a coach with the upcoming cycle, he'll get more action than the last time around. I think.

Belichick – the winningest coach in NFL postseason history with a 31-13 record, on top of his 302-165 regular-season mark – hasn't declared whether chasing Shula's regular-season victory total (328) or the overall win count (347) is a big motivator. That wouldn't be his style.

But it's hard to think that it wouldn't be an incentive, given a lifetime of competing.

I'm guessing it ranks right below the chance to coach again.

In the NFL.

Bill Belichick is the winningest coach in NFL postseason history at 31-13.
DAVID BUTLER II/IMAGN IMAGES

USA TODAY
Wine Club

Today in local ~~news~~ wine:

Join USA TODAY Wine Club and discover the hidden gems of small, family-owned wineries from around the country.

Your six-bottle starter box is only $54.

Scan to join our Wine Club family, and get 40% OFF your first order!
Questions? Call us:
+1 (888) 366-2161
Visit us: wineclub.usatoday.com

Alabama left lamenting Oklahoma loss

Scooby Axson
USA TODAY

Tis the season for complaining.

In other words, it's December, the teams for the 12-team College Football Playoff have been selected, and the talk about resumes and which teams you beat or lost to will be debated ad nauseam until the first round of games.

The teams on this snubs list have no one to blame but themselves. But in any other year, each of them is good enough to make the playoff and possibly play for a national championship, and the snub is more of a numbers game.

So those who didn't receive the gifts they wanted from Santa and his elves (a.k.a. Warde Manuel and the CFP selection committee) can look forward to next year – along with mass transfer portal entries, bowl game opt-outs and the usual finger-pointing at those reclining in Grapevine, Texas, tasked with being objective and selecting and seeding the nation's best football teams.

Alabama

Alabama's snub can be summed up in two words: Norman, Oklahoma. That was the site of the Crimson Tide's 2024 house of horrors when they laid an absolute egg two weeks ago against a pedestrian, yet motivated, Oklahoma team. Losing to Vanderbilt earlier in the season didn't help either, but the way Alabama was completely dominated by the Sooners had fans and pundits jumping off the bandwagon despite their resume being as strong as any of the actual playoff participants.

Miami

There are only so many times you get a second chance, and the Hurricanes had multiple chances this season to make this point moot. Losing twice by a grand total of nine points gets no sympathy here, and the nation's leader in total and scoring offense won't get a chance to show that off. In this case, it isn't who Miami lost to; it's comparing them to other schools and picking and choosing which data point (strength of record, the strength of schedule, eye test, etc.) satisfies whatever argument is being made to whatever athletic director has a gripe.

South Carolina

It's too bad Shane Beamer doesn't have the gift of gab like Nick Saban because maybe, just maybe, it would do him some favors in trying to get the Gamecocks into the playoffs. South Carolina is as hot as any team in the nation and wouldn't be an easy out no matter who it played.

Mississippi

Perhaps Ole Miss has the most legitimate claim to be included in the playoffs. But then again, losing to Kentucky and Florida, regardless of whether the SEC is the toughest conference, with a team with more talent than both of those teams combined, likely fell on deaf ears to the selection committee. Lane Kiffin knows exactly how this works and no amount of clowning the ACC was going to get them one of those 12 slots.

Army

Truthfully, Army could have gone 12-0 and received zero consideration for the playoffs. However, winning championships and possibly the commander-in-chief trophy are the only consolation this season for the Black Knights. A team with a top-10 defense and a top-10 rushing offense, such as Army, could give most of the teams in the playoff issues. But being in the AAC, without a previous history as a giant killer, and losing the one game they had to have (a 35-point beatdown by Notre Dame) gives them no benefit of the doubt, no matter what AAC Commissioner Tim Pernetti says.

Nick Saban shares schedule strength thoughts

Austin Curtright
USA TODAY NETWORK

Saban

Former Alabama football coach Nick Saban shared passionate thoughts Sunday on the College Football Playoff's selection process, including how strength of schedule is valued.

Saban was likely upset with Alabama being the first team left out of the 12-team bracket, as SMU earned the final at-large spot despite losing in the ACC championship game.

"My point earlier was that if SMU was (ranked) 8, and they played in the conference championship game and they lost by three points, they shouldn't be penalized for that, necessarily," Saban said on ESPN's CFP selection show. "But my question about all the strength of schedule, 15th strength of schedule versus 60th strength of schedule, that should've been taken into consideration before they ever played in the championship game. Maybe (SMU's) ranked 12th and if they win the game they get in and if they lose the game Clemson gets in.

"But it wasn't that way, so it looks like they have to get penalized. But if it was done based on strength of schedule to start with, that wouldn't have been the case. I really think, playing in the (SEC) for over 20 years, when you have to go play Tennessee, then you gotta go play LSU, then that team that you play next, you may be more vulnerable to. And you must have a very mature, competitive team that has a lot of depth to be able to play through all these circumstances, and it's very, very difficult.

"And to not take into consideration when you don't beat one top 25 team. Not one top 25 team. And you went through your whole season, Indiana didn't do that, SMU really didn't do that. It makes a huge difference. I mean, the Pittsburgh Steelers got beat by the Cleveland Browns. We don't sit around and say that should now (the Steelers) out of the playoffs. They still can play their way into the playoffs by beating other good teams."

While Saban never technically named Alabama, he did seem pretty clear to think SEC teams should have an advantage based on strength of schedule. Ole Miss and South Carolina were the other three-loss SEC teams on the outside looking in.

The Crimson Tide didn't do themselves any favors this season, however, with losses to a pair of 6-6 teams in Vanderbilt and Oklahoma, with the Sooners dominating Alabama 24-3 at home.

Saban later raised the question of the importance of scheduling good teams during your season, as he mentioned Alabama having games with Notre Dame, Ohio State and Wisconsin in upcoming seasons, on top of an already difficult conference schedule.

"Those are great games for fans to see," Saban said, "and what I think we should be doing in college football is creating more good inventory for more great games that people are interested in, but do you enhance people wanting to do that, where what's an athletic director gonna do, he may go cancel all those games now knowing that the SEC is tough enough."

Saban holds a 292-71-1 record as a head coach, winning seven national championships, six of which were with Alabama. The five-time SEC Coach of the Year retired following the end of the 2023 season after the Crimson Tide fell to Michigan in overtime of a College Football Playoff semifinal.

Saban is now a full-time member of ESPN's "College GameDay," the pregame show that travels to the site of their game of the week each Saturday.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BOWL SCHEDULE

Postseason lineup, from Dec. 14 through Jan. 20

Erick Smith USA TODAY

This college football postseason will be unlike any other in the sport's history. With the first year of the expanded playoff format, the season will run through the third week of January. Along the way, there will be 11 games that decide the national champion with contests being played on campus for the first time and including the six major bowls.

Those first-round games will take place Dec. 20 and 21 and are followed by the quarterfinals on Dec. 31 and Jan. 1. The semifinals will be played at the Cotton Bowl and Orange Bowl on Jan. 9 and Jan. 10, respectively. The national championship game will be held Jan. 20 at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta.

But there's also more than just the chase for the national championship. A full lineup of bowl games will kickoff on Dec. 14 and run concurrently with the playoff until the Bahamas Bowl on Jan. 4.

A look at the entire 46-game postseason schedule with dates, times and television details along with all the matchups that will take you through the holiday season and beyond:

Salute to Veterans Bowl

MATCHUP: South Alabama vs. Western Michigan
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 14, Montgomery, Ala., 9 p.m., ESPN

Frisco Bowl

MATCHUP: Memphis vs. West Virginia
DETAILS: Tuesday, Dec. 17, Frisco, Texas, 9 p.m., ESPN

Boca Raton Bowl

MATCHUP: James Madison vs. Western Kentucky
DETAILS: Wednesday, Dec. 18, Boca Raton, Fla., 5:30 p.m., ESPN

LA Bowl

MATCHUP: UNLV vs. California
DETAILS: Wednesday, Dec. 18, Inglewood, Calif., 9 p.m., ESPN

New Orleans Bowl

MATCHUP: Georgia Southern vs. Sam Houston State
DETAILS: Thursday, Dec. 19, New Orleans, 7 p.m., ESPN2

Cure Bowl

MATCHUP: Ohio vs. Jacksonville State
DETAILS: Friday, Dec. 20, Orlando, Fla., noon, ESPN

Gasparilla Bowl

MATCHUP: Florida vs. Tulane
DETAILS: Friday, Dec. 20, Tampa, Fla., 3:30 p.m., ESPN

College Football Playoff

MATCHUP: Indiana at Notre Dame
DETAILS: Friday, Dec. 20, campus site, 8 p.m., ABC/ESPN

College Football Playoff

MATCHUP: SMU at Penn State
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 21, campus site, noon, TNT

College Football Playoff

MATCHUP: Clemson at Texas
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 21, campus site, 4 p.m., TNT

College Football Playoff

MATCHUP: Tennessee at Ohio State
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 21, campus site, 8 p.m., ABC/ESPN

Myrtle Beach Bowl

MATCHUP: Coastal Carolina vs. Texas-San Antonio
DETAILS: Monday, Dec. 23, Conway, S.C., 11 a.m., ESPN

Idaho Potato Bowl

MATCHUP: Northern Illinois vs. Fresno State
DETAILS: Monday, Dec. 23, Boise, Idaho, 2:30 p.m., ESPN

Hawaii Bowl

MATCHUP: South Florida vs. San Jose State
DETAILS: Tuesday, Dec. 24, Honolulu, 8 p.m., ESPN

GameAbove Sports Bowl

MATCHUP: Pittsburgh vs. Toledo
DETAILS: Thursday, Dec. 26, Detroit, 2 p.m., ESPN

Rate Bowl

MATCHUP: Rutgers vs. Kansas State
DETAILS: Thursday, Dec. 26, Phoenix, 5:30 p.m., ESPN

68 Ventures Bowl

MATCHUP: Arkansas State vs. Bowling Green
DETAILS: Thursday, Dec. 26, Mobile, Ala., 9 p.m., ESPN

Birmingham Bowl

MATCHUP: Vanderbilt vs. Georgia Tech
DETAILS: Friday, Dec. 27, Birmingham, Ala., noon or 3:30 p.m., ESPN

Armed Forces Bowl

MATCHUP: Navy vs. Oklahoma
DETAILS: Friday, Dec. 27, Fort Worth, Texas, noon or 3:30 p.m., ESPN

Liberty Bowl

MATCHUP: Arkansas vs. Texas Tech
DETAILS: Friday, Dec. 27, Memphis, Tenn., 7 p.m., ESPN

Holiday Bowl

MATCHUP: Washington State vs. Syracuse
DETAILS: Friday, Dec. 27, San Diego, 8 p.m., Fox

Las Vegas Bowl

MATCHUP: Texas A&M vs. Southern California
DETAILS: Friday, Dec. 27, Las Vegas, 10:30 p.m., ESPN

Fenway Bowl

MATCHUP: Connecticut vs. North Carolina
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 28, Boston, 11 a.m., ESPN

Pinstripe Bowl

MATCHUP: Boston College vs. Nebraska
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 28, New York, noon, ABC

New Mexico Bowl

MATCHUP: TCU vs. Louisiana-Lafayette
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 28, Albuquerque, 2:15 p.m., ESPN

Pop-Tarts Bowl

MATCHUP: Miami (Fla.) vs. Iowa State
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 28, Orlando, Fla., 3:30 p.m., ABC

Arizona Bowl

MATCHUP: Miami (Ohio) vs. Colorado State
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 28, Tucson, Ariz., 4:30 p.m., CW

Military Bowl

MATCHUP: North Carolina State vs. East Carolina
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 28, Annapolis, Md., 5:45 p.m., ESPN

Alamo Bowl

MATCHUP: Brigham Young vs. Colorado
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 28, San Antonio, 7:30 p.m., ABC

Independence Bowl

MATCHUP: Army vs. Marshall
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 28, Shreveport, La., 9:15 p.m., ESPN

Music City Bowl

MATCHUP: Missouri vs. Iowa
DETAILS: Monday, Dec. 30, Nashville, Tenn., 2:30 p.m., ESPN

ReliaQuest Bowl

MATCHUP: Alabama vs. Michigan
DETAILS: Tuesday, Dec. 31, Tampa, Fla., noon, ESPN

Sun Bowl

MATCHUP: Washington vs. Louisville
DETAILS: Tuesday, Dec. 31, El Paso, Texas, 2 p.m., CBS

Citrus Bowl

MATCHUP: Illinois vs. South Carolina
DETAILS: Tuesday, Dec. 31, Orlando, Fla., 3 p.m., ABC

Texas Bowl

MATCHUP: LSU vs. Baylor
DETAILS: Tuesday, Dec. 31, Houston, 3:30 p.m., ESPN

Fiesta Bowl

MATCHUP: Boise State vs. Penn State-SMU winner
DETAILS: Tuesday, Dec. 31, Glendale, Ariz., 7:30 p.m., ESPN

Peach Bowl

MATCHUP: Arizona State vs. Texas-Clemson winner
DETAILS: Wednesday, Jan. 1, Atlanta, 1 p.m., ESPN

Rose Bowl

MATCHUP: Oregon vs. Ohio State-Tennessee winner
DETAILS: Wednesday, Jan. 1, Pasadena, Calif., 5 p.m., ESPN

Georgia wide receiver Dominic Lovett (6) runs the ball against Texas on Saturday. BRETT PATZKE/IMAGN IMAGES

Sugar Bowl

MATCHUP: Georgia vs. Notre Dame-Indiana winner
DETAILS: Wednesday, Jan. 1, New Orleans, 8:30 p.m., ESPN

Gator Bowl

MATCHUP: Duke vs. Mississippi
DETAILS: Thursday, Jan. 2, Jacksonville, Fla., 7:30 p.m., ESPN

First Responder Bowl

MATCHUP: North Texas vs. Texas State
DETAILS: Friday, Jan. 3, Dallas, 4 p.m., ESPN

Duke's Mayo Bowl

MATCHUP: Virginia Tech vs. Minnesota
DETAILS: Friday, Jan. 3, Charlotte, N.C., 7:30 p.m., ESPN

Bahamas Bowl

MATCHUP: Liberty vs. Buffalo
DETAILS: Saturday, Jan. 4, Nassau, Bahamas, 11 a.m., ESPN2

Orange Bowl

MATCHUP: College Football Playoff semifinal
DETAILS: Thursday, Jan. 9, Miami Gardens, Fla., 7:30 p.m., ESPN

Cotton Bowl

MATCHUP: College Football Playoff semifinal
DETAILS: Friday, Jan. 10, Arlington, Texas, 7:30 p.m., ESPN

College Football Playoff championship game

MATCHUP: CFP semifinal winners
DETAILS: Monday, Jan. 20, Atlanta, 7:30 p.m., ESPN

Juan Soto bids eclipse $700 million

Bob Nightengale
Columnist
USA TODAY

Juan Soto finished third in AL MVP voting in 2024.
DAVID RICHARD/IMAGN IMAGES

DALLAS – It was 24 years ago that baseball's Winter Meetings, in this same location, produced one of the wildest free agent runs in history.

Alex Rodriguez received a staggering 10-year, $252 million contract, twice as much as the biggest contract in sports history, and more than the total value of 18 MLB franchises. There was a record $739 million spent on 25 free agents at the Hilton Anatole in Dallas.

Now, nearly a quarter-century later, those meetings could look like a neighborhood bake sale with the amount of money that's about to be distributed.

Juan Soto is on the verge of signing a deal that will certainly exceed a record $700 million – perhaps reach $750 million – two officials with direct knowledge of negotiations told USA TODAY Sports. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly comment.

Soto's deal will eclipse Shohei Ohtani's 10-year, $700 million deal last winter with the Los Angeles Dodgers, and will pay Soto an average salary of at least $47 million a year for 14 or 15 years. And it will include opt-outs in case it's somehow undervalued in a few years.

The Mets remain the favorites, executives say, but officials caution that the Yankees, Blue Jays and Red Sox are in the $700-plus million neighborhood.

Baseball executives, scouts, managers and agents are scheduled to descend upon Dallas on Sunday, and by the time they depart Wednesday afternoon nearly $1.5 billion could be spent on free agents. Here are the most intriguing free agents and teams:

Top free agents set to cash in

Corbin Burnes and Max Fried: They haven't thrown a pitch in more than two months, but their stocks have soared thanks to the contracts given to pitchers whose resumes pale in comparison. When Matthew Boyd receives a 2-year, $29 million contract without throwing more than 79 innings since 2019, when Luis Severino is getting $67 million over three years and Blake Snell is making an average annual salary of $36.4 million, Burnes and Fried should top $200 million. The San Francisco Giants, New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox all lurk. The only drama is whether Fried goes ahead and signs before Burnes or lets Burnes set the bar. Fried priced himself out of Atlanta but is expected to sign with the Yankees or Red Sox. If Soto goes to the Mets, Fried could find himself in a nice bidding war between the Red Sox and Yankees.

Alex Bregman: Teams everywhere are being linked to Bregman, but the truth is that the Astros badly want him back, and the feeling is mutual. The trouble is that they are about $50 million apart. The Astros have a six-year deal worth $156 million sitting on the table – $5 million more than third baseman Matt Chapman received from the Giants but $26 million less than Willy Adames to the Giants– and Bregman is seeking in excess of $200 million. The Astros are expected to enhance their offer, but will it be enough to convince Bregman to stay?

Teoscar Hernández: Did the Dodgers meet with Soto and let people believe they actually are pursuing him just to help them sign Blake Snell, another Scott Boras client? Did they let the Soto rumors fester just to up the pressure on a Hernández reunin? Or did they jump into the original bidding to drive up the Soto price tag for everyone else? The truth is that the Dodgers should re-sign Hernandez to a three-year contract, with perhaps a fourth-year option, for somewhere in the $65 million-$80 million range. The two sides have been seriously engaged in negotiations but caution there's still a gap.

Pete Alonso: Alonso says he loves the Mets and the Mets say they love Alonso, but something seems off. The Mets tried to sign him to an extension – seven years and $158 million, according to the New York Post – but it was flatly rejected. There's no sign that the two sides have since talked, leaving everyone to wonder whether David Stearns, Mets president of baseball operations, even wants Alonso. He could easily turn to Christian Walker, the three-time Gold Glove first baseman who should come at less than half the cost of Alonso. Alonso could be a perfect fit for the Mariners.

Most intriguing teams

Yankees: In case they are ready to drown their miseries if they don't re-sign Soto, all they have to do is look at the Padres to give them a $700 million shot of confidence. The Padres had Soto the entire 2023 season. You know what happened? They missed the playoffs. They traded him to the Yankees in the offseason and got better. The Yankees, if they don't land Soto, can easily sign free agent Christian Walker for first base, sign Bregman or trade for Nolan Arenado for third base, trade for Cody Bellinger to play center, move Aaron Judge back to right field, and still sign a frontline starter. Losing out on Soto could turn out to be a blessing.

Red Sox: They have talked a huge game and have been in strong pursuit of Soto. Yet whether they land Soto or not, they can't stop now. They have to sign Fried or Burnes, or even both. They could trade for Arenado too. The expectations are simply too high to sit back and tell everyone that they tried.

Orioles: Yes, the days of losing 110 games a season are over. They've made the playoffs each of the past two seasons. But now much, much more is expected than just signing slugger Tyler O'Neill to a three-year, $49.5 million contract Saturday, especially with new ownership. The Orioles still have the best young players in the game, but if they're not careful, that window will close in a hurry. Just ask the 2016 Cubs.

Padres: The Padres, about to be hit with massive pay raises for Manny Machado, Fernando Tatis and Xander Bogaerts, could lose starters Dylan Cease and Michael King in free agency after the year. They need to win. And they need to win now. They've traded away a dozen prospects to become one of baseball's most powerful teams, but painfully realize this could be their final year to compete for a title without taking a step back. They need at least one frontline starter, if not two, with Joe Musgrove out for the year and questions about how many starts Yu Darvish can make this season. Their dream scenario is landing Japanese sensation Roki Sasaki. He may be more essential to the Padres' future than any team in baseball.

Atlanta: Come on, you know GM Alex Anthopoulos has some tricks up his sleeve after spending the first month creatively trimming about $38 million in payroll by trading Jorge Soler, letting catcher Travis d'Arnaud leave and restructuring two deals. They need at least one starting pitcher, if not two, with veteran starters Charlie Morton and Fried likely out the door. They also need a closer with Joe Jimenez expected to miss most of the season after knee surgery. They could also use a corner outfielder with Ronald Acuña expected to be out at least until late May.

Alex Bohm among those who could be dealt

Gabe Lacques
USA TODAY

Pretty wild ride in Philly for 3B Alex Bohm, who overcame significant second-year regression on both sides of the ball to improve his defense and eventually produce an All-Star first half in 2024, when he hit the break batting .295 with a .830 OPS.

Yet he declined to .251 and .681 in the second half, part of an overall Phillies regression, and was benched for a game of the National League division series round. While Bohm has vacillated between inconsistent and occasionally dynamic, he's also the most tradable piece on a club with a half-dozen nine-figure contracts.

And the target only grew bigger with the feeling that Philadelphia, after backsliding from World Series runner-up to NLCS loser to NLDS exit, needs to shake things up.

Bohm holds promise for an acquiring team in that he has two years remaining before free agency, is 28 and is projected to earn not much more than $8 million next season.

And while pitching is always in demand, impact hitters are hardly plentiful, particularly ones that don't come at a free agent premium. The Seattle Times reported that the Phillies requested one of the slugging-challenged Mariners' All-Star starters, Logan Gilbert or George Kirby.

Nice try, although that starting point gives you an idea that the Phillies aren't simply going to flip Bohm for the sake of doing so.

Garrett Crochet, LHP, White Sox

It's time.

For all the Crochet discourse bandied about near the trade deadline, shipping off a dominant starter in his first full year in the role while coming off Tommy John surgery was too much of a storm in which to land this plane.

Yet the relative quiet of the offseason enables both buyer and seller to know what they're getting: Two years of a 6-foot-6 lefty who averaged 13 strikeouts per nine innings last season and made 32 starts, though several were truncated to manage his innings increase.

The conditions are almost too perfect.

With Chicago losing a record 121 games, the turnaround plan, to the extent that it exists, will take far longer than two years to execute. And the acquiring team will only have to pay Crochet an estimated $3 million this year plus whatever he'll fetch in a final year of arbitration.

There's so many upsides for the acquiring team: A two-year window with a frontline starter, the lack of commitment that comes with acquiring a big time free agent pitcher, and the first crack at signing Crochet long term, if so inclined.

An impressive line of suitors that will begin with the losers of the Max Fried/Corbin Burnes derbies – think some combo of Boston, Baltimore, the New York clubs – along with perennial aggressive contenders should make for an excellent seller's market.

Cody Bellinger, 1B-OF, Cubs

Bellinger

Here's the funny thing about Bellinger: He's still a pretty good ballplayer!

Sure, it's always a bad sign when a Scott Boras client opts into, rather than out of, a player option, as Bellinger did when he activated his $27.5 million salary for 2025. That's largely the result of Bellinger's WAR getting halved from 4.4 to 2.2 in 130 games, the same number of posts he made in 2023.

That the Cubs feel compelled to trade him is a Cubs Problem; a team with their revenue should not feel hamstrung to upgrade unless they rid themselves of Bellinger. They will pay their two best starting pitchers, Shota Imanaga and Justin Steele, around $20 million in 2025 and saved more than $6 million by non-tendering players like Patrick Wisdom and Mike Tauchman.

Yet a team that could seemingly bully its way to NL Central dominance through financial might is instead aiming for "flexibility" once again. Enter Bellinger, who rehabbed his career nicely in 2023, got caught up in the "Boras Four" game last spring but still represents only a maximum $52.5 million commitment, should he opt into his 2026 player option, too.

For that, an acquiring team would get a former MVP who doesn't turn 30 until July, can play all three outfield positions and first base at a Gold Glove level and, at least in 2023, provide 26 homers and 20 steals.

Bellinger is well removed from his 2019 MVP season, but similarly detached from two ugly seasons in LA in which he battled back from a brutal combo of shoulder and calf injuries. At this stage in his career, his output does not move in linear fashion, and betting on an uptick wouldn't be a bad wager.

Luis Arráez, IF, Padres

Already kind of insane that a three-time batting champion has played for three teams in three years. Hey, why not make it four in four?

The Padres took off after acquiring Arráez from Miami in May, playing .470 ball before his arrival and .602 thereafter to make the playoffs and nearly steal the NL West from LA. Yet Arráez is due to make $14.6 million in arbitration, in his last season before free agency.

And San Diego still faces financial questions and roster imbalances not just in 2025 but going forward.

Determining Arráez's worth on the market would be challenging. On one hand, he has won three consecutive batting titles, never strikes out (29 whiffs last season, a 3.4% K rate) and provides a hitting ability that is far too rare in today's game.

On the other hand, he's limited defensively, making almost all of his starts with the Padres at DH and first base, where his lack of power is a poor fit. As such, his WAR dropped from 4.9 in 2023 to 1.0.

Challenging fit, challenging trade. Yet there's symbiosis out there somewhere.

MARKETPLACE TODAY

To view more Classified listings, visit: classifieds.usatoday.com

For advertising information: 1.800.397.0070 www.russelljohns.com/usat

All classified ads are subject to the applicable rate card, copies of which are available from our Advertising Dept. All ads are subject to approval before publication. USA Today reserves the right to edit, refuse, reject, classify or cancel any ad at any time. Errors must be reported in the first day of publication. USA Today shall not be liable for any loss or expense that results from an error in or omission of an advertisement. No refunds for early cancellation of order.

NOTICES
PUBLIC NOTICE

Request for Proposal (RFP)
E&I Cooperative Services, Inc. invites the submission of sealed proposals for:

RFP# EI00352~2024RFP for Source-to-Pay Solutions

Proposals are due by 1:00 PM ET on Wednesday, January 8, 2025

Respondents must submit their RFP response using E&I's Electronic Sourcing Solution which is accessible via https://www.eandi.org/contract-finder/rfp-development/.

E&I does not accept hard copy submissions or submissions through any other medium other than its Electronic Sourcing Solution.

E&I is committed to developing mutually advantageous business relationships with minority, women, disabled, veteran, and service-disabled veteran-owned businesses.

NOTICES
PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICES
LEGAL NOTICES

If you are or were employed by South Bay Safety, Inc. and placed to work at Acme Furniture Industry, Inc. in a non-exempt hourly position in the State of California during the period April 1, 2019 to September 29, 2022, you may be entitled to money from a Class Action Settlement. A lawsuit, Los Angeles Superior Court case number 21STCV38848, was filed by Ricardo Pantoja and seeks to recover wages and penalties, among other relief, for current and former employees. The deadline to request inclusion in the settlement class is January 31, 2025. Please visit pantoja-v-south-bay-safety.phoenixcases.com for full details regarding the Class Action Settlement and how it relates to your rights. You may also call Phoenix Settlement Administrators at 888-523-5773 for more information.

ADVERTISE HERE!
To advertise, call: 800-397-0070

NOTICES
LEGAL NOTICES

GET YOUR BUSINESS NOTICED!
Print • Online Classifieds • Web Banners

To advertise, contact us at:
(800) 397-0070
sales@russelljohns.com

Forward Dejan Joveljic celebrates with the Philip F. Anschutz trophy after the Galaxy defeat the Red Bulls for the MLS Cup. JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA/IMAGN IMAGES

Galaxy capture 6th MLS championship

Safid Deen
USA TODAY

The Los Angeles Galaxy are Major League Soccer champions once again.

Joseph Paintsil and Dejan Joveljic scored early goals and the Galaxy outlasted the New York Red Bulls 2-1 in the MLS Cup final in front of an announced crowd of 26,812 people at Dignity Sports Health Complex in Carson, California, on Saturday.

The Galaxy were already the winningest club in league history. But their sixth MLS title comes 10 years to the day of their last championship.

The Galaxy scored their goals in the first 14 minutes of the match.

Paintsil scored in the ninth minute to take a 1-0 lead, following a through ball from Gaston Brugman, who was named MLS Cup MVP for the assist. Joveljic scored in the 14th minute to make it 2-0, scoring his sixth goal this postseason.

The Galaxy goal scorers raised the No. 10 jersey of Riqui Puig, the former FC Barcelona standout whose game-winning assist after tearing his ACL in the Western Conference final helped Los Angeles contend for the title.

"I'm really happy for the fans, for Riqui, for the club and for us," Brugman said.

The Red Bulls, although shocked by the early deficit, rebounded quickly with Sean Nealis scoring inside the box after a corner kick in the 28th minute to make it 2-1.

Both clubs, however, were unable to score again despite a frantic finish in the second half.

In the final minute of stoppage time, the Red Bulls were penalized for an offside. But Galaxy players and team members prematurely stormed the field upon hearing the whistle.

One minute later, the Galaxy's celebration began.

Norris wins F1 final in Abu Dhabi

McLaren takes constructors' title for first time since 1998

Alan Baldwin
REUTERS

McLaren's Lando Norris celebrates after winning the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on Sunday. AMR ALFIKY/REUTERS

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates – Lando Norris led the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix from start to finish Sunday to end McLaren's 26-year wait for a Formula 1 constructors' title.

The Briton delivered in style after Australian teammate Oscar Piastri tangled with Red Bull's quadruple world champion Max Verstappen at the first corner and dropped to the back of the field.

Piastri finished 10th, with Carlos Sainz and Charles Leclerc second and third for Ferrari, McLaren's historic rivals over the decades and the only team that could have beaten them to the championship.

"You all deserve this. Thank you so much. It's been a special year," Norris said over the team radio after taking the checkered flag for his fourth 2024 win.

The 25 points, and Piastri's one, left McLaren 14 clear of Ferrari and champions for the first time since 1998. Norris finished the season as overall runner-up.

Seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton finished fourth in his last race for Mercedes, starting 16th and overtaking teammate George Russell on the 58th and final lap.

He joins Leclerc, who made stunning progress through the field after starting 19th, at Ferrari next season.

"Lewis, that was the drive of a world champion," said Mercedes boss Toto Wolff, who could at least take some consolation in McLaren winning with the German manufacturer's engines.

Hamilton was 14 seconds behind Russell, but on medium tires compared to his teammate's hards, with 15 laps to go but was told he could catch him. He did it six corners from the end, Russell putting up little resistance and clapping Hamilton at the finish.

The 39-year-old then saluted the crowd with some tire-smoking spins to mark the end of the most successful driver and team pairing in Formula 1 history. "What started as a leap of faith turned into a journey into the history books," Hamilton said over the team radio.

Verstappen, who took his fourth successive drivers' title in Las Vegas last month, was sixth after collecting a 10-second penalty for the collision with Piastri.

Pierre Gasly was seventh for Alpine, who won their midfield battle to finish sixth overall in the standings, with Nico Hulkenberg eighth for Haas and Fernando Alonso ninth for Aston Martin.

McLaren were the first team of the current engine era that started in 2014 to win the title as a customer rather than a factory team.

There was drama from the start as Verstappen and Piastri clashed, after McLaren had locked out the front row in qualifying but with Verstappen right behind in fourth slot.

Both cars spun while Norris made a clean getaway from pole position and sped away.

Verstappen said he had been "super unlucky" and claimed to have been all the way up the inside of the McLaren into the first corner but the evidence suggested he was at fault.

Ferrari hoped for a miracle that might slow Norris while McLaren boss Zak Brown watched nervously.

"That was the worst two hours of my life, by far," said Brown. "That race, he (Norris) carried us. To not make any mistakes, and we were worried about safety cars, I was worried about everything, and he drove flawlessly."

A SEASON WORTH
celebrating

A great gift — Los Angeles Dodgers' championship in a hardcover collector's book

Relive the thrilling journey of the 2024 Los Angeles Dodgers as they claimed the World Series. "**Blue Bloods: Superstars Align for L.A.'s 2024 Championship Run**" is a stunning 160-page, hardcover coffee-table book crafted by award-winning USA TODAY journalists. Dive into the behind-the-scenes stories and captivating photos that capture the essence of the Dodgers' unforgettable 2024 season. From Shohei Ohtani's record-breaking performances to the pivotal moments against the New York Yankees in the World Series, this book is your ultimate keepsake. Whether you're a lifelong Dodgers fan or just a lover of the game, "Blue Bloods" is a must-have addition to your collection. Order your copy today and relive the magic of the Dodgers' championship triumph.

Scan and shop!

Order online for holiday gift-giving at
LA.CHAMPSBOOK.COM

USA TODAY

FOR THE RECORD

All times ET

NFL

AMERICAN CONFERENCE

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Buffalo	10	2	0	.833	355	224
Miami	6	7	0	.462	264	292
N.Y. Jets	3	10	0	.231	251	300
New England	3	10	0	.231	221	307

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Pittsburgh	10	3	0	.769	323	238
Baltimore	8	5	0	.615	383	318
Cincinnati	4	8	0	.333	335	340
Cleveland	3	10	0	.231	232	335

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Houston	8	5	0	.615	308	288
Indianapolis	6	7	0	.462	267	298
Jacksonville	3	10	0	.231	238	345
Tennessee	3	10	0	.231	227	342

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Kansas City	11	1	0	.917	289	235
L.A. Chargers	8	4	0	.667	260	188
Denver	8	5	0	.615	305	234
Las Vegas	2	11	0	.154	236	361

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Philadelphia	11	2	0	.846	342	234
Washington	8	5	0	.615	376	296
Dallas	5	7	0	.417	248	339
N.Y. Giants	2	11	0	.154	194	293

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Detroit	12	1	0	.923	417	234
Minnesota	11	2	0	.846	339	240
Green Bay	9	4	0	.692	349	274
Chicago	4	8	0	.333	241	240

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Tampa Bay	7	6	0	.538	363	309
Atlanta	6	7	0	.462	278	333
New Orleans	5	8	0	.385	290	292
Carolina	3	10	0	.231	233	388

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Seattle	7	5	0	.583	272	265
Arizona	6	6	0	.500	266	259
L.A. Rams	6	6	0	.500	254	290
San Francisco	5	7	0	.417	270	295

Thursday's Score
Detroit 34, Green Bay 31

Sunday's Games
Miami 32, N.Y. Jets 26
Minnesota 42, Atlanta 21
New Orleans 14, N.Y. Giants 11
Philadelphia 22, Carolina 16
Pittsburgh 27, Cleveland 14
Tampa Bay 28, Las Vegas 13
Jacksonville 10, Tennessee 6
Seattle at Arizona
Buffalo at L.A. Rams
Chicago at San Francisco
L.A. Chargers at Kansas City

Monday's Game
Cincinnati at Dallas, 8:15 p.m.

Thursday's Game
L.A. Rams at San Francisco, 8:15 p.m.

Sunday, Dec. 15
Dallas at Carolina, 1 p.m.
Kansas City at Cleveland, 1 p.m.
Miami at Houston, 1 p.m.
N.Y. Jets at Jacksonville, 1 p.m.
Washington at New Orleans, 1 p.m.
Baltimore at N.Y. Giants, 1 p.m.
Cincinnati at Tennessee, 1 p.m.
New England at Arizona, 4:25 p.m.
Indianapolis at Denver, 4:25 p.m.
Buffalo at Detroit, 4:25 p.m.
Tampa Bay at L.A. Chargers, 4:25 p.m.
Pittsburgh at Philadelphia, 4:25 p.m.
Green Bay at Seattle, 8:20 p.m.

Monday, Dec. 16
Chicago at Minnesota, 8 p.m.
Atlanta at Las Vegas, 8:30 p.m.

NHL

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Florida	17	9	2	36	106	91
Toronto	16	9	2	34	80	71
Boston	15	11	3	33	75	87
Tampa Bay	13	9	2	28	94	74
Ottawa	12	12	2	26	80	82
Buffalo	11	13	3	25	80	86
Detroit	10	13	4	24	67	83
Montreal	10	14	3	23	75	98

Metropolitan Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	19	6	2	40	109	74
New Jersey	18	9	2	38	102	78
Carolina	17	9	1	35	101	81
N.Y. Rangers	14	11	1	29	85	79
Philadelphia	12	11	4	28	81	94
Pittsburgh	12	13	4	28	84	110
N.Y. Islanders	10	11	7	27	73	85
Columbus	11	12	3	25	89	95

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Central Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Minnesota	18	5	4	40	86	65
Winnipeg	20	8	0	40	102	71
Dallas	16	10	0	32	86	67
Colorado	15	13	0	30	91	103
St. Louis	13	13	2	28	73	87
Utah	11	11	4	26	75	77
Nashville	7	15	6	20	61	88
Chicago	8	17	2	18	66	86

Pacific Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	18	7	3	39	99	82
L.A. Kings	16	8	3	35	83	71
Vancouver	14	7	4	32	83	79
Edmonton	15	10	2	32	82	79
Calgary	13	9	5	31	72	78
Seattle	14	14	1	29	89	88
San Jose	10	15	5	25	82	108
Anaheim	10	12	3	23	62	76

NOTE: Two points for a win, one for OT loss.

Saturday's Scores
Utah 5, Buffalo 2
Boston 4, Philadelphia 3, OT
Winnipeg 4, Chicago 2
N.Y. Islanders 4, Carolina 3
Florida 3, San Jose 1
Washington 4, Montreal 2
Ottawa 3, Nashville 1
Colorado 2, Detroit 1
Pittsburgh 5, Toronto 2
L.A. Kings 4, Minnesota 1
Edmonton 4, St. Louis 2

Sunday's Games
Seattle 7, N.Y. Rangers 5
Tampa Bay at Vancouver
N.Y. Islanders at Ottawa
Columbus at Winnipeg
Colorado at New Jersey
Utah at Philadelphia
Calgary at Dallas

Monday's Games
Detroit at Buffalo, 7 p.m.
Chicago at N.Y. Rangers, 7 p.m.
Anaheim at Montreal, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday's Games
Toronto at New Jersey, 7 p.m.
Colorado at Pittsburgh, 7 p.m.
San Jose at Carolina, 7 p.m.
Philadelphia at Columbus, 7 p.m.
L.A. Kings at N.Y. Islanders, 7:30 p.m.
Calgary at Nashville, 8 p.m.
Boston at Winnipeg, 8 p.m.
Tampa Bay at Edmonton, 9 p.m.
Minnesota at Utah, 9:30 p.m.
St. Louis at Vancouver, 10 p.m.
Florida at Seattle, 10 p.m.

SOCCER

English Premier League

	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Liverpool	14	11	2	1	29	11	35
Chelsea	15	9	4	2	35	18	31
Arsenal	15	8	5	2	29	15	29
Man City	15	8	3	4	27	21	27
Aston Villa	15	7	4	4	23	23	25
Nott'm Forest	15	7	4	4	19	18	25
Brighton	15	6	6	3	25	22	24
Bournemouth	15	7	3	5	23	20	24
Fulham	15	6	5	4	22	20	23
Brentford	15	7	2	6	31	28	23
Newcastle	15	5	5	5	19	21	20
Tottenham	15	6	2	7	31	19	20
Man United	15	5	4	6	19	18	19
West Ham	14	4	3	7	18	27	15
Everton	14	3	5	6	14	21	14
Leicester City	15	3	5	7	21	30	14
Crystal Palace	15	2	7	6	14	20	13
Wolverhampton	14	2	3	9	22	36	9
Ipswich Town	15	1	6	8	14	27	9
Southampton	15	1	2	12	11	31	5

Note: Three points for win, one point for tie.

Saturday's Scores
Crystal Palace 2, Manchester City 2
Brentford 4, Newcastle United 2
Aston Villa 1, Southampton 0
Man United 2, Nottingham Forest 3
Liverpool at Everton, midnight

Sunday's Scores
Fulham 1, Arsenal 1
Ipswich Town 1, Bournemouth 2
Leicester City 2, Brighton 2
Tottenham Hotspur 3, Chelsea 4

Monday's Game
Wolverhampton at West Ham United, 3 p.m.

Champions League

Tuesday's Games
Celtic at GNK Dinamo, 12:45 p.m.
Liverpool at Girona, 12:45 p.m.
Aston Villa at Leipzig, 3 p.m.
Inter at Leverkusen, 3 p.m.
Real Madrid at Atalanta, 3 p.m.
Sporting CP at Club Brugge, 3 p.m.
Bayern München at Shakhtar, 3 p.m.
Paris at Salzburg, 3 p.m.
PSV at Brest, 3 p.m.

Wednesday's Games
Atlético vs. Slovan Bratislavia, 12:45 p.m.
Lille vs. SK Sturm Graz, 12:45 p.m.
AC Milan vs. Red Star Belgrade, 3 p.m.
Arsenal vs. AS Monaco, 3 p.m.
Benfica vs. Bologna, 3 p.m.
Borussia Dortmund vs. Barcelona, 3 p.m.
Feyenoord Rotterdam vs. Sparta Prague, 3
Juventus vs. Manchester City, 3 p.m.
VfB Stuttgart vs. Young Boys, 3 p.m.

MLS

Cup Final

Saturday's Game
LA Galaxy 2, NY Red Bulls 1

NBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	19	5	.792	–
N.Y. Knicks	14	9	.609	4½
Brooklyn	10	13	.435	8½
Philadelphia	7	15	.318	11
Toronto	7	17	.292	12

Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	16	9	.640	–
Atlanta	13	11	.542	2½
Miami	11	10	.524	3
Charlotte	6	17	.261	9
Washington	3	18	.143	11

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	21	3	.875	–
Milwaukee	11	11	.500	9
Indiana	10	14	.417	11
Chicago	10	15	.400	11½
Detroit	10	15	.400	11½

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	16	8	.667	–
Dallas	16	8	.667	–
Houston	15	8	.652	½
San Antonio	11	12	.478	4½
New Orleans	5	19	.208	11

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	18	5	.783	–
Minnesota	12	10	.545	5½
Denver	11	10	.524	6
Portland	8	15	.348	10
Utah	5	17	.227	12½

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Golden State	13	9	.591	–
L.A. Clippers	14	10	.583	–
Phoenix	12	10	.545	1
L.A. Lakers	12	11	.522	1½
Sacramento	11	13	.458	3

Saturday's Scores
Cleveland 116, Charlotte 102
Washington 122, Denver 113
Oklahoma City 119, New Orleans 109
Dallas 125, Toronto 118
Detroit 120, N.Y. Knicks 111
Memphis 127, Boston 121
Miami 121, Phoenix 111

Sunday's Games
Philadelphia 108, Chicago 100
Milwaukee at Brooklyn
Charlotte at Indiana
Denver at Atlanta
Cleveland at Miami
Phoenix at Orlando
Memphis at Washington
New Orleans at San Antonio
Minnesota at Golden State
Utah at Sacramento
Houston at L.A. Clippers
Portland at L.A. Lakers

Monday's Game
N.Y. Knicks at Toronto, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday's Games
Orlando at Milwaukee, 7 p.m.
Dallas at Oklahoma City, 9:30 p.m.

Wednesday's Games
Atlanta at N.Y. Knicks, 7 p.m.
Golden State at Houston, 9:30 p.m.

BETMGM

New BetMGM customers can sign up today and get a First Bet Offer up to $1,500 using bonus code **USAT**. Just download the BetMGM app, deposit at least $10 and place your first wager on any game. If your first bet loses, you will receive bonus bets in the amount of your bet (up to $1,500). Just make sure you use bonus code **USAT** when you sign up. **Bet now!**

ODDS SPONSORED BY BETMGM.COM

NFL

Monday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
Cincinnati	5.5	49.5	DALLAS

Gannett may earn revenue from sports betting operators for audience referrals to betting services. Sports betting operators have no influence over nor are any such revenues in any way dependent on or linked to the newsrooms or news coverage. Terms apply, see operator site for Terms and Conditions. Gambling problem? Call 1-800-GAMBLER CO, DC, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MD, MS, NJ, OH, PA, TN, VA, WV, WY. Call 877-8-HOPENY or text HOPENY (467369) (NY) Call 1-800-327-5050 (MA). 21+ to wager. Please Gamble Responsibly. Call 1-800-NEXT-STEP (AZ), 1-800-522-4700 (NV), 1-800-BETS-OFF (IA), 1-800-270-7117 for confidential help (MI), 1-800-981-0023 (PR). In partnership with Kansas Crossing Casino and Hotel. Visit BetMGM.com for Terms & Conditions. US promotional offers not available in DC, Nevada, New York or Ontario.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Playoffs

NCAA Football Championship Subdivision tournament
All games on ESPN+ unless listed.
Second round, Dec. 7
No. 6 UIW 13, No. 11 Villanova 6
No. 7 Mercer 17, No. 10 Rhode Island 10
No. 3 S Dakota State 35, No. 14 Montana 18
No. 1 Montana State 49, UT Martin 17
No. 2 North Dakota State 51, No. 15 Abilene Christian 31
No. 4 South Dakota 42, No. 13 Tarleton St 31
No. 5 UC Davis 42, No. 12 Illinois State 10
No. 8 Idaho 34, Lehigh 13
Quarterfinals
Friday, Dec. 13
No 1. Montana State vs. No. 8 Idaho, 9 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 14
No. 6 UIW vs. No. 3 South Dakota State, noon
No. 5 UC Davis vs. No. 4 South Dakota, 3 p.m.
No. 2 N Dakota St vs. No. 7 Mercer, 3:30 p.m.
Semifinals: Dec. 21
National championship: Jan. 6 on ESPN at 7 p.m.

NCAA Division II tournament
Quarterfinals, Dec. 7
No. 4 Slippery Rock 31, No. 3 Calif. (PA) 13
No. 1 Ferris State 41, Harding 7
No. 1 Valdosta State 49, Virginia Union 14
Minnesota State 27, Bemidji State 23
Semifinals: Saturday, Dec. 14
No 1. Valdosta State vs. No. 4 Minnesota State, noon
No. 2 Ferris State vs. No 3. Slippery Rock, 3:30 p.m.
National championship: Saturday, Dec. 21 on ESPN2

NCAA Division III tournament
Third round, Dec. 7
Susquehanna 41, Saint John's (Minn.) 38
Mary Hardin-Baylor 28, Linfield 18
Bethel (MN) 24, Wartburg 14
Johns Hopkins 14, DePauw 9
Springfield 40, Cortland 29
North Central (IL) 41, Hope 21
Salisbury 35, Randolph-Macon 14
Mount Union 24, Carnegie Mellon 19
Quarterfinals: Saturday, Dec. 14
Susquehanna vs. Bethel (MN), noon
Mary Hardin-Baylor vs. Johns Hopkins, noon
Salisbury vs. Mount Union, noon
Springfield vs. North Central (IL), 1 p.m.
Semifinals: Saturday, Dec. 21 on ESPN+
National championship: Sunday, Jan. 5 on ESPN

AUTO RACING

Formula One

Final Drivers Standings
1. Max Verstappen 437
2. Lando Norris 374
3. Charles Leclerc 356
4. Oscar Piastri 292
5. Carlos Sainz Jr. 290
6. George Russell 245
7. Lewis Hamilton 223
8. Sergio Pérez 152
9. Fernando Alonso 70
10. Pierre Gasly 42
11. Nico Hülkenberg 41
12. Yuki Tsunoda 30
13. Lance Stroll 24
14. Esteban Ocon 23
15. Kevin Magnussen 16
16. Alexander Albon 12
17. Daniel Ricciardo 12
18. Oliver Bearman 7
19. Franco Alejandro Colapinto 5
20. Zhou Guanyu 4
21. Liam Lawson 4
22. Valtteri Bottas 0
23. Logan Sargeant 0
24. Jack Doohan 0

Final Constructors Standings
1. McLaren 666
2. Ferrari 652
3. Red Bull 589
4. Mercedes 468
5. Aston Martin 94
6. Alpine 65
7. Haas 58
8. RB 46
9. Williams 17
10. Sauber 4

Scottie Scheffler repeats at Hero

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA | REUTERS

New putting grip, same old Scottie Scheffler.

The world No. 1 shot a blazing 9-under-par 63 on Sunday to repeat at the Hero World Challenge, winning by six shots over South Korea's Tom Kim at Albany Golf Course in Nassau, Bahamas.

Scheffler rolled in nine birdie putts, the longest a 49-footer at the par-4 fourth hole, as he finished the week at 25-under-par 263 to win the exclusive exhibition tournament for the second straight December.

He stuck his approach shot at the par-4 18th inside 4 feet and finished up with a birdie.

Scheffler completed a banner year in which he won The Players Championship, the Masters, an Olympic gold medal and the Tour Championship.

"I think it's been a great year, it's been a fun year," Scheffler said. "I've been fortunate to get some wins and have some really good golf. This was another week when I played really solid and was able to see some nice results from that. Overall it was a pretty, pretty fun year."

That said, he wasn't satisfied with his game and debuted a new putting grip that he said was introduced to him by his putting coach, Phil Kenyon.

"I think Phil calls it a claw, but he really doesn't even say that," Scheffler said Thursday. "He just says 'I want you to try a little bit' and he points his hand like that and wherever my hand felt good, that's where we settled. Not trying to think too much about it, trying to keep things simple."

Scheffler held the 36-hole lead but was passed by Justin Thomas on Saturday. Thomas had an uneven fourth round for his highest score of the week, a 71 (five birdies, four bogeys), and he finished third at 18 under, seven behind Scheffler and one behind Kim (final-round 68).

"It's just disappointing," said Thomas, who hasn't won a tournament of any kind since the 2022 PGA.

The weather changes. Stay up-to-date, 24/7. USA TODAY Download our free app

WEATHER

WEATHER ONLINE USATODAY.COM

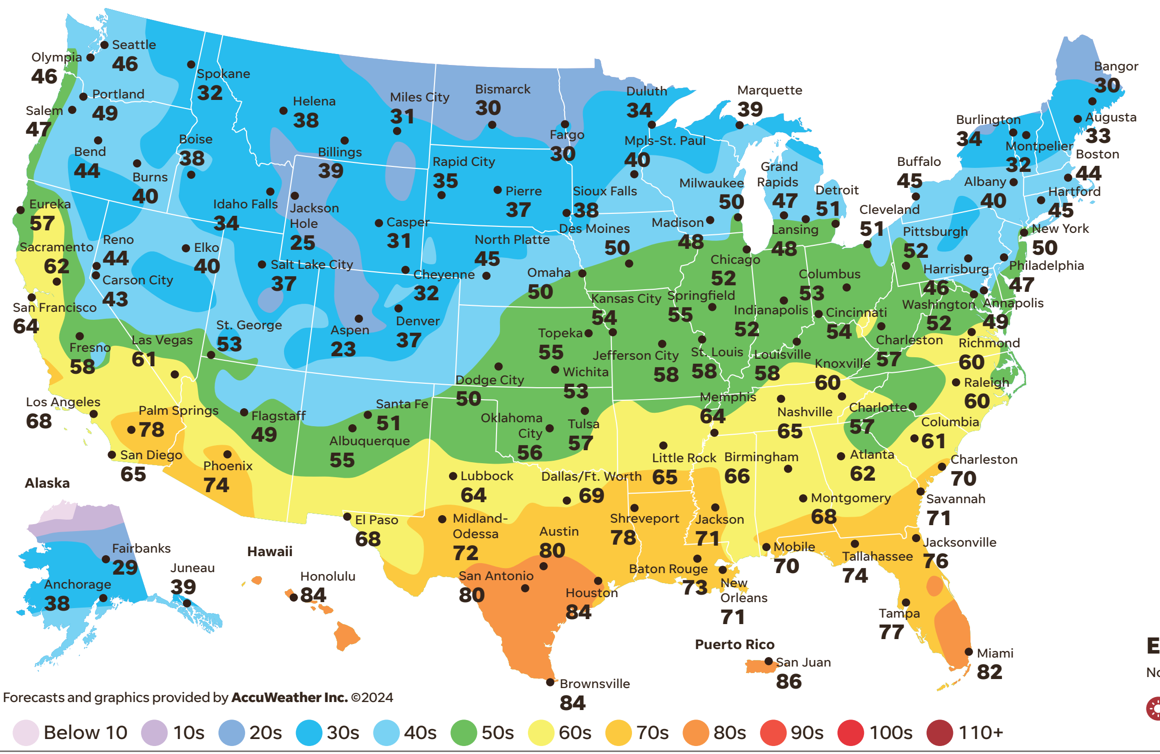
TODAY'S FORECAST

A storm tracking up the **East Coast** today will bring a little freezing rain in the morning to portions of upstate **New York**; roads can be slippery. Widespread rain is expected from the **Southeast** up into the **mid-Atlantic**, spreading into the **Northeast**, especially later.

In northern **New York**, **Vermont** and **New Hampshire** where it is likely to remain around or below freezing, snow in the afternoon is expected. Places in northwestern **Pennsylvania**, southwestern **New York** and areas in upstate **New York** that have received feet of snow should prepare for rain melting and soaking into snowpacks, including those on roofs.

Rain saturating them can lead to ponding on roads or roof collapses. Near the central **Gulf Coast**, there can be some rumbles of thunder with the rain.

TODAY'S HIGH TEMPERATURES



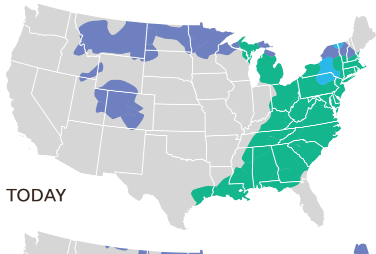
Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather Inc.** ©2024

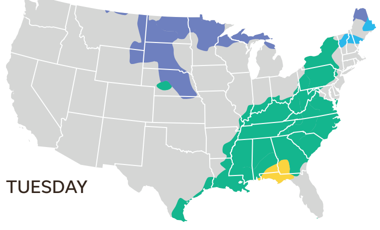
Below 10 | 10s | 20s | 30s | 40s | 50s | 60s | 70s | 80s | 90s | 100s | 110+

AccuWeather
Superior Accuracy™ means you will make better decisions.
Visit AccuWeather.com

PRECIPITATION FORECAST

T-storms | Rain | Snow | Ice/mix


TODAY


TUESDAY

EXTREMES
Note: For contiguous 48 states through 3 p.m. ET yesterday

HOTTEST: 79° Hollywood, Fla.
COLDEST: -12° Gunnison, Colo.

TOP TRAVEL CITIES
Air quality index (AQI)

City	MON	TUE	WED	AQI
ATLANTA	Rain at times 62/59	Rain 66/42	Morning rain 47/32	Moderate
BALTIMORE	Rain 49/40	Not as cool 56/50	Rain, windy 47/32	Moderate
BOSTON	A little rain 44/39	Clouds, fog 45/41	Rain, windy 59/37	Moderate
CHARLOTTE	A few showers 57/50	Rain 64/55	Morning rain 60/28	Moderate
CHICAGO	Clearing 52/29	Colder 33/21	Breezy, colder 27/8	Good
DALLAS/FT. WORTH	Warmer 69/43	Breezy, cooler 52/35	Sunny, milder 61/38	Moderate
DENVER	A snow shower 37/19	Breezy 39/27	Warmer 51/29	Good
DETROIT	Showers around 51/36	Partly sunny 44/27	Snow showers 35/17	Moderate
HONOLULU	Breezy 84/73	Breezy 83/73	Windy 84/73	Good
HOUSTON	Shower 84/52	Cooler 65/39	Sunny 63/38	Moderate
LAS VEGAS	Sunny 61/36	Sunny 57/36	Some sun 57/38	Moderate
LOS ANGELES	Mostly sunny 68/47	Mostly sunny 73/46	Partly sunny 75/49	Moderate
MIAMI	Breezy 82/71	Partly sunny 83/74	Stray t-storm 83/58	Good
MPLS-ST. PAUL	Breezy 40/18	Cloudy, colder 25/12	A snow shower 15/-5	Good
NEW ORLEANS	Rain 71/65	Rain 75/47	Cooler 56/44	Good
NEW YORK	Rain at times 50/44	Foggy 52/48	Rain, windy 58/33	Moderate
ORLANDO	Partly sunny 80/60	Mostly cloudy 81/67	Showers around 78/43	Good
PHILADELPHIA	Rain 47/40	Not as cool 56/50	Rain, windy 59/31	Moderate
PHOENIX	Plenty of sun 74/49	Sunny, nice 67/43	Partly sunny 69/47	Moderate
SALT LAKE CITY	Colder 37/24	Plenty of sun 39/24	Mainly cloudy 45/28	Moderate
SAN DIEGO	Partly sunny 65/44	Sunny, nice 74/41	Partly sunny 73/45	Moderate
SAN FRANCISCO	Mostly sunny 64/46	Partly sunny 60/45	Partly sunny 61/45	Unhealthy s/g
SEATTLE	Clearing 46/32	Rather cloudy 44/37	Incr. clouds 48/40	Good
WASHINGTON	Rain 52/43	P.M. mist 58/54	Rain, windy 59/33	Moderate

c Cloudy **f** Fog **i** Ice **r** Rain **sf** Snowflurries **sn** Snow **w** Windy **dr** Drizzle **h** Haze **pc** Partly cloudy **s** Sunny **sh** Showers **t** Thunderstorms

U.S. CITIES

	TODAY	TUE
Akron, Ohio	49/39r	46/32sh
Albany, N.Y.	40/36r	45/42c
Albuquerque	55/25s	41/22s
Allentown, Pa.	42/38r	51/46r
Amarillo, Texas	54/27s	44/24pc
Anaheim, Calif.	70/52s	76/49s
Anchorage, Alaska	38/34r	38/30r
Aspen, Colo.	23/7sn	22/4c
Atlantic City, N.J.	53/41r	53/49sh
Augusta, Ga.	63/58sh	68/57sh
Austin, Texas	80/46s	60/35w
Bakersfield, Calif.	62/36pc	63/38pc
Baton Rouge, La.	73/66r	73/41sh
Billings, Mont.	39/28sn	40/25c
Birmingham, Ala.	66/62r	67/35sh
Bismarck, N.D.	30/20w	27/-1sn
Boise, Idaho	38/24s	40/26s
Buffalo, N.Y.	45/41r	47/35r
Burlington, Vt.	34/31sn	43/39sh
Cedar Rapids, Iowa	50/20pc	31/17c
Charleston, S.C.	70/58c	74/64sh
Charleston, W.Va.	57/48r	61/36sh
Cheyenne, Wyo.	32/17sn	33/26c
Cincinnati	54/45sh	47/28c
Cleveland	51/40r	46/33pc
Colorado Springs	35/13sn	36/17c
Columbia, S.C.	61/55sh	69/57sh
Columbus, Ohio	53/44r	50/31c
Corpus Christi, Texas	85/56s	72/41sh
Dayton, Ohio	53/42sh	46/29pc
Daytona Beach, Fla.	78/61pc	78/63c
Des Moines, Iowa	50/24s	32/18c
Duluth, Minn.	34/12sf	17/1sf
Durham, N.C.	58/50r	65/56sh
El Paso, Texas	68/40s	54/29s
Fairbanks, Alaska	29/13c	28/18pc
Flagstaff, Ariz.	49/16s	39/12w
Fargo, N.D.	30/19sn	23/-2c
Fort Myers, Fla.	81/62pc	84/67s
Fort Smith, Ark.	63/41c	49/31c
Fort Wayne, Ind.	51/35c	41/25pc
Fresno, Calif.	58/39pc	61/40f
Grand Rapids, Mich.	47/33c	35/25c
Green Bay, Wis.	45/27c	32/19c
Greensboro, N.C.	56/47sh	60/54r
Greenville, S.C.	53/50sh	63/54r
Harrisburg, Pa.	46/39r	55/49r
Hartford, Conn.	45/36r	44/41sh
Indianapolis	52/36c	42/22s
Islip, N.Y.	52/41r	53/49sh
Jackson, Miss.	71/63r	68/37sh
Jacksonville, Fla.	76/57c	80/62pc
Jefferson City, Mo.	58/29pc	39/28pc
Kansas City	54/28pc	39/24c
Key West, Fla.	79/72pc	80/74sh
Knoxville, Tenn.	60/51r	63/37sh
Laredo, Texas	84/52s	71/40c
Lexington, Ky.	57/50sh	54/27sh
Lincoln, Neb.	52/27w	40/18c
Little Rock, Ark.	65/48c	52/32s
Long Beach, Calif.	69/49pc	76/46s
Louisville, Ky.	58/49c	50/28c
Lubbock, Texas	64/32s	47/25pc
Madison, Wis.	48/24c	28/20c
Manchester, N.H.	40/34r	39/36sh
Memphis, Tenn.	64/50c	51/32s
Milwaukee	50/30pc	35/24c
Mobile, Ala.	70/63r	74/42r
Modesto, Calif.	59/33s	59/36pc
Montgomery, Ala.	68/61r	70/41r
Myrtle Beach, S.C.	65/58c	69/61sh
Nags Head, N.C.	57/51r	63/56sh
Nashville, Tenn.	65/51sh	59/31sh
Newark, N.J.	50/45r	53/50sh
New Haven, Conn.	52/42r	51/46sh
Norfolk, Va.	59/49r	65/61sh
Oakland, Calif.	65/43s	60/41pc
Oklahoma City	56/33pc	45/29pc
Omaha, Neb.	50/27w	36/16c
Palm Springs, Calif.	78/49s	70/44s
Pensacola, Fla.	72/64r	75/48t
Pierre, S.D.	37/24w	33/8sn
Pittsburgh	52/47r	53/37r
Portland, Maine	37/27pc	33/32sn
Portland, Ore.	49/33pc	45/36c
Providence, R.I.	45/39r	47/42sh
Raleigh, N.C.	60/52r	67/60sh
Rapid City, S.D.	35/24w	35/14sf
Reno, Nev.	44/18s	46/23s
Richmond, Va.	60/42r	64/58sh
Rochester, N.Y.	46/40r	52/37r
Sacramento, Calif.	62/33s	60/37pc
San Antonio	80/47s	62/38c
San Jose, Calif.	69/36s	67/41pc
Santa Fe, N.M.	51/20pc	39/15pc
Sarasota, Fla.	78/60pc	81/67s
Savannah, Ga.	71/59c	74/62sh
Scottsdale, Ariz.	72/47s	65/39s
Shreveport, La.	78/50pc	60/35c
Sioux Falls, S.D.	38/23w	32/10pc
South Bend, Ind.	51/33c	37/25pc
Spokane, Wash.	32/27c	34/26pc
Springfield, Mo.	55/29pc	39/27c
Springfield, Ill.	55/27pc	36/25pc
St. Louis	58/32pc	39/29c
St. Petersburg, Fla.	78/61pc	81/65pc
Syracuse, N.Y.	42/38r	50/40r
Tallahassee, Fla.	74/63c	77/58t
Tampa, Fla.	77/62pc	79/67pc
Toledo, Ohio	51/38sh	44/29s
Topeka, Kan.	55/28pc	42/26pc
Tucson, Ariz.	73/42s	67/37s
Tupelo, Miss.	69/60r	63/34sh
Tulsa, Okla.	57/32c	48/30pc
Virginia Beach, Va.	60/50r	64/58sh
Wichita, Kan.	53/28s	47/26s
Wilmington, Del.	48/38r	53/50sh
Winston-Salem, N.C.	57/47sh	60/55r
Worcester, Mass.	40/34r	40/36sh

WORLD CITIES

	TODAY	TUE
Beijing	44/21c	43/23c
Buenos Aires	75/65pc	81/69s
Cancun, Mexico	83/74pc	84/71sh
Dubai, UAE	86/65s	83/68pc
Frankfurt	42/38r	42/38c
Hong Kong	67/60s	71/63s
Istanbul	62/55sh	61/53pc
Jerusalem	65/47s	66/48h
Johannesburg	83/64t	89/67c
London	46/43sh	45/40c
Mexico City	76/48s	78/51s
Montreal	25/21sn	41/37c
Moscow	31/19c	27/20sn
Mumbai, India	90/68pc	90/70h
Paris	43/39r	42/39c
Rio de Janeiro	86/75pc	81/74r
Rome	55/44sh	55/41sh
Seoul	44/22c	46/27s
Singapore	88/76t	85/75t
Sydney	75/69c	81/67s
Toronto	40/36r	43/35pc
Tokyo	56/43s	57/43s

Oregon Ducks draw playoff short straw

Dan Wolken
Columnist
USA TODAY

Oregon coach Dan Lanning and the Ducks celebrate after beating Penn State in Saturday's Big Ten title game. JORDAN PRATHER/ IMAGN IMAGES

Dear Oregon Ducks and head coach Dan Lanning,

This is the College Football Playoff selection committee.

Congratulations on a wonderful season and a hard-won conference championship in your first year as a Big Ten member. We are highly impressed with your 13-0 record, especially in a season where so many teams faltered along the way.

And when we consider that you had to fly to the Eastern or Central time zone four times, finishing off a perfect season with a 45-37 win over fellow playoff participant Penn State Saturday night, it is truly one of the great accomplishments of the last several years.

In fact, we as a committee are so enamored with what you've done, Oregon, that we are going to award you the playoff's No. 1 seed. Again, many congrats.

But here's the thing, Coach Lanning.

In every other sport that decides championships in a tournament format, the best teams or individuals get seeded in the order they are ranked to ensure that the bracket is balanced and fair. It doesn't always work out perfectly, but this is considered standard practice to give the highest-seeded teams the easiest theoretical path possible toward a championship. After all, that's what they've earned by virtue of their regular-season accomplishments.

If you thought that was how it was going to go in college football, though, the joke's on you, Oregon. We don't do things like other sports – at least not until we're publicly shamed to a sufficient extent or dragged into court by antitrust lawyers.

But never mind that. Here's the reality of *your* situation. Despite all the great things you've done, you are not getting the easiest path as a reward for being the top team in the country. Far from it, in fact. What the committee has cooked up for you is a quarterfinal against either Ohio State, which might be the sport's most-talented and expensive roster, or a Tennessee team that is currently ranked No. 8 nationally in offense and No. 4 on defense.

In fact, if we were putting together the bracket strictly by our committee rankings, you'd never see either of these teams unless it was in the championship game. Instead, you'd be playing the winner of Boise State-Indiana in the quarterfinals. Oops!

Oh, but that's not all. If you're fortunate enough to survive that quarterfinal matchup on a neutral field – remember, you only beat Ohio State 32-31 at home a couple of months ago – you're not going to get the winner of a favorable matchup between No. 4 Penn State and No. 5 Notre Dame in the semifinals. Rather, you're very likely just going to get a No. 3-ranked Texas team that will be heavily favored to cruise over Clemson at home and then Arizona State in the quarterfinals.

In other words, even though the Longhorns didn't beat a top-25 team all season and went 0-2 against Georgia, we are giving them an easier path to the semifinals than the one we're giving you. And that's kind of a theme in how we arranged this bracket.

Georgia, the No. 2 seed, gets the winner of Indiana-Notre Dame. Penn State, the team you just beat for the Big Ten title, gets SMU and then Boise State. If we are being real about it, Oregon, your first playoff game is probably going to have the smallest point spread of any quarterfinal.

We wish we could say as a committee that we gave you this burden because we think you're a good enough team to handle it. But that wouldn't be the truth. It's because we are constrained by a nonsensical system that the conference commissioners came up with before they all decided to blow up their sport from coast-to-coast.

When the 12-team playoff was conceived, the idea was that conference championships should be rewarded with a first-round bye, and so the four highest-ranked title game winners would slot in as Nos. 1 through 4. But that was back when the conferences – although not perfectly even in strength – were similar enough that recognizing championships made sense.

What happened subsequently, though, is that Oklahoma and Texas left the Big 12 for the SEC. Then Southern California and UCLA left the Pac-12 for the Big Ten. Then the Pac-12 imploded, and we ended up with a bunch of 16-team leagues where it was impossible to have any scheduling balance, even within leagues. But because conference commissioners are inherently selfish and look out only for their best interests, not those of the sport at large, they could not agree on any adjustments to the 12-team format.

As a result, we were forced to give Boise State the No. 3 seed despite ranking them No. 9 and to give Arizona State the No. 4 seed despite ranking them No. 12. We were also too lazy to make any significant adjustments to seeding based on the results of the conference championship games and boxed ourselves in to some unfortunate imbroglios because ESPN forces us to go on television every week, give fake rankings with incomplete data and then try to explain them to the public.

So, at the end of the day, we recognize that the bracket is a nonsensical mess that puts you at a severe disadvantage. Here is how our chairman, Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel, explains it.

"We rank the teams one through 25. That's what we've been asked to do," he said on ESPN. "We don't discuss if we put this team at No. 1 and we move this team to No. 8 or 9 and they're going to be playing each other and we need to go back and reconsider how we feel about them in the top 25. We've been asked as a committee to rank the best teams one through 25.

"Then the seeding and what the commissioners set up is how to seed those teams come into play, and we only can go off what they want us to do as we seed the teams in the tournament. It turns out that is a very good game in terms of 8/9 and playing 1, but from the start, that's what it was going to be, and we don't know who those teams are until we get through the top 25."

In other words, Oregon, we can only offer you a bunch of rhetorical gobbledygook that explains why our process stinks so badly.

Oh well! That's college sports for you. The Ducks aren't the only ones who quack in this business.

We recognize that if this were a better system that made more sense, your season would have earned a much greater reward than having to face Ohio State or Tennessee. That's not just not our problem, though.

It's yours.

So enjoy the playoff. And congrats again on drawing the short straw.

Sincerely,

The College Football Playoff selection committee

ACC

Continued from Page 1C

regular season and lost by a field goal to a pair of ranked opponents. But SMU will be in the crosshairs as the final at-large team in the playoff.

The ACC

Clemson's win will give the ACC two teams in the playoff, a fairly remarkable development given where the league stood in the postseason picture as recently as last weekend. While Miami lost twice in November to fall out of the race, that SMU and Clemson made the field gives the ACC a solid argument for being seen as the third-best league in the Power Four, behind the SEC and Big Ten and ahead of the Big 12.

Arizona State

Another team that came out of nowhere to reach the playoff, Arizona State will benefit enormously from Clemson's win by earning a bye into the quarterfinals as one of the top four conference champions. As the No. 4 seed, the Sun Devils will meet the winner of Clemson and Texas. They have won six in a row and eight of nine to end the regular season, including ranked wins against Iowa State, Kansas State and Brigham Young.

Texas

Despite losing the SEC championship to Georgia, the Longhorns were able to land in the coveted No. 5 spot as the top-ranked at-large team. That gives Texas manageable matchups against Clemson in the opening round and then, with a win, against Arizona State in the quarterfinals. Penn State also benefits from earning the No. 6 seed, since that pits the Nittany Lions against SMU and potentially Boise State.

LOSERS

Alabama

The Crimson Tide were the first team left out of the expanded 12-team field after slumping to three losses in coach Kalen DeBoer's first season. Those losses, including an ugly 21-point defeat to Oklahoma last month, overshadowed Alabama's high-quality wins against Georgia, South Carolina, LSU and Missouri. In the end, the Tide's week-to-week unpredictability and inability to seal the deal in November cost them dearly in the comparison with SMU.

South Carolina and Mississippi

Both three-loss contenders had strong cases for the expanded playoff: South Carolina was the hottest team in the SEC in the second half of the regular season and Ole Miss often looked like one of the best teams in the entire Football Bowl Subdivision. For the Gamecocks, losses to the Crimson Tide and Rebels were impossible to overcome even as they ended the year on a six-game winning streak. For the Rebels, an unforgivable loss to Florida cost them a chance at making the playoff and likely hosting an opening-round matchup.

Miami

That SMU made the playoff despite losing to Clemson will be hard for Miami to swallow because the Hurricanes were set to meet the Mustangs before losing to Syracuse in the season finale. Given how the committee came down in the comparison between SMU and Alabama, the Hurricanes would've had a very strong case for an at-large bid had they reached the ACC title game with one loss and then lost to the Mustangs. Miami ended up as the second team out of the field after the Tide.

Bracket

Continued from Page 1C

First round

No. 5 Texas vs. No. 12 Clemson
- Saturday, Dec. 21 at 4 p.m. ET on TNT and Max
- Darrel K Royal Texas Memorial Stadium, Austin, Texas
- Winner to play No. 4 Arizona State in quarterfinals
- **Tickets:** Get Texas vs. Clemson tickets on StubHub

No. 6 Penn State vs. No. 11 SMU
- Saturday, Dec. 21 at 12 p.m. ET on TNT and Max
- Beaver Stadium, State College, Pennsylvania
- Winner to play No. 3 Boise State in quarterfinals
- **Tickets:** Get Penn State vs. SMU tickets on StubHub

No. 7 Notre Dame vs. No. 10 Indiana
- Friday, Dec. 20 at 8 p.m. ET on ESPN and ABC
- Notre Dame Stadium, South Bend, Indiana
- Winner to play No. 2 Georgia in quarterfinals
- **Tickets:** Get Notre Dame vs. Indiana tickets on StubHub

No. 8 Ohio State vs. No. 9 Tennessee
- Saturday, Dec. 21 at 8 p.m. ET on ESPN and ABC
- Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio, 8 p.m. ET
- Winner to play No. 1 Oregon in quarterfinals
- **Tickets:** Get Ohio State vs. Tennessee tickets on StubHub

CFP championship bracket

Quarterfinals

No. 4 Arizona State vs. Texas/ Clemson winner
- Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl (Atlanta)
- Wednesday, Jan. 1 at 1 p.m. ET on ESPN
- **Tickets:** Get Peach Bowl tickets on StubHub

No. 1 Oregon vs. Ohio State/Tennessee winner
- Rose Bowl (Pasadena, California)
- Wednesday, Jan. 1 at 5 p.m. ET on ESPN and ABC
- **Tickets:** Get Rose Bowl tickets on StubHub

No. 3 Boise State vs. Penn State/ SMU winner
- Vrbo Fiesta Bowl (Glendale, Arizona)
- Tuesday, Dec. 31 at 7:30 p.m. ET on ESPN
- **Tickets:** Get Fiesta Bowl tickets on StubHub

No. 2 Georgia vs. Notre Dame/Indiana winner
- Allstate Sugar Bowl (New Orleans)
- Wednesday, Jan. 1 at 8:45 p.m. ET on ESPN
- **Tickets:** Get Sugar Bowl tickets on StubHub

Semifinals

National semifinal 1
- Capital One Orange Bowl (Miami Gardens, Florida)
- Thursday, Jan. 9 at 7:30 p.m. ET on ESPN
- **Tickets:** Get Orange Bowl tickets on StubHub

National semifinal 2
- Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic (Arlington, Texas)
- Friday, Jan. 10 at 7:30 p.m ET on ESPN
- Tickets: Get Cotton Bowl tickets on StubHub

CFP national championship game

- At Mercedes Benz Stadium (Atlanta)
- Monday, Jan. 20 at 7:30 p.m. ET on ESPN
- **Tickets:** Get tickets on StubHub

GANNETT | USA TODAY NETWORK

NOW HIRING

Delivery

Packaging

Distribution

Press Operator

Technician

Your next step forward starts with us.

Discover opportunities in our Manufacturing and Distribution departments at any of our 200 papers nationwide, including USA TODAY.

Working at Gannett is much more than a job, it's a family comprised of diverse voices, extraordinary talent, vast experiences, and innovative ideas.

Benefits at Gannett Publishing Services include:

- A supportive, inclusive workplace
- Competitive benefits, such as medical, dental, vision, 401k, PTO, and tuition assistance*
- Accessible entry and mid-level positions with room to grow

Apply today!

Gannett awards, recognition & honors:

Forbes 2024 BEST EMPLOYERS FOR DIVERSITY

EQUALITY 100 2023 2024 Leader in LGBTQ+ Workplace Inclusion

WINNER TOP 10 ENTERPRISE-WIDE ERG & DEI COUNCILS AWARD

*Eligibility for certain benefit programs will vary based on employee eligibility, geographic location,and/or the terms of any applicable collective bargaining agreement.

‘Somebody Somewhere’ leaves fans – and star – wanting more

“I never want to say goodbye” to characters in the HBO dramedy, Bridget Everett says. **Page 2D**

LIFELINE

JUSTIN TALLIS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

HOW WAS YOUR DAY? ‘WIZARD OF OZ’ FANS

Dorothy’s iconic ruby slippers from “The Wizard of Oz” sold for a whopping $32.5 million on Saturday, making them the most valuable movie memorabilia ever sold at auction, according to Heritage Auctions. The shoes were one of four surviving pairs worn by Judy Garland while filming the 1939 movie and were famously stolen in 2005 from the Judy Garland Museum in her hometown of Grand Rapids, Minn., and recovered 13 years later by the FBI.

IT’S YOUR BIRTHDAY WHO’S CELEBRATING TODAY

Simon Helberg is 44. **John Malkovich** is 71. **Judi Dench** is 90.

HOROSCOPE | SANCTUARY

More: www.sanctuaryworld.co

Aries (March 21-April 19). Making the first move? Trusting your instincts nets you successful conquests as the moon harmonizes with Mars.

Taurus (April 20-May 20). Emotional moments? Conflicts prove cathartic. A tense exchange clears the air.

Gemini (May 21-June 21). Hyping up the crowd? Your passion for an idea is infectious.

Cancer (June 22-July 22). Good business instincts? Savvy hunches get you ahead as the moon and Mars harmonize. Your ambitious attitude is your strength.

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22). Purposeful decisions? Let your vision lead you. Champion a conviction.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Investigating a mystery? You’re drawn into occult fascinations or psychological webs.

Libra (Sept.23-Oct. 23). Motivational rivalries? Competition helps you AND your opponent get ahead.

Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Barreling through a professional obstacle? Yesterday’s mountain is today’s molehill as the moon and Mars harmonize.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Expressing your passionate side? Act upon a creative or romantic urge.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Defending a loved one? You have no patience for bullies! Directly address a threat.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Making your opinion known? Hash out a conflict of interest with a partner.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20). In a secure headspace? Choices made with confidence deliver immediate results.

TELEVISION YEAR IN REVIEW

Cate Blanchett stars in “Disclaimer,” a limited series about secrets, the stories we tell ourselves and the assumptions we make about women.
PROVIDED BY APPLE TV+

Best shows offered an escape and made us think

Kelly Lawler USA TODAY

This year may have felt as if it lasted as few decades, but it went by a little more quickly if you watched some of its best TV shows. • Yes, 2024 was full of historical and important political news, major weather events, pop culture milestones and breakout music stars, which is a lot to wrap our brains around. But it was also full of some beautiful, thrilling and thought-provoking TV series that entertained and diverted us through the hard parts. • The 10 best TV shows of 2024 didn’t follow set formulas or play it safe. They were on streaming and network TV, featured movie stars and breakout new faces. These shows were profound, silly or both, and they had us begging for more even if the story was resoundingly resolved. Mostly they transported us out of our current time and place to somewhere new, and that is what the best storytelling is meant to do. • So here are the 10 best TV shows of 2024, from romantic comedies to dystopian science fiction to British punk rockers. We can’t wait to see what TV in 2025 brings us.

10. ‘Nobody Wants This’ (Netflix)

Netflix’s romantic comedy about an irreverent agnostic (Kristen Bell) and a super-cool rabbi (Adam Brody) who fall for each other is a fun, silly, opposites-attract story that could use a little help when it comes to its portrayal of some characters (particularly Jewish women). But what elevates the show is the palpable, blazing chemistry between Bell and Brody, so fiery your screen might be hot to the touch during their zingy meet-cute. The series’ full embrace of romance – ooey-gooey, sometimes messy but always driven by a belief in the warmth and goodness of love – could be seen as cheesy and old-fashioned in our deeply cynical era of “Euphoria” and app dating. But this is no Hallmark Christmas movie. It is complicated and raw and honest and will make you believe in love, if only for 10 short episodes in its first season. Mercifully for our hearts, it’s coming back for more.

Joanne (Kristen Bell) and Noah (Adam Brody) fall for each other in a fun, silly, opposites-attract story in “Nobody Wants This.”
PROVIDED BY HOPPER STONE/NETFLIX

See BEST TV, Page 2D

TELEVISION

Van Der Beek strips away any illusions about cancer

Bryan Alexander
USA TODAY

James Van Der Beek had his own secret reason to bare all on TV for Fox’s “The Real Full Monty.”

When he was first approached to appear on the striptease special inspired by the 1997 movie for cancer awareness, Van Der Beek, 47, privately was undergoing his own cancer battle after being diagnosed with Stage 3 colorectal cancer in August 2023. Taking it all off in a male celebrity revue led by Anthony Anderson not only would make for raucously good TV, he figured, but also serve as the ultimate platform to highlight the need for screenings for deadly diseases that men often are embarrassed to discuss: prostate, testicular and colorectal cancer.

“The universe is hilarious. I knew immediately in my heart I was doing this,” Van Der Beek tells USA TODAY about ripping off a red thong for the cause on Monday’s two-hour special (8 EST/PST). “My brain had to catch up to what I’d be doing. There’s been nothing even resembling a male stripping past for me, so this was truly novel. The added layer was this was going to be my first time talking about my diagnosis.”

James Van Der Beek is in a rare moment of being fully clothed in “The Real Full Monty.”
PROVIDED BY RAY MICKSHAW/FOX

Van Der Beek revealed his health challenge last month before announcing the sale of signed replica football jerseys from his 1999 drama “Varsity Blues” to raise money for treatment. The actor felt the outpouring of concern and love from friends and fans worldwide.

“It’s been amazing and overwhelming,” he says. He received a gift basket with a touching note from Katie Holmes, his co-star in WB’s hit 1998-2003 series “Dawson’s Creek.” “To find myself in a place where I’m being supported with so many good wishes really took me aback.”

The support also came from his fellow “Full Monty” strippers, including actors Anderson, Taye Diggs and Tyler Posey, Kansas City Chiefs defensive tackle Chris Jones and “Dancing With the Stars” judge Bruno Tonioli.

When Van Der Beek revealed his diagnosis to his fellow dancers on camera, the concern was palpable. Tonioli, who judged Van Der Beek and pro Emma Slater on Season 28 of “DWTS,” burst into tears.

“Bruno and I go way back,” says Van Der Beek, who was touched. “I’ve always been this independent person, so counting on these guys for support was huge. Hopefully others will be inspired to see me stop trying to be Superman constantly and relying on my support system.”

That support includes his wife of 14 years, Kimberly, their six children (“they’ve been amazing”) and friends like Slater (they’ve remained so close that his kids call her “Auntie”). Even with the love, there are moments he’s overwhelmed thinking about the life-changing diagnosis.

“It really is a lot. It’s definitely been a huge initiation into what I call ‘Act Three,’ ” he says. “But I’m in a really good spot, feeling really strong and

See VAN DER BEEK, Page 2D

TELEVISION

Everett hopes for a future for 'Somebody'

Erin Jensen
USA TODAY

In the last few minutes of Sunday's series finale of HBO's "Somebody Somewhere," Sam (Bridget Everett) celebrates her personal growth over three seasons by belting out Miley Cyrus' "The Climb."

The poppy power ballad hammers home the belief that life is about the journey, and not a destination. "Ain't about how fast I get there, ain't about what's waiting on the other side," Sam sings to her friends at the bar where she works. "It's the climb."

"Over the last two seasons, Sam was learning from her friends and Joel lifting her up and the community around her," Everett says in an interview. "Season 3 for her is about putting those lessons to practice, to push through it when it hurts – especially when it hurts – to push through it and keep going and try to live a bigger, broader, brighter life."

The performance in the finale is the perfect callback to the show's 2022 premiere, when Sam became reacquainted with Joel (Jeff Hiller), a fellow member of their high school's show choir she just couldn't seem to place. Yet Joel adored her: "I used to love watching you sing," he told Sam in that first episode. "You were so joyful it, like, soaked into me. Nothing made me happy in high school, and that made me so happy."

Sam's singing in the finale conjures up that same joy, and it will be evident to those who have watched the series' 21 episodes just how far Sam has come. When viewers first met her, she was grieving her sister, who had died six months earlier and was struggling to find her place in Manhattan, Kansas. (Everett's hometown is the setting for the semi-autobiographical series.) Sam had returned to take care of her sister, who was battling cancer.

Sam (Bridget Everett) and Joel (Jeff Hiller) are each other's persons in HBO's dramedy "Somebody Somewhere." PROVIDED BY SANDY MORRIS/HBO

"I feel really good," Sam tells her friends from the bar stage in Sunday's episode. "And I thought that that was a good enough reason to ask all my favorite people to be here with me today. I want you guys to know how much I love you. I really do. ... Cheers to us, and here's to living."

The finale brings the characters full circle, which is why it's surprising to learn Everett and the cast didn't know the episode would be their last. (HBO canceled the series after three seasons.)

"That was my first day on set" for Season 3, says Hiller, 49.

"It was kind of wild," Everett adds, "because you sort of have an idea of where you think you want the temperature to be of the scene, but we just really rolled the dice and hoped that that was good enough."

An online petition with more than 10,000 signatures urges HBO to give the Peabody Award-winning series a fourth season, praising the "quietly compassionate show that features – and highlights – a loving community in middle America, the importance of chosen family, authentic trans and queer representation, and real relationships that endure even the most painful conflict."

And Everett, 52, is game for more.

"I never want to say goodbye to these characters," she says. "I hope it's only goodbye for right now. I was saying to somebody earlier I was out getting my steps yesterday, or whatever day it was, and I was thinking about a scene between Sam and Joel, where they might be right now, and a set of circumstances that I have in my head. It just it feels like I'm right back in it."

What Everett envisions for the characters she keeps close to the vest, but she knows "exactly how I'd want it to end."

Hiller would also raise a 'tini to resurrecting the characters. In the finale, people-pleaser Joel decides to return to his church and finds the courage to share his decision with his partner, Brad (Tim Bagley).

"But let's just say that if we did get to do a movie or something, Joel wouldn't be living in London and having a phone call in," he says, referencing Kim Cattrall's brief "And Just Like That ..." cameo, amid a public feud with star Sarah Jessica Parker. "I'll be there."

Hiller describes the series as "a platonic rom-com." It would make as much sense to have Sam without Joel as a peanut butter sandwich without jelly.

Everett's favorite moment in the finale is when Joel declares Sam to be his person: "My life is so much better because of you," he tells her.

"It feels like the point of the show," Everett says. Sam "needs somebody like Joel who's undeniable and not willing to give up on her."

As a result of Joel's unconditional love and a strengthened relationship with her sister, Tricia (Mary Catherine Garrison), a more confident Sam feels emboldened to take a chance on romance with a man nicknamed Iceland (Ólafur Darri Ólafsson).

Sam initially said Iceland blew her off after their first date, when she in fact ghosted him because she was scared of being rejected. After Tricia encourages Sam to give things a shot, she invites Iceland to the bar, where he's mesmerized by her performance. "That was amazing," he tells her before Sam falls into his shoulder and the credits roll.

"The whole point of the show is to not give up on yourself," Hiller says. "By the time I had turned 40 and I hadn't ever made it as an actor full time, I kind of was like: 'Oh, it's never going to happen. I'm just going to be someone who teaches improv and then sometimes gets to play a waiter on a sitcom.' And this show said, 'No, your story is valid, too.' "

Best TV

Continued from Page 1D

9. 'Silo' (Apple TV+)

This dystopian science fiction drama about the (seemingly) last 10,000 people on Earth surviving in an underground silo is so deeply compelling and engrossing, it's easy to forgive its minor flaws. No show on TV can carry tension and drama from episode to episode like this mystery box starring Rebecca Ferguson. In an era of lazy binge-watch storytelling, "Silo" keeps you begging for more each week.

8. 'Matlock' (CBS)

Network TV isn't dead, you just have to wade through some of the lesser and lazier series to find true greatness. The team of Kathy Bates and Jennie Snyder Urman ("Jane the Virgin," "Charmed") perfectly molded a show that feels at home next to "NCIS" but offers something bigger and newer than your average procedural. Bates plays a septuagenarian lawyer who returns to the workforce at a fancy white-shoe New York law firm seemingly out of desperate financial need. But there's far more to her heart-wrenching story. Riding on Urman's snappy scripts and Bates' charm (she's still got it), "Matlock" is ridiculously watchable, even if it's not much like the 1980s Andy Griffith drama that inspired it.

7. 'Manhunt' (Apple TV+)

Who knew a Civil War-era TV show about an asthmatic bureaucrat hunting down the man who shot Abraham Lincoln could be such a rollicking good time? "Manhunt" turns a social studies lesson – what happened after Lincoln was assassinated, and the hunt for his killer – into an action-adventure banger. Anthony Boyle ("Masters of the Air") gives a deliciously smarmy performance as assassin John Wilkes Booth, balanced with the almost too-upright portrayal of War Secretary Edwin Stanton by Tobias Menzies. Seventh grade history was never this much fun, or this effectively told.

6. 'Fallout' (Amazon Prime)

It might just be the golden age of video game adaptations, and it might just be because Hollywood has started making movies and TV based on good video games. "Fallout," a post-apocalyptic thriller, blasted onto the scene this year with bright colors, a don't-give-a-hoot attitude and enough cheeky gore to paint the town very red. Set centuries after a nuclear armageddon, the series has an appealing cast, an irreverent tone, good jokes, bold visuals, cute dogs and is fun for all. Overly somber shows take note: It's possible to be dark and lively at the same time.

Bisma (Faith Omole), Saira (Sarah Kameela Impey), Amina (Anjana Vasan), Momtaz (Lucie Shorthouse) and Ayesha (Juliette Motamed) are members of a Muslim punk band in "We Are Lady Parts." PROVIDED BY SAIMA KHALID/WTTV LIMITED/PEACOCK/CHANNEL 4

Hiroyuki Sanada stars in "Shogun," an FX series containing a wealth of awe-inspiring moments big and small as it tells the story of the first English contact with feudal Japan PROVIDED BY KATIE YU/FX

5. 'Say Nothing' (Hulu)

Based on Patrick Radden Keefe's nonfiction book about Northern Ireland's Troubles, "Say Nothing" will shock and appall viewers unfamiliar with this period of recent history. In this world, portly Irish housewives hide guns in the garden and teenage girls choose between violent revolution and art school. Focused on young IRA soldier Dolours Price (Lola Petticrew, a force), the series does an exquisite job painting its 1970s Belfast setting in excruciating detail, balancing heavy darkness with levity and reminding us that our societal troubles aren't that far behind us.

4. 'True Detective: Night Country' (HBO)

Literally chilling, shocking and impossible to look away from, HBO's anthology drama "True Detective" returned to its best form in its fourth season, subtitled "Night Country," and with a new producer, Issa López. Set in the winter darkness in Alaska, the mystic crime drama puts Chief Liz Danvers (Jodie Foster) and Detective Evangeline Navarro (Kali Reis) to work investigating the frozen deaths of seven men at a research facility. The twists start early and don't stop until the last seconds of the finale. But even without such a bombastic story, the performances by Foster and Reis would be enough to keep your eyes glued.

3. 'Shogun' (FX)

Gloriously brought to life with gorgeous sets, costumes and performances, "Shogun" is a true epic. The FX series contains awe-inspiring moments big and small as it tells the story of the first English contact with feudal Japan. Violence, romance and politics collide in the exquisitely crafted (and multi-Emmy-winning) drama.

2. 'We Are Lady Parts' (Peacock)

The British series about an all-female Muslim punk band returned this summer, three years after its near-perfect first season, providing a reminder that any day without "Lady Parts" is a day robbed of joy. The second season sees our brilliant band dealing with money troubles, a rival Muslim girl group and rom-com shenanigans in the most delectable way possible. Some of the themes are heavier this time, and the series superbly balances its thoughtfulness with it's giddy fun. And it doesn't hurt to have Malala Yousafzai make a cameo appearance for a music video.

1. 'Disclaimer' (Apple TV+)

"Gravity" and "Roma" director Alfonso Cuarón brought his Oscar-winning talents to TV for this limited series about secrets, the stories we tell ourselves and the assumptions we make about women. Although loaded with big ideas and thought-provoking themes, the story is intimate and direct, a narrative focused on the consequences of a meeting between a young mother (Leila George) and 19-year-old boy (Louis Partridge) on an Italian beach. Twenty years later, that woman (Cate Blanchett, as always a star) and the boy's father (Kevin Kline) must reckon with their lives then and now, and the complicated emotions of grief, rage and regret. Like Cuarón's other work, "Disclaimer" immerses you fully, locking you in even when it's hard to watch. Too much current TV is lightweight, simplistic fluff that can't make you stop scrolling long enough to pay attention. "Disclaimer" will make you pay attention.

Van Der Beek

Continued from Page 1D

able to exercise and keep in shape, so that's a big boost."

"Full Monty" brought him escapist joy. Van Der Beek even loved being the butt of a "Weekend Update" joke, which referred to the special as "Dawson's Crack." The zinger was particularly funny since Van Der Beek had been busted with a copy of a VHS porn video with the same title.

"It's a 100% true story. I received the 'Dawson's Crack' porno as a wrap gift for 'The Rules of Attraction,' " he says, referring to his 2002 movie. "It was on VHS. That's how long ago this was." He packed the NSFW tape when returning to the "Dawson's Creek" set in North Carolina, because "I wanted to show everybody that we'd made it" as a successful show. "So I put it in my suitcase and went through security. It was right after 9/11, and security opened up every suitcase, including mine. And it was right on top. Not only was it a porno, but a porno based on a show I was in. The TSA guard looked at me, got embarrassed, and just closed the suitcase. And I was on my merry way."

He couldn't slink away from raw duty on "Full Monty," not even the thong-removal training. "It's more technical than you think," Van Der Beek says. "The thong needs to stay on when you want it to stay on, and it needs to come off when you want it off. Timing is crucial, and you're putting a lot of faith in a plastic clasp."

Yes, each man really stripped down to nothing in front of an appreciative audience. There is more than just the final thong. Even Van Der Beek doesn't know how much of the ultimate reveal will be shown on Fox.

"But we all went full monty, 100%. We got naked in front of a crowd. It was actually pretty liberating. And if we can get up on stage and do that, then someone can have that conversation with their doctor and maybe save their life.

"The dancing is optional."

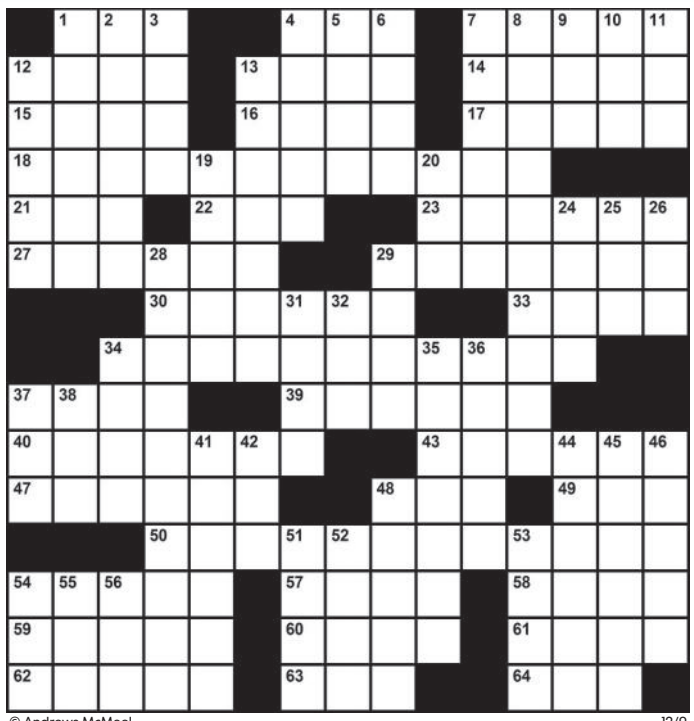
In an arresting move, Tyler Posey, James Van Der Beek, Anthony Anderson, Chris Jones and Taye Diggs lose it in "The Real Full Monty." PROVIDED BY FOX

USA TODAY CROSSWORD

EDITED Amanda Rafkin

BY Olivia Mitra Framke & Sally Hoelscher

FIRST DANCE



© Andrews McMeel 12/9

ACROSS

1 Wrathful
4 Making out in the park, e.g.
7 Picket line crossers
12 Base that four runners cross after a grand slam
13 Panache
14 Forbidden
15 Plant with soothing gel
16 Big blast of wind
17 Cookies paired with Coca-Cola in a "Besties for a limited time" promotion
18 "Howl's Moving Castle" animation company
21 X
22 Boosts a post (Abbr.)
23 Intros to "Only Murders in the Building" episodes, for example
27 What the stick the Grinch ties on his dog's head represents
29 Beethoven wrote 32 of them for the piano
30 Mystery
33 Dot on a map
34 "Come on over and take a look"
37 ___ and crafts
39 Credit card provider, e.g.
40 Brochure
43 Like a cheetah but not a sloth
47 Scared
48 Tai ___
49 Salonga who has voiced two Disney princesses
50 Stacked deli offering
54 Marisa who won an Oscar for "My Cousin Vinny"
57 Currency of Ireland
58 Langston Hughes poem with the lines "They'll see how beautiful I am / and be ashamed-"
59 Not mainstream
60 Doodle
61 Try again
62 Annoying bugs
63 ___ the table
64 U-turn from WNW

DOWN

1 Like flowing lava
2 Invoice line
3 Ownership certificate
4 Stops up
5 Word following "em" or "en"
6 Against
7 Like Mona Lisa's smile in a Carmen Sandiego video game
8 Cartoonish portrait
9 Name of Timehop's dino mascot
10 Ghost's sound
11 "Our boat's in trouble!"
12 "___ luego!" ("See you later!")
13 Self-centered endeavor
19 "Flashdance . . . What a Feeling" singer Cara
20 Dude
24 On
25 Feline or canine foot
26 U.S. tax ID
28 "We need to accept facts . . ."
29 Droops
31 Determination
32 Prefix for "information"
34 "___ Wars: Revenge of the Sith"
35 "Quiet, you!"
36 Lukewarm
37 Brownie ___ mode
38 Ump
41 "Tiger" flowers
42 www.newschool.___
44 Best of the best
45 Crack
46 Web portal with "!" in its logo
48 Diamond measure
51 Sleeping spots
52 "Okay!"
53 Electrical current carrier
54 20%, e.g.
55 Age indicated by a single finger
56 Surgeons' degrees

Friday's Answer

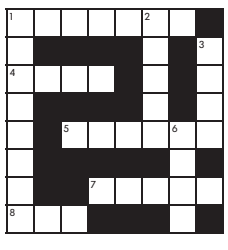
	T	W	A	N	G		S	P	A	M		B	A	D
H	A	I	L	E	D		T	A	T	A		E	T	A
I	K	N	O	W	P	L	A	C	E	S		J	O	T
K	E	E	N			I	R	E		A	R	E	N	A
E	N	D	G	A	M	E			S	L	O	W		
				D	O	N	T	B	L	A	M	E	M	E
S	E	A	R	E	D		W	A	Y		P	L	O	D
C	A	F	E			S	I	N		P	E	E	V	E
A	C	T	S		B	U	S		H	A	R	D	E	N
T	H	E	E	R	A	S	T	O	U	R				
		R	T	E	S			T	E	T	H	E	R	
P	E	G		S	M	E	A	R			A	X	E	S
A	C	L		T	A	Y	L	O	R	S	W	I	F	T
W	H	O		S	T	E	P		A	N	K	L	E	S
N	O	W			I	D	S		P	O	S	E	R	

12/6

CROSSWORDS ON YOUR PHONE
get our crossword app

Answers: Call 1-900-988-8300, 99 cents a minute; or, with a credit card, 1-800-320-4280.

TXTPERT



12/9

Across
1. 7762536
4. 7325
5. 333328
7. 22688
8. 363

Down
1. 73778233
2. 38653
3. 4468
6. 2583

© USA TODAY and Rich Coulter

Today's theme
Literary terms

Use the phone keypad to decode the clues. For example: 2 could be A, B or C ... and 5678 could be LOST

Yesterday's solution 12/6

Numbers

More puzzles: **puzzles.usatoday.com**
Want solutions? **answers.usatoday.com**
Feedback: **feedback@usatoday.com**

SUDOKU

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 (no repeats).

4	2		6				5	7
1				3				6
		8	9	7				
		6		1	5	4	8	3
	3	1		9		6	7	
8	4	5	7	6		2		
				4	7	3		
6				5				1
3	1				6		9	4

12/9 DIFFICULTY RATING ★☆☆☆☆

SUDOKU FUSION ON YOUR PHONE
puzzles.usatoday.com

© Andrews McMeel

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x2 box contains the numbers 1 through 6 (no repeats).

	1		3		
	3	6	5	2	
	2	1	6	4	3
6	4	3	1	5	
	5	4	2	1	
		2		3	

DIFFICULTY RATING ★☆☆☆☆

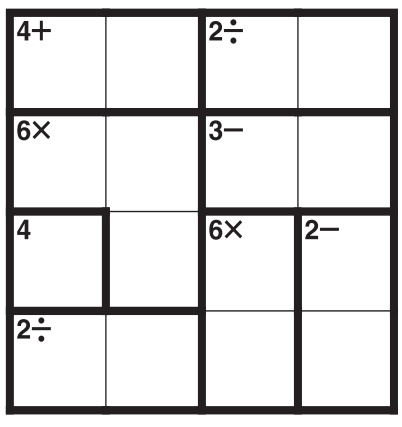
Friday's Answers

5	3	4	2	9	1	7	6	8
6	8	2	3	4	7	5	1	9
9	7	1	8	6	5	4	2	3
7	9	5	4	2	6	8	3	1
1	2	8	7	5	3	6	9	4
4	6	3	1	8	9	2	7	5
2	4	9	6	3	8	1	5	7
8	5	7	9	1	2	3	4	6
3	1	6	5	7	4	9	8	2

5	6	3	2	1	4
1	4	2	6	5	3
2	1	4	5	3	6
6	3	5	1	4	2
4	2	1	3	6	5
3	5	6	4	2	1

12/6

KENKEN



Trademark KenKen, LLC Distributed by Andrews McMeel

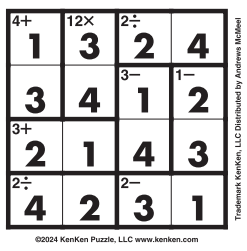
©2024 KenKen Puzzle, LLC www.kenken.com

1. Each row and column must contain the numbers 1 through 4 (easy) or 1 though 6 (challenging) without repeating.

2. The numbers within the heavily outlined boxes, called cages, must combine using the given operation (in any order) to produce the target numbers in the top-left corners.

3. Freebies: fill in single-box cages with the number in the top-left corner.

FRIDAY'S SOLUTION

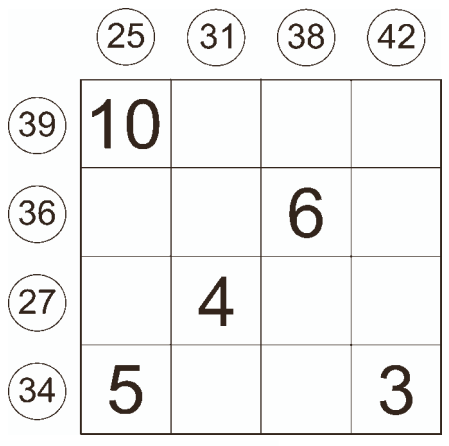


Trademark KenKen, LLC Distributed by Andrews McMeel

©2024 KenKen Puzzle, LLC www.kenken.com

KUBOK 16

By Davide Coppo Difficulty: **HARD**



Solution to Friday's puzzle

14	11	12	1
3	8	7	5
16	9	6	10
4	15	13	2

Enter the missing numbers from 1 to 16 without repetitions so that the sum of the four numbers in each row and column is the same as the corresponding circled number.

©2024 Kubok. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency. All rights reserved. 12/9/24

Words

WORD ROUNDUP

By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek 12/9

Find and Circle:

Six fish starting with S	☑☐☐☐☐☐
Five planets	☐☐☐☐☐
Canada's ____ ____ Island	☐☐
Melbourne's state	☐
Square root of nine	☐

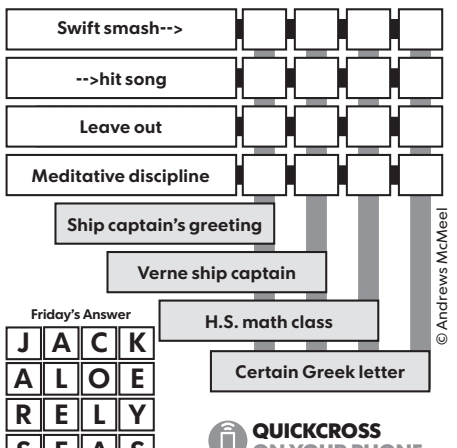
Friday's answer: ALASKA HAWAII IDAHO TEXAS MAINE IOWA OHIO UTAH / GENERAL CAPTAIN COLONEL MAJOR / JERRY LEWIS / EVEREST / LAOS

S	W	J	S	M	E	L	T	H	Z	W	N
S	O	V	I	C	T	O	R	I	A	O	Y
N	T	L	N	Z	H	D	N	K	E	R	N
A	H	I	E	T	R	O	K	G	U	R	S
P	R	N	R	A	M	R	R	C	U	U	S
P	E	A	W	L	A	U	R	T	N	R	C
E	E	D	A	H	T	E	A	E	A	C	J
R	E	S	S	S	M	S	V	M	B	D	T

© Andrews McMeel

QUICKCROSS

By John Wilmes 12/9



© Andrews McMeel

Friday's Answer

J	A	C	K
A	L	O	E
R	E	L	Y
S	E	A	S

12/6

QUICKCROSS ON YOUR PHONE
puzzles.usatoday.com

UP & DOWN WORDS

By David L. Hoyt and Russell L. Hoyt 12/9

1. **INNER**
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____ **STAR**

Clues:
1. Group of close advisers
2. Revisit
3. Behind-the-scenes HQ
4. Desk job holder
5. Hive supporter
6. 2007 DreamWorks film
7. Famous actor

Friday's Answer

CONSOLE	TABLE
TABLE	TALK
TALK	TOUGH
TOUGH	BREAK
BREAK	POINT
POINT	OUT
OUT	WEST

PLAY ONLINE PUZZLES.USATODAY.COM

© Andrews McMeel

DON'T QUOTE ME®

© WIGGLES 3D GAMES

Entrepreneur Mary Kay Ash offers this management advice.

Rearrange the words to complete the quote.
CREATE HELPED PEOPLE SUPPORT WHICH

"_____ WILL _____ THAT _____ THEY _____ TO _____." 12/9

Friday's Answer: "Men want the same thing from their underwear that they want from women: a little bit of support, and a little bit of freedom."- Jerry Seinfeld

7 LITTLE WORDS

Find the 7 words to match the 7 clues. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in each solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

CLUES	SOLUTIONS
1 unwanted plants (5)	_____
2 like golden oldies (7)	_____
3 relieves of duty (9)	_____
4 it's measured in degrees (11)	_____
5 chasms (4)	_____
6 benefits (6)	_____
7 one shaping legal procedures (11)	_____

EDS	WE	SS	SES	DIS
IC	TEM	PLU	POL	URE
MA	ICY	CLA	PER	GA
KER	PS	SES	AT	MIS

Friday's Answers: 1. SAFFLOWER 2. PHOTOSTAT 3. NASA 4. LUCIDITY 5. LHASA 6. AHMED 7. IRIDESCENT 12/7

© 2024 Blue Ox Family Games, Inc., Dist. by Andrews McMeel

JUMBLE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

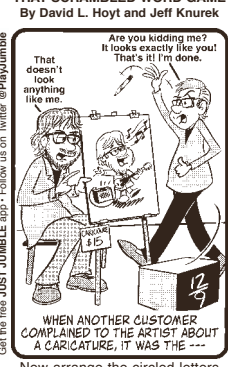
Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

ELWDL

CTYHA

SINIAR

LBAALD



Get the free **JUST JUMBLE** app • Follow us on Twitter @PlayJumble

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Print your answer here: ○○○○○ " ○○○○○ "

(Answers tomorrow)

FRIDAY'S Jumbles: BRAVO ICING CATTLE AGENCY
Answer: After inflatable tires were introduced, it didn't take long for them to — GAIN TRACTION

©2024 Tribune Content Agency, LLC All Rights Reserved.

BONUS CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Elec. units
5 Dollars and cents
9 Chinese idol
13 Secular
14 Chili con —
15 Eye layer
16 Giant furniture retailer
17 Of a space
18 Stew meat
19 Quondam
21 Dip into water
23 Snow clearing machine
25 Tilt
26 Flop
29 Threefold
33 Monopoly game piece
34 Fill
36 Murdered
37 Discord personified
39 Old anesthetic
41 Minced oath
42 Book of maps
44 "— goes nothing!"
45 Reply (Abbr.)
46 Pea coat
48 Entry in a directory
51 Times
53 English boarding school
54 Antiquated
57 Pulled
61 Venus de —
62 Relating to birth
65 Start for space
66 Fall birthstone
67 Undermine
68 Discern
69 — packing
70 Act
71 Fencing weapon

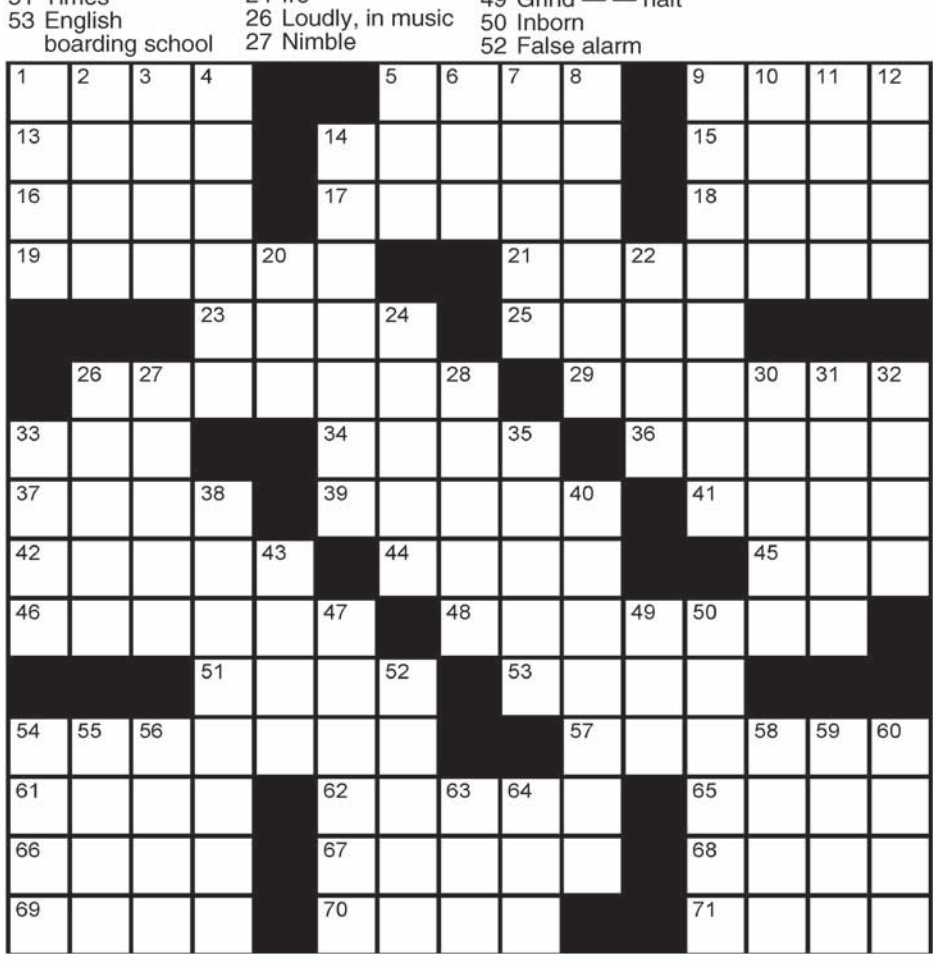
DOWN

1 First Arabic letter
2 — shark
3 Wharf
4 Large shrimp
5 SUV
6 Have being
7 Aquarium creature
8 Headgear for a quarterback
9 Childish
10 Concluded
11 Earth's waters
12 Store event
14 Drink and make merry
20 Annex
22 Fourth rock from the sun
24 Ire
26 Loudly, in music
27 Nimble
28 Lucy's friend
30 Irreligious one
31 Old Chinese weight
32 Tips
33 Costly
35 Uncanny
38 Place of refuge
40 Make design changes
43 Antitoxins
47 Showered
49 Grind — — halt
50 Inborn
52 False alarm
54 Singer Tori —
55 Mellow
56 Family group
58 Hold
59 Perry's creator
60 Pineapple brand
63 Shoe part
64 Attach

FRIDAY'S SOLUTION

	M	A	R	S	H				M	A	D	A	M	
G	E	L	A	T	O			D	E	C	O	D	E	D
A	G	I	T	A	T	E		A	T	H	L	E	T	E
L	A	T	E	R		N	O	W		Y	E	A	R	N
			S	E	T	T	I	N	G			L	O	T
S	P	A		S	O	I	L		O	C	T			
H	A	N	G		O	R	T		T	O	R	P	O	R
A	C	O	R	N		E	A	R		P	A	R	K	A
D	E	N	I	E	S		N	U	B		M	A	R	S
			T	W	O		K	N	E	W		Y	A	P
W	A	R			S	C	E	N	T	E	D			
A	G	O	R	A		A	R	E		A	R	E	T	E
R	E	G	U	L	A	R		R	E	V	I	L	E	D
P	R	E	L	U	D	E			S	E	V	E	R	S
	S	T	E	M	S				P	R	E	E	N	

12-9-24 © 2024 UFS, Dist. by Andrews McMeel for UFS



WHOLE HOME SOLUTION

LION
SANCTUARY™

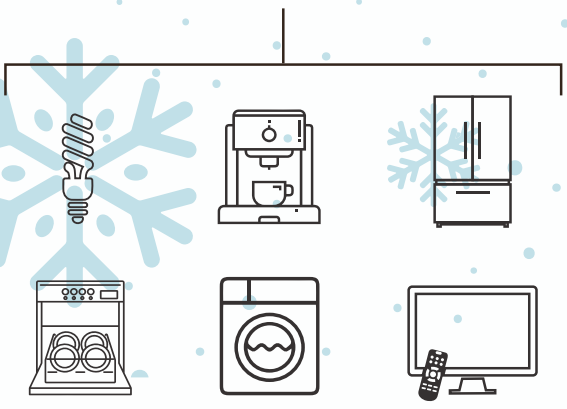
Lithium Energy Storage System™

NEED FINANCING?

When working with our installation partners, keep in mind that we are registered for financing through the following companies.

MOSAIC DIVIDEND a division of Fifth Third Bank goodleap Sunlight Financia

Powerful Inverter and Energy Storage unit to provide power to your home or business during black outs, emergencies or daily use.



Why Buy the Lion Sanctuary System?

Lion Energy is the market leader and innovator in energy storage systems. We provide these key benefits to our customers:

Safest on the Market - Meets the most stringent safety protocols: UL9540, which includes UL1741 for the inverter and UL1973 for the battery (lithium iron phosphate or LiFePO4).

Best Economic Value - By far the most cost effective to purchase, to install and to use (fully-integrated and expandable battery storage 13.5kWh, per battery).

Quickest ROI - Efficient time of use programmable battery that maximizes energy savings, costing less while accelerating ROI.

Flexible - Can use off-grid, on-grid, metered or non-net metered.

Best Capacity Value - Can easily be expanded from 13.5kWh to 40.5kWh stored energy. Inverter ranges from 8kW to 14kW peak (competitors at 5kW). And has an amazing high pass-through that allows for more circuits backed up and used (90A compared to 50A of competitors).

LIONENERGY™

Is Sanctuary Right For You?

SPEAK WITH A HOME ENERGY EXPERT CALL NOW

888-717-3496

Scan Me

BBB ACCREDITED BUSINESS BBB Rating: A+ As of 9/6/2024 Click for Profile

NATION&WORLD EXTRA

INSIDE

Trump vows to pardon Jan. 6 defendants. 5NN

Smoke rises after Syrian rebels announced that they have ousted Syria's Bashar al-Assad, in Damascus, Syria, on Sunday.
MOHAMED AZAKIR/REUTERS

SYRIAN REBELS SEIZE CAPITAL

Toppled Assad flees to Russia in Mideast shakeup

Maya Gebeily and Timour Azhari
REUTERS

DAMASCUS – Syrian rebels seized the capital Damascus unopposed on Sunday after a lightning advance that sent President Bashar al-Assad fleeing to Russia after a 13-year civil war and six decades of his family's autocratic rule.

In one of the biggest turning points for the Middle East in generations, the fall of Assad's government wiped out a bastion from which Iran and Russia exercised influence across the Arab world. Moscow gave asylum to Assad and his family, Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's ambassador to international organizations in Vienna, said on his Telegram channel.

His sudden overthrow, at the hands of a revolt partly backed by Turkey and with roots in jihadist Sunni Islam, limits Iran's ability to spread weapons to its allies and could cost Russia its Mediterranean naval base. It could allow millions of refugees scattered for more than a decade in camps across Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan to finally return home.

For Syrians, it brought a sudden unexpected end to a war in deep freeze for years, with hundreds of thousands dead, cities pounded to dust and an economy hollowed by global sanctions.

"How many people were displaced across the world? How many people lived in tents? How many drowned in the seas?" the top rebel commander, Abu Mohammed al-Golani, told a huge crowd at the medieval Umayyad Mosque in central Damascus, referring to refugees who died trying to reach Europe.

"A new history, my brothers, is being written in the entire region after this great victory," he said, adding that with hard work Syria would be "a beacon for the Islamic nation."

The Assad police state – known since his father seized power in the 1960s as one of the harshest in the Middle East with hundreds of thousands of political prisoners - melted away overnight.

Bewildered and elated inmates poured out of jails after rebels blasted open their cells. Reunited families wept in joy. Newly freed prisoners were filmed at dawn running through the Damascus streets holding up the fingers of both hands to show how many years they had been in prison.

"We toppled the regime!" a voice shouted as one prisoner yelled and skipped with delight.

The White Helmets rescue organization said it had dispatched five emergency teams to the notorious Sedhaya

See SYRIA, Page 6NN

People celebrate from a vehicle while carrying a Syrian opposition flag at Masnaa Border Crossing after Syrian rebels announced that they have ousted President Bashar al-Assad, in Lebanon on Sunday. AMR ABDALLAH DALSH/REUTERS

Biden: US to work with partners in Syria to manage risk

Steve Holland, Katharine Jackson and Phil Stewart
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – The United States will work with partners and stakeholders in Syria to help seize the opportunity that has presented itself after rebel fighters' stunning overthrow of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, President Joe Biden said on Sunday.

"At long last, the Assad regime has fallen," said Biden, commenting on a fast-moving string of events in Syria that caught some in the White House off guard.

Biden and his top national security aides took stock of a new-look Middle East that may be emerging after rebel forces ousted Assad in little more than a week.

Biden said Syria is in a period of risk and uncertainty and that it is the first time in years that neither Russia nor Iran nor the Hezbollah militant organization held an influential role in Syria.

"For years, the main backers of Assad have been Iran, Hezbollah and Russia. But over the last week, their support collapsed – all three of them – because all three of them are far weaker today than they were when I took office," said Biden, who became president in 2021.

He said Syria faced a period of "risk and uncertainty" and that the United States would help where it can.

"As we all turn to the question of

See BIDEN, Page 6NN

President Joe Biden speaks after Syrian rebels announced that they have ousted Syria's Bashar al-Assad, at the White House in Washington on Sunday.
KEN CEDENO/REUTERS

Trump calls for Ukraine ceasefire

Kyiv and Moscow cite their conditions

John Irish
REUTERS

PARIS - President-elect Donald Trump called on Sunday for an immediate ceasefire and negotiations between Ukraine and Russia to end "the madness," prompting Ukrainian President Volodymr Zelenskyy and the Kremlin to list their conditions.

Trump made his comments just hours after meeting Zelenskyy in Paris for their first face-to-face talks since Trump won last month's U.S. election. Trump has vowed to bring about a negotiated end to the conflict, but so far has not provided details.

"Zelensky and Ukraine would like to make a deal and stop the madness," Trump wrote on his social media platform Truth Social, adding that Kyiv had lost some 400,000 soldiers. "There should be an immediate ceasefire and negotiations should begin."

"I know Vladimir well. This is his time to act. China can help. The World is waiting!" Trump added, referring to Russian President Putin.

Trump, in Paris for the reopening of Notre-Dame Cathedral, sat down with Zelenskyy on Saturday for about an hour, along with host President Emmanuel Macron.

> **"When we talk about effective peace with Russia, we must first and foremost talk about effective guarantees for peace."**
>
> **Volodymr Zelenskyy**
> Ukrainian president

Trump and Zelenskyy shook hands and smiled, but it was unclear how the conversation had gone. Accounts of the talks from the French and Ukrainian sides said only that the discussions had been good and productive.

Zelenskyy reacted to Trump's message on Sunday saying peace was not just a piece of paper, but needed guarantees.

"When we talk about effective peace with Russia, we must first and foremost talk about effective guarantees for peace. Ukrainians want peace more than anyone else," he said on X.

"It (the war) cannot simply end with a piece of paper and a few signatures. A ceasefire without guarantees can be reignited at any moment, as Putin has already done before. To ensure that Ukrainians no longer suffer losses, we must guarantee the reliability of peace and not turn a blind eye to occupation."

See UKRAINE, Page 5NN

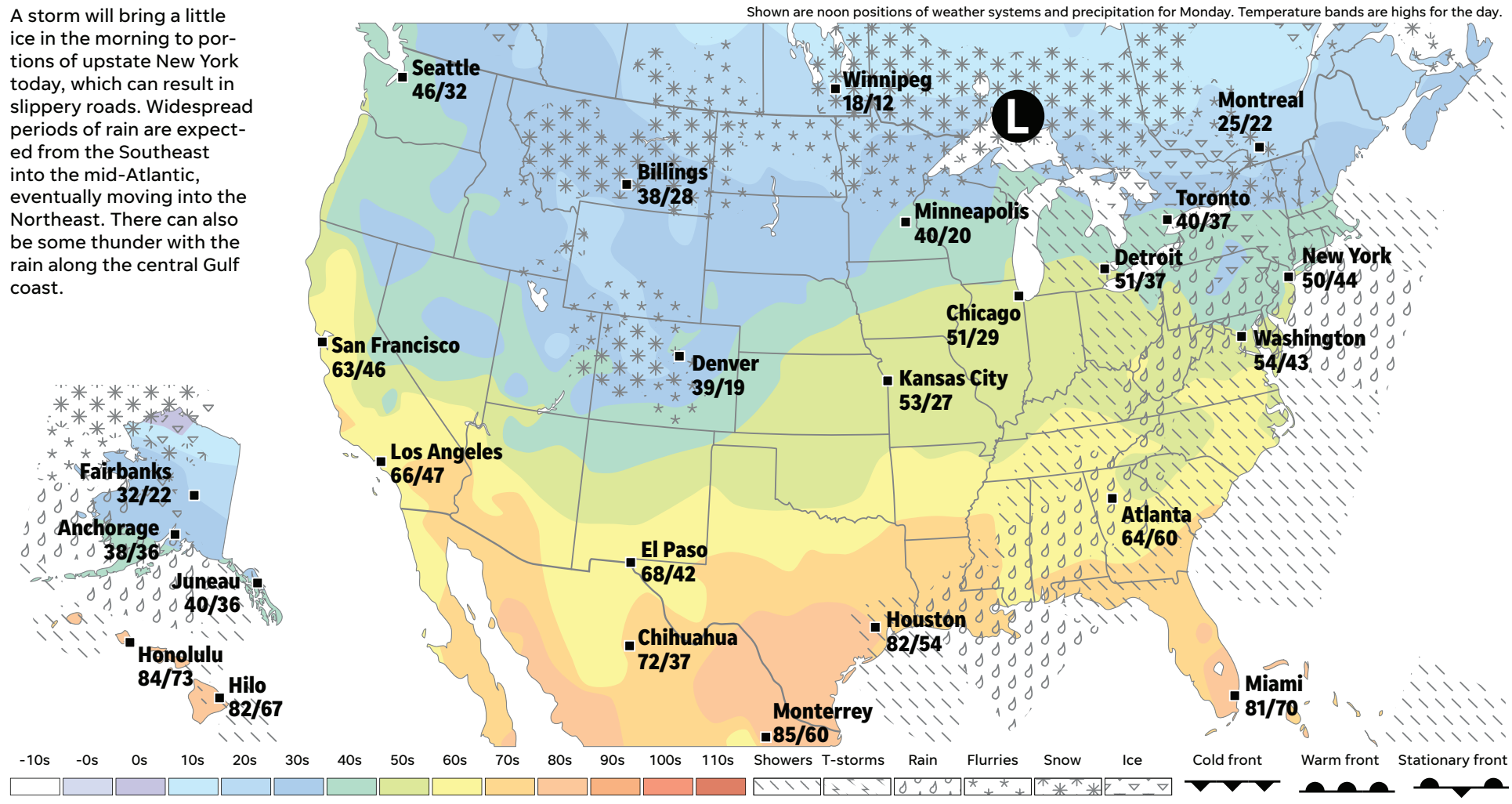
President-elect Donald Trump shakes hands with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as they leave after a trilateral meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron at the Elysee Palace in Paris, France, on Saturday.
SARAH MEYSSONNIER/REUTERS

NATIONAL SUMMARY

A storm will bring a little ice in the morning to portions of upstate New York today, which can result in slippery roads. Widespread periods of rain are expected from the Southeast into the mid-Atlantic, eventually moving into the Northeast. There can also be some thunder with the rain along the central Gulf coast.

In the digital e-edition, you can click anywhere on the US map to get up-to-date forecasts, radar, MinuteCast® and more.

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation for Monday. Temperature bands are highs for the day.



SUNDAY EXTREMES

NATIONAL (for the 48 contiguous states)

High:	**79** at Hollywood, FL
Low:	**-12** at Gunnison, CO
Precip:	**1.50”** at Stampede Pass, WA

INTERNATIONAL (excludes Antarctica)

High:	**113** at Paraburdoo, Australia
Low:	**-49** at Kabardino, Russia
Precip:	**4.31”** at Surigao City, Philippines

TODAY IN HISTORY

On Dec. 9, 1987, three people were killed and two injured in Mill City, Ore., when a moving vehicle was smashed by a falling tree during a storm of high winds and heavy rain.

WEATHER TRIVIA™

Q: Where is the coldest place on Earth?

A: The South Pole. The annual mean temperature is -72(F)

NATIONAL CITIES MONDAY

● Denotes possible travel delays

	High/low/W	Air Quality
● Aberdeen, SD	32/21/c	21
Abilene, TX	68/36/s	38
Accomac, VA	54/39/sh	42
Adrian, MI	51/36/sh	43
● Akron, OH	49/41/r	38
Alamogordo, NM	64/33/s	38
Alexandria, VA	53/39/r	53
● Alliance, OH	50/40/r	41
Amarillo, TX	55/29/s	31
● Ames, IA	49/24/s	30
● Anderson, SC	55/53/r	28
● Appleton, WI	44/27/c	40
● Asheville, NC	61/47/r	36
● Ashland, OH	50/38/r	43
● Athens, GA	59/56/r	29
● Augusta, GA	64/58/sh	37
Austin, TX	80/46/s	40
Bartlesville, OK	55/31/s	35
Battle Creek, MI	48/33/c	38
● Bedford, IN	53/41/c	46
● Binghamton, NY	39/37/r	48
Bluffton, SC	66/57/c	30
Bremerton, WA	45/32/pc	46
● Brockton, MA	46/39/r	47
Brownwood, TX	74/38/s	35
Burlington, IA	52/25/pc	35
● Burlington, NC	57/47/r	39
● Burlington, VT	34/32/sn	39
● Cambridge, OH	54/46/r	33
Camdenton, MO	56/29/pc	41
● Canandaigua, NY	44/39/r	46
● Canton, OH	49/40/r	50
● Carlsbad, NM	69/35/s	87
● Chambersburg, PA	46/42/r	49
● Cherry Hill, NJ	49/38/r	58
● Cincinnati, OH	55/46/sh	41
Clarksville, TN	59/50/c	33
Coldwater, MI	48/32/c	40
● Columbus, OH	54/46/r	38
● Corning, NY	43/38/r	42
Corpus Christi, TX	85/58/s	35
Daytona Beach, FL	78/61/pc	38
Deming, NM	65/32/s	45
DeRidder, LA	75/57/r	27
● Des Moines, IA	50/24/s	34
Detroit, MI	51/37/sh	53
● Devils Lake, ND	24/15/sf	15
● Dover, NH	39/30/r	49
El Paso, TX	68/42/s	64
● Elmira, NY	44/37/r	43
Erie, PA	49/41/r	38
● Eugene, OR	42/30/pc	44
● Evansville, IN	56/43/c	41
● Fall River, MA	47/41/r	51
● Farmington, NM	44/16/pc	33
Fayetteville, NC	60/55/r	33
Fond du Lac, WI	46/27/c	44
Fort Myers, FL	81/61/pc	32
● Fort Smith, AR	62/40/c	30
● Framingham, MA	44/37/r	50
Freeport, IL	50/25/pc	40
Fremont, OH	54/40/sh	43
Fort Collins, CO	41/18/sf	35
● Gadsden, AL	65/59/r	26
Gainesville, FL	78/55/c	31
Galesburg, IL	52/25/c	36
● Gastonia, NC	56/49/sh	35
Glen Rose, TX	73/39/s	39
● Gonzales, LA	72/66/r	27
Great Falls, MT	36/23/c	37
● Green Bay, WI	44/29/c	37
● Greenville, SC	53/51/sh	27
● Hackensack, NJ	50/42/r	53
● Hagerstown, MD	48/41/r	46
● Hattiesburg, MS	69/65/r	22
● Henderson, KY	57/44/c	46
● Hendersonville, NC	57/48/r	39
● Herkimer, NY	39/35/r	50
Hillsdale, MI	48/32/c	40
● Holland, MI	48/35/c	43
● Hornell, NY	45/39/r	44
● Houma, LA	73/66/r	17
Howell, MI	49/33/sh	43
● Hutchinson, KS	52/27/s	27
● Hyannis, MA	45/41/r	36
Indianapolis, IN	53/37/c	44
● Iowa City, IA	51/24/pc	46
● Ithaca, NY	41/37/r	43
● Jackson, MS	71/65/r	39
Jackson, TN	62/52/c	40
Jacksonville, FL	77/57/c	32
Jacksonville, NC	64/55/r	31
● Kent, OH	49/38/r	47
Kewanee, IL	52/25/pc	42
● Keyser, WV	54/41/r	37
● Kinston, NC	61/53/r	31
Knoxville, TN	60/53/r	31
Lafayette, IN	53/32/c	37
● Lafayette, LA	75/67/r	21
● Levittown, PA	48/38/r	54
Lincoln, IL	55/29/pc	42
● Louisville, KY	58/49/c	51
Lubbock, TX	63/32/s	32
Manitowoc, WI	44/29/c	43
● Mansfield, OH	50/41/r	38
Marshall, NC	61/44/r	31
● Marshfield, WI	42/22/c	43
● Massillon, OH	50/41/r	48
McLean, VA	52/37/r	51
Melbourne, FL	77/60/pc	38
Memphis, TN	64/51/c	46
● Middletown, NY	41/36/r	50
● Milford, MA	44/37/r	50
Milwaukee, WI	50/29/pc	44
Monroe, MI	51/37/sh	48
Monroe, LA	74/56/c	34
● Montgomery, AL	69/62/r	18
● Muncie, IN	53/37/c	39
Murfreesboro, TN	65/52/r	36
Naples, FL	79/62/pc	35
Nashville, TN	64/53/sh	41
● Neptune, NJ	52/42/r	51
● New Bedford, MA	47/42/r	37
New Bern, NC	63/55/r	32
● New Philadelphia, OH	52/43/r	40
● Newark, OH	55/45/r	40
● Newton, NJ	44/37/r	55
● New York, NY	50/44/r	55
● Norwich, CT	47/37/r	43
Ocala, FL	79/55/pc	36
Oklahoma City, OK	56/34/pc	39
● Opelousas, LA	75/64/r	28
Oshkosh, WI	44/27/c	40
Palm Beach, FL	80/70/pc	31
Palm Springs, CA	77/48/s	52
● Panama City, FL	76/68/c	30
Pekin, IL	55/28/pc	50
● Pensacola, FL	73/65/r	37
Peoria, IL	54/28/pc	48
Petersburg, VA	60/42/r	40
Phoenix, AZ	73/49/s	70
Port Huron, MI	49/36/sh	37
● Portsmouth, NH	40/33/r	37
● Poughkeepsie, NY	44/39/r	50
● Providence, RI	46/40/r	42
● Pueblo, CO	39/14/sn	37
● Quincy, MA	44/40/r	51
Redding, CA	64/34/s	50
Reno, NV	43/16/s	53
● Ravenna, OH	49/38/r	45
● Richmond, IN	53/42/c	45
● Rochester, NY	46/42/r	39
Rockford, IL	50/27/pc	40
Ruidoso, NM	55/22/s	39
Salem, OR	47/29/pc	51
Salina, KS	52/27/pc	26
Salinas, CA	72/40/s	65
Salisbury, MD	53/38/r	51
San Angelo, TX	75/37/s	33
Sarasota, FL	78/60/pc	30
Savannah, GA	72/59/c	45
● Sheboygan, WI	46/31/c	44
● Shelby, NC	57/49/sh	32
● Sherman, TX	68/39/pc	41
Shreveport, LA	76/50/pc	45
Silver City, NM	60/27/s	43
● Sioux Falls, SD	37/22/pc	34
● Somerset, PA	48/44/r	36
● Somerville, NJ	48/38/r	54
South Bend, IN	51/33/c	32
● Spartanburg, SC	52/50/sh	26
Springfield, IL	55/29/pc	48
Springfield, MO	56/31/pc	26
St. Augustine, FL	76/59/c	29
● St. Cloud, MN	37/18/sf	15
St. George, UT	53/26/s	37
Staunton, VA	57/33/r	31
● Stevens Point, WI	44/25/c	43
Stockton, CA	60/31/s	52
● Stroudsburg, PA	42/37/r	55
Stuart, FL	81/65/pc	37
Sturgis, MI	49/32/c	43
Tallahassee, FL	74/62/c	28
● Thibodaux, LA	72/66/r	20
Topeka, KS	54/28/pc	34
● Tuscaloosa, AL	69/62/r	34
● Utica, NY	38/35/r	44
Ventura, CA	61/53/pc	81
Victorville, CA	61/22/s	53
Vineland, NJ	51/34/r	55
Visalia, CA	56/38/pc	128
Washington, DC	54/43/r	46
● Watertown, SD	32/18/c	27
● Wausau, WI	41/23/c	36
● Waynesboro, PA	47/42/r	48
● White Plains, NY	47/41/r	51
● Wichita Falls, TX	61/35/s	36
● Wilmington, DE	48/38/r	60
● Wilmington, NC	67/58/r	26
● Wisconsin Rapids, WI	45/23/c	43
● Wooster, OH	51/41/r	35
● Worcester, MA	41/35/r	52
● York, PA	47/38/r	51

Air Quality Index: 0-50, Good; 51-100, Moderate; 101-150, Unhealthy for sensitive groups; 151-200, Unhealthy; 201-300, Very unhealthy; 301-500, Hazardous

INTERNATIONAL CITIES

	Monday High/low/W	Tuesday High/low/W
Acapulco	87/73/s	86/73/s
Addis Ababa	75/42/s	76/42/s
Algiers	59/46/r	60/38/pc
Amman	65/44/s	66/44/pc
● Amsterdam	44/41/c	43/37/c
Ankara	56/39/pc	59/40/s
Asuncion	81/68/sh	87/68/pc
Athens	69/56/s	67/52/s
● Auckland	73/60/r	70/56/pc
Baghdad	74/45/pc	72/42/pc
Bangkok	91/74/c	92/74/c
Beijing	44/21/c	43/23/c
Beirut	71/59/c	72/59/pc
● Belgrade	44/37/c	44/38/c
● Berlin	41/35/sh	39/33/c
Bogota	69/45/s	68/47/s
Brussels	41/39/r	41/36/c
Bucharest	50/35/sh	47/36/c
● Budapest	42/37/c	42/34/c
Buenos Aires	75/65/pc	81/69/s
Cairo	73/54/pc	74/57/pc
● Cape Town	81/63/s	82/66/s
Caracas	90/76/s	91/74/sh
Casablanca	64/39/pc	62/39/s
● Colombo	87/75/r	88/77/r
● Copenhagen	41/35/pc	39/31/pc
Damascus	63/37/pc	64/36/pc
Dublin	47/40/c	46/36/c
● Geneva	42/35/c	40/32/c
Guatemala City	78/61/pc	81/62/s
● Hanoi	71/63/c	79/68/c
Harare	86/61/pc	91/59/pc
Havana	84/65/s	86/68/pc
Helsinki	34/30/c	37/35/s
Hong Kong	67/60/s	71/63/s
Jakarta	88/79/t	89/78/t
Jerusalem	65/47/s	66/48/pc
● Johannesburg	81/60/t	88/63/c
Kabul	45/34/s	44/32/s
Khartoum	95/69/pc	92/67/pc
● Kyiv	34/32/c	35/32/sh
Kingston	91/77/s	90/77/s
La Paz	58/41/sh	57/39/sh
Lagos	88/78/s	90/79/s
● Lima	72/63/c	72/63/pc
Lisbon	57/43/s	55/40/s
● London	46/44/sh	46/41/c
Madrid	50/32/pc	49/32/c
● Manila	87/78/c	87/78/t
Mexico City	76/48/s	79/50/s
Milan	49/38/pc	49/34/c
Mombasa	88/75/r	89/77/t
Montevideo	71/54/c	78/59/s
● Montreal	25/22/sn	41/37/c
● Moscow	31/19/c	27/20/sn
● Nairobi	80/61/t	79/60/t
New Delhi	70/46/s	69/43/pc
Panama City	92/72/r	91/74/r
● Paris	43/39/r	43/38/c
Port-au-Prince	93/71/s	93/70/pc
● Rio de Janeiro	83/72/pc	80/72/r
Riyadh	86/54/pc	76/47/pc
● Rome	55/43/sh	56/41/sh
San Jose	82/66/sh	84/66/sh
San Salvador	87/67/pc	88/68/s
Santiago	89/53/s	88/53/s
Sao Paulo	78/67/r	77/64/r
● Sarajevo	41/36/c	42/36/c
Shanghai	55/46/pc	54/47/c
● Singapore	86/76/t	85/76/t
Stockholm	33/22/c	30/22/pc
Sydney	75/69/c	77/66/s
Taipei	67/63/pc	77/61/pc
● Tegucigalpa	79/64/pc	79/66/t
Tehran	54/38/sh	53/37/s
Tokyo	56/43/s	57/43/s
Toronto	40/37/r	43/35/pc
Tunis	63/46/s	63/44/s
Vancouver	46/31/c	44/37/pc
● Vienna	39/35/r	38/33/r
● Warsaw	38/32/r	35/30/c
Yerevan	41/26/pc	40/24/pc
Zagreb	37/34/c	40/35/c
● Zurich	39/34/c	38/34/c

● Denotes possible travel delays Monday

Weather(W): **s**-sunny, **pc**-partly cloudy, **c**-cloudy, **sh**-showers, **t**-thunderstorms, **r**-rain, **sf**-snow flurries, **sn**-snow, **i**-ice.

©2024; forecasts and graphics provided by AccuWeather Visit AccuWeather.com

Crisis following South Korea martial law fallout deepens

Prosecutors close in on president, former defense minister

Hyunjoo Jin and Josh Smith
REUTERS

Protesters take part in a rally calling for the impeachment of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, who declared martial law, which was reversed hours later, in front of the National Assembly in Seoul, South Korea, on Saturday.
KIM SOO-HYEON/REUTERS

SEOUL – South Korea's leadership crisis deepened on Sunday as prosecutors named President Yoon Suk Yeol as a subject of a criminal investigation over last week's martial law attempt, a media report said, and his former defense minister was arrested.

Yoon survived an impeachment vote in the opposition-led parliament late on Saturday, prompted by his short-lived attempt to impose martial law on Tuesday, but the leader of his own party said the president would effectively be excluded from his duties before eventually stepping down.

That proposal, which appeared to win tacit approval from the Yoon-appointed prime minister on Sunday, drew condemnation from opposition lawmakers who said it was another unconstitutional power grab to delegate authority without resignation or impeachment.

Thousands of people rallied in front of the parliament in Seoul on Sunday, calling for the impeachment and arrest of Yoon and the disbandment of his ruling party.

Yoon's martial law declaration on Tuesday plunged Asia's fourth-largest economy and a key U.S. military ally into its greatest political crisis in decades, threatening to shatter South Korea's reputation as a democratic success story.

The main opposition Democratic Party called for the immediate suspension of Yoon's presidential duties and for stripping him of authority to control the military. The DP called for the arrest of Yoon and related military officials implicated in the martial law fiasco.

Criminal probe

Yonhap news agency reported that prosecutors had "booked" Yoon, a process in South Korea that involves formally naming subjects of investigation.

Prosecutors could not immediately be reached for comment on the report.

Three minority opposition parties filed a complaint with the prosecution against Yoon, ex-Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyun and martial law commander Park An-su, accusing them of insurrection. The crime of leading an insurrection is punishable by death or life imprisonment, with or without prison labor

Kim, who stepped down on Wednesday after Yoon rescinded martial law, was seen as a central figure in the debacle. He had proposed martial law to the president, according to a senior military official and the impeachment filings.

The prosecution's special investigative team arrested Kim on Sunday and seized his mobile phone, it said in a brief statement to reporters. Before the arrest, investigators questioned Kim, who voluntarily appeared at the Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office around 1:30 a.m. on Sunday (1630 GMT on Saturday), Yonhap news agency reported.

Military crisis

Hours before Saturday's impeachment vote, Yoon addressed the nation in a televised speech to apologize for his martial law decree, saying he would put his fate in the hands of his party.

Han said the comments were effectively a promise to leave office early, adding that the ruling party would consult with the prime minister to manage state affairs.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo said on Sunday the cabinet would do its best to "maintain trust with our allies", referring to the United States and Japan.

The ruling party offered few details on their plan to prevent Yoon's impeachment but have him give up power, and the proposal added more confusion to the crisis over presidential authority.

Ghana's Mahama wins election

Former president makes political comeback

Maxwell Akalaare Adombila and Christian Akorlie
REUTERS

ACCRA – Ghana's former President John Dramani Mahama has staged a political comeback by winning the West African nation's presidential election after his rival Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia conceded defeat on Sunday.

The result of Ghana's general election is another blow to a ruling party in a region where voters, hit by economic hardship, high inflation and local currency depreciation, have caused upsets seeking hanges in leadership.

Mahama, 66, who served as Ghana's president from 2012 to 2016, framed Bawumia as representing a continuation of the policies that led to Ghana's worst economic crisis in a generation.

The world's second biggest cocoa grower, and major gold-producing nation, reached a deal with the International Monetary Fund last year for a $3 billion bailout after it defaulted on most of its international debt.

"I have, this morning, received a congratulatory call from my brother Dr. Bawumia, following my emphatic victory in Saturday's election. Thank you, Ghana," Mahama said in a post on X social media.

Addressing a press conference from his residence, Bawumia said he called Mahama to congratulate him.

"The data from our own internal collation of the election results indicate that former President John Dramani Mahama has won the presidential election decisively," Bawumia said, adding that the National Democratic Congress also won the parliamentary election.

Bawumia said he conceded before the official result to ease tensions.

Before his concession, scuffles had been reported in several local constituency centers where results were still arriving from polling stations.

"I am making this concession speech before the official announcement by the Electoral Commission to avoid further tension and preserve the peace of our country," Bawumia said.

Hundreds of NDC supporters took to the streets of the capital Accra on Sunday to celebrate after Bawumia conceded defeat.

Early results had shown Mahama and the NDC party with a commanding lead. Joy News reported that Mahama was leading with over 53% of the vote to Bawumia's 45.16% after provisional results from 68 out of a total 276 constituencies were counted.

In a news conference on Sunday before Bawumia conceded, Sammy Gyamfi, national spokesperson for the NDC, said provisional internally collated results by party agents from 38,896 out of the total 40,976 polling stations showed Mahama was leading with around 56%.

Romania holds election finance probe

Top court cancels Dec. 8 presidential run-off

REUTERS

BUCHAREST – Romanian prosecutors searched several properties on Saturday in an investigation into potential illegal financing in the country's presidential election, a day after the top court annulled the ballot following accusations of Russian meddling.

The court ruled on Friday that the election should be held again, plunging Romania, a member of the European Union and NATO, into institutional chaos and raising concern that public trust in the state could be eroded.

Prosecutors have not named the candidate whose campaign is being investigated, but documents declassified by the national security council this week focused on the campaign of Calin Georgescu – a far-right, pro-Russian critic of NATO.

Georgescu – who wants to end Romanian support for Ukraine against Russia's invasion, had attracted only single-digit support in opinion polls before the Nov. 24 first-round vote but surged to first place in that round, raising questions about the validity of the election.

A second-round vote to decide the election had been planned for Sunday, until the court's ruling. No date has been set yet for the re-run.

Georgescu

The declassified documents showed the electoral process had been spoiled through vote manipulation, campaign irregularities and non-transparent funding.

Prosecutors said on Saturday three searches had taken place in the central city of Brasov.

"The searches target the possible involvement of an individual in the illegal financing of the electoral campaign of a candidate for the Presidency of Romania, through the use of sums of money... (that) could come from the commission of crimes, being subsequently introduced into a money laundering process," prosecutors said in a statement.

Russia has denied accusations by Romanian officials of meddling in the election.

In one of the unclassified documents, Romania's intelligence agency said Georgescu was massively promoted on social media platform TikTok through coordinated accounts, recommendation algorithms and paid promotion.

TikTok denies giving Georgescu special treatment, saying his account was labeled as a political account and treated like any other.

Georgescu said on Friday the court's decision to annul the election amounted to a "coup." He urged election authorities to disregard the ruling. He has declared zero funds spent in the campaign.

Outgoing President Klaus Iohannis, who will stay on until the election is held again, said on social media platform X that he had spoken to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

IN BRIEF

Trump aides contact Google, Meta, Snap over online drug sales

President-elect Donald Trump's transition team has invited five major tech companies, including Google, Microsoft and Meta Platforms to a meeting in mid-December about dealing with online sales of drugs, The Information reported on Sunday.

A representative for Jim Carroll, the drug czar during Trump's first term, and Trump's transition team emailed staffers from the three tech giants on Thursday, as well as those from Snap and TikTok, to invite them to a call, the report added, citing a person with direct knowledge of the correspondence.

The transition officials want to hear from the companies about their priorities and any barriers to addressing issues around the sales of drugs online, the person told the Information.

Google, Microsoft, Meta, Snap, TikTok and the Trump transition team did not immediately respond to a Reuters' request for comment.

Trump has vowed to get Mexico to do more to stop the flow of fentanyl to the U.S., which has killed hundreds of thousands of Americans and threatened to impose steep tariffs on goods from Mexico and Canada unless those countries curb fentanyl trafficking and illegal migration.

In November, Trump also said in a post on Truth Social that he "will be working on a large scale United States Advertising Campaign, explaining how bad fentanyl is for people to use."

In March, The Wall Street Journal reported that U.S. prosecutors were investigating Meta's role and whether it profited from the sale and distribution of drugs on Facebook and Instagram.

In January, eBay agreed to pay $59 million and upgrade compliance measures to resolve U.S. Department of Justice allegations that it didn't do enough to stop criminals from buying devices for making counterfeit drugs, including pills laced with fentanyl.

Pope Francis appeals for US to commute death row sentences

VATICAN CITY – Pope Francis appealed on Sunday for U.S. authorities to commute the sentences of death row prisoners, in an unusual request during his weekly Sunday prayer in St. Peter's Square.

"Today, it comes to my heart to ask all of you to pray for the prisoners in the United States who are on death row," the pontiff said. "Let's pray that their sentence would be commuted (or) changed."

Francis is a vocal advocate against the death penalty and changed the Catholic Church's teachings in 2018 to specifically call for a ban on the practice.

But the pontiff, as leader of the 1.4-billion-member Church, usually refrains from naming specific countries that continue the practice.

There are about 2,250 prisoners on death row across the U.S., according to the non-profit Death Penalty Information Center. About 40 are federal prisoners.

Some American Catholic groups have been calling on President Joe Biden to commute the federal sentences in his remaining time in office.

Morocco's king undergoes successful shoulder surgery

RABAT – King Mohammed VI of Morocco had successful surgery on Sunday on his left shoulder after suffering a fall while working out, state media said.

He has been told to rest for 45 days to allow his shoulder to recover, state news agency MAP said, citing a statement by the king's medical team.

The palace has issued statements about the king's health in the past, including when he had heart surgery in 2018 and 2020, a lung infection in 2019 and COVID-19.

REUTERS

Pope Francis leads the Angelus prayer from his window at the Vatican on Sunday. GUGLIELMO MANGIAPANE/REUTERS

WALL ST WEEK AHEAD

Inflation report will test US stocks rally

Lewis Krauskopf
REUTERS

NEW YORK – An inflation report in the coming week will test the strength of the record-setting U.S. stocks rally and provide a crucial piece of data that could factor into the Federal Reserve's plans for rate cuts.

The S&P 500 on Friday was on pace for its third-straight weekly gain, pushing its year-to-date advance to over 27%.

The rosy backdrop for stocks is underscored by expectations of further Fed interest rate cuts at the same time the economy remains resilient.

That scenario historically has produced strong equity gains, and it was supported by Friday's employment report that monthly job growth was stronger than expected. Yet the data was not likely to signal a material shift in labor market conditions that would cause the Fed to rethink its rate trajectory at its Dec 17-18 meeting.

However, data on consumer prices due on Wednesday could threaten the upbeat narrative if inflation rates are above expectations, posing a challenge for high-flying stocks.

"If you come in hot, I do think that's going to be tough for the stock market to digest," said Matthew Miskin, co-chief investment strategist at John Hancock Investment Management. "It is going to bring in a little bit of uncertainty ahead of the Fed meeting."

Bets that the Fed would cut rates at its next meeting firmed after the November payrolls report. Data showed an increase of 227,000 jobs, but the unemployment rate ticked up to 4.2%.

Fed fund futures trading as of midday Friday indicated a nearly 90% chance the central bank would cut by 25 basis points, according to CME FedWatch.

Following the jobs data, there is a "higher bar" for the upcoming consumer price report to pause any planned rate cut at the Fed's next meeting, said Molly McGown, U.S. rates strategist at TD Securities.

Stocks continue to charge higher, raising concerns about sentiment becoming worrisomely optimistic.

The consumer price index is expected to have climbed 2.7% for the 12 months through November, according to Reuters data.

Rather than pause rate cuts, if CPI comes in hotter than estimates, the central bank could implement a "hawkish cut" by tempering expectations for reductions in 2025, Miskin said.

The potential for a revival in inflation is also in greater focus because of President-elect Donald Trump's plans to raise tariffs on imports. Tariffs are expected to be inflationary.

TD Securities expects the Fed to pause rate cuts at the start of the year, as policy makers assess Trump's fiscal policies after he takes office in January, McGown said.

"We heard from (Fed Chair Jerome) Powell that once they know what the actual policies are, that's when they'll start to put that into their framework of figuring out what they're going to do with monetary policy," McGown said.

Meanwhile, stocks continue to charge higher, raising concerns about sentiment becoming worrisomely optimistic. The S&P 500 was trading at 22.6 times expected earnings for the next 12 months, its highest P/E ratio in more than three years, according to LSEG Datastream.

Yardeni Research cited concerns with several measures, such as bullish sentiment among investment advisors and foreign private purchases of U.S. stocks.

"Contrarian indicators are turning bearish," Yardeni said in a note on Thursday.

Yet some investors say the prospects for stocks look solid into year end, which is a seasonally strong period for equities.

"The bear arguments from earlier in the year – such as the job market pressures, interest rate fluctuations, Fed uncertainty, and geopolitical tensions – have significantly eased," Mark Hackett, chief of investment research at Nationwide, said in emailed comments. "It is difficult to see how this trend reverses by year end."

NYC mayor says police closing in on executive murder suspect

REUTERS

An image of the individual sought in connection to the investigation of the shooting death of Brian Thompson, the CEO of UnitedHealth's insurance unit, is seen in an undated still image from surveillance video taken in a taxi in New York City, released on Sunday. NYPD NEWS/VIA REUTERS

Authorities are closing in on the man suspected of killing UnitedHealth executive Brian Thompson, New York City Mayor Eric Adams was quoted as saying on Saturday by the New York Post.

"The net is tightening," Adams said at a Police Athletic League holiday party in Harlem, according to the Post. He declined to name the suspect.

Thompson, 50, who became CEO of UnitedHealth's insurance unit in April 2021, was shot in the back around 6:45 a.m. ET on Wednesday in what police described as a targeted attack by a masked assailant lying in wait.

The murder occurred just before the company's annual investor conference at the Hilton hotel on Sixth Avenue.

The shooting sparked a massive manhunt for the gunman, who fled on foot wearing a hooded jacket, balaclava and gray backpack before mounting an electric bike and riding into Central Park, police said.

Adams declined to say whether investigators had the suspect's name, according to the NY Post.

"We don't want to release that now," the mayor said. "If you do, you are basically giving a tip to the person we are seeking and we do not want to give him an upper hand at all. Let him continue to believe he can hide behind the mask."

"We revealed his face," he continued, referring to security camera photos and video released after the murder. "We're going to reveal who he is and we're going to bring him to justice."

A backpack resembling the one worn by the suspect has been recovered near a playground in Central Park, according to media reports. MSNBC said on Saturday that police examining the bag and its contents found a jacket and Monopoly money, but no firearm.

Police divers were searching for the weapon used in the killing in a pond in Central Park on Saturday, CNN reported, citing police sources. Reuters has not independently verified the account.

"We have video of him entering the Port Authority Bus Terminal. We don't have any video of him exiting so we believe he may have gotten on a bus."
Joseph Kenny
New York Police Department Chief of Detectives

New York City Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch told CNN on Friday that police have gathered "a huge amount of evidence," including fingerprints, DNA evidence and a camera footage of the suspect's movements throughout the city.

New York police said on Friday they believe the suspect had left New York City, after video emerged showing him climbing into a taxi that took him to a bus station.

"We have video of him entering the Port Authority Bus Terminal. We don't have any video of him exiting so we believe he may have gotten on a bus," New York Police Department Chief of Detectives Joseph Kenny told CNN. "Those buses are interstate buses. That's why we believe he may have left New York City."

The New York police have offered a $10,000 reward for information leading to the capture of the shooter and the FBI has added $50,000 to that reward.

The circumstances of the attack suggested it was premeditated and planned, police said, with video showing the gunman ignoring other pedestrians while appearing to wait for Thompson.

UnitedHealth is the largest U.S. health insurer, providing benefits to tens of millions of Americans, who pay more for healthcare than people in any other country.

US clears export of AI chips to UAE

REUTERS

The U.S. government has approved the export of advanced artificial intelligence chips to a Microsoft-operated facility in the United Arab Emirates as a part of the company's highly-scrutinized partnership with Emirati AI firm G42, Axios reported on Saturday, citing two people familiar with the deal.

Microsoft invested $1.5 billion in G42 earlier this year, giving the U.S. company a minority stake and a board seat. As part of the deal, G42 would use Microsoft's cloud services to run its AI applications.

The deal, however, was scrutinized after U.S. lawmakers raised concerns G42 could transfer powerful U.S. AI technology to China. They asked for a U.S. assessment of G42's ties to the Chinese Communist Party, military and government before the Microsoft deal advances.

The U.S. Commerce Department and G42 did not immediately respond to Reuters' requests for comment. Microsoft declined to comment on the report.

The approved export license requires Microsoft to prevent access to its facility in the UAE by personnel who are from nations under U.S. arms embargoes or who are on the U.S. Bureau of Industry and Security's Entity List, the Axios report said.

The restrictions cover people physically in China, the Chinese government or personnel working for any organization headquartered in China, the report added.

U.S. officials have said that AI systems could pose national security risks, including by making it easier to engineer chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. The Biden administration in October required the makers of the largest AI systems to share details about them with the U.S. government.

G42 earlier this year said it was actively working with U.S. partners and the UAE's government to comply with AI development and deployment standards, amid concerns about its ties to China.

Abu Dhabi sovereign wealth fund Mubadala Investment Company, the UAE's ruling family and U.S. private equity firm Silver Lake hold stakes in G42. The company's chairman, Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan, is the UAE's national security advisor and the brother of the UAE's president.

Trump won't try to replace Fed's Powell

Promise of tariffs could stymie inflation efforts

Nathan Layne
REUTERS

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump said in an interview aired on Sunday he will not try to replace Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell upon taking office in January.

"No, I don't think so. I don't see it," Trump said on NBC News' "Meet the Press with Kristen Welker" when asked if he would seek to remove Powell, whose term ends in 2026.

Trump added that he didn't think Powell, who he has sparred with in the past over interest rate levels, would go quietly.

"I think if I told him to, he would. But if I asked him to, he probably wouldn't," Trump told Welker.

Trump campaigned on a promise to lower mortgage rates and other borrowing costs for U.S. households, raising the prospect that he could clash with Powell – as he did in his first term – over interest rate policy. Trump's vow to implement across-the-board tariffs could also complicate the Fed's efforts to keep inflation in check.

President-elect Donald Trump named Jerome Powell, a former private equity executive, as Federal Reserve chair in early 2018 during his first term.
CARLOS BARRIA/REUTERS

Last month, Powell said he would refuse to leave office early if Trump tried to oust him, arguing that removing him, or any of the other Fed governors, ahead of the end of their terms is "not permitted under the law."

Trump named Powell, a former private equity executive and a Republican, to Fed chair in early 2018 to replace Janet Yellen, who later became President Joe Biden's Treasury Secretary. Biden reappointed Powell to his current term.

But the relationship between Trump and Powell turned sour, with Trump frequently attacking the Fed and its chief during his first term in office. Trump privately discussed trying to dismiss Powell in late 2018, upset over the Fed's move to raise interest rates, and publicly argued against rate hikes.

Trump also criticized Powell in early 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, saying Powell had made several bad decisions and arguing he had a right to remove him.

Trump's attacks on the Fed during his first term broke from decades of presidents steering clear of direct criticism of the central bank, which operates with legal independence subject to the oversight of Congress.

Earlier this year, Trump said he felt he should have a say in the Fed's decisions, an indication of his interest in infringing on its independence.

Traders are expecting the Fed to cut interest rates at its upcoming Dec. 17-18 policy meeting, after recent data showed the U.S. labor market was continuing to cool. A quarter-percentage-point reduction would bring the Fed's policy rate to the 4.25%-4.50% range, a full percentage point below where it was in September when the central bank began its easing cycle.

Trump vows to pardon Jan. 6 defendants

May include defendants who had pleaded guilty

Nathan Layne and Andrew Goudsward
REUTERS

President-elect Donald Trump said in an interview that aired on Sunday that he would act on his first day in office to pardon rioters involved in the Jan. 6, 2021 Capitol attack, further building expectations for a broad granting of clemency.

"I'm going to be acting very quickly, first day," Trump said on NBC News' "Meet the Press with Kristen Welker" when asked when he planned to pardon his supporters who were charged in the attack aimed at overturning his 2020 election defeat.

Trump told Welker that there could be "some exceptions" to his pardons if the individuals had acted "radical" or "crazy" during the assault, which left more than 140 police officers injured and led to several deaths.

But Trump described the prosecutions of his supporters as inherently corrupt and did not rule out pardoning the more than 900 defendants who had already pleaded guilty, including those accused of acting violently in the attack.

"I'm going to look at everything. We're going to look at individual cases," Trump said.

The comments – Trump's most detailed on the issue of pardons since he defeated Vice President Kamala Harris in the Nov. 5 election – will likely add to already high expectations for broad action once Trump is sworn in to office on Jan. 20.

"He continues to put out the public message closer and closer to what the J6 community is asking for, which is clemency for all of the January 6ers," Suzzanne Monk, a longtime advocate for defendants charged in the riot, told Reuters.

Hopes among Jan. 6 defendants and their supporters for broad-based clemency have been growing over the past week after President Joe Biden pardoned his son Hunter, marking a reversal from his pledge not to interfere with his son's criminal cases.

Biden said Hunter deserved a pardon because he was the victim of political persecution, an argument Trump will likely use to justify mass pardons. Some Biden critics said his decision would lessen the political cost for Trump.

Kimberly Wehle, a professor at the University of Baltimore School of Law, said she was worried broad amnesty for Jan. 6 defendants would serve to wrongly incentivize the fomenting of unrest or even violence on behalf of a president.

"The idea that he's going to reward people for violating the law on his behalf in connection with an attempt to overthrow legitimate election results... that's not precedented," said Wehle, author of a recent book on presidential pardon power.

Supporters of President Donald Trump gather in front of the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington on Jan. 6, 2021.
STEPHANIE KEITH/REUTERS

> **"The idea that he's going to reward people for violating the law on his behalf in connection with an attempt to overthrow legitimate election results ... that's not precedented."**
> **Kimberly Wehle**
> Professor at the University of Baltimore School of Law

'Nasty system'

In what has been billed as America's largest-ever criminal investigation, at least 1,572 defendants have been charged in the Jan. 6 attack, with crimes ranging from unlawfully entering restricted grounds to seditious conspiracy and violent assault.

Of that total, more than 1,251 have been convicted or pleaded guilty and 645 have been sentenced to prison, with punishments ranging from a few days to 22 years, according to the latest data from the Justice Department.

John Pierce, a lawyer who has represented dozens of Jan. 6 defendants, urged Trump to issue a blanket pardon for all who were charged with participating in the riot.

"I just don't know how you do it otherwise," he said, noting that it would be difficult to parse which conduct out of the scores of cases that have already worked their way through the legal system would merit a pardon.

"I think you would see a lot of unhappy people in the January 6 community" if pardons were granted on a case-by-case basis, he said.

In the NBC interview, Trump lamented those held for long periods of detention, saying they were being kept in "a filthy, disgusting place that shouldn't even be allowed to be open." He described them as being victims of a "very nasty system."

Attorney Norm Pattis believes pardons should cover his clients, Zachary Rehl and Joseph Biggs, two former leaders of the Proud Boys militant group sentenced to 15 and 17 years in prison after a jury convicted them of seditious conspiracy.

Pattis said Trump, in promoting the idea that the 2020 election had been stolen from him through widespread fraud – an assertion for which there is no evidence – prompted his clients to believe that they had to take drastic action.

"He needs to own the fact that he created a tremendous sense of expectations with his claims about a stolen election, and people responded to him as President of the United States," Pattis said. "I would hope that he would pardon broadly."

Pattis said it was unclear how Trump might draw a line excluding some defendants from clemency due to acts of violence.

Jake Lang, a New York man who was charged with assaulting police officers and has been held in jail prior to trial, said he was hopeful he would be swept up in a blanket pardon.

"I think on January 20, 2025 we are going to see a similar situation to Hunter Biden," Lang said in a phone interview. "Everybody's pardoned, full exoneration. Get them all out of prison and get this thing over with, so that we can start the national healing process."

Trump aims to deport all immigrants in the US illegally

Ted Hesson
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – President-elect Donald Trump aims to deport all immigrants in the U.S. illegally over his four-year term but wants a deal to protect so-called "Dreamer" immigrants, he said in an interview that aired on Sunday on NBC News' "Meet the Press with Kristen Welker."

Trump also said he plans to take executive action on his first day in office to try to end birthright citizenship, which confers citizenship on anyone born in the U.S. regardless of their parents' immigration status.

Trump, a Republican who won a second term in the White House promising mass deportations, is expected to declare illegal immigration a national emergency when he takes office on Jan. 20 and draw on resources from across the federal government to support a wide-ranging crackdown.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security estimated some 11 million immigrants were in the U.S. illegally as of January 2022, although the figure is likely higher today.

In the NBC News interview, Welker asked Trump if his plan was to deport everyone without legal status.

"I think you have to do it," Trump said. "It's a very tough thing to do. You know, you have rules, regulations, laws."

Trump said he wanted a deal to protect "Dreamer" immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally as children, saying Republicans are open to the idea. During his 2017-2021 presidency, Trump tried to end a program that provides deportation relief and work permits to the immigrants, but was rebuffed by the Supreme Court.

Republican presidential nominee and former President Donald Trump gestures as he delivers remarks on border security and immigration, in Austin, Texas, on Oct. 25. CARLOS BARRIA/REUTERS

Trump's plans to try to end birthright citizenship will likely face legal challenges. The right stems from an amendment to the U.S. Constitution and is supported by 1898 Supreme Court precedent.

Speaking to Welker, Trump suggested Republicans may need to pursue a constitutional amendment to address the issue – an arduous process. "We'll maybe have to go back to the people," he said.

Trump's incoming border czar Tom Homan and deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller both told Fox News' "Sunday Morning Futures" that Congress should provide a major funding increase for immigration enforcement. The pro-immigration American Immigration Council estimated that deporting all immigrants in the U.S. illegally over more than a decade would cost $88 billion annually.

Homan said the minimum needed would be near that amount. "We're going to need as much money as Congress can get us," he said.

Ukraine

Continued from Page 1NN

It appeared that Trump's figure of 400,000 Ukrainian soldiers lost in the war meant those both killed and wounded. Zelenskyy said 43,000 soldiers had been killed in the war and that there had been 370,000 wounded soldiers.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov convened a conference call with reporters to address Trump's comments.

Peskov said Russia was open to talks, but that they had to be based on agreements reached in Istanbul in 2022 and on current realities on the battlefield where Russian forces have been pushing forward at their fastest rate since the early days of the war in 2022.

Putin has said repeatedly that a preliminary agreement reached between Russian and Ukrainian negotiators in the first weeks of the war at talks in Istanbul, which was never implemented, could serve as the basis for future talks.

"Our position on Ukraine is well known," said Peskov.

"The conditions for an immediate stop to hostilities were set out by President Putin in his speech to the Russian Foreign Ministry in June of this year. It is important to recall that it was Ukraine that refused and continues to refuse negotiations," he said.

Putin has said that Ukraine must not join the NATO military alliance and that Russia should be left fully in control of four Ukrainian regions his troops partially control at the moment for a peace deal to be done.

Peskov noted that Zelenskyy had banned contacts with the Russian leadership through a special decree, which Peskov said would have to be revoked if talks were to proceed.

CONFLICT IN MIDDLE EAST

Bewildered prisoners pour out of Syrian jails

Adam Makary and Deniz and Uyar
REUTERS

Bewildered and elated prisoners poured out of Syrian jails on Sunday, shouting with joy as they emerged from one of the world's most notorious detention systems and walked to freedom following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's government.

All across Syria, families wept as they were reunited with children, siblings, spouses and parents who vanished years ago into the impregnable gulag of the Assad dynasty's five-decade rule.

A video verified by Reuters showed newly freed prisoners ran through the Damascus streets, holding up the fingers of both hands to show how many years they had been in prison, asking passers-by what had happened, not immediately understanding that Assad had fallen.

"We toppled the regime!" a voice shouted and a prisoner yelled and skipped with delight in the same video. A man watching the prisoners rush through the dawn streets put his hands to head, exclaiming with wonder: "Oh my god, the prisoners!"

Throughout the civil war that began in 2011, security forces held hundreds of thousands of people seized into detention camps where international human rights organizations say torture was universal practice. Families were often told nothing of their loved ones' fates.

As insurgents seized one city after another in a dizzying eight-day campaign, prisons were often among their first objectives. The most notorious prisons in and around Damascus itself were finally opened on the uprising's final night and the early hours of Sunday.

When they reached Sednaya prison, rebels shot the lock off the gate, a video showed, using more gunfire to open closed doors leading to cells. Men poured out into corridors and a courtyard, cheering and helping them open more cells.

In a video uploaded by Step News Agency, a gray-haired man leapt into the arms of relatives in a sudden, disbelieving hug, the three men clasping each other and sobbing with joy before one fell to his knees, still clutching the freed man's legs.

A person gestures as individuals, reportedly freed prisoners, run in the streets of Damascus, Syria, on Sunday. NEDAL AL-AMARI/VIA REUTERS

The pan-Arab Arabiya news channel showed a family arriving in Damascus by car from Jordan to meet their newly released son, the elderly mother's voice breaking with emotion as she told the interviewer he had been freed after 14 years.

Reuters was not immediately able to verify the locations of some of the videos, though no one disputed prisons were opened across the country.

In what was purported to be the women's block at Sednaya prison on the Damascus outskirts, perhaps the most notorious in the country, a rebel recorded the moment he reached cells and pulled open the doors for prisoners who seemed to have had little idea they were about to be freed.

"May God honour you!" a woman shouted to the men freeing her. As they left their cells a toddler could be seen walking the corridor, having apparently been held in the prison along with his mother.

"He (Assad) has fallen. Don't be scared," a voice shouts, trying to reassure the prisoners that they faced no more danger.

In another video, a deafening roar erupted as rebels marched down a corridor, said to be in the prison at Mezzeh air base southwest of the old center of Damascus.

Russia: Syria's Assad in Moscow after deal

Country is staunch ally of overthrown president

Andrew Osborn and Maxim Rodionov
REUTERS

Syria's former President Bashar al-Assad is in Moscow with his family after Russia granted them asylum on humanitarian grounds, a Kremlin source told Russian news agencies on Sunday, and a deal has been done to ensure the safety of Russian military bases.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said earlier that Assad had left Syria and given orders for a peaceful transfer of power, after rebel fighters raced into Damascus unopposed on Sunday, ending nearly six decades of his family's iron-fisted rule.

"Syrian President Assad of Syria and members of his family have arrived in Moscow. Russia has granted them asylum on humanitarian grounds," the privately-owned Interfax news agency and state media quoted the unnamed Kremlin source as saying.

Interfax cited the same Kremlin source as saying Russia favored a political solution to the crisis in Syria, where Moscow supported Assad during the long civil war. The source said negotiations should be resumed under the auspices of the United Nations.

Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's ambassador to international organizations in Vienna, said on his Telegram messaging channel: "Breaking news! Bashar al-Assad and his family in Moscow. Russia does not betray friends in difficult situations."

Syrian opposition leaders had agreed to guarantee the safety of Russian military bases and diplomatic institutions in Syria, the source told news agencies. But some Russian war bloggers said the situation around the bases was extremely tense and the source did not say how long the security guarantee lasted.

Moscow, a staunch backer of Assad whom it intervened to help in 2015 in its biggest Middle East foray since the Soviet collapse, is scrambling to salvage its position. Its geopolitical clout in the wider region and two strategically-important military bases in Syria are on the line.

A deal to secure Russia's Hmeimim air base in Syria's Latakia province and its naval facility at Tartous on the coast would come as a relief to Moscow.

The Tartous facility is Russia's only Mediterranean repair and replenishment hub, and Moscow has used Syria as a staging post to fly its military contractors in and out of Africa.

Losing Tartous would be a serious blow to Russia's ability to project power in the Middle East, the Mediterranean and Africa, say Western military analysts.

Military presence in doubt

Influential Russian war blogger "Rybar", who is close to the Russian Defense Ministry and has over 1.3 million followers on his Telegram channel, said the situation around the bases was a serious cause for concern whatever Moscow's official line.

"Russia's military presence in the Middle East region hangs by a thread," Rybar said.

"What anyone decided in high offices is absolutely irrelevant on the ground," he added, suggesting Russian forces at the bases had not taken the initiative to defend their positions in the absence of orders from Moscow.

Russian warships had left Tartous and taken up position off the coast for security reasons, the Hmeimim airbase had effectively been cut off after rebels took control of a nearby town, Kurdish forces had started to block Russian facilities beyond the Euphrates, and Russian positions at an oil facility in Homs had been blocked, Rybar said.

Reuters could not independently confirm Rybar's assertions.

Earlier on Sunday, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the two military facilities had been put on a state of high alert, but played down any immediate risk.

"There is currently no serious threat to their security," the ministry said as it announced Assad's departure from office and from Syria.

The Foreign Ministry said Moscow was alarmed by events in Syria.

Syria

Continued from Page 1NN

prison to search for hidden underground cells believed to hold detainees.

Defaced Assad images

As the sun set in Damascus without Assad for the first time, roads leading into the city were mostly empty, apart from motorcycles carrying armed men and rebel vehicles caked with mud as camouflage.

Some men could be seen looting a shopping center on the road between the capital and the Lebanese border. The myriad checkpoints lining the road to Damascus were empty. Posters of Assad were torn at his eyes. A burning Syrian military truck was parked diagonally on the road out of the city.

A thick column of black smoke billowed from the Mazzeh neighborhood, where Israeli strikes earlier had targeted Syrian state security branches, according to two security sources.

Intermittent gunfire rang out in apparent celebration.

Shops and restaurants closed early in line with a curfew imposed by the rebels. Just before it came into effect, people could be seen briskly walking home with stacks of bread.

Earlier, the rebels said they had entered the capital with no sign of army deployments. Thousands of people in cars and on foot congregated at a main square in Damascus waving and chanting "Freedom."

People were seen walking inside the Al-Rawda Presidential Palace, with some leaving carrying furniture. A motorcycle was parked on the intricately-laid parquet floor of a gilded hall.

The Syrian rebel coalition said it was working to complete the transfer of power to a transitional governing body with executive powers.

"The great Syrian revolution has moved from the stage of struggle to overthrow the Assad regime to the struggle to build a Syria together that befits the sacrifices of its people," it added in a statement.

People stand near a damaged statue of former Syrian president Hafez al-Assad after Syrian rebels announced that they have ousted President Bashar al-Assad, in Qamishli, Syria on Sunday. ORHAN QEREMAN/REUTERS

Mohammad Ghazi al-Jalali, prime minister under Assad, called for free elections and said he had been in contact with Golani to discuss the transitional period.

Golani, whose group was once Syria's branch of al Qaeda but has softened its image to reassure members of minority sects and foreign countries, said there was no room for turning back.

Arab world stunned

The pace of events stunned Arab capitals and raised concerns about more instability on top of the Gaza war.

U.S. President Joe Biden, in a televised address, cheered Assad's fall but acknowledged that it was also a moment of risk and uncertainty.

"As we all turn to the question of what comes next, the United States will work with our partners and the stakeholders in Syria to help them seize an opportunity to manage the risk," Biden said.

The U.S. Central Command said its forces conducted dozens of airstrikes targeting known Islamic State camps and operatives in central Syria on Sunday.

Later in the day Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said he spoke with Turkish Minister of National Defense Yasar Guler, emphasizing that the United States is watching closely.

Jubilant supporters of the revolt crowded Syrian embassies around the world, lowering red, white and black Assad-era flags and replacing them with the green, white and black flag flown by his opponents.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Assad's fall was thanks to blows Israel had dealt to Iran and its Lebanese ally Hezbollah, once the lynchpin of Assad's security forces.

"The barbaric state has fallen," French President Emmanuel Macron said.

When the celebrations fade, Syria's new leaders face the daunting task of trying to deliver stability to a diverse country that will need billions of dollars in aid.

During the civil war, which erupted in 2011 as an uprising against Assad, his forces and their Russian allies bombed cities to rubble. The refugee crisis across the Middle East was one of the biggest of modern times and caused a political reckoning in Europe when a million people arrived in 2015.

In recent years Turkey had backed some rebels in a small redoubt in the northwest and along its border. The United States, which still has 900 soldiers on the ground, backed a Kurdish-led alliance that fought Islamic State jihadists from 2014-2017.

The biggest strategic losers were Russia and Iran, which intervened in the war's early years to rescue Assad, helping him recapture most territory and all major cities. The front lines were frozen four years ago under a deal Russia and Iran reached with Turkey.

But Moscow's focus on its war in Ukraine and the blows to Iran's allies following the war in Gaza – particularly the decimation of Hezbollah by Israel over the past two months – left Assad with scant support.

Biden

Continued from Page 1NN

what comes next, the United States will work with our partners and the stakeholders in Syria to help them seize an opportunity to manage the risk," Biden added.

But a senior U.S. official cautioned that the United States did not plan to offer a blueprint for Syria going forward. "The future will be written by Syrians," the official told reporters.

The United States was watching closely statements from the HTS rebel organization that tossed out Assad. The group is "saying the right things" at this stage but that it was too early to say what was going to happen in Syria, the official added.

The United States will work to ensure the safety of chemical weapons stockpiles in Syria, the senior U.S. official said, without elaborating except to say there would not be a role for U.S. troops on the ground in this effort.

A second senior U.S. official told Reuters that the United States would likely keep its estimated 900 troops in eastern Syria as a hedge against ISIS militants.

The future of Russia's two main bases and some smaller ones in Syria was unclear. The bases have been used to back Assad and give Russia a footprint in the region.

Assad is in Moscow with his family after Russia granted them asylum on humanitarian grounds, a Kremlin source told Russian news agencies on Sunday, and a deal has been done to ensure the safety of Russian military bases.

Biden said U.S. forces on Sunday conducted dozens of precision strikes within Syria targeting camps and operatives of Islamic State to keep the militant group from reasserting itself.

"It's a moment of historic opportunity for the long suffering people of Syria to build a better future for their proud country. It's also a moment of risk and uncertainty," Biden said.

CONFLICT IN MIDDLE EAST

INSIGHT

Syrian residents in Turkey wave Syrian opposition flags as they celebrate the fall of long-time ruler Bashar al-Assad after rebel fighters took control of the Syrian capital Damascus overnight, in Istanbul on Sunday. YASIN AKGUL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

How Syria's rebels' stars aligned for Assad's ouster

Operation helped by weakened allies, demoralized army

Jonathan Spicer and Maya Gebeily
REUTERS

ISTANBUL – After 13 years of civil war, Syria's opposition militias sensed an opportunity to loosen President Bashar al-Assad's grip on power when, about six months ago, they communicated to Turkey plans for a major offensive and felt they had received its tacit approval, two sources with knowledge of the planning said.

Launched barely two weeks ago, the operation's speedy success in achieving its initial goal – seizing Syria's second city, Aleppo – took almost everybody by surprise. From there, in a little more than a week, the rebel alliance reached Damascus and on Sunday put an end to five decades of Assad family rule.

The lightning advance relied on an almost perfect alignment of stars for the forces opposed to Assad: his army was demoralized and exhausted; his main allies, Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah, were severely weakened by conflict with Israel; and his other key military supporter, Russia, was distracted and losing interest.

There was no way the rebels could go ahead without first notifying Turkey, which has been a main backer of the Syrian opposition from the war's earliest days, said the sources, a diplomat in the region and a member of the Syrian opposition.

Turkey has troops on the ground in northwest Syria, and provides support to some of the rebels who were intending to take part, including the Syrian National Army (SNA) – though it considers the main faction in the alliance, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), to be a terror group.

Because of his former ties to al Qaeda, Golani is designated as a terrorist by Washington, Europe and Turkey. However, over the past decade, HTS, previously known as the Nusra Front, has tried to moderate its image, while running a quasi-state centered on Idlib, where, experts say, it levied taxes on commercial activities and the population.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan's government, which struck a deal with Russia in 2020 to de-escalate fighting in northwestern Syria, has long opposed such a major rebel offensive, fearing it would lead to a new wave of refugees crossing its border.

The Syrian opposition source said the rebels had shown Turkey details of the planning, after Ankara's attempts to engage Assad had failed.

The message was: "That other path hasn't worked for years – so try ours. You don't have to do anything, just don't intervene." Reuters was unable to determine the exact nature of the communications.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, speaking in Doha on Sunday, said Erdogan's effort in recent months to reach out to Assad failed and Turkey "knew something was coming".

However, Turkey's deputy minister for foreign affairs, Nuh Yilmaz, told a conference on Middle Eastern affairs in Bahrain on Sunday that Ankara was not behind the offensive, and did not provide its consent, saying it was concerned about instability.

Turkey's foreign and defense ministries did not respond directly to Reuters questions about an HTS-Ankara understanding about the Aleppo operation. In reply to questions about Turkey's awareness of battlefield preparations, a Turkish official told Reuters that the HTS "does not receive orders or direction from us (and) does not coordinate its operations with us either."

The official said that "in that sense" it would not be correct to say that the operation in Aleppo was carried out with Turkey's approval or green light. Turkish intelligence agency MIT did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Reuters was unable to reach a representative for HTS.

Vulnerable

The rebels struck when Assad was at his most vulnerable.

Distracted by wars elsewhere, his military allies Russia, Iran, and Lebanon's Hezbollah failed to mobilize the kind of decisive firepower that had propped him up for years.

Syria's weak armed forces were unable to resist. A regime source told Reuters that tanks and planes were left with no fuel because of corruption and looting – an illustration of just how hollowed out the Syrian state had become.

Over the past two years morale had severely eroded in the army, said the source, who requested anonymity because of fear of retribution.

Aron Lund, a fellow at Century International, a Middle-East focused think-tank, said the HTS-led coalition was stronger and more coherent than any previous rebel force during the war, "and a lot of that is Abu Mohammed al-Golani's doing." But, he said, the regime's weakness was the deciding factor.

Syrian rebel supporters hoist flags at embassies abroad

REUTERS

Supporters of rebels who ousted President Bashar al-Assad on Sunday have entered some Syrian embassies abroad to hoist their flag, while insurgents also entered the Italian envoy's residence in Damascus.

Following are incidents at diplomatic premises:

Spain

About 150 people cheered and shouted "Freedom!" as a man at the Syrian embassy in Madrid threw the Assad government's flag to the ground and hoisted the black, green and white flag with three stars used by the rebels.

Greece

Supporters of the rebels entered the Syrian embassy in Athens and hoisted their flag from the rooftop. Police entered and detained four people, but left the flag flying.

"Our joy is indescribable, 55 years of horrible dictatorship has finally ended," said Alompeint Marouf, 59, among people celebrating outside.

Protesters also tore down Assad's portrait in the embassy, Greek media said.

Italy

Rebels entered the residence of Italy's ambassador in Damascus to search for pro-Assad troops or relevant documents and fired a few shots against a wall, but did not harm him or security staff, Italy's Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said.

"They took away only three cars and that was it," he said.

Syrian Foreign Ministry

Syria's Foreign Ministry said its diplomatic missions abroad will serve all citizens in a "new page" of national history that would unite people without one opinion dominating.

Indonesia

The Indonesian embassy in Damascus said it had taken steps to ensure the safety of its citizens, including preparing for potential evacuation.

Assad loyalists shaken by rapid fall

Some express relief over lack of violence

REUTERS

Confusion and fear have swept through Bashar al-Assad's Alawite sect and other loyalist communities since his fall, with many questioning how the collapse was so rapid after so many of their members had died to keep him in power.

Loyalists spoke with a sense of resignation about the implosion of his 24-year rule and with it, the end of decades of rule by minority Alawites – an offshoot of Shi'ite Islam – in majority Sunni Syria.

Assad's hometown of Qardaha – home to a mausoleum to his father, Hafez – for many years hosted continuous funerals due to the numbers of loyalist fighters who were dying to defend him, locals say.

Reuters spoke to four people in the Alawite heartland between the coastal city of Tartous and Latakia hours after Assad was toppled. One, Mohsen, said he was bewildered by how the Syrian army had given up without even calling up extra reserves from Assad's core support base.

"I know for a fact that there were many men who would have been willing to fight if they were called upon by the president, but that did not happen. Instead, we see withdrawals everywhere. It's strange."

He said that inhabitants of Alawite villages near the coast had set up informal security measures, with checkpoints at villages to monitor who came in and out.

Protests have broken out in mainly-Alawite Latakia and in Tartous, with residents knocking down statues of Hafez al-Assad and chanting anti-Assad slogans.

An Alawite resident of the coast who witnessed the protests, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that they had been struck by the peaceful nature of the protests and said so far there were few sectarian tensions around the issue.

Relief at lack of violence so far

"If it keeps going like this, there is little reason to have concerns," he said. "it would mean we are not going for the Libya model and that all we were told to be scared about was not true."

After taking over Homs, rebels searched government offices and security branches in the city but did not ransack them or destroy property, residents said, adding the inhabitants reacted with a sense of relief.

Residents of Homs' Alawite Zahraa neighborhood published a statement saying they would stay in their homes and were against any kind of violence, calling on rebels to act responsibly as they had in other areas where they had encountered minorities. They also said anyone resisting rebels was acting on his own.

Rebels had barely entered the Alawite neighborhood, residents said.

Alawites are believed to make up about about 10 percent of the 23 million population, Sunni Muslims about 70 percent, and there are substantial communities of Christians, Kurds, Druze and other religious or ethnic minorities.

Syrian government loyalists prepare to protest in front of the French embassy in Damascus on July 11, 2011. Syrian president Bashar al-Assad has fled to Russia.
STRINGER/REUTERS

SPORTS EXTRA

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

Conference championship losers get CFP love

Blake Toppmeyer
College football columnist
USA TODAY NETWORK

A conference silver medal became the golden ticket with this College Football Playoff selection committee.

The playoff committee's bracket choices Sunday in this inaugural 12-team field devalued the reward for winning a conference title by protecting teams that lost in conference championship games. Confused? So am I.

Let's start with the most-puzzling presentation in the bracket: The committee awarded the No. 11 seed to SMU (11-2), the ACC's runner-up that owns no marquee victories. The committee clearly valued SMU's 11 victories compared to teams left out of the field like Alabama (9-3) and Mississippi (9-3), which compiled inferior records against a tougher schedule. I might disagree with that rationale, but I understand it. What I can't comprehend is why SMU received a better seed than 12th-seeded Clemson, the ACC's champion that beat SMU on a neutral field less than 12 hours before the bracket reveal.

Clemson (10-3) snatched a playoff auto bid thanks to that victory, but despite playing a tougher schedule than SMU and beating the Mustangs in what had been billed as a high-stakes game, the committee bizarrely seeded the ACC's champion behind the conference's silver medalist.

It's as if committee members fell asleep before Clemson won with a last-second field goal to beat SMU 34-31.

Respect for conference title losers goes beyond SMU

Elsewhere in the bracket, you'll find

See TOPPMEYER, Page 6NS

College Football Playoff schedule

First Round

No. 12 Clemson (10-3) at No. 5 Texas (11-2), 4 p.m. Dec. 21

No. 11 SMU (11-2) at No. 6 Penn State (11-2), Noon Dec. 21

No. 10 Indiana (11-1) at No. 7 Notre Dame (11-1), 8 p.m. Dec. 20

No. 9 Tennessee (10-2) at No. 8 Ohio State (10-2), 8 p.m. Dec. 21

Quarterfinals

Fiesta Bowl: No. 3 Boise State vs. SMU/Penn State, 7:30 p.m. Dec. 31

Peach Bowl: No. 4 Arizona State vs. Texas/Clemson, 1 p.m. Jan. 1

Rose Bowl: No. 1 Oregon vs. Ohio State/Tennessee, 5 p.m. Jan 1

Sugar Bowl: No. 2 Georgia vs. Notre Dame/Indiana, 8:30 p.m. Jan. 1

Semifinals

Orange Bowl, 7:30 p.m. Jan. 9

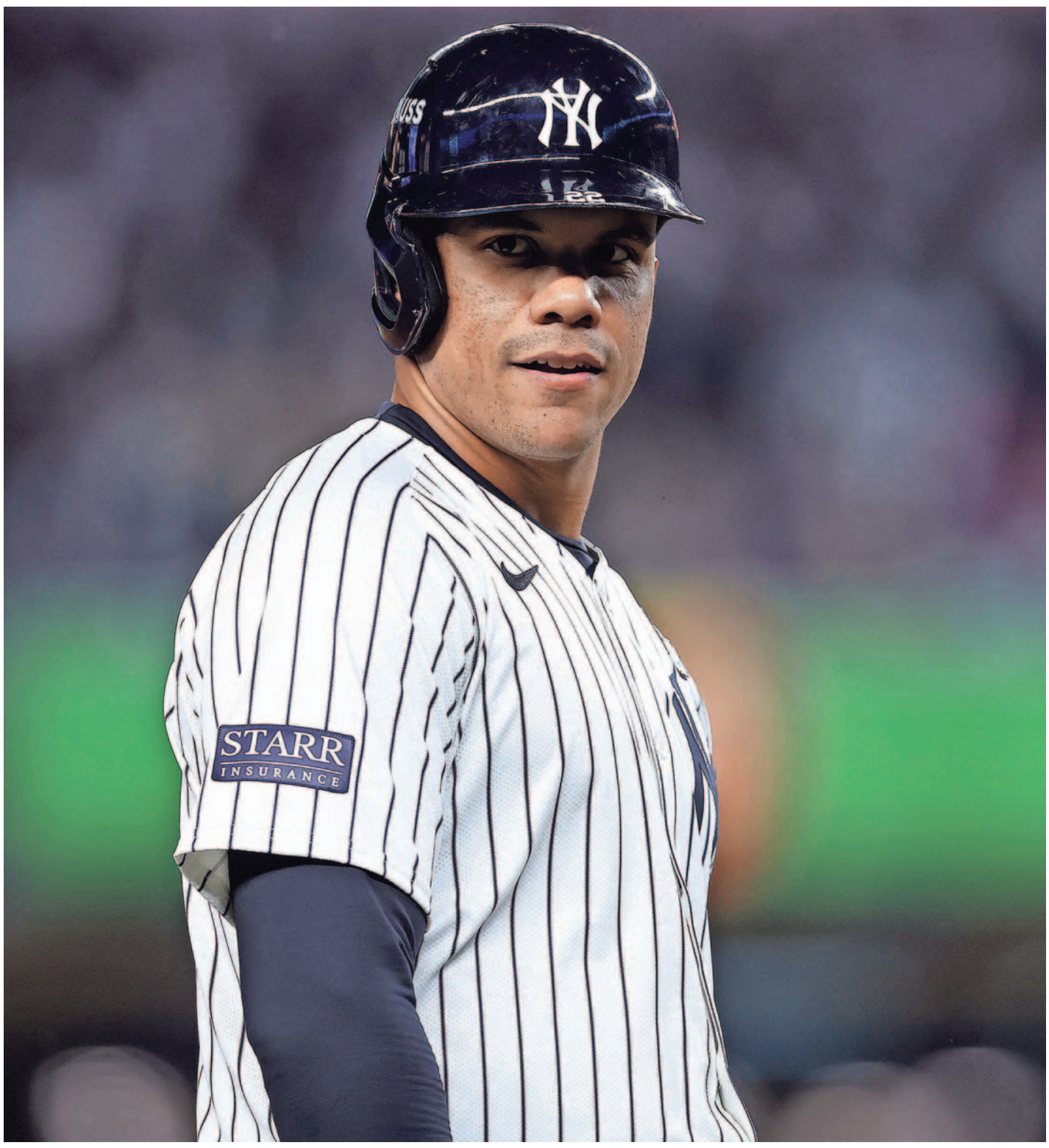
Cotton Bowl, 7:30 p.m. Jan 10

Championship Game

At Atlanta, 7:30 p.m. Jan. 20

MLB

King of Queens



Juan Soto and the New York Mets agreed to a 15-year, $765 million contract Sunday night. BRAD PENNER/IMAGN IMAGES

Soto goes to Mets on massive 15-year, $765 million contract

Gabe Lacques and Bob Nightengale
USA TODAY

After years of elite production amid career instability, Juan Soto has found his permanent home – thanks to a stupendous and record-setting contract commitment from the New York Mets.

Soto and the New York Mets agreed to a 15-year, $765 million contract Sunday night, the biggest contract in sports history and making Soto the highest-paid player in baseball by almost every measure.

A person with direct knowledge of the agreement confirmed to USA TODAY Sports that Soto and the Mets came to terms. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the deal is not yet finalized.

The total and current value of his contract exceeds that of two-way superstar Shohei Ohtani, who signed a heavily-deferred 10-year, $700 million deal with the Dodgers one year ago. Soto's $51 million average annual value is a record for a baseball player, as it contains no deferred money.

Soto's departure from the crosstown Yankees to the Mets represents a massive commitment from owner Steve Cohen, ending his tenure in the Bronx after one season that culminated in a World Series appearance. The Yankees, according to a person familiar with the negotiations, offered $760 million for 16 years, close in total value but with an

See SOTO, Page 7NS

GOLF

Scheffler defends title at Hero World Challenge

Adam Schupak
Golfweek | USA TODAY NETWORK

NASSAU, Bahamas — Eight wasn't enough for Scottie Scheffler.

With birdies on three of the first four holes on Sunday, he assumed the lead and cruised to a six-stroke victory over Tom Kim at the 2024 Hero World Challenge for his ninth win of the year.

"It feels nice," Scheffler said. "I've been fortunate to get some wins out of some really good golf. This was another week where I played really solid and was able to see some nice results from that. Overall it was a pretty fun year."

Was it ever. Scheffler closed with a birdie at the final hole to shoot 9-under 63 at Albany Club, a 72-hole total of 25-under 263 and successfully defend his title at the 20-man unofficial event hosted by Tiger Woods.

"You were in my tummy last time," Meredith Scheffler told the couple's first born, son Bennett, who arrived in May and was carried around the course by her mother in a baby carrier.

Scheffler, the world No. 1 and FedEx Cup champion, won seven times on the PGA Tour, including the Masters,

See SCHEFFLER, Page 5NS

BILLS FALL SHORT VS. RAMS

Rams wide receiver Puka Nacua (17) scores on a 4-yard touchdown run in the second quarter against the Bills.

NFL ROUNDUP, PAGE 2NS

KIRBY LEE/IMAGN IMAGES

NFL

ROUNDUP

Chiefs top Chargers to win West

Field Level Media

Chiefs kicker Matthew Wright (49) celebrates after kicking a game-winning field goal against the Chargers at GEHA Field at Arrowhead Stadium. JAY BIGGERSTAFF/IMAGN IMAGES

Patrick Mahomes threw for 210 yards and a touchdown, Matthew Wright made a 31-yard field goal off the left upright as time expired and the Kansas City Chiefs clinched another AFC West title with a 19-17 victory Sunday night over the visiting Los Angeles Chargers.

Mahomes guided a 14-play, 47-yard drive, which was capped by Wright's game-winning kick, as the Chiefs extended their NFL record to 15 consecutive one-score victories going back to last season, counting playoff games.

Wright, who finished with four field goals, is Kansas City's third kicker this season with Harrison Butker and Spencer Shrader both out with injuries.

Isiah Pacheco had 55 yards rushing and Travis Kelce finished with five receptions for 45 yards, including a key first-down catch just after the two-minute warning in the fourth quarter, as Kansas City won its ninth consecutive division title.

Justin Herbert had 213 yards passing with a touchdown, and Joshua Palmer had six receptions for 78 yards for the Chargers. Quentin Johnston had five receptions for 48 yards and a TD for Los Angeles, which lost for just the second time in its past seven games.

Dolphins 32, Jets 26 (OT)

Tua Tagovailoa tossed a 10-yard touchdown pass to Jonnu Smith on the first possession of overtime as Miami defeated the New York Jets on Sunday afternoon in Miami Gardens, Fla.

Tagovailoa passed for 331 yards and two touchdowns as Miami (6-7) kept its playoff hopes alive. Tyreek Hill caught 10 passes for 115 yards and one TD. Jaylen Waddle caught nine passes for 99 yards and a two-point conversion.

The game featured six lead changes, and it was the ninth straight year that the Dolphins beat the Jets at home.

The Dolphins didn't force a punt until they got two straight stops in the fourth quarter, allowing Miami to rally from an eight-point deficit. Anders Carlson made a 42-yard field goal with 52 seconds to give the Jets a 26-23 lead, but Jason Sanders nailed a 52-yarder with seven seconds left, sending the game to overtime.

Vikings 42, Falcons 21

Sam Darnold completed 22 of 28 passes for 347 yards and a career-high five touchdowns, and Minnesota pulled away from visiting Atlanta.

Jordan Addison had eight catches for 133 yards and a career-high three touchdowns for Minnesota (11-2), which won its sixth consecutive game. Justin Jefferson had seven catches for 132 yards and two touchdowns.

Kirk Cousins completed 23 of 37 passes for 344 yards and two interceptions in his return to Minnesota, where he spent the previous six seasons before leaving as a free agent.

Saints 14, Giants 11

Derek Carr passed for 219 yards and a touchdown before being injured and visiting New Orleans defeated the reeling New York Giants.

Carr completed 20 of 31 passes, but left the game late in the fourth quarter after apparently injuring his left arm while being tackled.

The Saints (5-8) secured the victory when Bryan Bresee blocked Graham Gano's 35-yard field-goal attempt with eight seconds left.

Drew Lock completed 21 of 49 passes for 227 yards for the NFC-worst Giants (2-11), who lost their eighth consecutive game.

Eagles 22, Panthers 16

Jalen Hurts threw 4 yards to Grant Calcaterra on Philadelphia's only second-half scoring drive as the Eagles held off visiting Carolina.

Hurts tossed two touchdowns and finished with 108 yards on 14-for-21 passing. He also ran for a score. Saquon Barkley rushed for 124 yards as the Eagles (11-2) won their ninth game in a row.

Philadelphia needed a defensive stop to seal the win after the Panthers reached the Eagles' 32-yard line in the final minute on a 13-play drive.

Steelers 27, Browns 14

Russell Wilson threw two touchdown passes to help Pittsburgh cruise past visiting Cleveland.

Eagles tight end Grant Calcaterra (81) reacts to his touchdown catch against the Panthers during the fourth quarter at Lincoln Financial Field. BILL STREICHER/IMAGN IMAGES

Najee Harris rushed for a touchdown and Van Jefferson and Pat Freiermuth caught scoring passes for Pittsburgh (10-3), which has won seven of its last eight games. Cameron Heyward had two sacks and Keeanu Benton and James Pierre had interceptions for the Steelers, who increased their lead in the AFC North to two games over the idle Baltimore Ravens.

Wilson completed 15 of 26 passes for 158 yards to help Pittsburgh avenge a 24-19 loss to the Browns in a snowy affair in Cleveland on Nov. 21.

Buccaneers 28, Raiders 13

Rachaad White and Jalen McMillan each produced two touchdowns as host Tampa Bay extended Las Vegas' losing streak to nine.

Tampa Bay (7-6), which has won three in a row, took over first place in the NFC South as the Atlanta Falcons (6-7) lost at the Minnesota Vikings.

Shut down for the second and third quarters, the Bucs got a 3-yard scoring run from White and a 29-yard touchdown catch from McMillan in the fourth to finish it. Las Vegas quarterback Aidan O'Connell was carted to the locker room with an air cast on his right leg after being pushed from behind by Calijah Kancey with 1:23 left in the third.

Jaguars 10, Titans 6

Tank Bigsby ran for an 8-yard touchdown with 6:46 left Sunday and visiting Jacksonville held off Tennessee.

Bigsby raced through a hole between the left guard and tackle, then stiff-armed a defender near the goal line to cap a seven-play, 81-yard drive. The key play was Mac Jones' 31-yard pass to Brian Thomas Jr. that got Jacksonville to the 12. Jones completed 23 of 31 passes for 220 yards and two interceptions in his first start since quarterback Trevor Lawrence went on injured reserve Wednesday with a concussion. The Jaguars (3-10) ended a five-game losing streak.

Seahawks 30, Cardinals 18

Zach Charbonnet rushed for a career-high 134 yards and scored two touchdowns as the Seahawks remained atop the NFC West with a victory against host Arizona.

Jaxon Smith-Njigba caught a 19-yard scoring strike from Geno Smith and Jason Myers kicked three field goals for the Seahawks (8-5), who have won four consecutive games since their bye week — including two against Arizona.

Smith completed 24 of 30 passes for 233 yards and Charbonnet, starting for the injured Kenneth Walker III (calf), added a team-high seven receptions for 59 yards.

Rams 44, Bills 42

Puka Nacua finished with 178 yards from scrimmage and a pair of touchdowns, and Los Angeles held on against visiting Buffalo.

Nacua caught 12 passes for 162 yards and a touchdown, and he rushed for 16 yards and another score for Los Angeles (7-6). Kyren Williams added 87 yards and two touchdowns on the ground, and Cooper Kupp finished with five catches for 92 yards and a score.

Josh Allen made history in the loss for Buffalo (10-3) as the first player to pass for three touchdowns and rush for three touchdowns in a single game. Allen completed 22 of 37 passes for 342 yards and three touchdowns, and he carried the ball 10 times for 82 yards and three touchdowns.

49ers 38, Bears 13

Brock Purdy passed for 325 yards and two touchdowns, Isaac Guerendo ran for two scores and Leonard Floyd registered two sacks against his former team as host San Francisco routed skidding Chicago. San Francisco (6-7) stopped a three-game losing streak while remaining in the hunt in the NFC wild-card race. Chicago lost its seventh in a row, stumbling through its first game under interim coach Thomas Brown, who took the reins after the organization fired third-year coach Matt Eberflus on Nov. 29. The Bears (4-9) were outgained 452-162.

NFL

MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL

Beating Cowboys could help Bengals change perceptions

Pat Brennan
Cincinnati Enquirer | USA TODAY NETWORK

Nothing puts the spotlight on a team more than playing the Cowboys in prime time. Joe Burrow (9) and the Bengals get that chance. KAREEM ELGAZZAR/THE ENQUIRER

Rather than be burdened by the realities of Monday's game against the Dallas Cowboys, the Cincinnati Bengals are welcoming it as an opportunity to set the record straight about who, and what, they are.

For Cincinnati (4-8), the game is a nationally-televised road test against the resurgent Cowboys (5-7) at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas (8:15 p.m., ESPN). The faintest of playoff hopes are hanging in the balance, but more than that, the Bengals simply need a respectable, 60-minute performance. Ideally, they'd get contributions from all three units, too, because it's been a while since that's happened.

On top of it all, a viewing audience of millions, and maybe tens of millions, will be scrutinizing Cincinnati for 60 minutes. A slip-up on this stage will likely cement the narratives around the Bengals, and specifically that they've abjectly squandered a season of prolific offense and MVP-level play from quarterback Joe Burrow.

Cincinnati is keen to fend off that narrative and others, though. In fact, the pressure of Monday's game might be exactly what the team needs.

"It's a tough test for our guys and exciting to be on Monday Night Football, and I think that's what this team needs right now," Taylor said. "Put us back in the spotlight, have an opportunity to overcome and find a win and get on the right stretch here."

To glance at the divisional standings across the NFL, a football fan in Las Vegas or Philadelphia might look at the Bengals' 4-8 record and not think much of the team. But those who have followed Cincinnati closely in 2024 — everyone who has watched the Bengals discover new ways to lose and go 1-7 in one-score games — know there's more to this team.

Against Dallas, a win might not be enough to salvage the 2024 campaign. The Bengals' door to an AFC Wild Card berth is almost shut and closing quickly. But respectability is still attainable for a team that's constantly been on the cusp and unable to finish.

The story of the 2024 Bengals isn't finished, and the narrative can be corrected over the final five weeks of the season.

How better to begin rewriting that story than with a win on the grand stage that is Monday Night Football at AT&T Stadium?

"I feel like that's the goal for us every week, trying to go out there and prove, not to ourselves, but to the world that we're better than what our record says," Bengals receiver Ja'Marr Chase said Friday at Paycor Stadium "We've only got five games but there's not much we can really show more than keep executing like we've been doing."

From starting the year as a team with objectives far beyond simply qualifying for the playoffs, the Bengals have seen near-miss after near-miss take their toll on their collective psyche. The players in the locker room now need to feel and see themselves close out a victory as much as anyone else.

"We've lost, what, two or three straight now? So, just trying to get a win and get back in the win column and trying to feel good about ourselves," receiver Tee Higgins said Friday at Paycor Stadium.

One win at Dallas could spur interesting developments in the weeks to come, and reveal much about what the team is made of.

Kansas City 19, L.A. Chargers 17

L.A. Chargers	0	0	14	3 –	17
Kansas City	3	10	0	6 –	19

First Quarter
KC–Matthew Wright 47 yd FG, 10:05.

Second Quarter
KC–Matthew Wright 33 yd FG, 7:47.
KC–DeAndre Hopkins 9 yd pass from Patrick Mahomes (Matthew Wright kick), 0:47.

Third Quarter
LAC–Gus Edwards 3 yd run (Cameron Dicker kick), 7:12.
LAC–Quentin Johnston 4 yd pass from Justin Herbert (Cameron Dicker kick), 3:30.

Fourth Quarter
KC–Matthew Wright 50 yd FG, 13:04.
LAC–Cameron Dicker 37 yd FG, 4:35.
KC–Matthew Wright 31 yd FG, 0:00.
A–73,571

	LAC	KC
First downs	20	20
Total Net Yards	288	298
Rushes-yards	24-94	25-96
Passing	194	202
Punt Returns	1-0	3-34
Kickoff Returns	4-106	3-85
Interceptions Ret.	0-0	0-0
Comp-Att-Int	21-30-0	24-37-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	3-19	3-8
Punts	5-42.6	4-51.8
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	0-0
Penalties-Yards	7-50	8-98
Time of Possession	30:53	29:07

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS
RUSHING–L.A. Chargers, Edwards 10-36, Vidal 8-34, Herbert 4-12, Heinicke 1-12, Davis 1-0. Kansas City, Pacheco 14-55, Mahomes 4-17, Hunt 5-16, Worthy 1-5, Perine 1-3.
PASSING–L.A. Chargers, Herbert 21-30-0-213. Kansas City, Mahomes 24-37-0-210.
RECEIVING–L.A. Chargers, Palmer 6-78, Johnston 5-48, Smartt 3-54, Dissly 2-19, Davis 2-1, Chark 1-9, Reagor 1-4, Fisk 1-0. Kansas City, Kelce 5-45, Worthy 5-41, Hopkins 4-32, Gray 4-26, Smith-Schuster 2-31, Pacheco 2-6, Perine 1-16, Hunt 1-13.
MISSED FIELD GOALS–None.

Miami 32, N.Y. Jets 26, OT

N.Y. Jets	3	10	10	3	0 –	26
Miami	6	9	0	11	6 –	32

First Quarter
Mia–De'Von Achane 2 yd run (Jason Sanders missed kick), 10:24.
NYJ–Anders Carlson 28 yd FG, 5:19.

Second Quarter
Mia–Jason Sanders 39 yd FG, 14:53.
NYJ–Isaiah Davis 17 yd run (Anders Carlson kick), 11:56.
Mia–Jason Sanders 24 yd FG, 4:56.
NYJ–Anders Carlson 30 yd FG, 0:49.
Mia–Jason Sanders 57 yd FG, 0:02.

Third Quarter
NYJ–Davante Adams 3 yd pass from Aaron Rodgers (Anders Carlson kick), 11:20.
NYJ–Anders Carlson 40 yd FG, 1:02.

Fourth Quarter
Mia–Tyreek Hill 4 yd pass from Tua Tagovailoa (Jaylen Waddle 2pt Pass from Tua Tagovailoa), 9:04.
NYJ–Anders Carlson 42 yd FG, 0:52.
Mia–Jason Sanders 52 yd FG, 0:07.

OT
Mia–Jonnu Smith 10 yd pass from Tua Tagovailoa, 6:05.

	NYJ	Mia
First downs	23	28
Total Net Yards	402	375
Rushes-yards	21-83	19-43
Passing	299	332
Punt Returns	2-0	1-10
Kickoff Returns	1-29	4-123
Interceptions Ret.	0-0	0-0
Comp-Att-Int	27-39-0	33-47-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	3-20	0-0
Punts	2-48.0	3-49.3
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	0-0
Penalties-Yards	9-83	8-49
Time of Possession	31:02	38:58

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS
RUSHING–N.Y. Jets, Allen 11-43, Davis 10-40. Miami, Achane 14-23, Wright 2-7, Hill 1-6, Wilson Jr. 1-4, Tagovailoa 1-3.
PASSING–N.Y. Jets, Rodgers 27-39-0-339. Miami, Tagovailoa 33-47-0-332.
RECEIVING–N.Y. Jets, Adams 9-109, Wilson 7-114, Allen 4-38, Conklin 3-33, Davis 3-27, Lazard 1-18. Miami, Hill 10-115, Waddle 9-100, Achane 6-45, Smith 3-44, Wright 2-6, Hill 1-14, Wilson Jr. 1-7, Beckham Jr. 1-1.
MISSED FIELD GOALS–None.

Minnesota 42, Atlanta 21

Atlanta	7	3	11	0 –	21
Minnesota	7	7	7	21 –	42

First Quarter
Min–Justin Jefferson 12 yd pass from Sam Darnold (Will Reichard kick), 2:01.
Atl–Younghoe Koo 20 yd FG, 0:10.

Third Quarter
Atl–Younghoe Koo 29 yd FG, 5:06.
Min–Justin Jefferson 52 yd pass from Sam Darnold (Will Reichard kick), 3:25.
Atl–Bijan Robinson 13 yd run (Bijan Robinson 2pt Rush), 0:39.

Fourth Quarter
Min–Jordan Addison 11 yd pass from Sam Darnold (Will Reichard kick), 12:59.
Min–Jordan Addison 6 yd pass from Sam Darnold (Will Reichard kick), 8:23.
Min–Aaron Jones Sr. 15 yd run (Will Reichard kick), 3:38.

	Atl	Min
First downs	25	24
Total Net Yards	496	433
Rushes-yards	32-158	24-115
Passing	332	289
Punt Returns	1-11	0-0
Kickoff Returns	1-31	2-46
Interceptions Ret.	0-0	2-4
Comp-Att-Int	23-37-2	22-28-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	1-6	4-29
Punts	1-53.0	2-51.0
Fumbles-Lost	1-1	0-0
Penalties-Yards	12-127	6-35
Time of Possession	31:35	28:25

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS
RUSHING–Atlanta, Robinson 22-92, Allgeier 9-63, McCloud III 1-3. Minnesota, Jones Sr. 13-73, Akers 5-37, Darnold 4-7, Mullens 2-(minus 2).
PASSING–Atlanta, Cousins 23-37-2-344. Minnesota, Darnold 22-28-0-347.
RECEIVING–Atlanta, McCloud III 8-98, Mooney 6-142, London 5-70, Robinson 2-9, Pitts 1-14, Woerner 1-11. Minnesota, Addison 8-133, Jefferson 7-132, Hockenson 4-45, Jones Sr. 2-11, Oliver 1-26.
MISSED FIELD GOALS–Reichard 47.

New Orleans 14, N.Y. Giants 11

New Orleans	7	0	7	0 –	14
N.Y. Giants	0	3	0	8 –	11

First Quarter
NO–Kendre Miller 8 yd run (Blake Grupe kick), 1:19.

Second Quarter
NYG–Graham Gano 43 yd FG, 11:20.

Third Quarter
NO–Juwan Johnson 11 yd pass from Derek Carr (Blake Grupe kick), 3:40.

Fourth Quarter
NYG–Tyrone Tracy Jr. 1 yd run (Malik Nabers 2pt Pass from Drew Lock), 4:11.

	NO	NYG
First downs	18	17
Total Net Yards	292	325
Rushes-yards	33-92	23-112
Passing	181	199
Punt Returns	0-0	5-46
Kickoff Returns	2-47	2-49
Interceptions Ret.	1-0	1-0
Comp-Att-Int	20-31-1	21-49-1
Sacked-Yards Lost	2-19	2-14
Punts	7-41.7	8-37.4
Fumbles-Lost	2-0	0-0
Penalties-Yards	6-40	12-112
Time of Possession	31:24	28:36

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS
RUSHING–New Orleans, Kamara 17-44, Miller 10-32, Carr 2-12, Williams 3-5, Haener 1-(minus 1). N.Y. Giants, Lock 5-59, Tracy Jr. 16-45, Singletary 2-8.
PASSING–New Orleans, Carr 20-31-1-219, Haener 0-0-0-0. N.Y. Giants, Lock 21-49-1-227.
RECEIVING–New Orleans, Kamara 5-35, Valdes-Scantling 4-51, Johnson 4-50, Moreau 2-40, Williams 2-10, Wilson Jr. 1-18, Holker 1-10, Austin Jr. 1-5. N.Y. Giants, Nabers 5-79, Bellinger 5-45, Tracy Jr. 5-38, Robinson 4-38, Slayton 2-27.
MISSED FIELD GOALS–Gano 35, Grupe 53.

Philadelphia 22, Carolina 16

Carolina	3	7	6	0 –	16
Philadelphia	0	14	0	8 –	22

First Quarter
Car–Eddy Pineiro 38 yd FG, 1:09.

Second Quarter
Phi–Jalen Hurts 1 yd run (Jake Elliott kick), 11:48.
Car–Tommy Tremble 3 yd pass from Bryce Young (Eddy Pineiro kick), 4:00.
Phi–DeVonta Smith 4 yd pass from Jalen Hurts (Jake Elliott kick), 0:14.

Third Quarter
Car–Chuba Hubbard 1 yd run (Eddy Pineiro missed kick), 2:49.

Fourth Quarter
Phi–Grant Calcaterra 4 yd pass from Jalen Hurts (Saquon Barkley 2pt Rush), 13:45.

	Car	Phi
First downs	20	18
Total Net Yards	302	294
Rushes-yards	34-118	31-211
Passing	177	58
Punt Returns	2-16	1-2
Kickoff Returns	3-72	1-26
Interceptions Ret.	0-0	1-15
Comp-Att-Int	19-34-1	14-21-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	1-7	4-25
Punts	2-45.0	4-43.3
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	1-0
Penalties-Yards	7-43	7-40
Time of Possession	33:33	26:27

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS
RUSHING–Carolina, Hubbard 26-92, Young 7-29, Brooks 1-(minus 3). Philadelphia, Barkley 20-124, Hurts 8-61, Gainwell 3-26.
PASSING–Carolina, Young 19-34-1-191. Philadelphia, Hurts 14-21-0-108.
RECEIVING–Carolina, Thielen 9-102, Hubbard 4-15, Legette 2-39, Moore 2-25, Thompkins 1-7, Tremble 1-3. Philadelphia, Brown 4-43, Smith 4-37, Calcaterra 3-16, Gainwell 2-7, Dotson 1-5.
MISSED FIELD GOALS–Elliott 52.

Pittsburgh 27, Cleveland 14

Cleveland	7	0	0	7 –	14
Pittsburgh	3	10	14	0 –	27

First Quarter
Pit–Chris Boswell 30 yd FG, 9:32.
Cle–Jerry Jeudy 35 yd pass from Jameis Winston (Dustin Hopkins kick), 5:50.

Second Quarter
Pit–Najee Harris 1 yd run (Chris Boswell kick), 11:00.
Pit–Chris Boswell 54 yd FG, 4:21.

Third Quarter
Pit–Van Jefferson 10 yd pass from Russell Wilson (Chris Boswell kick), 8:37.
Pit–Pat Freiermuth 20 yd pass from Russell Wilson (Chris Boswell kick), 3:51.

Fourth Quarter
Cle–David Njoku 15 yd pass from Jameis Winston (Dustin Hopkins kick), 7:19.

	Cle	Pit
First downs	20	14
Total Net Yards	299	272
Rushes-yards	25-104	35-125
Passing	179	136
Punt Returns	4-44	2-20
Kickoff Returns	1-56	0-0
Interceptions Ret.	0-0	2-29
Comp-Att-Int	24-41-2	15-26-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	3-16	1-11
Punts	5-45.2	6-52.2
Fumbles-Lost	2-1	1-1
Penalties-Yards	9-81	6-61
Time of Possession	29:56	30:04

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS
RUSHING–Cleveland, Chubb 11-48, Ford 10-28, Winston 4-28. Pittsburgh, Harris 16-53, Warren 9-47, Wilson 6-17, Patterson 4-8.
PASSING–Cleveland, Winston 24-41-2-211. Pittsburgh, Wilson 15-26-0-158.
RECEIVING–Cleveland, Njoku 7-42, Jeudy 5-64, Moore 3-34, Ford 3-18, Proche II 2-18, Strong Jr. 2-9, Akins 1-14, Woods II 1-12. Pittsburgh, Freiermuth 3-48, Miller 3-38, Williams 3-36, Warren 2-25, Jefferson 1-10, Austin III 1-4, Pruitt 1-(minus 1), Patterson 1-(minus 2).
MISSED FIELD GOALS–Hopkins 38.

Tampa Bay 28, Las Vegas 13

Las Vegas	0	10	0	3 –	13
Tampa Bay	14	0	0	14 –	28

First Quarter
TB–Jalen McMillan 15 yd pass from Baker Mayfield (Chase McLaughlin kick), 8:07.
TB–Rachaad White 5 yd pass from Baker Mayfield (Chase McLaughlin kick), 3:52.

Second Quarter
LV–Aidan O'Connell 1 yd run (Daniel Carlson kick), 9:21.
LV–Daniel Carlson 25 yd FG, 4:28.

Fourth Quarter
TB–Rachaad White 3 yd run (Chase McLaughlin kick), 8:47.
LV–Daniel Carlson 27 yd FG, 3:05.
TB–Jalen McMillan 29 yd pass from Baker Mayfield (Chase McLaughlin kick), 1:56.

	LV	TB
First downs	16	22
Total Net Yards	286	420
Rushes-yards	25-91	26-152
Passing	185	241
Punt Returns	2-30	1-3
Kickoff Returns	2-58	2-49
Interceptions Ret.	2-24	1-0
Comp-Att-Int	23-37-1	18-29-2
Sacked-Yards Lost	2-10	4-27
Punts	4-44.0	3-42.7
Fumbles-Lost	2-1	2-1
Penalties-Yards	3-31	5-31

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS
RUSHING–Las Vegas, McCormick 15-78, O'Connell 6-6, Ridder 2-3, Bowers 1-3, Abdullah 1-1. Tampa Bay, White 17-90, Tucker 3-47, Mayfield 2-12, Irving 4-3.
PASSING–Las Vegas, O'Connell 11-19-1-104, Ridder 12-18-0-101. Tampa Bay, Mayfield 18-29-2-295.
RECEIVING–Las Vegas, Mayer 7-68, Meyers 7-67, Bowers 3-49, McCormick 2-11, Tucker 2-7, Marshall Jr. 1-6, Abdullah 1-(minus 3). Tampa Bay, Evans 4-69, Shepard 4-63, McMillan 4-59, Otton 3-70, White 2-19, Irving 1-15.
MISSED FIELD GOALS–None.

Jacksonville 10, Tennessee 6

Jacksonville	0	0	0	10 –	10
Tennessee	3	0	3	0 –	6

First Quarter
Ten–Nick Folk 46 yd FG, 8:32.

Third Quarter
Ten–Nick Folk 39 yd FG, 4:30.

Fourth Quarter
Jax–Cam Little 23 yd FG, 12:09.
Jax–Tank Bigsby 8 yd run (Cam Little kick), 6:46.

	Jax	Ten
First downs	17	18
Total Net Yards	292	272
Rushes-yards	26-72	28-126
Passing	220	124
Punt Returns	2-8	1-6
Kickoff Returns	2-34	2-58
Interceptions Ret.	0-0	2-10
Comp-Att-Int	23-31-2	19-32-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	1-0	2-22
Punts	4-49.5	3-47.7
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	1-0
Penalties-Yards	5-39	4-25
Time of Possession	28:15	31:45

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS
RUSHING–Jacksonville, Bigsby 18-55, Etienne Jr. 4-20, Jones 3-4, Duvernay 1-(minus 7). Tennessee, Pollard 21-102, Spears 6-21, Levis 1-3.
PASSING–Jacksonville, Jones 23-31-2-220. Tennessee, Levis 19-32-0-168.
RECEIVING–Jacksonville, Thomas Jr. 8-86, Etienne Jr. 4-50, Engram 4-33, Duvernay 3-8, Washington 2-15, Strange 1-21, Bigsby 1-7. Tennessee, Ridley 7-59, Okonkwo 3-8, Whyle 2-31, Pollard 2-22, Westbrook-Ikhine 1-19, Oliver 1-16, Boyd 1-7, Vannett 1-4, Spears 1-2.
MISSED FIELD GOALS–None.

Seattle 30, Arizona 18

Seattle	17	7	3	3 –	30
Arizona	7	3	8	0 –	18

First Quarter
Ari–Michael Wilson 41 yd pass from Kyler Murray (Chad Ryland kick), 11:53.
Sea–Jason Myers 20 yd FG, 4:41.
Sea–Jaxon Smith-Njigba 19 yd pass from Geno Smith (Jason Myers kick), 3:25.
Sea–Zach Charbonnet 1 yd run (Jason Myers kick), 0:16.

Second Quarter
Ari–Chad Ryland 28 yd FG, 10:53.
Sea–Zach Charbonnet 51 yd run (Jason Myers kick), 2:36.

Third Quarter
Sea–Jason Myers 36 yd FG, 5:29.
Ari–James Conner 2 yd pass from Kyler Murray (Kyler Murray 2pt Rush), 1:05.

Fourth Quarter
Sea–Jason Myers 35 yd FG, 1:56.
A–64,533

	Sea	Ari
First downs	18	21
Total Net Yards	409	356
Rushes-yards	31-176	23-121
Passing	233	235
Punt Returns	1-14	2-21
Kickoff Returns	1-27	0-0
Interceptions Ret.	2-21	0-0
Comp-Att-Int	24-30-0	25-38-2
Sacked-Yards Lost	0-0	2-24
Punts	5-53.0	4-45.0
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	1-0
Penalties-Yards	9-62	6-49
Time of Possession	33:02	26:58

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS
RUSHING–Seattle, Charbonnet 22-134, McIntosh 7-38, Smith-Njigba 1-4, Smith 1-0. Arizona, Conner 18-90, Murray 3-16, Benson 2-15.
PASSING–Seattle, Smith 24-30-0-233. Arizona, Murray 25-38-2-259.
RECEIVING–Seattle, Charbonnet 7-59, Smith-Njigba 5-82, Metcalf 4-49, Fant 3-18, McIntosh 2-7, Barner 1-13, Brown 1-6, Holani 1-(minus 1). Arizona, McBride 7-70, Harrison Jr. 4-49, Conner 4-32, Demercado 4-15, Wilson 2-57, Reiman 1-14, Jones 1-13, Dortch 1-5, Benson 1-4.
MISSED FIELD GOALS–Ryland 40.

L.A. Rams 44, Buffalo 42

Buffalo	7	7	7	21 –	42
L.A. Rams	7	17	14	6 –	44

First Quarter
LAR–Kyren Williams 3 yd run (Joshua Karty kick), 8:26.
Buf–Josh Allen 1 yd run (Tyler Bass kick), 3:22.

Second Quarter
LAR–Joshua Karty 22 yd FG, 13:37.
LAR–Hunter Long 22 yd blocked punt return (Joshua Karty kick), 12:29.
Buf–Ty Johnson 41 yd pass from Josh Allen (Tyler Bass kick), 10:23.
LAR–Puka Nacua 4 yd run (Joshua Karty kick), 2:36.

Third Quarter
LAR–Kyren Williams 7 yd run (Joshua Karty kick), 8:26.
Buf–Khalil Shakir 51 yd pass from Josh Allen (Tyler Bass kick), 3:54.
LAR–Cooper Kupp 17 yd pass from Matthew Stafford (Joshua Karty kick), 0:18.

Fourth Quarter
Buf–Josh Allen 1 yd run (Tyler Bass kick), 14:27.
Buf–Mack Hollins 21 yd pass from Josh Allen (Tyler Bass kick), 8:49.
LAR–Puka Nacua 19 yd pass from Matthew Stafford (Joshua Karty missed kick), 1:54.
Buf–Josh Allen 1 yd run (Tyler Bass kick), 1:00.

	Buf	LAR
First downs	25	28
Total Net Yards	445	457
Rushes-yards	17-103	42-137
Passing	342	320
Punt Returns	0-0	1-8
Kickoff Returns	2-34	4-81
Interceptions Ret.	0-0	0-0
Comp-Att-Int	22-37-0	23-30-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	0-0	0-0
Punts	3-33.7	2-47.5
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	0-0
Penalties-Yards	7-59	9-99
Time of Possession	21:30	38:30

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS
RUSHING–Buffalo, Allen 10-82, Cook 6-20, Samuel 1-1. L.A. Rams, Williams 29-87, Corum 8-34, Nacua 5-16.
PASSING–Buffalo, Allen 22-37-0-342. L.A. Rams, Stafford 23-30-0-320.
RECEIVING–Buffalo, Cooper 6-95, Shakir 5-106, Hollins 4-57, Johnson 2-55, Samuel 2-15, Cook 2-9, Knox 1-5. L.A. Rams, Nacua 12-162, Kupp 5-92, Atwell 3-45, Williams 2-10, Parkinson 1-11.
MISSED FIELD GOALS–None.

San Francisco 38, Chicago 13

Chicago	0	0	6	7 –	13
San Francisco	14	10	0	14 –	38

First Quarter
SF–Jauan Jennings 7 yd pass from Brock Purdy (Jake Moody kick), 12:20.
SF–Isaac Guerendo 1 yd run (Jake Moody kick), 1:39.

Second Quarter
SF–Jauan Jennings 16 yd pass from Brock Purdy (Jake Moody kick), 7:41.
SF–Jake Moody 23 yd FG, 1:50.

Third Quarter
Chi–Rome Odunze 4 yd pass from Caleb Williams (failed 2pt Pass from Caleb Williams), 5:56.

Fourth Quarter
SF–Isaac Guerendo 4 yd run (Jake Moody kick), 14:57.
Chi–Rome Odunze 14 yd pass from Caleb Williams (Cairo Santos kick), 11:48.
SF–Patrick Taylor Jr. 3 yd run (Jake Moody kick), 5:15.
A–71,662

	Chi	SF
First downs	14	22
Total Net Yards	162	452
Rushes-yards	21-68	34-131
Passing	94	321
Punt Returns	1-14	4-22
Kickoff Returns	1-25	0-0
Interceptions Ret.	1-0	0-0
Comp-Att-Int	18-24-0	20-26-1
Sacked-Yards Lost	7-46	1-4
Punts	6-52.7	2-46.0
Fumbles-Lost	1-1	0-0
Penalties-Yards	2-30	7-31
Time of Possession	28:12	31:48

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS
RUSHING–Chicago, Swift 14-38, Williams 4-27, Evans 3-3. San Francisco, Guerendo 15-78, Taylor Jr. 7-25, Samuel Sr. 5-13, Purdy 5-11, Vaughn 2-4.
PASSING–Chicago, Williams 17-23-0-134, Bagent 1-1-0-6. San Francisco, Purdy 20-25-0-325, Allen 0-1-1-0.
RECEIVING–Chicago, Moore 6-49, Odunze 4-42, Allen 3-30, Homer 3-11, Johnson 1-6, Swift 1-2. San Francisco, Jennings 7-90, Kittle 6-151, Guerendo 2-50, Samuel Sr. 2-22, Pearsall 1-5, Saubert 1-4, Juszczyk 1-3.
MISSED FIELD GOALS–None.

NBA

SUNDAY'S ROUNDUP

Jokic, Nuggets cool off Hawks

Field Level Media

Nikola Jokic scored 48 points to guide the visiting Denver Nuggets to a 141-111 win over Atlanta on Sunday, ending the Hawks' six-game winning streak.

Jokic went 17-for-29 from the field and added 14 rebounds and eight assists. After scoring a career-high 56 points against the Washington Wizards on Saturday, Jokic set the pace by scoring 13 points in the first quarter on Sunday, and he had 25 at halftime.

The Nuggets also got 26 points and seven rebounds from Michael Porter Jr. and 17 points and eight boards from Christian Braun. Denver has won four straight games against Atlanta.

Atlanta's top scorers were De'Andre Hunter (20 points) and Dyson Daniels (18), with Daniels also grabbing five steals. Trae Young was limited to 15 points and scored only one point on four shots from the floor in the first half.

Heat 122, Cavaliers 113

Tyler Herro scored 19 of his game-high 34 points in the third quarter as the host Miami Heat handed the red-hot Cleveland Cavaliers a rare loss. Cleveland (21-4) still has the best record in the NBA, but the Cavaliers had their four-game winning streak snapped.

Cavaliers star Evan Mobley - who scored 41 points against Charlotte on Saturday – did not return after reportedly suffering a sprained left ankle in the second quarter. He finished with just four points.

Miami's Jimmy Butler finished with 18 points. Duncan Robinson (23 points) and Bam Adebayo (16 points, 13 rebounds) provided support for Herro, who also tallied a game-high seven assists.

Darius Garland led Cleveland with 23 points.

76ers 108, Bulls 100

Joel Embiid returned from a seven-game absence to provide 31 points and 12 rebounds as the Philadelphia 76ers held off the host Chicago Bulls for a win.

Embiid carried Philadelphia to its fourth win in five games after sitting out to manage a left knee injury. Tyrese Maxey backed the big man with his first career triple-double, collecting 25 points, 11 rebounds and 14 assists.

Paul George and Kelly Oubre Jr. chipped in 12 points apiece for the 76ers, who outshot Chicago 46.7 percent to 40.7 percent from the field.

Zach LaVine racked up 30 points and the Bulls sank 19 threes, but they still couldn't avoid their second straight loss. Nikola Vucevic and Coby White each finished with 13 points, with Vucevic also snatching eight boards.

Bucks 118, Nets 113

Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 34 points and the visiting Milwaukee Bucks rallied for a victory over the Brooklyn Nets.

Bobby Portis added 12 of his 23 points in the fourth quarter, including an open 3 from the left side that followed a steal by Andre Jackson Jr. and gave the Bucks a 109-108 lead with 2:08 left. The reserve forward made 9 of 10 shots and was a perfect 5-of-5 from behind the arc, and he added a block of Dennis Schroder that set up Antetokounmpo's dunk with 1:09 left.

Gary Trent Jr. contributed 20 as the Bucks shot 57.4 percent and hit 15 3s. Damian Lillard chipped 15 points and 11 assists while Khris Middleton finished with 11 points in his second game back from an ankle injury.

Schroder scored a season-high 34 and added 11 assists but the Nets lost for the fourth time in five games. Cameron Johnson added 26 points and Nic Claxton contributed a season-high 21 points and 10 rebounds as the Nets shot 50.6 percent but blew a 12-point lead late in the third.

Hornets 113, Pacers 109

Brandon Miller scored 26 points as the Charlotte Hornets snapped an eight-game losing skid by beating the Indiana Pacers in Indianapolis. Vasilije Micic had 18 points and nine assists, Cody Martin scored 14 points and Nick Richards combined nine points with 14 rebounds.

T.J. McConnell came off the pine to post a career-best 30 points for the Pacers, while fellow reserve Jarace Walker had 15 points.

Magic 115, Suns 110

Jalen Suggs had a game-high 26 points, including 14 in the fourth quarter, and helped the short-handed Orlando Magic finish with a flourish to beat the visiting Phoenix Suns. The Magic remain the NBA's only unbeaten team at home at 10-0.

Orlando earned the win despite not having star forwards Paolo Banchero, who has been out over a month, and Franz Wagner, who suffered a torn oblique in the Magic's loss to the Philadelphia 76ers on Friday.

Orlando leaned on its balance to make up the absences as four Magic players scored in double figures. Goga Bitadze finished with 21 points and 16 rebounds, Cole Anthony had 14 points and Moritz Wagner added 10 for Orlando, which has won two of its past three games.

Devin Booker scored 25 points, Tyus Jones added 21 points, Bradley Beal chipped in 18 points, Royce O'Neal finished with 16 and Grayson Allen poured in 13 for the Suns, who have lost three in a row.

Grizzlies 140, Wizards 112

Jaren Jackson Jr.'s 21 points led seven Memphis scorers in double figures and his four blocked shots contributed to a stifling defensive effort as the Grizzlies cruised to their ninth win in their last 10 games with a rout of the host Washington Wizards in Washington, D.C.

Santi Aldama's 19 points led a 76-point effort from the Memphis bench, more than half of the Grizzlies' output in their second-highest game of the season. That production also included 17 points from Jay Huff and 14 from Cam Spencer, with Spencer also registering five assists and four rebounds.

Washington's reserves managed just 41 points despite 20 points from Marvin Bagley III. Jonas Valanciunas led the Wizards with 20 points and a game-high 14 rebounds.

Spurs 121, Pelicans 116

Victor Wembanyama scored 25 points, including the final seven for San Antonio over the final 36.9 seconds of the game, as the Spurs defeated the visiting New Orleans Pelicans.

Chris Paul had 10 assists for the Spurs to pass Jason Kidd for second on the all-time assists list. Paul's 12,099 helpers trail only John Stockton (15,806) in that category.

Wembanyama added 10 rebounds in his return from a two-game absence caused by a sore back. Stephon Castle scored 22 points, Harrison Barnes and Charles Bassey each had 16 and Julian Champagnie netted 12 as the Spurs snapped a three-game losing streak. Bassey also grabbed 12 boards.

Trey Murphy III led New Orleans with 25 points.

Warriors 114, Timberwolves 106

Stephen Curry, Buddy Hield and Jonathan Kuminga combined for 77 points, Gary Payton II made two big defensive plays and the Golden State Warriors held the Minnesota Timberwolves scoreless over the final 4:46 of a victory in San Francisco.

Curry finished with a game-high 30 points, Hield went for 27 and Kuminga added 20 for the Warriors, who avenged a 107-90 loss to the Timberwolves on Friday with just the second win in their past eight games.

Alexander-Walker had 19 points off the bench for Minnesota, which saw a four-game winning streak come to an end.

Kings 141, Jazz 97

Kevin Huerter scored 26 points off the bench and De'Aaron Fox added 21 points and nine assists as the host Sacramento Kings blew out the Utah Jazz.

Domantas Sabonis tallied 19 points, 12 rebounds and six assists to help his teammate's cause. He made eight of his 13 attempts from the field. DeMar DeRozan finished with 18 points on 8-of-14 shooting.

The Jazz were led offensively by Keyonte George, who scored 25 points on 8-of-13 shooting, with 14 points coming in the first half.

Rockets 117, Clippers 106

Jalen Green scored 31 points and Amen Thompson added 22 as the visiting Houston Rockets rebounded from consecutive defeats for the first time this season to upend the Los Angeles Clippers at Inglewood, Calif.

Dillon Brooks added 19 points and Jabari Smith Jr. added 13 points with 12 rebounds as the Rockets went 1-2 on a three-game California road trip after losing at Sacramento and Golden State. Alperen Sengun had 11 points with 10 rebounds and Aaron Holiday also had 11 points.

Ivica Zubac scored 21 points with 12 rebounds and Norman Powell added 17 points for the Clippers, who were without James Harden because of right groin soreness.

Lakers 107, Trail Blazers 98

Anthony Davis recorded 30 points, 11 rebounds and five blocked shots to help the Los Angeles Lakers cruise to a victory over the visiting Portland Trail Blazers.

D'Angelo Russell achieved season bests of 28 points and 14 assists for the Lakers, who played without LeBron James (foot). Rui Hachimura added 23 points and four steals for Los Angeles, which halted a three-game losing streak.

Austin Reaves (back/pelvis) missed his fifth straight game for Los Angeles.

Jerami Grant finished with just three points on 1-of-12 shooting as Portland shot 41.7 percent overall and 9 of 36 from 3-point range.

Portland's Robert Williams III (concussion) missed his sixth straight game.

The Trail Blazers were behind by 14 points at halftime before scoring the first nine points of the second half to move within 59-54 on a three-point play by Simons. The Lakers answered with a 9-2 run, which was capped by Dalton Knecht's dunk that pushed Los Angeles' lead to 68-56 with 4:50 left in the third.

SUNDAY'S BOX SCORES

L.A. Lakers 107, Portland 98

PORTLAND (98)

Camara 3-6 1-1 8, Grant 1-12 0-0 3, Ayton 7-14 0-0 14, Sharpe 7-15 3-4 19, Simons 5-13 3-3 14, Avdija 4-7 3-4 13, Henderson 3-6 6-6 13, Banton 2-5 1-1 6, Walker 1-2 2-2 4, Murray 0-1 0-0 0, McGowens 1-2 0-0 2, Rupert 1-1 0-0 2. Totals 35-84 19-21 98.

L.A. LAKERS (107)

Hachimura 9-13 2-2 23, Knecht 3-9 0-0 6, Davis 10-21 9-9 30, Christie 1-6 1-2 4, Vincent 1-4 0-0 3, Russell 9-17 5-6 28, Reddish 2-3 1-2 6, Koloko 1-3 0-0 2, Olivari 1-3 0-0 3, Traore 1-2 0-0 2, Lewis 0-0 0-0 0, James 0-2 0-0 0. Totals 38-83 18-21 107.

POR	28	17	29	24	– 98
LAL	22	37	18	30	– 107

3-Point Goals: Portland 9-36 (Avdija 2-3, Sharpe 2-6, Banton 1-3, Henderson 1-3, Camara 1-4, Simons 1-6, Grant 1-7, Walker 0-1, McGowens 0-1, Ayton 0-2), L.A. Lakers 13-34 (Russell 5-10, Hachimura 3-5, Vincent 1-2, Reddish 1-2, Olivari 1-3, Davis 1-4, Christie 1-4, Traore 0-1, Knecht 0-3). Fouled Out: Portland (Ayton). Rebounds: Portland 49 (Ayton 19), L.A. Lakers 40 (Davis 11). Assists: Portland 17 (Simons 4), L.A. Lakers 25 (Russell 14). Total Fouls: Portland 19, L.A. Lakers 20. A: 18,997 (18,997)

Sacramento 141, Utah 97

UTAH (97)

Collins 5-12 4-4 19, Markkanen 2-9 4-4 8, Kessler 4-5 0-0 8, George 8-14 6-6 25, Sexton 4-8 4-4 15, Juzang 2-8 0-0 5, Sensabaugh 3-7 0-0 9, Collier 0-5 0-0 0, Potter 0-2 0-0 0, Mykhailiuk 0-5 0-0 0, Eubanks 2-2 1-2 5, Filipowski 1-3 1-1 3. Totals 31-80 20-21 97.

SACRAMENTO (141)

DeRozan 8-14 2-2 18, Murray 3-5 0-0 7, Sabonis 8-13 1-1 19, Fox 9-16 2-4 21, Monk 7-15 0-1 16, Huerter 10-14 0-0 26, Jones 1-3 0-0 3, Ellis 2-3 0-0 5, Robinson 1-5 0-0 2, McDermott 6-7 0-0 18, Len 0-0 0-0 0, McLaughlin 2-5 0-0 6, Crawford 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 57-100 5-8 141.

UTA	23	22	29	23	– 97
SAC	26	36	43	36	– 141

3-Point Goals: Utah 15-42 (Collins 5-8, Sexton 3-4, George 3-6, Sensabaugh 3-6, Juzang 1-4, Filipowski 0-1, Potter 0-2, Collier 0-2, Markkanen 0-4, Mykhailiuk 0-5), Sacramento 22-44 (McDermott 6-7, Huerter 6-9, McLaughlin 2-3, Sabonis 2-3, Monk 2-7, Jones 1-1, Ellis 1-2, Murray 1-3, Fox 1-5, DeRozan 0-2, Robinson 0-2). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Utah 38 (Kessler 14), Sacramento 43 (Sabonis 12). Assists: Utah 21 (George 6), Sacramento 39 (Fox 9). Total Fouls: Utah 17, Sacramento 17. A: 15,706 (17,500)

Houston 117, L.A. Clippers 106

HOUSTON (117)

Brooks 7-15 1-1 19, Smith Jr. 4-9 3-4 13, Sengun 4-9 3-4 11, Green 9-20 8-8 31, Thompson 9-14 3-3 22, Holiday 3-6 2-2 11, Tate 2-4 2-2 6, Sheppard 0-3 0-0 0, Adams 2-2 0-2 4. Totals 40-82 22-26 117.

L.A. CLIPPERS (106)

Jones Jr. 1-1 0-0 2, Powell 5-18 6-7 17, Zubac 9-15 3-4 21, Dunn 4-10 0-0 9, Porter Jr. 8-18 1-2 19, Miller 5-12 0-0 12, Hyland 7-13 3-3 22, Batum 0-3 0-0 0, Jones 2-2 0-0 4. Totals 41-92 13-16 106.

HOU	30	34	31	22	– 117
LAC	28	24	31	23	– 106

3-Point Goals: Houston 15-41 (Green 5-13, Brooks 4-8, Holiday 3-6, Smith Jr. 2-5, Thompson 1-3, Tate 0-1, Sengun 0-2, Sheppard 0-3), L.A. Clippers 11-34 (Hyland 5-10, Miller 2-4, Porter Jr. 2-5, Dunn 1-5, Powell 1-8, Batum 0-2). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Houston 50 (Smith Jr. 12), L.A. Clippers 33 (Zubac 12). Assists: Houston 23 (Sengun 6), L.A. Clippers 21 (Porter Jr. 6). Total Fouls: Houston 16, L.A. Clippers 24. A: 14,782 (18,000)

Memphis 140, Washington 112

MEMPHIS (140)

Jackson Jr. 8-15 2-4 21, Wells 0-3 4-4 4, Clarke 6-10 0-0 12, Pippen Jr. 6-11 2-3 14, Smart 5-8 0-0 13, Spencer 4-8 4-4 14, Huff 6-14 2-2 17, LaRavia 3-7 2-3 9, Konchar 3-4 0-0 7, Aldama 7-11 2-3 19, Castleton 1-3 4-4 6, Kawamura 1-2 1-2 4. Totals 50-96 23-29 140.

WASHINGTON (112)

Champagnie 6-12 0-0 14, Coulibaly 6-13 4-5 17, Valanciunas 8-17 4-4 20, Carrington 3-12 0-0 7, Poole 2-6 4-4 9, Butler 6-14 1-1 14, Bagley III 9-15 2-2 20, Gill 0-4 2-2 2, Davis 3-7 3-4 9. Totals 43-100 20-22 112.

MEM	34	38	39	29	– 140
WAS	26	29	27	30	– 112

3-Point Goals: Memphis 17-43 (Aldama 3-5, Smart 3-6, Jackson Jr. 3-8, Huff 3-11, Spencer 2-4, Konchar 1-2, Kawamura 1-2, LaRavia 1-3, Castleton 0-1, Pippen Jr. 0-1), Washington 6-32 (Champagnie 2-4, Poole 1-4, Coulibaly 1-4, Butler 1-6, Carrington 1-7, Valanciunas 0-1, Gill 0-1, Bagley III 0-2, Davis 0-3). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Memphis 46 (Konchar 8), Washington 52 (Valanciunas 14). Assists: Memphis 34 (Pippen Jr. 12), Washington 20 (Butler 7). Total Fouls: Memphis 20, Washington 25. A: 15,012 (20,308)

San Antonio 121, New Orleans 116

NEW ORLEANS (116)

Jones 5-10 1-2 12, Murphy III 8-16 5-5 25, Missi 6-14 6-7 18, McCollum 8-18 0-0 19, Murray 6-20 5-5 18, Boston Jr. 7-11 0-0 17, Robinson-Earl 2-5 0-0 5, Cain 1-2 0-0 2, Reeves 0-2 0-0 0, Jemison 0-1 0-2 0. Totals 43-99 17-21 116.

SAN ANTONIO (121)

Barnes 4-6 5-6 16, Champagnie 5-13 0-0 12, Wembanyama 9-16 4-4 25, Castle 8-15 4-5 22, Paul 2-7 0-0 6, Vassell 3-11 1-1 7, Sochan 2-6 3-4 7, Bassey 6-12 4-7 16, Johnson 2-5 4-4 8, Collins 1-2 0-0 2. Totals 42-93 25-31 121.

NOP	34	28	25	29	– 116
SAS	28	43	21	29	– 121

3-Point Goals: New Orleans 13-38 (Murphy III 4-10, Boston Jr. 3-5, McCollum 3-8, Robinson-Earl 1-2, Jones 1-4, Murray 1-7, Cain 0-1, Reeves 0-1), San Antonio 12-39 (Barnes 3-5, Wembanyama 3-7, Castle 2-5, Paul 2-6, Champagnie 2-8, Johnson 0-2, Sochan 0-2, Vassell 0-4). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: New Orleans 43 (Missi 14), San Antonio 55 (Bassey 12). Assists: New Orleans 26 (Murray 11), San Antonio 27 (Paul 10). Total Fouls: New Orleans 21, San Antonio 18. A: 16,840 (18,797)

Philadelphia 108, Chicago 100

PHILADELPHIA (108)

George 6-13 0-0 12, Yabusele 2-5 0-0 4, Embiid 13-28 5-6 31, Maxey 10-22 2-2 25, Oubre Jr. 3-6 4-4 12, McCain 4-10 0-0 11, Martin 3-3 0-0 6, Martin 0-0 0-0 0, Lowry 1-3 0-0 3, Drummond 1-2 2-2 4. Totals 43-92 13-14 108.

CHICAGO (100)

Dosunmu 3-6 2-2 10, LaVine 10-21 4-5 30, Vucevic 4-7 4-4 13, Giddey 4-10 0-0 9, White 5-17 0-0 13, Buzelis 2-7 1-1 5, Ball 1-7 0-0 3, Smith 4-7 0-0 11, Horton-Tucker 1-2 0-0 3, Terry 0-0 0-0 0, Phillips 1-2 0-0 3. Totals 35-86 11-12 100.

PHI	23	39	26	20	– 108
CHI	33	17	29	21	– 100

3-Point Goals: Philadelphia 9-36 (McCain 3-7, Maxey 3-12, Oubre Jr. 2-3, Lowry 1-2, Yabusele 0-2, George 0-5, Embiid 0-5), Chicago 19-54 (LaVine 6-14, Smith 3-5, White 3-11, Dosunmu 2-4, Vucevic 1-2, Horton-Tucker 1-2, Phillips 1-2, Giddey 1-4, Ball 1-5, Buzelis 0-5). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Philadelphia 56 (Embiid 12), Chicago 35 (Vucevic 8). Assists: Philadelphia 25 (Maxey 14), Chicago 29 (Giddey 11). Total Fouls: Philadelphia 15, Chicago 18. A: 18,837 (20,917)

Milwaukee 118, Brooklyn 113

MILWAUKEE (118)

Antetokounmpo 14-22 6-10 34, Prince 0-2 0-0 0, Lopez 1-4 1-2 3, Jackson Jr. 2-3 0-0 6, Lillard 2-7 9-11 15, Portis 9-10 0-0 23, Trent Jr. 6-10 5-5 20, Green 2-2 0-0 6, Middleton 3-8 4-4 11. Totals 39-68 25-32 118.

BROOKLYN (113)

Finney-Smith 3-7 0-0 9, Johnson 9-16 4-4 26, Claxton 9-14 3-3 21, Johnson 2-8 0-0 6, Schroder 13-19 4-5 34, Wilson 1-8 0-0 3, Simmons 0-0 0-0 0, Milton 2-4 0-0 6, Watford 1-2 2-2 4, Sharpe 1-3 2-2 4. Totals 41-81 15-16 113.

MIL	27	24	35	32	– 118
BKN	25	27	34	27	– 113

3-Point Goals: Milwaukee 15-31 (Portis 5-5, Trent Jr. 3-7, Green 2-2, Jackson Jr. 2-3, Lillard 2-7, Middleton 1-3, Lopez 0-2, Prince 0-2), Brooklyn 16-35 (Schroder 4-7, Johnson 4-8, Finney-Smith 3-5, Milton 2-4, Johnson 2-5, Wilson 1-5, Claxton 0-1). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Milwaukee 31 (Antetokounmpo 11), Brooklyn 30 (Claxton 10). Assists: Milwaukee 26 (Lillard 11), Brooklyn 24 (Schroder 11). Total Fouls: Milwaukee 18, Brooklyn 25. A: 17,926 (17,732)

Charlotte 113, Indiana 109

CHARLOTTE (113)

Green 3-4 4-7 10, Martin 6-10 0-0 14, Richards 3-5 3-4 9, Micic 7-15 0-0 18, Miller 9-18 4-5 26, Jeffries 3-4 0-0 8, Wong 3-6 2-3 9, Simpson 1-3 2-2 4, Curry 3-6 2-2 9, Gibson 2-3 2-3 6, Smith Jr. 0-4 0-0 0. Totals 40-78 19-26 113.

INDIANA (109)

Mathurin 4-11 2-2 11, Siakam 3-8 3-3 9, Turner 3-9 1-2 10, Haliburton 4-10 1-2 9, Nembhard 3-5 2-2 10, McConnell 14-19 2-2 30, Toppin 4-11 0-0 11, Walker 6-7 0-0 15, Furphy 0-1 2-2 2, Freeman 1-1 0-0 2. Totals 42-82 13-15 109.

CHA	28	35	20	30	– 113
IND	24	38	20	27	– 109

3-Point Goals: Charlotte 14-29 (Micic 4-6, Miller 4-9, Jeffries 2-3, Martin 2-4, Wong 1-1, Curry 1-3, Simpson 0-1, Smith Jr. 0-2), Indiana 12-36 (Turner 3-4, Walker 3-4, Toppin 3-9, Nembhard 2-3, Mathurin 1-7, Siakam 0-2, McConnell 0-3, Haliburton 0-4). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Charlotte 45 (Richards 14), Indiana 29 (Siakam 11). Assists: Charlotte 24 (Micic 9), Indiana 23 (Haliburton 8). Total Fouls: Charlotte 18, Indiana 19. A: 17,274 (18,165)

Denver 141, Atlanta 111

DENVER (141)

Gordon 1-6 4-5 6, Porter Jr. 12-17 1-1 26, Jokic 17-29 11-13 48, Braun 7-11 1-2 17, Westbrook 4-6 0-1 9, Strawther 5-6 0-0 13, Watson 1-2 0-1 2, Pickett 2-2 0-0 5, Jordan 2-2 0-0 4, Tyson 2-2 0-0 5, Nnaji 1-2 0-1 2, Hall 1-2 0-0 2, Alexander 1-2 0-0 2. Totals 56-89 17-24 141.

ATLANTA (111)

Nance Jr. 6-11 2-2 16, Risacher 3-11 4-6 10, Capela 4-7 1-2 9, Daniels 7-15 2-4 18, Young 6-13 1-2 15, Okongwu 5-10 4-4 14, Hunter 7-20 3-3 20, Mathews 0-4 2-2 2, Krejci 1-6 1-2 3, Roddy 0-1 0-0 0, Bufkin 2-3 0-0 4. Totals 41-101 20-27 111.

DEN	38	33	35	35	– 141
ATL	23	25	36	27	– 111

3-Point Goals: Denver 12-27 (Strawther 3-4, Jokic 3-6, Braun 2-2, Tyson 1-1, Pickett 1-1, Westbrook 1-3, Porter Jr. 1-5, Watson 0-1, Gordon 0-4), Atlanta 9-40 (Hunter 3-9, Daniels 2-5, Nance Jr. 2-7, Young 2-7, Roddy 0-1, Bufkin 0-1, Risacher 0-2, Mathews 0-4, Krejci 0-4). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Denver 43 (Jokic 14), Atlanta 45 (Capela 10). Assists: Denver 43 (Westbrook 11), Atlanta 26 (Young 10). Total Fouls: Denver 22, Atlanta 22. A: 16,137 (18,729)

Miami 122, Cleveland 113

CLEVELAND (113)

Mobley 2-4 0-0 4, Wade 3-7 2-2 11, Allen 3-7 0-0 6, Garland 9-19 3-4 23, Mitchell 5-16 1-1 12, Niang 5-7 2-2 15, LeVert 5-7 1-1 13, Jerome 4-11 6-6 14, Merrill 3-6 2-2 10, Thor 2-2 0-0 5, Tyson 0-0 0-0 0, Travers 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 41-86 17-18 113.

MIAMI (122)

Butler 6-12 6-8 18, Highsmith 0-2 0-0 0, Adebayo 7-14 0-0 16, Herro 10-19 9-9 34, Robinson 7-11 5-5 23, Rozier 6-14 0-0 14, Smith 4-9 0-0 11, Jaquez Jr. 1-4 2-2 4, Bryant 0-0 2-2 2, Love 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 41-86 24-26 122.

CLE	25	26	29	33	– 113
MIA	21	38	31	32	– 122

3-Point Goals: Cleveland 14-33 (Niang 3-4, Wade 3-7, LeVert 2-2, Merrill 2-5, Garland 2-6, Thor 1-1, Mitchell 1-5, Mobley 0-1, Jerome 0-2), Miami 16-37 (Herro 5-9, Robinson 4-6, Smith 3-6, Adebayo 2-4, Rozier 2-5, Love 0-1, Butler 0-2, Highsmith 0-2, Jaquez Jr. 0-2). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Cleveland 36 (Wade 8), Miami 47 (Adebayo 13). Assists: Cleveland 25 (Jerome 6), Miami 27 (Herro 7). Total Fouls: Cleveland 18, Miami 15. A: 19,600 (19,600)

Orlando 115, Phoenix 110

PHOENIX (110)

Beal 8-12 1-2 18, O'Neale 6-10 0-0 16, Plumlee 2-5 3-4 7, Booker 8-21 8-9 25, Jones 7-16 2-2 21, Allen 3-3 5-5 13, Ighodaro 2-5 0-0 4, Morris 2-8 0-0 4, Okogie 0-1 0-0 0, Bol 1-2 0-0 2. Totals 39-83 19-22 110.

ORLANDO (115)

Carter Jr. 2-4 2-2 6, da Silva 3-7 1-4 8, Bitadze 8-15 5-6 21, Caldwell-Pope 3-6 0-2 8, Suggs 8-18 6-7 26, Anthony 6-14 0-0 14, Black 4-8 0-1 8, Houstan 3-4 0-0 8, Wagner 3-8 3-6 10, Howard 2-4 2-2 6. Totals 42-88 19-30 115.

PHX	34	28	25	23	– 110
ORL	29	28	27	31	– 115

3-Point Goals: Phoenix 13-28 (Jones 5-8, O'Neale 4-6, Allen 2-2, Beal 1-2, Booker 1-5, Morris 0-5), Orlando 12-36 (Suggs 4-10, Houstan 2-3, Caldwell-Pope 2-5, Anthony 2-6, Wagner 1-3, da Silva 1-3, Carter Jr. 0-1, Bitadze 0-1, Howard 0-1, Black 0-3). Fouled Out: Phoenix (Beal). Rebounds: Phoenix 39 (O'Neale 7), Orlando 44 (Bitadze 16). Assists: Phoenix 24 (Booker 7), Orlando 17 (Bitadze 4). Total Fouls: Phoenix 24, Orlando 19. A: 18,311 (18,500)

Golden State 114, Minnesota 106

MINNESOTA (106)

McDaniels 4-9 0-0 9, Randle 4-15 4-4 14, Gobert 1-3 2-4 4, Conley 3-7 3-3 12, Edwards 10-19 2-2 27, Alexander-Walker 7-9 1-2 19, Reid 3-8 3-5 10, DiVincenzo 3-9 0-0 8, Minott 1-1 0-0 3. Totals 36-80 15-20 106.

GOLDEN STATE (114)

Kuminga 7-16 5-8 20, Payton II 4-8 0-1 8, Green 3-5 0-0 6, Curry 8-18 9-11 30, Hield 10-18 0-0 27, Waters III 0-5 0-0 0, Looney 6-8 0-0 12, Podziemski 2-5 0-0 6, Anderson 1-3 0-0 3, Moody 1-4 0-0 2. Totals 42-90 14-20 114.

MIN	30	28	32	16	– 106
GSW	21	28	44	21	– 114

3-Point Goals: Minnesota 19-42 (Edwards 5-9, Alexander-Walker 4-5, Conley 3-6, Randle 2-4, DiVincenzo 2-8, Minott 1-1, McDaniels 1-3, Reid 1-6), Golden State 16-41 (Hield 7-13, Curry 5-11, Podziemski 2-4, Anderson 1-1, Kuminga 1-4, Green 0-1, Payton II 0-2, Moody 0-2, Waters III 0-3). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Minnesota 39 (Randle 11), Golden State 45 (Looney 9). Assists: Minnesota 22 (Edwards 6), Golden State 28 (Curry 8). Total Fouls: Minnesota 18, Golden State 20. A: 18,064 (18,064)

NHL ROUNDUP

Guentzel, Lightning beat Canucks

Field Level Media

Jake Guentzel scored a tiebreaking power-play goal late in the third period, and the Tampa Bay Lightning opened a four-game Western road trip with a 4-2 victory over the Vancouver Canucks on Sunday afternoon. Guentzel scored when Vancouver goaltender Kevin Lankinen (28 saves) deflected a shot that bounced up into the Lightning winger. It then hit Vancouver's Noah Juulsen and bounced in for Guentzel's 12th tally.

Brayden Point sealed it with an empty-net goal to give Tampa Bay its 11th win in the past 13 games (11-2-0) against Vancouver. Point had two goals and two assists, including his 300th career helper, while Nikita Kucherov was back after being out two games and totaled a goal and two assists. Goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 22 shots.

In the second game of their six-game homestand, the Canucks got tallies from Quinn Hughes and Kiefer Sherwood but fell to 1-1-1 in their past three.

Lightning forward Jake Guentzel celebrates his goal against the Canucks during the third period at Rogers Arena. BOB FRID/IMAGN IMAGES

Blue Jackets 4, Jets 1

Kent Johnson scored a pair of third-period goals for the Columbus Blue Jackets, who ended a three-game losing streak and a five-game road trip with a victory over the host Winnipeg Jets.

Johnson's goals rewarded a solid defensive effort against one of the top teams in the league.

Winnipeg, which put 44 shots on goal when the two teams met in Columbus on Nov. 1, managed just 25 on Sunday.

The Jets' lone goal came from Kyle Connor, whose team-high 15th opened the scoring and came with 8:09 remaining in the second period while Winnipeg was on a power play.

Kraken 7, Rangers 5

Oliver Bjorkstrand tallied two goals and two assists as the Seattle Kraken rallied from a two-goal deficit to defeat the host New York Rangers. Eeli Tolvanen had a goal and two assists and Shane Wright added one of each for Seattle, which wrapped up a 3-1-0 trip and defeated the Rangers for just the second time in franchise history (2-6-0).

Seattle's Brandon Tanev, Vince Dunn and Yanni Gourde also scored, while Chandler Stephenson and Matty Beniers each had two assists. Philipp Grubauer, getting the start in net because Joey Daccord was suffering from an illness, made 32 saves to win for the first time in his past seven decisions dating to Oct. 17.

K'Andre Miller and Vincent Trocheck had a goal and an assist apiece, while Adam Fox and Artemi Panarin each added two helpers for the Rangers, who have lost seven of their past nine.

Islanders 4, Senators 2

Kyle Palmieri scored the tiebreaking goal with 6:14 left for the visiting New York Islanders, who completed a successful weekend with a win over the Ottawa Senators. Anders Lee and Kyle MacLean scored in the first and Bo Horvat added an empty-netter with 51 seconds left for the Islanders, who have won two straight for just the second time this season. New York beat the visiting Carolina Hurricanes 4-3 on Saturday.

Adam Gaudette scored in the first and Josh Norris had a goal in the second for the Senators.

Avalanche 4, Devils 0

Scott Wedgewood made 25 saves and the visiting Colorado Avalanche shut out the New Jersey Devils. Ross Colton and Logan O'Connor scored first-period goals for the Avalanche, who are 3-1 on their five-game road trip. Casey Mittelstadt and Calvin de Haan each had two assists.

Wedgewood, who was drafted by the Devils and spent parts of three seasons with the club, improved to 4-0 against New Jersey. It was Wedgewood's first shutout of the season and the seventh of his career. Jake Allen made 19 saves for the Devils, who were shut out for the fifth time this season.

Utah 4, Flyers 2

Logan Cooley scored the go-ahead goal during a wild second period as the Utah Hockey Club earned a road victory over the Philadelphia Flyers.

Michael Carcone, Juuso Valimaki and Kevin Stenlund also scored for Utah, which has won two in a row for the first time since starting the season 3-0. Jaxson Stauber made 21 saves in the win.

Joel Farabee and Owen Tippett scored for the Flyers, who dropped their third straight game.

Stars 6, Flames 2

Roope Hintz broke a third-period tie while Thomas Harley scored twice as the host Dallas Stars claimed a victory over the Calgary Flames.

Jason Robertson scored once and added an assist while Wyatt Johnston and Evgenii Dadonov tallied once each and Oskar Back collected a pair of assists for the Stars, who snapped a two-game losing skid. Goaltender Jake Oettinger made 29 saves.

Jonathan Huberdeau and Connor Zary replied for the Flames, who have one victory in seven outings. Goalie Dustin Wolf stopped 22 shots.

Dallas boasts a 11-2-0 home record, the league's best home-ice winning percentage.

NHL SUMMARIES

Dallas 6, Calgary 2

Calgary	1	1	0 –	2
Dallas	1	1	4 –	6

First Period–1, Calgary, Huberdeau 9 (Kadri), 1:00. 1, Dallas, Johnston 6, 4:26. Penalties–Coleman, CGY (Hooking), 2:23. Benn, DAL (Tripping), 3:58. Bahl, CGY (Tripping), 13:59. Bahl, CGY (Interference), 17:01.
Second Period–1, Dallas, Robertson 6 (Back, Lyubushkin), 7:47. 1, Calgary, Zary 6 (Miromanov, Kuzmenko), 16:08. Penalties–Robertson, DAL (Interference), 5:39.
Third Period–1, Dallas, Hintz 11 (Lindell, Robertson), 5:13. 1, Dallas, Steel 3 (Benn), 12:01. 1, Dallas, Harley 3 (Lundkvist, Back), 13:02. 2, Dallas, Harley 4 (Marchment, Duchene), 19:02. Penalties–Pachal, CGY (High-sticking), 17:29. Stankoven, DAL (Slashing), 18:46.
Shots on Goal–Calgary 5-14-12–31. Dallas 12-7-9–28.
Power-play opportunities–Calgary 0 of 3; Dallas 0 of 4.
Goalies–Calgary, Wolf 8-5-1 (28 shots-22 saves). Dallas, Oettinger 14-6-0 (31-29).
A–18,532 (18,532).

Utah 4, Philadelphia 2

Utah	0	3	1 –	4
Philadelphia	0	2	0 –	2

First Period–None. Penalties–Bortuzzo, UTA (Interference), 2:13. Sanheim, PHI (Holding), 11:30. Couturier, PHI (Hooking), 15:43.
Second Period–1, Utah, Carcone 2 (Bortuzzo), 7:01. 1, Philadelphia, Farabee 4 (Seeler, Konecny), 7:20. 1, Utah, Valimaki 1 (Sergachev, McBain), 9:42. 1, Philadelphia, Tippett 8 (Seeler, Michkov), 13:34. 1, Utah, Cooley 7 (Guenther, Keller), 15:30. Penalties–Foerster, PHI (Delay of Game), 14:21.
Third Period–1, Utah, Stenlund 3, 15:43. Penalties–Cole, UTA (High-sticking), 14:01. Hayton, UTA (Roughing), 19:43. Michkov, PHI (Roughing), 19:43. Michkov, PHI (Misconduct), 19:43.
Shots on Goal–Utah 12-8-5–25. Philadelphia 7-9-8–24.
Power-play opportunities–Utah 1 of 3; Philadelphia 0 of 2.
Goalies–Utah, Stauber 2-0-0 (24 shots-22 saves). Philadelphia, Ersson 5-3-2 (25-21).
A–17,462 (19,523).

Colorado 4, New Jersey 0

Colorado	2	1	1 –	4
New Jersey	0	0	0 –	0

First Period–1, Colorado, Colton 9 (Mittelstadt, Nichushkin), 4:07. 1, Colorado, O'Connor 4 (de Haan, Kiviranta), 14:52. Penalties–Malinski, COL (Interference), 17:35.
Second Period–1, Colorado, Lehkonen 7 (Mittelstadt), 14:36. Penalties–Noesen, NJD (Hooking), 15:19.
Third Period–1, Colorado, Kelly 2 (Rantanen, de Haan), 16:05. Penalties–Girard, COL (Holding), 0:38. Palat, NJD (Tripping), 9:00. Colorado bench, served by Ivan (Too many men), 10:35.
Shots on Goal–Colorado 8-10-5–23. New Jersey 10-2-13–25.
Power-play opportunities–Colorado 0 of 2; New Jersey 0 of 3.
Goalies–Colorado, Wedgewood 3-3-1 (25 shots-25 saves). New Jersey, Allen 5-4-1 (22-19).
A–15,044 (17,625).

Columbus 4, Winnipeg 1

Columbus	0	1	3 –	4
Winnipeg	0	1	0 –	1

First Period–None. Penalties–Barron, WPG (Tripping), 2:51. van Riemsdyk, CBJ (Roughing), 4:41. van Riemsdyk, CBJ (Tripping), 4:41. Pionk, WPG (Roughing), 4:41. Fabbro, CBJ (Hooking), 11:31.
Second Period–1, Winnipeg, Connor 15 (Morrissey, Scheifele), 11:51. 1, Columbus, Voronkov 7 (Marchenko, Werenski), 13:53. Penalties–Severson, CBJ (High-sticking), 1:30. Danforth, CBJ (Boarding), 10:07. Lambert, WPG (High-sticking), 13:02.
Third Period–1, Columbus, Johnson 7 (Monahan, van Riemsdyk), 7:15. 2, Columbus, Johnson 8 (van Riemsdyk, Provorov), 9:42. 1, Columbus, Kuraly 3, 18:38. Penalties–None.
Shots on Goal–Columbus 12-7-9–28. Winnipeg 6-8-11–25.
Power-play opportunities–Columbus 1 of 2; Winnipeg 1 of 4.
Goalies–Columbus, Merzlikins 9-7-2 (25 shots-24 saves). Winnipeg, Comrie 3-4-0 (27-24).
A–13,887 (15,294).

Seattle 7, N.Y. Rangers 5

Seattle	0	4	3 –	7
N.Y. Rangers	1	2	2 –	5

First Period–1, N.Y. Rangers, Smith 5 (Miller, Zibanejad), 3:38. Penalties–Beniers, SEA (Slashing), 6:18. Chytil, NYR (Goaltender Interference), 8:08.
Second Period–1, Seattle, Bjorkstrand 8 (Stephenson, Beniers), 1:46. 1, N.Y. Rangers, Chytil 5 (Kakko, Cuylle), 2:50. 1, N.Y. Rangers, Trocheck 8 (Fox), 4:47. 1, Seattle, Tanev 7 (Stephens, Kartye), 14:06. 1, Seattle, Tolvanen 8 (Bjorkstrand, Wright), 15:34. 2, Seattle, Bjorkstrand 9 (Montour, Tolvanen), 19:24. Penalties–Lindgren, NYR (Elbowing), 0:14. Montour, SEA (Cross-checking), 4:31.
Third Period–1, Seattle, Dunn 3 (Burakovsky, Stephenson), 1:00. 1, Seattle, Wright 7 (Tolvanen, Bjorkstrand), 11:13. 1, N.Y. Rangers, Miller 2 (Panarin, Fox), 12:27. 1, N.Y. Rangers, Lafreniere 9 (Trocheck, Panarin), 14:57. 1, Seattle, Gourde 5 (Beniers, Oleksiak), 18:14. Penalties–None.
Shots on Goal–Seattle 6-11-5–22. N.Y. Rangers 12-12-13–37.
Power-play opportunities–Seattle 1 of 2; N.Y. Rangers 1 of 2.
Goalies–Seattle, Grubauer 2-8-0 (37 shots-32 saves). N.Y. Rangers, Quick 5-2-0 (21-15).
A–18,006 (18,200).

N.Y. Islanders 4, Ottawa 2

N.Y. Islanders	2	0	2 –	4
Ottawa	1	1	0 –	2

First Period–1, Ottawa, Gaudette 13 (Gregor, Stuetzle), 5:37. 1, N.Y. Islanders, Lee 12 (Dobson, Palmieri), 12:27. 1, N.Y. Islanders, MacLean 2 (Cholowski, Engvall), 14:48. Penalties–Giroux, OTT (High-sticking), 12:09. Palmieri, NYI (Interference), 19:22.
Second Period–1, Ottawa, Norris 12 (Batherson, Stuetzle), 0:37. Penalties–MacLean, NYI (High-sticking), 12:34.
Third Period–1, N.Y. Islanders, Palmieri 11 (Lee, Dobson), 13:46. 1, N.Y. Islanders, Horvat 7, 19:09. Penalties–Wahlstrom, NYI (Tripping), 7:16. Norris, OTT (Tripping), 13:00.
Shots on Goal–N.Y. Islanders 5-5-3–13. Ottawa 12-7-12–31.
Power-play opportunities–N.Y. Islanders 2 of 2; Ottawa 1 of 3.
Goalies–N.Y. Islanders, Sorokin 8-7-4 (31 shots-29 saves). Ottawa, Forsberg 4-6-0 (12-9).
A–15,878 (19,153).

Tampa Bay 4, Vancouver 2

Tampa Bay	0	2	2 –	4
Vancouver	1	0	1 –	2

First Period–1, Vancouver, Hughes 7 (Suter), 16:08. Penalties–Hagel, TBL (High-sticking), 0:55.
Second Period–1, Tampa Bay, Kucherov 13 (McDonagh, Point), 4:40. 1, Tampa Bay, Point 17 (Kucherov, Hedman), 6:29. Penalties–Desharnais, VAN (Tripping), 5:08. Geekie, TBL (Cross-checking), 7:35. Suter, VAN (Tripping), 16:13. Garland, VAN (Hooking), 18:58.
Third Period–1, Vancouver, Sherwood 8 (Myers, Raty), 4:52. 1, Tampa Bay, Guentzel 12 (Kucherov, Point), 16:04. 2, Tampa Bay, Point 18, 19:42. Penalties–Vancouver bench, served by Hoglander (Too many men), 14:09.
Shots on Goal–Tampa Bay 6-18-8–32. Vancouver 8-5-12–25.
Power-play opportunities–Tampa Bay 2 of 4; Vancouver 0 of 3.
Goalies–Tampa Bay, Vasilevskiy 12-8-1 (25 shots-23 saves). Vancouver, Lankinen 13-4-3 (31-28).
A–18,290 (18,910).

Scheffler

Continued from Page 1NS

Players Championship and Tour Championship. He also won a gold medal at the Paris Olympics, which he counts as win No. 8.

"Gotta enjoy each one, they're all so unique," Scheffler's caddie Ted Scott said. "It's just good to see him back on the horse." And he smiled a wry smile before dashing to the airport to catch a flight.

Scheffler opened with 67 and followed with a bogey-free 64 to assume the lead. But he shot a rather pedestrian third-round 69 and trailed Justin Thomas by one stroke heading into the final round. Thomas wedged from 112 yards to 3 feet at the first to protect his one-shot lead. But he made bogeys at Nos. 2 and 5 (and a birdie at three) to lose the lead and never got it back. Scheffler now has shot lower than Thomas, who closed in 71 and finished alone in third, eight of the last nine times they have been paired together.

"I would have liked to put a little more heat obviously on Scottie going to the back nine," Thomas said. "But I mean, you know, obviously I can't expect to have good things happen when I'm leading by one over Scottie and only shooting 1 under on Sunday."

Scheffler stormed out of the gate hot to let it be known he meant business. He drained an 8-foot birdie at the first and reached the par-5 third hole in two and two-putted for another birdie. Then a body blow to the hopes of his competitors at the fourth: He sank a 49-foot birdie putt.

Scottie Scheffler walks the 18th fairway during the final round of the Hero World Challenge on Sunday in Nassau, Bahamas. KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES

"Anytime you see a long putt go in like that, it's always a good feeling and it's good momentum and I try to use that as good fuel for the rest of the round," he said.

Kim, who closed in 68, cut Scheffler's lead to one momentarily with a 4-foot birdie at the ninth before Scheffler converted his own 4-foot birdie putt at nine in the next group. He kept the pedal down on the back nine, making birdie at 10 and went flag hunting at 13. He dripped in the 6-foot putt using the claw grip, taking his palm of the right hand off the club, which he used from around 15 feet and in this week for the first time in competition.

"It's over," a fan said, perhaps prematurely, but he wasn't wrong.

Scheffler left little doubt down the stretch, driving the green at the 359-yard par 4 14th for another birdie and adding circles on the card at Nos. 16 and 18.

When it was all said and done, some of the best players were left with nothing else to do but praise his brilliance.

"Sometimes he makes the competition look like he's just playing around with us, you know what I mean, which isn't easy to do," Jason Day said.

To Kim, who often played money games at home in Dallas with Scheffler before the birth of Bennett and noted he lost 95 percent of those matches marveled at how Scheffler never goes out and shoots a bad score.

"He comes out here and wins, he does it all the time," Kim said. "I think the biggest thing that I see is that he's always trying to get better. Despite winning nine times this year, he's always finding little ways and I think it's really, really cool to see and you can take a lot from that."

Thomas and others echoed a similar sentiment that Scheffler excels at handling all the outside noise — whether it be the birth of his baby or being arrested before his tee time at the PGA Championship or just dealing with expectations he's supposed to win every time he tees it up. No one has proved better at being able to compartmentalize and stay in his own little bubble.

"I don't think people understand how difficult it is to win when you're expected to win or when every single person that's there expects you to play well and you expect you to play well and then to still play well," Thomas said. "It truly is just as much of a talent as being able to, you know, control your distance with your wedges or flight a driver or hit it far, whatever it is, is being able to stay present, stay in the moment.

"It's very hard to explain, but it's so hard to do sometimes," Thomas added. "To me that's been the most impressive thing from Scottie."

The year 2024 was for Scottie Scheffler, and if his latest putting adjustment is any indication, he's in for only more success in 2025.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

NOTEBOOK

Purdue hires Odom as coach

Blake Toppmeyer
USA TODAY NETWORK

Purdue hired Barry Odom on Sunday to be its football coach, fresh off Odom leading UNLV to its best season in 40 years.

Odom, 48, is 44-33 in six seasons as a coach, including four at Missouri and the past two at UNLV. He led the Rebels to the Mountain West Conference championship game, where they lost to Boise State on Friday. Had UNLV won, it would have been in the running to reach the College Football Playoff.

"During our interactions with Coach Odom, it became clear that he possesses the belief, tenacity and competitive drive necessary to return Purdue football to the standard of excellence we all expect," Purdue athletics director Mike Bobinski said in a news release announcing the hire. "He is a proven and experienced leader who has brought success to two different football programs."

Odom replaces Ryan Walters, whom Purdue fired on Dec. 1. Walters went 5-19 in two seasons with the Boilermakers. That included a 1-11 record this season.

The push to jump-start Purdue comes during college football's rapidly changing landscape, including the dawn of the first 12-team CFP bracket, revealed Sunday. Indiana, Purdue's longstanding rival, earned a playoff bid under first-year coach Curt Cignetti, despite being a longshot to reach this field before the season. And the chasm between the programs couldn't seem bigger: Indiana beat Purdue 66-0 on Nov. 30, a day before Purdue fired Walters.

Odom earned his first college head-coaching job at Missouri, his alma mater, from 2016-19. He went 25-25 there but only had one losing season. The Tigers made two bowl appearances under his watch and were 6-6 in his final season in 2019. Odom's past stints also include defensive coordinator stops at Memphis, Missouri and Arkansas.

Odom's 10-3 record this season at UNLV marks the best season of his career.

UNLV head coach Barry Odom reacts during the second half against Kansas at Children's Mercy Park. JAY BIGGERSTAFF/IMAGN IMAGES

UCF hires Frost

The architect of UCF's greatest football season in program history is back. Scott Frost will return as the Knights' head coach, agreeing to a five-year contract that runs through the 2029 season, athletic director Terry Mohajir announced late Saturday evening in a statement. The Orlando Sentinel's Matt Murschel first reported the news.

Frost takes over for Gus Malzahn, who resigned Nov. 30 to become Florida State's offensive coordinator.

"Today marks an exciting reunion for UCF Football as we welcome back Scott Frost, a coach who ignites the spirit and passion of Knight Nation," Mohajir said. "Scott's love for his players, along with his leadership, enthusiasm and vision were pivotal in making the decision to bring him back to UCF. Throughout this national search, his passion for UCF was clear. I believe no one wanted to lead our program more than Scott."

Frost, 49, went 19-7 in his first tour of duty in Orlando — capped by the memorable, undefeated 2017 season in which the Knights claimed a national championship after a Peach Bowl triumph over Auburn.

"I'm deeply honored to return to UCF, a school that has always held a special place in my heart," Frost said. "The foundation we built here has only grown stronger, and I am thrilled to continue shaping this program's legacy. As we prepare for year three in the Big 12 Conference, I look forward to working alongside our dedicated student-athletes, talented staff, and passionate fans to reach new heights together."

He departed for his alma mater, Nebraska, but was fired in 2022 after posting a 16-31 record without reaching a bowl game. The Cornhuskers lost 22 of 27 games decided by one possession during Frost's tenure.

— Chris Boyle, Daytona Beach News-Journal

Tulsa set to hire Lamb as coach

Tulsa football has agreed to a deal to make East Tennessee State's Tre Lamb its next head coach.

Lamb will replace Kevin Wilson, who got fired on Nov. 24 after two seasons at the helm. ESPN's Pete Thamel first reported the news on Sunday.

Lamb, 35, has enjoyed success at the FCS level. He spent one year at East Tennessee State and helped the program improve from 3-8 in 2023 to 7-5 this season.

Lamb also spent four seasons as the head coach at Gardner-Webb from 2020-23. He went 20-20 during that time and led the team to two FCS playoff appearances.

Lamb is now tasked with helping Tulsa turn things around. The Golden Hurricane (3-9, 1-7 AAC) posted a losing record for the third straight season.

— Justin Martinez, The Oklahoman

Toppmeyer

Continued from Page 1NS

more supreme valuation of conference runners-up. Texas and Penn State lost their respective conference championship games but earned the Nos. 5 and 6 seeds, respectively, the highest seeds available to at-large qualifiers.

Those seeds are particularly valuable within this bracket format, because it guarantees Texas and Penn State won't face either of the playoff's top two seeds, Oregon and Georgia, sooner than the semifinals.

Texas could coast into the semifinals without beating a top-10 team.

The committee seeded Penn State two spots ahead of eighth-seeded Ohio State after the Buckeyes beat Penn State in Happy Valley just more than a month ago. While Penn State enjoys arguably the most ideal placement in the bracket — it opens against SMU — the Buckeyes received one of the toughest draws. They'll start by hosting Tennessee, and No. 1 Oregon awaits the winner.

The Nittany Lions own one extra victory than Ohio State, but they have the same number of losses. The Buckeyes beat two playoff teams, including — let's reiterate — Penn State. The Nittany Lions beat no playoff teams and only one team in the CFP's top 25. But, hey, they've got that Big Ten silver medal. That's as good as gold.

If the committee had rejected SMU or penalized Penn State in the seeding, it would have signaled that conference championship results matter. As is, it's as if SMU and Penn State lost in glorified exhibition games Saturday, and the committee deemed those results mostly meaningless.

CFP welcomes ACC runner-up, rejects Army, BYU, others

Much of the attention Sunday centered on whether the committee would choose Alabama or SMU for the final at-large spot. Let's put aside for the moment Alabama, a team that lost to two 6-6 opponents, and look at Army.

If the committee were willing to embrace a team with a squishy strength of schedule to avoid selecting a three-loss team, why not choose the 11-1 Black Knights, who pummeled Tulane to win the AAC? Army's only loss came against Notre Dame, a caliber of opponent SMU never faced.

SMU wide receiver Jordan Hudson (8) is tackled by Clemson cornerback Avieon Terrell during the ACC championship game. JIM DEDMON/IMAGN IMAGES

College football bowl schedule

Can be found on **Page 9NS**

If this had been an exercise of valuing conference champions, select Army. If it's about valuing record, there again, Army looks good. Avoiding losses to bad teams? Army still looks good.

Don't like Army's strength of schedule? Understood. If strength of schedule rules, opt for Alabama or South Carolina. Or, if impressive victories rule, choose Ole Miss, which smashed Georgia and South Carolina.

Value head-to-head results? OK, consider Brigham Young, a two-loss team that beat SMU in the Mustangs' stadium in September and played a tougher schedule than SMU.

By embracing SMU, the committee went for none of those alternative ideas. Instead, when forced to make tough selection and seeding decisions, this committee chose a peculiar path and protected conference runners-up who didn't get blown out. SMU, Penn State and Texas combined for six losses, the most lopsided of which was Texas' 15-point regular-season loss to Georgia.

In contrast, Alabama suffered a blowout two weeks ago at Oklahoma. Adios, Alabama. South Carolina got trounced at home in October by Ole Miss. Bye-bye, Gamecocks, even though you beat Clemson one week before SMU lost. Clemson lost in a lopsided game to Georgia in the season opener. Enjoy that 12-seed, Tigers. And Army got whipped by Notre Dame, so the committee ignored the Black Knights' conference title.

The case for SMU centered almost entirely around its 11 victories — a figure Army matched while playing one fewer game — and the Mustangs' ACC red ribbon. By luck of the draw, SMU avoided Clemson, Miami and Syracuse during the regular season. Those three teams join SMU as the ACC's only teams ranked inside this CFP top 25.

The 17-team ACC plays only eight conference games. SMU's favorable schedule draw set it up for a runner-up finish that it parlayed into a sweet prize.

"It would be criminal if we are not in," SMU's Rhett Lashlee told reporters after losing to Clemson. "It would be wrong not just to our team but to what college football stands for."

I understand Lashlee campaigning for his team, but I'm sorry, since when has college football stood for protecting the ACC's runner-up? Since Sunday.

Never in college football's history has there been a better time to lose a conference championship game.

Blake Toppmeyer is the USA TODAY Network's national college football columnist. Email him at BToppmeyer@gannett.com and follow him on X @btoppmeyer.

COLLEGE MEN'S BASKETBALL TOP 25 ROUNDUP

Bates, Missouri topple No. 1 Kansas

Field Level Media

Tamar Bates scored a season-high 29 points for Missouri to spark a 76-67 upset of visiting No. 1 Kansas on Sunday in Columbia, Mo.

Mark Mitchell added 17 points for the Tigers (8-1), while Anthony Robinson II scored 11 as Missouri beat its "Border War" rival for the first time since February 2012. Robinson and Bates both tallied five steals, as the Tigers forced 22 Kansas turnovers.

Josh Gray added seven points and 10 rebounds for Missouri, which saw its 24-point lead reduced to two before pulling away late. Missouri's eight wins matched its total from all of last season.

Hunter Dickinson's 19 points and 14 rebounds led Kansas (7-2), which will tumble in the Top 25 after losing its second in a row. David Coit scored 14 for the Jayhawks, followed by Dajuan Harris Jr.'s 13 and KJ Adams Jr.'s 11.

Missouri guard Aidan Shaw celebrates with fans after defeating Kansas at Mizzou Arena. JAY BIGGERSTAFF/IMAGN IMAGES

No. 2 Auburn 98, Richmond 54

Miles Kelly and Tahaad Pettiford scored 15 points apiece and Auburn (8-1) never trailed in cruising to a rout of visiting Richmond in Auburn, Ala.

Chad Baker-Mazara added 13 along with Jahki Howard, who appeared in his second game since Nov. 6 against Vermont. Johni Broome added 11 as did Denver Jones, who was scoreless against Duke.

Mikkel Tyne scored 16 to lead Richmond (4-5), which fell to 0-27 all-time against top-five opponents.

No. 5 Iowa State 100, Jackson State 58

Curtis Jones came off the bench to score 19 points and drain a handful of 3-pointers and Iowa State marched to a win over Jackson State in Ames, Iowa.

Jones made 6 of 12 shots from the field and 5 of 10 shots from beyond the arc for the Cyclones (7-1). Milan Momcilovic finished with 18 points on 6-for-10 shooting, including a 4-for-6 mark from 3-point range.

Dorian McMillian scored 20 points to lead Jackson State (0-10). Juan Reyna III finished with 15 points and a team-high six assists.

No. 7 Purdue 83, Maryland 78

Braden Smith paired 24 points with 10 assists to help Purdue fend off visiting Maryland in Big Ten play in West Lafayette, Ind.

Smith led the Boilermakers with five 3-pointers and made 4 of 5 in the second half to help Purdue (8-2, 1-1 Big Ten) pick up its first conference win after losing 81-70 at Penn State on Thursday. Trey Kaufman-Renn added 21 points with eight rebounds, Camden Heide netted 15 points and Fletcher Loyer scored 12 to go along with seven rebounds for the Boilermakers.

Derik Queen bundled 26 points and 12 rebounds — both game-highs — and Ja'Kobi Gillespie added 18 points for the Terrapins (8-2, 1-1).

No. 9 Duke 76, Louisville 65

Cooper Flagg scored 20 points and grabbed 12 rebounds for Duke, but the visiting Blue Devils (7-2) did not need their freshman phenom in the game as they rallied to beat host Louisville.

Flagg, who fouled out in the final minute, led four Blue Devils in double figures. Tyrese Proctor went for 13 points, Kon Knueppel added 12 and Sion James finished with 11.

Terrence Edwards Jr. led Louisville (5-4) with 21 points.

UCLA 73, No. 10 Oregon 71

Dylan Andrews banked in a 3-pointer with 0.4 seconds left giving UCLA (8-1) a victory over Oregon at Eugene, Ore.

Oklahoma State transfer Eric Dailey, Jr. led the Bruins with a season-high 19 points on 7-of-8 shooting from the field.

Kobe Johnson finished with 11 points and Andrews and Sebastian Mack each had 10 points.

Nate Bittle led Oregon (9-1) with 22 points and 10 rebounds.

No. 14 Cincinnati 84, Howard 67

Simas Lukosius scored 18 points for Cincinnati, which used a second-half surge to beat visiting Howard.

Coming off a loss at former Big East-rival Villanova on Tuesday, the Bearcats (7-1) faced a struggle early on against the Bison (3-6), the two-time defending Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference champions who took Cincinnati to overtime last season.

The lead changed 10 times during the first half.

Aziz Bandaogo scored 17 points for the Bearcats, who also got 14 points from Dillon Mitchell.

Arkansas State 85, No. 15 Memphis 72

Joseph Pinion scored 22 points, Dyondre Dominguez added 19 and visiting Arkansas State upset Memphis.

Taryn Todd scored 17 and Kobe Julien had 12 for the Red Wolves (7-3), who made 12-of-36 3-pointers compared to 7-of-22 for the Tigers (7-2).

PJ Haggerty scored 29 points, Dain Dainja added 16 points and 12 rebounds off the bench and Colby Rogers scored 11 to lead Memphis, which trailed for all but two minutes.

No. 24 Texas A&M 72, Texas Tech 67

Wade Taylor IV racked up 19 points that included eight in the final 3:22 of the game as Texas A&M outlasted Texas Tech in the USLBM Coast-to-Coast Challenge in Fort Worth, Texas.

Jace Carter added 16 points and Zhuric Phelps had 12 for the Aggies (8-2), who have won four straight games.

Chance McMillian's 23 points were a game high, while Kevin Overton added 17 and Darrion Williams had 11 for Texas Tech (7-2), which had a three-game winning streak snapped.

MLB

Parker, Allen elected to Hall of Fame

Field Level Media

Sluggers Dave Parker and Dick Allen will be enshrined in Cooperstown, N.Y., this summer after both were elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame on Sunday by the Classic Era Committee. Needing a vote of at least 75 percent, Parker received 14 of 16 votes and Allen, who died in 2020 at the age of 78, got 13 votes.

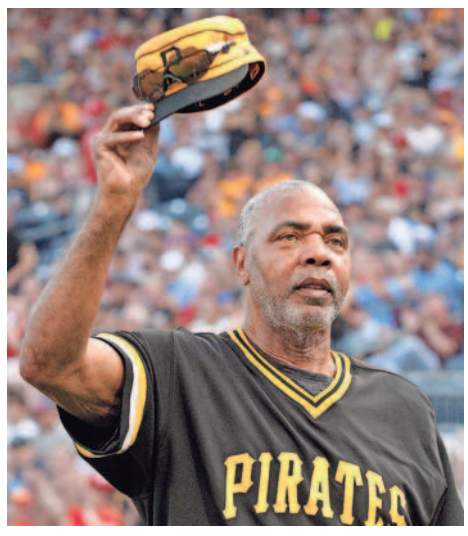
Tommy John finished third with seven votes, while Steve Garvey, Luis Tiant, Ken Boyer, Vic Harris and John Donaldson all received less than five votes.

Parker and Allen will be inducted on July 27 along with players voted in by the Baseball Writers' Association of America. Those ballots will be revealed on Jan. 21.

"I'm looking forward to being there," Parker said of the induction ceremonies on the MLB Network. "I've been holding this speech in for 15 years."

Parker, 73, starred in the 1970s for the Pittsburgh Pirates, winning the 1978 National League MVP award and back-to-back NL batting titles in 1977-78. In 1979, when the Pirates won the World Series, the seven-time All-Star hit .310 with 25 home runs and 94 RBIs.

Over 19 seasons with the Pirates (1973-83), Cincinnati Reds (1984-87), Oakland Athletics (1988-89), Milwaukee Brewers (1990), California Angels (1991) and Toronto Blue Jays (1991), Parker hit .290 with 339 home runs and 1,493 RBIs in 2,466 games. The right fielder had a strong throwing arm and was a three-time Gold Glove winner and three-time Silver Slugger.



Dave Parker hit .290 with 339 home runs and 1,493 RBIs in 2,466 games. CHARLES LECLAIRE/USA TODAY SPORTS

Dick Allen hit .292 with 351 home runs and 1,119 RBIs in 1,749 games. MALCOLM EMMONS/USA TODAY SPORTS

"The 70s were tough," Parker said. "You had to be a heck of a player to play in the 70s. I enjoyed that. I loved the competition. I just enjoyed playing."

Parker, who is battling Parkinson's disease, touched on his long wait for this night to arrive and something about the modern game he would like.

"It was a long time waiting. So it was exciting," Parker said of the call coming in. "I wish I could play in today's market with the salaries that they are giving away. I think that would be ideal."

Parker earned $200,000 in his MVP season of 1978.

Allen was also a former MVP and a seven-time All-Star, winning the AL MVP award with the Chicago White Sox in 1972. He was also named the 1964 NL Rookie of the Year with the Philadelphia Phillies.

In 15 seasons with the Phillies (1963-69, 1975-76), St. Louis Cardinals (1970), Los Angeles Dodgers (1971), White Sox (1972-74) and Athletics (1977), Allen hit .292 with 351 home runs and 1,119 RBIs in 1,749 games.

"What a tremendous, well-deserved honor for my friend Dick who has always been a Hall of Famer to me," said shortstop Larry Bowa, a Philadelphia teammate of Allen's during the 1975-76 seasons. "He meant so much to the Phillies organization throughout the years. His experience and leadership were instrumental in the development of players like (Hall of Famer Mike) Schmidt, Bob Boone, Greg Luzinski, Garry Maddox and myself. He taught me how to play the game the right way. I am elated that he is finally going into the Hall of Fame."

Soto

Continued from Page 1NS

average annual of $47.5 million.

Now, unless Soto exercises his right to opt out of the contract after 2029, he will put his significant talents on display in Flushing past his 40th birthday.

Soto, 26, was in high demand from Major League Baseball's usual coterie of big-revenue, big-spending teams, and the Yankees had at least the advantage of familiarity after Soto's one year in the Bronx resulted in 41 home runs, a .989 OPS and a run to their first World Series appearance since 2009.

But as the process wound down, the Mets stepped forward and separated themselves from a pack that included the Yankees and Boston Red Sox to secure one of the game's great all-time hitters and playoff performers.

Soto debuted at 19 and by 26 has already played in two World Series and three league championship series — and has performed excellently in October. He's a career .281 hitter with a .927 OPS and 11 home runs in 43 postseason games — including the pennant-clinching shot for the Yankees at Cleveland in Game 5 of the ALCS.

His performance on the biggest stages only burnishes his vast accomplishments within the game's daily grind: Soto's .421 on-base percentage leads active players, he has a .953 career OPS and has won a batting title, with a career .281 average.

That's put him on a career track mirroring players either already in the Hall of Fame — such as Ken Griffey Jr., Frank Robinson and Mickey Mantle — or those who are near-locks to make it, such as his former Washington teammate Bryce Harper and Mike Trout.

Yet for all his greatness, the Mets will be Soto's fourth team in four seasons. After Soto led them to the 2019 World Series title, the Nationals digressed and found it more prudent to restructure on the back of a Soto trade and dealt him to San Diego in August 2022.

The Padres made a run to the 2022 NLCS but, after a lackluster 2023, needed to pare payroll and shipped Soto to the Yankees for four players. It was a true win-win: The Padres and Yankees were both playoff teams eliminated by the eventual champion Los Angeles Dodgers.

After that defeat, Soto proclaimed himself "available to all 30 teams," which wasn't exactly a harbinger of joy for the Yankees. The price tag kept climbing until the Mets met it.

And now, Soto may not have to relocate for quite some time.

Soto's $51 million annual salary exceeds the present value of Ohtani's deal, which the MLB Players' Association valued at $46 million since $680 million of it is deferred. It's rarefied air for a yearly salary, occupied only by the likes of Golden State Warriors star Stephen Curry, whose current four-year, $215 million deal carries an average annual value of $53.8 million.

As for the Yankees? They stayed in the fight for Soto beyond what they might have considered rational, until, perhaps, it was clear they would not outbid Cohen. Yankees owner Hal Steinbrenner met the demand when reigning MVP Aaron Judge hit free agency two years ago, and signed him to a nine-year, $360 million deal.

COLLEGE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL TOP 25 ROUNDUP

No. 4 South Carolina runs past No. 13 TCU

Field Level Media

MiLaysia Fulwiley collected 20 points and three steals, and No. 4 South Carolina lowered the boom on No. 13 TCU in the second quarter for an 85-52 win in the Coast to Coast Challenge in Fort Worth, Texas.

Te-Hina Paopao and Raven Johnson scored 11 points apiece for South Carolina (9-1), which ran its winning streak to four since losing its only game of the season. The Gamecocks handed TCU its first loss and also scored the most points of the season against TCU, which entered Sunday tied for second in Division I by allowing only 49.1 points per game.

Haile Van Lith netted 21 points for TCU (9-1), which was the home team in the game played at Dickie's Arena instead of the Schollmaier Arena on campus.

After Van Lith's 3-pointer pulled the Horned Frogs within six to close the first quarter, the Gamecocks scored 10 straight points to open the second. After a 9-3 TCU run, South Carolina put together an 11-0 burst to lead by 21 at halftime, and the rout was on.

South Carolina guard MiLaysia Fulwiley (12) scores a layup past TCU guard Hailey Van Lith (10) during the first half at Dickies Arena. CHRIS JONES/IMAGN IMAGES

No. 1 UCLA 73, Washington 62

Lauren Betts scored 23 points on 10-of-16 shooting and Kiki Rice added 18 points as No. 1 UCLA survived a third-quarter challenge from Washington to win the Big Ten Conference opener in Seattle.

UCLA (9-0, 1-0 Big Ten) led 35-25 at halftime but had to rely on Betts and Rice, who combined to score 16 of the Bruins' 22 points in the third period.

Washington's Elle Ladine, Dalayah Daniels and Hannah Stines teamed for 21 of the Huskies' 24 points in the third, but Washington (7-3, 0-1) still trailed by eight going into the fourth. Ladine finished with a team-high 19 points.

The Bruins shot 54.2 percent from the field, including 66.7 percent in the third. The Huskies shot just 40.4 percent from the field despite making 9 of 15 shots (60 percent) in the third.

No. 3 Texas 93, James Madison 62

Madison Booker, Jordan Lee and Rori Harmon dominated the first half as the Longhorns clobbered the host Dukes in Harrisonburg, Va.

Booker scored 21 points, Lee added 20 and Harmon 19 by combining on 25-of-33 shooting. They had 49 of their points in the first half as Texas (7-1) piled up a 58-29 halftime lead.

The Longhorns, who entered seventh in the nation in scoring at 90 points per game, shot 54 percent for the game to 40 percent for the Dukes.

Roshala Scott led James Madison (7-3) with 22 points and Peyton McDaniel and Ashanti Barnes had 12 apiece. McDaniel added eight rebounds for the Dukes, who had 24 turnovers.

No. 5 LSU 100, Grambling State 54

Aneesah Morrow had a field day for the unbeaten Tigers against the Lady Tigers, scoring a season-high 26 points on 10-of-14 shooting in Bossier City, La.

Morrow also had 16 rebounds, four steals and one block as LSU (11-0) mounted a 54-29 lead by halftime.

Flau'Jae Johnson, who entered the day ninth in Division I in scoring at 22.2 points, scored 20 and Mikay Williams 16 as LSU had no player go more than 26 minutes.

Halima Salat led Grambling State (2-7) with 12 points, Lydia Freeman added 10 and Alyssa Phillip snared seven rebounds.

No. 9 Duke 81, Virginia Tech 59

Freshman reserve Toby Fournier scored 27 points on 12-of-17 shooting and added nine rebounds as the Blue Devils won their Atlantic Coast Conference opener against the Hokies.

Delaney Thomas added 14 points on 6-of-8 shooting and Oluchi Okananwa chipped in 12 points and 12 boards for Duke (9-2, 1-0), which led 15-8 after one quarter thanks to seven points by Fournier.

Duke shot 51.6 percent for the game to 43.6 percent for Virginia Tech.

Carleigh Wenzel scored 19 points for the Hokies (7-3, 0-1), and Carys Baker and Samyha Suffren notched 11 and 10 points, respectively.

No. 10 Notre Dame 93, Syracuse 62

The Fighting Irish pulled away from a seven-point halftime lead to demolish the host Orange in the ACC opener for both schools.

The trio of Sonia Citron, Hannah Hidalgo and Olivia Miles led Notre Dame's win with double-doubles. Citron had 25 points and 11 rebounds, Hidalgo racked up 24 and 10, respectively, and Miles shone with 20 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists.

Hidalgo, third in Division I in scoring (24.6 ppg), netted nine points and Citron had eight in the third quarter, as Notre Dame (7-2, 1-0 ACC) outscored Syracuse (4-6, 0-1) 29-13 to pull away.

Keira Scott posted 16 points and Sophie Burrows tacked on 13 for the Orange, who shot only 32.5 percent. The Irish shot 50 percent and thrived despite 20 turnovers.

No. 11 Oklahoma 110, Alabama State 46

Skylar Vann scored 18 of her 20 points in the first half as the Sooners roared to a 68-29 lead at intermission and emptied the bench in crushing the Lady Hornets.

Raegan Beers and Aubrey Joens had 14 points apiece, Payton Verhulst 13 and Lexy Keys 11 for Oklahoma (8-1), which put 13 players in the scoring column. The Sooners, the sixth-highest scoring team in the nation entering Sunday, shot a blistering 58.9 percent from the field and made 12 steals, three by Verhulst.

Justina Graham finished with 10 points and Alanah Pooler nine for Alabama State (2-7), which had 27 turnovers.

No. 7 Ohio State 83, No. 21 Illinois 74

Cotie McMahon scored 11 of her 25 points in the third quarter as the unbeaten Buckeyes built a big enough lead to hold off the Fighting Illini in the Big Ten Conference opener in Columbus, Ohio.

McMahon, one of three players for Ohio State (8-0, 1-0 Big Ten) to average about 16 points per game, began the third quarter with a three-point play to push the Buckeyes' lead to 17, and her 3-pointer extended the cushion to 18 midway through the period.

Illinois (7-2, 0-1) trimmed its deficit to eight on Genesis Bryant's trey with 3:04 left in the game, but the Fighting Illini were unable to get any closer. Bryant led Illinois with 22 points, followed by Kendall Bostic (17 points, 13 rebounds) and Jasmine Brown-Hagger (14 points).

No. 12 Kansas State 89, Texas A&M 50

The Wildcats shot 50.7 percent from the field and scored at least 20 points in each of the first three quarters in routing the Aggies in College Station, Texas.

Taryn Sides led the onslaught with 19 points, seven rebounds and six assists. Zyanna Walker netted 17 points, Serena Sundell 16 and Jaelyn Glenn 12 for Kansas State (10-1). Sundell had 11 in the first half as the Wildcats built a 46-25 cushion.

Aicha Coulibaly scored 12 points to pace the Aggies (5-5), who made only 31.1 percent of their shots and had 18 turnovers. The Wildcats held Texas A&M right at their average in points allowed per game, 50.3, which was ninth in the nation entering Sunday.

No. 15 North Carolina 72, Coppin State 46

The Tar Heels built a comfortable halftime lead and used its bench players freely in devouring the Eagles in Chapel Hill, N.C.

North Carolina (9-1) entered second-best in the nation in scoring defense at 49.1 points per game and excelled again, holding Coppin State to 27.3 percent shooting.

Meanwhile, the Tar Heels shot 44.4 percent while having 12 players enter the scoring column, led by Maria Gakdeng's 10 points on 5-of-6 shooting. Reniya Kelly scored six of her eight points in the first quarter as North Carolina took a 23-13 lead. The Tar Heels grew the lead to 46-27 by intermission.

Tiffany Hammond and Angel Jones scored 12 points apiece for Coppin State (6-5), and Laila Lawrence added 10 points with 10 rebounds.

No. 18 Ole Miss 85, Tennessee State 38

The Rebels had more points by halftime than the Lady Tigers scored in the game after jumping out to a 14-2 lead in the first quarter and 44-19 by intermission. Kennedy Todd-Williams led Ole Miss (6-3) with 15 points and seven rebounds, and Sira Thienou added 12 and six, respectively. The Rebels shot 46 percent for the game.

Ole Miss began the day seventh in the nation in scoring defense at 49.8 points allowed per game, and it punished Tennessee State to the tune of 23.6 percent shooting and 22 forced turnovers.

XaiOnna Whitfield led the Lady Tigers (4-6) with 10 points.

No. 19 Iowa State 82, Central Michigan 56

Audi Crooks scored 19 points on 9-of-12 shooting and added 10 rebounds as the Cyclones slammed the Chippewas in Ames, Iowa.

Emily Ryan netted 10 of her 12 points in the first quarter and Crooks scored nine in the period as Iowa State (8-2) jumped out to a 31-13 lead and enjoyed a cushion of at least 18 points the rest of the way. Addy Brown added 18 points for the Cyclones, who shot 52.5 percent and rolled despite having 20 turnovers.

Jayda Mosley led Central Michigan (3-6) with 11 points and Madi Morson and Ayanna-Sarai Darrington added 10 apiece. The Chippewas shot only 33.3 percent from the floor and had 26 turnovers.

No. 25 Michigan State 89, DePaul 61

The unbeaten Spartans put four scorers in double figures as they systematically disposed of the Blue Demons in East Lansing, Mich.

Jaddan Simmons finished with 18 points, five rebounds and five assists, and Julia Ayrault stuffed the stat sheet with 17 points, 12 rebounds, five assists and three steals for Michigan State (9-0). Emma Shumate and Jocelyn Tate had 12 and 10 points, respectively.

Jorie Allen put up 15 points, 11 boards, seven assists and three steals and Grace Carstensen also notched 15 points for DePaul (3-7), which shot just 28.8 percent despite hitting 9 of 18 of its 3-point attempts. The Spartans led by seven after one quarter and 17 at halftime before coasting through the second half.

AUTO RACING

Norris' Abu Dhabi win gives McLaren F1 title

Alan Baldwin
Reuters

ABU DHABI — Lando Norris led the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix from start to finish on Sunday to end McLaren's 26-year wait for a Formula One constructors' title. The Briton delivered in style after Australian team mate Oscar Piastri tangled with Red Bull's quadruple world champion Max Verstappen at the first corner and dropped to the back of the field.

Piastri finished 10th, with Carlos Sainz and Charles Leclerc second and third for Ferrari, McLaren's historic rivals over the decades and the only team that could have beaten them to the championship.

"You all deserve this. Thank you so much. It's been a special year," said Norris over the team radio after taking the checkered flag for his fourth win of the season.

"Next year is going to be my year too."

The 25 points, and Piastri's one, left McLaren 14 clear of Ferrari and champions for the first time since 1998. Norris finished the season as overall runner-up. Seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton finished fourth in his last race for Mercedes, starting 16th and overtaking team mate George Russell on the 58th and final lap.

He joins Leclerc, who made stunning progress through the field after starting 19th, at Ferrari next season.

"Lewis, that was the drive of a world champion," said Mercedes boss Toto Wolff, who could at least take some consolation in McLaren winning with the German manufacturer's engines.

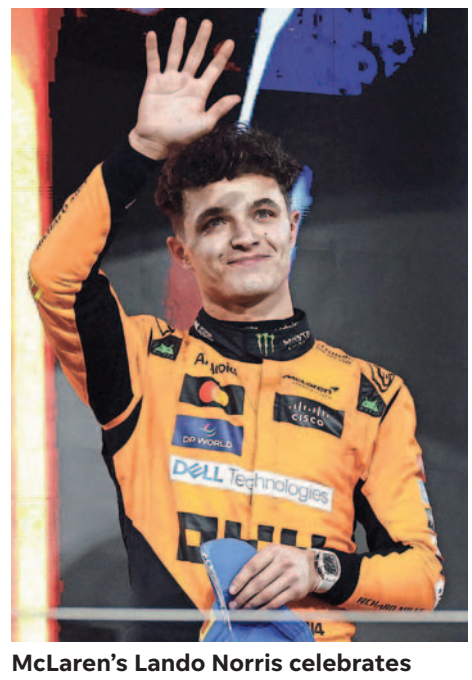
Hamilton was 14 seconds behind Russell, but on medium tires compared to his team mate's hards, with 15 laps to go but was told he could catch him.

He did it six corners from the end, Russell putting up little resistance and clapping Hamilton at the finish.

The 39-year-old then saluted the crowd with some tyre-smoking spins to mark the end of the most successful driver and team pairing in Formula One history.

"What started as a leap of faith turned into a journey into the history books," Hamilton said over the team radio.

Verstappen, who took his fourth successive drivers' title in Las Vegas last month, was sixth after collecting a 10-second penalty for the collision with Piastri. Pierre Gasly was seventh for Alpine, who won their midfield battle to finish sixth overall in the standings, with Nico Hulkenberg eighth for Haas and Fernando Alonso ninth for Aston Martin. McLaren were the first team of the current engine era that started in 2014 to win the title as a customer rather than a factory team. There was drama from the start as Verstappen and Piastri clashed, after McLaren had locked out the front row in qualifying but with Verstappen right behind in fourth slot.



McLaren's Lando Norris celebrates Sunday after winning the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. AMR ALFIKY/REUTERS

SCOREBOARD

BETMGM

New BetMGM customers can sign up today and get a First Bet Offer up to $1,500 paid back in bonus bets*, if you don't win, using bonus code **USATSPORTS**. Just download the BetMGM app, deposit at least $10 and place your first wager on any game. If your first bet loses, you will receive bonus bets in the amount of your bet (up to $1,500)*. Just make sure you use bonus code **USATSPORTS** when you sign up.* Gambling problem? Call 1-800-GAMBLER (Available in the US). Call 877-8-HOPENY or text HOPENY (467369) (NY). Call 1-800-327-5050 (MA). 21+ only. Please Gamble Responsibly. Call 1-800-NEXT-STEP (AZ), 1-800-BETS-OFF (IA), 1-800-981-0023 (PR). First Bet Offer for new customers only.* Subject to eligibility requirements. Rewards are non-withdrawable bonus bets that expire in 7 days. In partnership with Kansas Crossing Casino and Hotel. *See BetMGM.com for Terms. US promotional offers not available in North Carolina, New York, Nevada, Ontario, or Puerto Rico.

ODDS SPONSORED BY BETMGM.COM

Odds available as of print deadline.

NFL

FAVORITE	Monday LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
Cincinnati	5.5	50	DALLAS

All times Eastern

NFL

American Conference

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Buffalo	10	3	0	.769	397	268
Miami	6	7	0	.462	264	292
N.Y. Jets	3	10	0	.231	251	300
New England	3	10	0	.231	221	307

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Pittsburgh	10	3	0	.769	323	238
Baltimore	8	5	0	.615	383	318
Cincinnati	4	8	0	.333	335	340
Cleveland	3	10	0	.231	232	335

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Houston	8	5	0	.615	308	288
Indianapolis	6	7	0	.462	267	298
Jacksonville	3	10	0	.231	238	345
Tennessee	3	10	0	.231	227	342

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Kansas City	12	1	0	.923	308	252
L.A. Chargers	8	5	0	.615	277	207
Denver	8	5	0	.615	305	234
Las Vegas	2	11	0	.154	236	361

National Conference

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Philadelphia	11	2	0	.846	342	234
Washington	8	5	0	.615	376	296
Dallas	5	7	0	.417	248	339
N.Y. Giants	2	11	0	.154	194	293

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Detroit	12	1	0	.923	417	234
Minnesota	11	2	0	.846	339	240
Green Bay	9	4	0	.692	349	274
Chicago	4	9	0	.308	254	278

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Tampa Bay	7	6	0	.538	363	309
Atlanta	6	7	0	.462	278	333
New Orleans	5	8	0	.385	290	292
Carolina	3	10	0	.231	233	388

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Seattle	8	5	0	.615	302	283
L.A. Rams	7	6	0	.538	298	332
Arizona	6	7	0	.462	284	289
San Francisco	6	7	0	.462	308	308

Sunday's Scores

Miami 32, N.Y. Jets 26
Minnesota 42, Atlanta 21
New Orleans 14, N.Y. Giants 11
Philadelphia 22, Carolina 16
Pittsburgh 27, Cleveland 14
Tampa Bay 28, Las Vegas 13
Jacksonville 10, Tennessee 6
Seattle 30, Arizona 18
L.A. Rams 44, Buffalo 42
San Francisco 38, Chicago 13
Kansas City 19, L.A. Chargers 17

Monday's Game

Cincinnati at Dallas, 8:15 p.m.

Thursday's Game

L.A. Rams at San Francisco, 8:15 p.m.

Sunday, Dec. 15

Dallas at Carolina, 1 p.m.
Kansas City at Cleveland, 1 p.m.
Miami at Houston, 1 p.m.
N.Y. Jets at Jacksonville, 1 p.m.
Washington at New Orleans, 1 p.m.
Baltimore at N.Y. Giants, 1 p.m.
Cincinnati at Tennessee, 1 p.m.
New England at Arizona, 4:25 p.m.
Indianapolis at Denver, 4:25 p.m.
Buffalo at Detroit, 4:25 p.m.
Tampa Bay at L.A. Chargers, 4:25 p.m.
Pittsburgh at Philadelphia, 4:25 p.m.
Green Bay at Seattle, 8:20 p.m.

Monday, Dec. 16

Chicago at Minnesota, 8 p.m.
Atlanta at Las Vegas, 8:30 p.m.

NBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	19	5	.792	–
N.Y. Knicks	14	9	.609	4½
Brooklyn	10	14	.417	9
Philadelphia	7	15	.318	11
Toronto	7	17	.292	12

Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	17	9	.654	–
Miami	12	10	.545	3
Atlanta	13	12	.520	3½
Charlotte	7	17	.292	9
Washington	3	19	.136	12

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	21	4	.840	–
Milwaukee	12	11	.522	8
Indiana	10	15	.400	11
Chicago	10	15	.400	11
Detroit	10	15	.400	11

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	17	8	.680	–
Houston	16	8	.667	½
Dallas	16	8	.667	½
San Antonio	12	12	.500	4½
New Orleans	5	20	.200	12

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	18	5	.783	–
Denver	12	10	.545	5½
Minnesota	12	11	.522	6
Portland	8	15	.348	10
Utah	5	17	.227	12½

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Golden State	14	9	.609	–
L.A. Clippers	14	11	.560	1
L.A. Lakers	12	11	.522	2
Phoenix	12	11	.522	2
Sacramento	11	13	.458	3½

Saturday's Scores

Cleveland 116, Charlotte 102
Washington 122, Denver 113
Oklahoma City 119, New Orleans 109
Dallas 125, Toronto 118
Detroit 120, N.Y. Knicks 111
Memphis 127, Boston 121
Miami 121, Phoenix 111

Sunday's Scores

Philadelphia 108, Chicago 100
Milwaukee 118, Brooklyn 113
Charlotte 113, Indiana 109
Denver 141, Atlanta 111
Miami 122, Cleveland 113
Orlando 115, Phoenix 110
Memphis 140, Washington 112
San Antonio 121, New Orleans 116
Golden State 114, Minnesota 106
Sacramento 141, Utah 97
Houston 117, L.A. Clippers 106
L.A. Lakers 107, Portland 98

Monday's Game

N.Y. Knicks at Toronto, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday's Games

Orlando at Milwaukee, 7 p.m.
Dallas at Oklahoma City, 9:30 p.m.

Wednesday's Games

Atlanta at N.Y. Knicks, 7 p.m.
Golden State at Houston, 9:30 p.m.

Thursday's Games

Detroit at Boston, 7:30 p.m.
Toronto at Miami, 7:30 p.m.
Sacramento at New Orleans, 8 p.m.

NHL

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Florida	17	9	2	36	106	91
Toronto	16	9	2	34	80	71
Boston	15	11	3	33	75	87
Tampa Bay	14	9	2	30	98	76
Ottawa	12	13	2	26	82	86
Buffalo	11	13	3	25	80	86
Detroit	10	13	4	24	67	83
Montreal	10	14	3	23	75	98

Metropolitan Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	19	6	2	40	109	74
New Jersey	18	10	2	38	102	82
Carolina	17	9	1	35	101	81
N.Y. Rangers	14	11	1	29	85	79
N.Y. Islanders	11	11	7	29	77	87
Philadelphia	12	12	4	28	83	98
Pittsburgh	12	13	4	28	84	110
Columbus	12	12	3	27	93	96

Western Conference

Central Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Minnesota	18	5	4	40	86	65
Winnipeg	20	9	0	40	103	75
Dallas	17	10	0	34	92	69
Colorado	16	13	0	32	95	103
Utah	12	11	4	28	79	79
St. Louis	13	13	2	28	73	87
Nashville	7	15	6	20	61	88
Chicago	8	17	2	18	66	86

Pacific Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	18	7	3	39	99	82
L.A. Kings	16	8	3	35	83	71
Vancouver	14	8	4	32	85	83
Edmonton	15	10	2	32	82	79
Calgary	13	10	5	31	74	84
Seattle	14	14	1	29	89	88
San Jose	10	15	5	25	82	108
Anaheim	10	12	3	23	62	76

NOTE: Two points for a win, one for OT loss.

Saturday, Dec. 7

Utah 5, Buffalo 2
Boston 4, Philadelphia 3, OT
Winnipeg 4, Chicago 2
N.Y. Islanders 4, Carolina 3
Florida 3, San Jose 1
Washington 4, Montreal 2
Ottawa 3, Nashville 1
Colorado 2, Detroit 1
Pittsburgh 5, Toronto 2
L.A. Kings 4, Minnesota 1
Edmonton 4, St. Louis 2

Sunday, Dec. 8

Seattle 7, N.Y. Rangers 5
Tampa Bay 4, Vancouver 2
N.Y. Islanders 4, Ottawa 2
Columbus 4, Winnipeg 1
Colorado 4, New Jersey 0
Utah 4, Philadelphia 2
Dallas 6, Calgary 2

Monday's Games

Detroit at Buffalo, 7 p.m.
Chicago at N.Y. Rangers, 7 p.m.
Anaheim at Montreal, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday's Games

Toronto at New Jersey, 7 p.m.
Colorado at Pittsburgh, 7 p.m.
San Jose at Carolina, 7 p.m.
Philadelphia at Columbus, 7 p.m.
L.A. Kings at N.Y. Islanders, 7:30 p.m.
Calgary at Nashville, 8 p.m.
Boston at Winnipeg, 8 p.m.
Tampa Bay at Edmonton, 9 p.m.
Minnesota at Utah, 9:30 p.m.
St. Louis at Vancouver, 10 p.m.
Florida at Seattle, 10 p.m.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Final College Football Playoff rankings

1. Oregon
2. Georgia
3. Texas
4. Penn State
5. Notre Dame
6. Ohio State
7. Tennessee
8. Indiana
9. Boise State
10. SMU
11. Alabama
12. Arizona State
13. Miami
14. Ole Miss
15. South Carolina
16. Clemson
17. BYU
18. Iowa State
19. Missouri
20. Illinois
21. Syracuse
22. Army
23. Colorado
24. UNLV
25. Memphis

US LBM Coaches Poll

Dec. 8

The US LBM Coaches Poll is conducted weekly throughout the regular season using a panel of head coaches at Football Bowl Subdivision schools. The panel is chosen by random draw, conference by conference plus independents, from a pool of coaches who have indicated to the American Football Coaches Association their willingness to participate. Each coach submits a Top 25 with a first-place vote worth 25 points, second place 24, and so on down to one point for 25th.

	Record	Pts	Prv
1. Oregon (54)	13-0	1350	1
2. Georgia	11-2	1281	5
3. Notre Dame	11-1	1214	4
4. Texas	11-2	1178	2
5. Penn Sta.	11-2	1080	3
6. Tennessee	10-2	1069	6
7. Ohio St.	10-2	1037	8
8. Boise St.	12-1	929	10
9. Indiana	11-1	925	9
10. Arizona St.	11-2	856	13
11. Alabama	9-3	749	11
12. SMU	11-2	741	7
13. Clemson	10-3	707	17
14. South Carolina	9-3	668	12
15. Ole Miss	9-3	631	15
16. Miami (FL)	10-2	611	14
17. BYU	10-2	423	18
18. Army	11-1	361	23
19. Iowa St.	10-3	355	16
20. Missouri	9-3	282	20
21. Illinois	9-3	275	21
22. Colorado	9-3	228	22
23. Memphis	10-2	166	24
24. UNLV	10-3	140	19
25. Syracuse	9-3	129	25

Others receiving votes: Texas A&M 50; Duke 40; Louisville 17; Kansas State 16; Marshall 14; Ohio 8; Tulane 6; Louisiana 6; Jacksonville State 3; Georgia Tech 3; LSU 1; Iowa 1.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

USA TODAY Sports Coaches Poll

The USA TODAY Sports Men's Basketball Coaches Poll is conducted weekly throughout the regular season using a panel of head coaches at Division I schools. The panel is chosen in consultation with the National Association of Basketball Coaches. The voters represent each of the 32 Division I conferences that receive an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament. Each coach submits a Top 25 with a first-place vote worth 25 points, second place 24, and so on down to one point for 25th, with first-place votes in parenthesis.

	Record	Pts	Prv.
1. Kansas (19)	7-0	760	1
2. Auburn (12)	7-0	755	3
3. Tennessee	7-0	694	6
4. Marquette	8-0	646	11
5. Iowa State	5-1	629	5
6. Kentucky	7-0	628	8
7. Purdue	7-1	535	12
8. Gonzaga	7-1	517	4
9. Duke	5-2	472	10
10. Oregon	8-0	457	NR
11. Wisconsin	8-0	450	17
12. Alabama	6-2	441	9
13. Florida	8-0	427	16
14. Cincinnati	6-0	376	14
15. Memphis	6-1	265	NR
16. Baylor	5-2	262	18
17. Illinois	6-1	234	NR
18. Houston	4-3	221	7
19. Pittsburgh	7-1	213	25
20. Ole Miss	6-1	139	24
21. Oklahoma	7-0	111	NR
22. North Carolina	4-3	96	13
23. Michigan	6-1	90	NR
24. Texas A&M	6-2	86	20
25. Michigan State	6-2	73	NR

Others receiving votes: UConn 63; San Diego State 56; Texas 54; Mississippi State 39; Arizona State 39; Drake 34; Texas Tech 32; Arkansas 28; UCLA 17; Xavier 16; BYU 16; Ohio State 15; Utah State 13; Saint Mary's 12; Dayton 10; St. John's 8; Nebraska 8; Indiana 8; Creighton 8; West Virginia 5; Maryland 5; Clemson 5; Georgia 3; Arizona 2; UC Irvine 1; Nevada 1.

USA TODAY Sports Women's Coaches Poll

The USA TODAY Sports women's basketball coaches poll is conducted weekly throughout the regular season using a panel of head coaches at Division I schools. The panel is chosen by the Women's Basketball Coaches Association. The members represent each of the 32 Division I conferences that receive an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament. Each coach submits a Top 25 with a first-place vote worth 25 points, second place 24, and so on down to one point for 25th, with first-place votes in parenthesis.

	Record	Pts	Prv.
1. UCLA (16)	8-0	759	2
2. UConn (14)	6-0	756	1
3. Texas (1)	7-0	706	4
4. South Carolina	7-1	687	5
5. LSU	9-0	633	7
6. USC	6-1	619	6
7. Ohio State	7-0	536	9
8. Maryland	8-0	529	11
9. Duke	8-1	501	13
10. Notre Dame	5-2	462	3
11. Oklahoma	6-1	445	8
12. Kansas State	7-1	423	12
13. TCU	8-0	410	21
14. West Virginia	8-1	400	10
15. North Carolina	7-1	338	14
16. Kentucky	7-0	337	16
17. Alabama	9-0	232	20
18. Ole Miss	5-2	209	18
19. Iowa State	6-2	180	15
20. Iowa	8-0	166	24
21. Illinois	7-1	131	19
22. Louisville	5-2	117	23
23. Baylor	7-2	112	22
24. NC State	4-3	96	17
25. Michigan St.	8-0	60	NR

Others receiving votes: Tennessee 57; Florida State 41; Nebraska 34; Michigan 26; Mississippi State 22; Georgia Tech 20; Richmond 15; Utah 6; Penn State 5; Stanford 3; Vanderbilt 1; South Dakota State 1.

GOLF

Hero World Challenge
Sunday
Albany, Bahamas
Purse: $5 million
Yardage: 7,449; Par: 72
Final Round

Scottie Scheffler .67-64-69-63–263 (-25)
Tom Kim .....74-65-62-68–269 (-19)
Justin Thomas .....66-67-66-71–270 (-18)
Akshay Bhatia .....67-66-71-69–273 (-15)
Keegan Bradley.....68-67-68-71–274 (-14)
Ludvig Aberg.....67-70-72-67–276 (-12)
Robert MacIntyre ..68-71-68-70–277 (-11)
Sahith Theegala.....67-71-66-74–278 (-10)
Sungjae Im .....69-68-72-71–280 (-8)
Sepp Straka.....69-68-72-71–280 (-8)
Patrick Cantlay.....67-71-71-72–281 (-7)
Brian Harman.....70-72-72-68–282 (-6)
Cameron Young .....64-75-72-72–283 (-5)
Sam Burns .....68-72-74-70–284 (-4)
Aaron Rai .....71-71-72-70–284 (-4)
Nick Dunlap.....68-73-70-76–287 (-1)
Wyndham Clark.....73-70-71-74–288 (0)
Matthieu Pavon.....74-73-69-72–288 (0)
Jason Day.....75-70-73-71–289 (1)
Russell Henley.....69-71-79-70–289 (1)

AUTO RACING

F1 World Championship Points Leaders

1. Max Verstappen, 437.
2. Lando Norris, 374.
3. Charles Leclerc, 356.
4. Oscar Piastri, 292.
5. Carlos Sainz Jr., 290.

TRANSACTIONS

Sunday's Transactions
HOCKEY
National Hockey League

CAROLINA HURRICANES – D Ty Smith Called up from minors from Chicago-AHL.
CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS – G Drew Commesso Called up from minors from Rockford-AHL. D Kevin Korchinski Called up from minors from Rockford-AHL. RW Joey Anderson Waived.
LOS ANGELES KINGS – D Caleb Jones Waived.
MINNESOTA WILD – C Travis Boyd Sent to minors Iowa-AHL.
NEW YORK RANGERS – G Dylan Garand Called up from minors from Hartford-AHL. D Connor Mackey Called up from minors from Hartford-AHL.
OTTAWA SENATORS – D Nikolas Matinpalo Sent to minors Belleville-AHL. LW Cole Reinhardt Sent to minors Belleville-AHL.
SAN JOSE SHARKS – LW Givani Smith Waived.
SEATTLE KRAKEN – RW Ryan Winterton Sent to minors Coachella Valley-AHL.
VANCOUVER CANUCKS – G Arturs Silovs Sent to minors Abbotsford-AHL.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BOWL GAME SCHEDULE (ALL TIMES EASTERN)

Salute to Veterans Bowl

MATCHUP: South Alabama vs. Western Michigan
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 14, Montgomery, Ala., 9 p.m., ESPN

Frisco Bowl

MATCHUP: Memphis vs. West Virginia
DETAILS: Tuesday, Dec. 17, Frisco, Texas, 9 p.m., ESPN

Boca Raton Bowl

MATCHUP: James Madison vs. Western Kentucky
DETAILS: Wednesday, Dec. 18, Boca Raton, Fla., 5:30 p.m., ESPN

LA Bowl

MATCHUP: UNLV vs. California
DETAILS: Wednesday, Dec. 18, Inglewood, Calif., 9 p.m., ESPN

New Orleans Bowl

MATCHUP: Georgia Southern vs. Sam Houston State
DETAILS: Thursday, Dec. 19, New Orleans, 7 p.m., ESPN2

Cure Bowl

MATCHUP: Ohio vs. Jacksonville State
DETAILS: Friday, Dec. 20, Orlando, Fla., noon, ESPN

Gasparilla Bowl

MATCHUP: Florida vs. Tulane
DETAILS: Friday, Dec. 20, Tampa, Fla., 3:30 p.m., ESPN

College Football Playoff

MATCHUP: Indiana at Notre Dame
DETAILS: Friday, Dec. 20, campus site, 8 p.m., ABC/ESPN

College Football Playoff

MATCHUP: SMU at Penn State
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 21, campus site, noon, TNT

College Football Playoff

MATCHUP: Clemson at Texas
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 21, campus site, 4 p.m., TNT

College Football Playoff

MATCHUP: Tennessee at Ohio State
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 21, campus site, 8 p.m., ABC/ESPN

Myrtle Beach Bowl

MATCHUP: Coastal Carolina vs. Texas-San Antonio
DETAILS: Monday, Dec. 23, Conway, S.C., 11 a.m., ESPN

Idaho Potato Bowl

MATCHUP: Northern Illinois vs. Fresno State
DETAILS: Monday, Dec. 23, Boise, Idaho, 2:30 p.m., ESPN

Hawaii Bowl

MATCHUP: South Florida vs. San Jose State
DETAILS: Tuesday, Dec. 24, Honolulu, 8 p.m., ESPN

GameAbove Sports Bowl

MATCHUP: Pittsburgh vs. Toledo
DETAILS: Thursday, Dec. 26, Detroit, 2 p.m., ESPN

Rate Bowl

MATCHUP: Rutgers vs. Kansas State
DETAILS: Thursday, Dec. 26, Phoenix, 5:30 p.m., ESPN

68 Ventures Bowl

MATCHUP: Arkansas State vs. Bowling Green
DETAILS: Thursday, Dec. 26, Mobile, Ala., 9 p.m., ESPN

Birmingham Bowl

MATCHUP: Vanderbilt vs. Georgia Tech
DETAILS: Friday, Dec. 27, Birmingham, Ala., noon or 3:30 p.m., ESPN

Armed Forces Bowl

MATCHUP: Navy vs. Oklahoma
DETAILS: Friday, Dec. 27, Fort Worth, Texas, noon or 3:30 p.m., ESPN

Liberty Bowl

MATCHUP: Arkansas vs. Texas Tech
DETAILS: Friday, Dec. 27, Memphis, Tenn., 7 p.m., ESPN

Holiday Bowl

MATCHUP: Washington State vs. Syracuse
DETAILS: Friday, Dec. 27, San Diego, 8 p.m., Fox

Las Vegas Bowl

MATCHUP: Texas A&M vs. Southern California
DETAILS: Friday, Dec. 27, Las Vegas, 10:30 p.m., ESPN

Fenway Bowl

MATCHUP: Connecticut vs. North Carolina
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 28, Boston, 11 a.m., ESPN

Pinstripe Bowl

MATCHUP: Boston College vs. Nebraska
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 28, New York, noon, ABC

New Mexico Bowl

MATCHUP: TCU vs. Louisiana-Lafayette
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 28, Albuquerque, 2:15 p.m., ESPN

Pop-Tarts Bowl

MATCHUP: Miami (Fla.) vs. Iowa State
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 28, Orlando, Fla., 3:30 p.m., ABC

Arizona Bowl

MATCHUP: Miami (Ohio) vs. Colorado State
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 28, Tucson, Ariz., 4:30 p.m., CW

Military Bowl

MATCHUP: North Carolina State vs. East Carolina
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 28, Annapolis, Md., 5:45 p.m., ESPN

Alamo Bowl

MATCHUP: Brigham Young vs. Colorado
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 28, San Antonio, 7:30 p.m., ABC

Independence Bowl

MATCHUP: Army vs. Marshall
DETAILS: Saturday, Dec. 28, Shreveport, La., 9:15 p.m., ESPN

Music City Bowl

MATCHUP: Missouri vs. Iowa
DETAILS: Monday, Dec. 30, Nashville, Tenn., 2:30 p.m., ESPN

ReliaQuest Bowl

MATCHUP: Alabama vs. Michigan
DETAILS: Tuesday, Dec. 31, Tampa, Fla., noon, ESPN

Sun Bowl

MATCHUP: Washington vs. Louisville
DETAILS: Tuesday, Dec. 31, El Paso, Texas, 2 p.m., CBS

Citrus Bowl

MATCHUP: Illinois vs. South Carolina
DETAILS: Tuesday, Dec. 31, Orlando, Fla., 3 p.m., ABC

Texas Bowl

MATCHUP: LSU vs. Baylor
DETAILS: Tuesday, Dec. 31, Houston, 3:30 p.m., ESPN

Fiesta Bowl

MATCHUP: Boise State vs. Penn State-SMU winner
DETAILS: Tuesday, Dec. 31, Glendale, Ariz., 7:30 p.m., ESPN

Peach Bowl

MATCHUP: Arizona State vs. Texas-Clemson winner
DETAILS: Wednesday, Jan. 1, Atlanta, 1 p.m., ESPN

Rose Bowl

MATCHUP: Oregon vs. Ohio State-Tennessee winner
DETAILS: Wednesday, Jan. 1, Pasadena, Calif., 5 p.m., ESPN

Sugar Bowl

MATCHUP: Georgia vs. Notre Dame-Indiana winner
DETAILS: Wednesday, Jan. 1, New Orleans, 8:30 p.m., ESPN

Gator Bowl

MATCHUP: Duke vs. Mississippi
DETAILS: Thursday, Jan. 2, Jacksonville, Fla., 7:30 p.m., ESPN

First Responder Bowl

MATCHUP: North Texas vs. Texas State
DETAILS: Friday, Jan. 3, Dallas, 4 p.m., ESPN

Duke's Mayo Bowl

MATCHUP: Virginia Tech vs. Minnesota
DETAILS: Friday, Jan. 3, Charlotte, N.C., 7:30 p.m., ESPN

Bahamas Bowl

MATCHUP: Liberty vs. Buffalo
DETAILS: Saturday, Jan. 4, Nassau, Bahamas, 11 a.m., ESPN2

Orange Bowl

MATCHUP: College Football Playoff semifinal
DETAILS: Thursday, Jan. 9, Miami Gardens, Fla., 7:30 p.m., ESPN

Cotton Bowl

MATCHUP: College Football Playoff semifinal
DETAILS: Friday, Jan. 10, Arlington, Texas, 7:30 p.m., ESPN

College Football Playoff championship game

MATCHUP: CFP semifinal winners
DETAILS: Monday, Jan. 20, Atlanta, 7:30 p.m., ESPN