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STARS AND STRIPES

stripes.com

Volume 84 Edition 253 ©SS 2026 MONDAY, APRIL 13, 2026 平成12年4月5日 第三種郵便物認可 日刊（土日除く）
発行所 星条旗新聞社 〒106-0032 東京都港区六本木7丁目23番17号 定価￥50
50¢/Free to Deployed Areas



PHOTOS BY COREY DICKSTEIN/Stars and Stripes

Army Spc. Jose Paz, right, from the 7th Infantry Division, strikes at Spc. Walter Galope, of the 10th Mountain Division, during an intermediate bout in the service's annual Lacerda Cup All-Army Combatives tournament at Fort Benning, Ga., on Thursday.

'Soldier grit'

Army's top troops put skills on display during expanded Infantry Week

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

FORT BENNING, Ga. Hundreds of soldiers gathered last week at Fort Benning, determined to establish themselves as the most skilled Rangers, the best at shooting mortars and sniper rifles, the top hand-to-hand fighters and the Army's best jumpmasters.

The installation's annual Infantry Week competitions attract some of the most skilled soldiers in the U.S. Army, and some troops from across its sister services and partner nation armies.



Competitors line up their shots on Friday during the International Sniper Competition at Fort Benning.

"In the infantry, we have a moral obligation to ensure that every soldier is trained to fight, survive and win in the hardest day of combat," said Brig. Gen. Phillip Kinery, the Army's Fort Benning-based infantry commandant. "What Infantry Week represents … is a culmination event of five different competitions that show

SEE GRIT ON PAGE 6

IRAN WAR

Blockade of Hormuz ordered as talks fail

From wire reports

The United States is preparing to impose a naval blockade in the Strait of Hormuz, President Donald Trump announced Sunday, sharply escalating the conflict with Iran after talks between the two sides failed to produce a deal.

"Effective immediately, the United States Navy, the Finest in the World, will begin the process of BLOCKADING any and all Ships trying to enter, or leave, the Strait of Hormuz," Trump said in a post on Truth Social.



Vance

"I have also instructed our Navy to seek and interdict every vessel in International Waters that has paid a toll to Iran. No one who pays an illegal toll will have safe passage on the high seas," he added. "Any Iranian who fires at us, or at peaceful vessels, will be BLOWN TO HELL!"

Earlier Sunday, Vice President JD Vance said negotiators would return to the U.S. from Pakistan without a deal after Iran failed to give a commitment it would not seek a nuclear weapon. Iranian media said the U.S. made "excessive" demands, although a spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry appeared to leave the door open for more discussions.

"We've made very clear what our red lines are, what things we're willing to accommodate them on, and what things we're not willing to accommodate them on," Vance told reporters early Sunday in Islamabad. "And we've

SEE IRAN ON PAGE 8

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Inflation surges in largest monthly jump since 2022

Bloomberg News

U.S. inflation surged in March by the most in nearly four years as the war with Iran sent gasoline prices skyrocketing.

The consumer price index rose 0.9% from February, according to data out Friday. From a year ago, it picked up to 3.3%, the strongest pace since 2024.

A record increase in gas prices was responsible for nearly three-quarters of the monthly advance, the Bureau of Labor Statistics said. Another measure that excludes food and energy costs increased at a slower 0.2% pace.

The data underscore how the war in the Middle East is beginning to ripple through the U.S. economy, worsening the affordability woes many households have faced in recent years. Americans are already experiencing higher prices at the pump, and service providers including Delta Air Lines Inc. and the U.S. Postal Service have warned of price hikes ahead.

Even if the U.S.-Iran truce holds and there's a rapid resolution to the conflict, economists anticipate higher costs are likely to persist in the near term as oil output normalizes. Beyond the energy shock, a disruption in the supply of fertilizer is expected to eventually lead to higher grocery bills, while rising transportation costs could impact all kinds of consumer goods.

"Looking ahead, we expect a similarly sized rise in headline CPI in April," Kathy Bostjancic, the chief economist at Nationwide, said in a note after the release.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates	
Euro costs (April 13)	0.83
British pound (April 13)	$1.31
Japanese yen (April 13)	155.00
South Korean won (April 13)	1441.00

Commercial rates	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3747
Britain (Pound)	1.3455
Canada (Dollar)	1.3841
China (Yuan)	6.8278
Denmark (Krone)	6.3724
Egypt (Pound)	53.0872
Euro	0.8526
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.832
Hungary (Forint)	320.0
Israel (Shekel)	3.0323
Japan (Yen)	159.25
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3081
Norway (Krone)	9.5219
Philippines (Peso)	59.751
Poland (Zloty)	3.6242
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7489
Singapore (Dollar)	1.2736
South Korea (Won)	1483.57
Switzerland (Franc)	0.7893
Thailand (Baht)	32.09
Turkey (NewLira)	44.663

(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	6.75
Interest Rates Discount rate	3.75
Federal funds market rate	3.62
3-month bill	3.68
30-year bond	4.91

WEATHER OUTLOOK

MONDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



MONDAY IN EUROPE



TUESDAY IN THE PACIFIC



The weather is provided by weather.com

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MILITARY



KAYLYN BARNHART BATISTA/Stars and Stripes

Chief Petty Officer Courtney Dion talks to media in front of the USS Harvey C. Barnum Jr. at Naval Station Norfolk, Va., on Thursday.

Sailor carries uncle's legacy aboard ship named for him

BY KAYLYN BARNHART BATISTA
Stars and Stripes

NORFOLK, Va. — Before leaving for boot camp 16 years ago, Chief Petty Officer Courtney Dion asked Medal of Honor recipient and retired Marine Corps Col. Harvey C. Barnum Jr. — known to her simply as "Uncle Barney"— for advice.



Barnum

"Just keep your head down and don't make a fuss out of anything," he told her, and she moved through boot camp just like any other recruit, with no one knowing her family ties to a war hero.

Now, Dion proudly serves aboard the ship that bears her uncle's name, carrying forward her family's legacy through her service.

"To be able to contribute to the mission and the readiness is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and to be a representative of his legacy is one of the best things," said Dion, a hospital corpsman.

The USS Harvey C. Barnum Jr. was commissioned at its homeport in Naval Station Norfolk on Saturday, joining the fleet as one of the service's latest Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyers. The ship's sponsor, Martha Hill, is Barnum's wife and Dion's aunt.

Barnum was at the ceremony — a momentous occasion rarely experienced by a namesake.



JACKSON ROTT/U.S. Navy

The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Harvey C. Barnum Jr. arrives at Naval Station Norfolk, on March 20.

"All the hard work, the hours and hours of training, and the separation from your families was not for nothing," Barnum told the crew. "You have prepared this warship, the newest warship in the fleet. Mission accomplished, bravo zulu, charge on."

Having a living namesake "with us throughout this entire process, from new construction to joining the fleet, it's just been a great, great exceptional opportunity. That's a once-in-a-lifetime event," said Cmdr. Ben Cantu, the ship's commanding officer.

Barnum received the Medal of Honor for his actions during the Vietnam War.

On Dec. 18, 1965, he moved through enemy fire to lead attacks against entrenched fighters and, after securing the area, coordinated the landing of transport helicopters to evacuate casualties.

"When the ship got named after him, he was speechless," Dion said. "I think, every day, he lives in awe knowing that this is something that he's done, because to him, he's just doing the right thing, at the right time, for the right reasons."

Dion serves as the senior medical department representative aboard the ship and is responsible for the health and well-being of the crew. In 2024, she was selected as the U.S. Fleet Forces Command Sailor of the Year, which recognizes sailors who exemplify excellence and leadership.

"His (Barnum's) devotion to duty, what he has done in his life, what he's been able to achieve, the experiences that he's been able to have, has definitely been an influence for me to join the military," Dion said.

Judge: Pentagon fixes to press access fall short

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

The Defense Department is still in violation of a court order to lift restrictions that deny journalists Pentagon access, a federal judge said this week in a ruling that escalates a First Amendment fight with President Donald Trump's administration.

U.S. District Judge Paul Friedman in Washington said Thursday that the Pentagon had not followed his March ruling in the case, The New York Times Company v. Department of Defense.

The DOD disagreed with that finding and plans to appeal, agency spokesman Sean Parnell said Thursday.

The Times filed suit in December after more than 50 journalists refused to sign an agreement placing limits on how they could gather and publish certain information. They were subsequently denied credentials.

Defense Department officials have said the policy was intended to protect sensitive information and ensure security at the Pentagon.

Friedman sided with the newspaper last month, saying the policy is unconstitutional. He ordered the DOD to reinstate the press credentials of the Times reporters.

In response, the Pentagon issued an interim policy. But the plaintiff argues that the revised policy imposes similar restrictions by moving the press corps out of the main Pentagon building and into an annex facility.

"The Department cannot simply reinstate an unlawful policy under the guise of taking 'new' action and expect the Court to look the other way," Friedman wrote in Thursday's order.

The revised policy appears to perpetuate many of the same unconstitutional actions identified in the earlier ruling, he said.

In its revised policy, the department lists what it sees as appropriate ways for journalists to solicit information. However, Friedman found fault with this, too, saying it leaves open the possibility that asking questions on certain topics and to certain officials could trigger the revocation or denial of their press credentials.

"Simply put, the department's attempt to 'clarify' the policy did not cure its constitutional infirmities," the order said, directing the DOD to bring its policies into compliance.

A Pentagon spokesperson declined further comment Friday, referring questions back to Parnell's social media post.

In that message, Parnell said the Defense Department "remains committed to press access at the Pentagon" while ensuring safe and secure operation of the facility.

Friedman closed his order with pointed language, saying the DOD was attempting "to control the message so that the public hears and sees only what the Secretary and the Trump Administration want them to hear and see.

"The Constitution demands better," he wrote. "The American public demands better, too."

Army investigates package found at base in Germany

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Authorities are investigating the circumstances surrounding the discovery of a suspicious package earlier last week at a U.S. military installation in a Stuttgart suburb.

The Army Criminal Investigation Division is working with local police to learn more about how the package ended up at Panzer Kaserne, home to garrison administrative offices, special operations units and a Marine Corps headquarters, the agency said.

"Based on available information, Army CID does not believe there is any danger to the installation or public," CID spokesman Thomas B. Hamilton III said in a statement Thursday.

The package was discovered around 8 a.m. Wednesday near the bowling alley, which is within walking distance of garrison headquarters and offices used by special operations units.

The area was cordoned off, students at schools on post were told to stay indoors and roads were closed. By about 11 a.m., the package was removed and traffic returned to normal, the garrison said.

MILITARY

Drills highlight South Korea's push for control

BY YOOJIN LEE
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. and South Korean air forces kicked off their biannual joint Freedom Flag exercise on Friday with a focus on Seoul leading the way.

The two nations plan to conduct the large-scale training from Gwangju Air Base, 200 miles south of the capital, until April 24, according to both air forces.

The training is aimed at strengthening combined readiness.

South Korea is leading this year's drills as part of preparations for the eventual transfer of wartime operational control from the United States to the South Korean military, according to an onfficial air force news release Thursday.

President Lee Jae Myung has made assuming wartime operational control a priority during his term.

Freedom Flag will include a range of aircraft from both countries.

The U.S. Air Force is deploying F-16 Fighting Falcons, E-3G Sentry airborne warning and control aircraft and RQ-4 Global Hawk drones, while the Marine Corps is seperately contributing F/A-18 Hornets and MQ-9 Reaper drones.

South Korea's air force plans to operate F-5E/F Tiger II, F-15K Slam Eagle and F-16 fighters, along with transport and early warning aircraft.

The drills will focus on improving combined operational capabilities, survivability and coordination in high-intensity scenarios, officials said.

The joint exercise "underscores more than 70 years of a strong U.S.-[South Korea] alliance, demonstrating a shared commitment to regional stability and security," U.S. 7th Air Force spokeswoman Maj. Laura Hayden told Stars and Stripes by email Friday.

The 31st Air Expeditionary Wing is supporting live flying units for the first time during the exercise, providing command and control, logistics and base operations support, 31st Air Task Force spokesperson Lt. Daniel White told Stars and Stripes by email Friday.

Training will include defensive counterair, interdiction and close air support missions, along with simulated enemy threats designed to test tactics and procedures, according to the press release from the South Korean air force.

The exercise will also integrate fourth- and fifth-generation aircraft.

"We will develop our combined defense posture through high-intensity realistic training and share strategies and know-how tailored for modern warfare," Col. Gang Soo-gu of South Korea's Air Force Operations Command said in the release.

Freedom Flag was first launched in October 2024 and is now in its fourth iteration, Hayden said.



NICHOLAS MARTINEZ/U.S. Marine Corps

Members of I Marine Expeditionary Force unload military vehicles at the Port of Cagayan de Oro, Philippines,on March 14.

Marines deliver gear to Mindanao ahead of exercises in Philippines

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Marine Corps has for the first time sent prepositioned military equipment to the southern Philippine island of Mindanao ahead of a major joint exercise later this month.

The annual Balikatan exercise — Tagalog for "shoulder to shoulder" — is scheduled to begin April 20 and run through late May, according to the state-run Philippine News Agency. The drills are typically held at multiple locations across the country.

Participation numbers have not been announced, but last year's exercise included about 10,000 U.S. troops and 6,000 personnel from the Philippines, Australia and Japan.

The equipment movement was announced Wednesday by Blount Island Command, a Jacksonville, Fla.-based Marine unit that oversees prepositioned gear worldwide.

The cargo ship USNS Seay delivered equipment for the I Marine Expeditionary Force to the port of Cagayan de Oro on Mindanao last month, according to a command news release.

The offload marked the first time the unit has delivered prepositioned equipment to the island, according to Robert Hazlett, the contracting officer's technical representative for the command.

"Bringing this capability into a new location like Mindanao shows how we can extend the network, using what's already here, working with partners and still deliver ready-to-issue equipment where it's needed," he said in the release.

The operation required coordination with the U.S. Navy, the Philippine military and commercial port operators, the command said.

Marine Corps officials say the practice allows forces to rapidly access equipment, including vehicles, communications gear and sustainment supplies stored aboard cargo ships.

Prepositioning provides "critical combat power to Marine air-ground task force commanders," Col. Coby Moran, the I Marine Expeditionary Force officer overseeing the Mindanao offload, said in the release.

After arriving in Mindanao, the equipment was transferred to commercial barges and moved to Subic Bay on the main island of Luzon, where it will be issued to troops participating in Balikatan.

The Marine Corps opened a supply depot at Subic Bay last year, according to the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority.

Officials said the site is intended to support humanitarian assistance and disaster response and will not store ammunition.

Airmen reflect 30 years after Croatia crash killed Cabinet secretary

BY ZADE VADNAIS
Stars and Stripes

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — U.S. airmen at this vast hub for military operations paused this week to mark the 30th anniversary of a plane crash in Croatia that killed six of their own, along with a Cabinet secretary and 28 others.

Dozens gathered at a bronze-and-stone monument Thursday for a wreath-laying ceremony and speeches honoring the victims, who were part of a U.S. trade delegation to Croatia, which had emerged in the wake of the 1991 breakup of Yugoslavia.

Their CT-43A aircraft, callsign IFO-21, crashed into a mountainside during final approach to Dubrovnik Airport on April 3, 1996.

The flight was operated by Ramstein's 76th Airlift Squadron and carried Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, American business leaders, government staffers and Croatian nationals.

Of the 35 people aboard, all but one were killed instantly. The sole survivor, Tech. Sgt. Shelly Kelly, died later that day from her injuries. A C-21A from the squadron performed a flyover Thursday in their honor.

The crash prompted sweeping reforms across the Air Force that continue to shape flight safety protocols, crew training and risk management.

Speakers at Ramstein reflected on the tragedy, its legacy and the perils of military aviation.



ZADE VADNAIS/Stars and Stripes

A wreath rests at a memorial at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, April 9 honoring members of the 76th Airlift Squadron killed in a 1996 plane crash in Croatia.

"Thirty years is a long time, but the call to serve and the risks inherent in answering that call have not diminished," said Shannon Murphy, historian for the 86th Airlift Wing.

Last month, six airmen supporting the U.S. mission against Iran were killed when their KC-135 went down in Iraq. The crash is still being investigated, according to U.S. authorities.

"Like the crew of IFO-21, they were not lost to enemy fire but to the unforgiving realities of aviation," Murphy said.

U.S. and Croatian officials held a separate commemoration on April 1 at a crash memorial near the Dubrovnik airport.

"It's such an honor to come here today and see that our Croatian partners and the city of Dubrovnik continue to honor the memory of everyone lost that day," said Lt. Col. Brian Cotter, chief of the U.S. military group in Croatia.

The legacy of the Croatia crash victims endures not just through the memories shared at the two gatherings but also in the military's ongoing application of the lessons learned.

"The loss of IFO-21 served as a catalyst for significant changes in aviation safety and procedures," said Col. Nathan Bump, deputy commander of the 86th Airlift Wing. "These changes, written in the blood of those we lost, have saved lives in the years since."

Stars and Stripes reporter Slobodan Lekic contributed to this article.

MILITARY

Detonations and dog fights

Nimitz jets put on show during exercise with Ecuadorian navy

By Gary Warner
Stars and Stripes

Fighter attack jets from USS Nimitz engaged in mock aerial dogfights and dropped live bombs into the sea this week as part of a joint exercise with the Ecuadorian navy.

The two navies are participating in Southern Seas 2026, a multinational exercise. The Ecuadorian Esmeralda-class missile corvettes BAE Manabi and BAE Loja took part, alongside the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Gridley. Ecuadorian A-29 Super Tucano aircraft flew air patrol with F/A-18 Super Hornets over the Nimitz.

On Tuesday, the Nimitz crew loaded live bombs onto the Super Hornets, which flew a simulated attack run, dropping the ordnance in an open area of the sea. A pair of Hornets demonstrated tactical maneuvers, and a third Hornet released flares used as countermeasures that in real combat are designed to confuse incoming missiles.



Alyssa J. Boling/U.S. Navy

Sailors prepare for flight operations on the flight deck.

"Engaging with partners like Ecuador ensures that when the need arises, we can work together as a proficient warfighting team, built with trust and experience," Rear Adm. Cassidy Norman, commander of Carrier Strike Group 11, said in a statement.

The Navy said the exercises include simulated maritime interdiction actions, live-fire gunnery and air defense practice.

The Nimitz is scheduled to hold additional exercises with South and Central American partner militaries during its transit from Naval Base Kitsap in Bremerton, Wash., around the tip of South America, to its new homeport at Naval Station Norfolk, Va.



Julian Jaime/U.S. Navy

An E/A-18G Growler of the "Cougars" of Electronic Attack Squadron 139 makes a high-speed flyby of the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz on Tuesday.



Jaron Wills/U.S. Navy

Ordnance dropped by F/A-18E Super Hornets of "Kestrels" of Strike Fighter Squadron 137 explodes off the coast of Ecuador.

Wounded 24 times in WWII, Korea, vet dies at 106

By Chad Garland
Stars and Stripes

The Nazis couldn't kill Thomas E. Gwynn, and the communists failed, too — though he earned a dozen Purple Hearts fighting them.

But no one lives forever, not even the Tennessean who called himself "the greatest Ranger that ever was." The World War II and Korean War veteran died April 6, according to an online obituary. He was two months from turning 107.

Born in June 1919 outside Memphis, Gwynn joined the Army in 1941 and became a Ranger in April 1943, the obituary said. He told an interviewer in 2023 that a fateful coin flip helped spur his decision to try to join, but he was initially turned down in 1940.

He would go on to distinguish himself as an infantryman, earning two Silver Stars and two Bronze Stars fighting in some of the most storied battles of the wars.

They included the Normandy invasion and Battle of the Bulge during World War II and the Korean War landing at Incheon. He told a local TV reporter in 2021 that he was scared only once: the entire time.

As a sergeant in early December 1944, he was called before Gen. Omar Bradley, a top Army general in Europe and future five-star general who would become the first chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.



Gwynn

"I thought they was gonna court-martial me," Gwynn said in a 2023 interview with the veterans nonprofit Operation Song. "They saluted me. Throwed that arm up and said, 'Lieutenant Gwynn.' "

He'd earned a battlefield promotion. And it was Bradley who said there's never been a Ranger like him and never will be, Gwynn told Nashville's WZTV news in a November 2021 interview.

It's not clear from the obituary and other sources whether Gwynn was part of the famed Ranger battalions of WWII, precursors to today's special operations units that bear the same name, or graduated from an early Ranger school that trained members of other units.

Even today, use of the Ranger moniker can cause confusion, as it may refer to members of a special operations unit, who wear distinctive scroll patches on their uniforms, or to graduates of the Army's small-unit leadership school, who wear Ranger tabs.

The date the obituary says Gwynn became a Ranger matches that of the activation of the 2nd Ranger Battalion at Camp Nathan Bedford Forrest in Tullahoma, Tenn., where Gwynn would settle after the war.

Troops from that battalion scaled the cliffs at Pointe du Hoc, between Utah and Omaha beaches at Normandy, to take out enemy positions ahead of the D-Day landings of June 6, 1944.

A 1945 news article, however, says Gwynn was a Ranger of the 30th Infantry Division in Germany when he received his commission from Bradley. The division landed on Omaha Beach five days after D-Day.

In any case, Gwynn remained in Europe through the end of World War II. Five years later, he was called back to duty while working at a Kroger grocery store in Memphis, according to a local newspaper report citing his family.

The report said he had already been shot twice while serving in Korea as of June 1951. Counting those injuries, he was wounded two dozen times on the battlefield, including from a bayonet up his nose and a bludgeoning with a rifle butt, WZTV reported in 2021.

Once, he was nearly hanged with his own belt after being captured, alone on a mountaintop, by North Korean soldiers.

But while one of his captors was stripping him down, the Tennessean "wheeled, bashed him on the jaw, sent him sprawling, and flung himself down the slope," the (Memphis) Commercial Appeal reported in January 1952, shortly after he returned home from 14 months at war.

"You can roll a lot quicker than you think you can," said Gwynn, then a 32-year-old first lieutenant with the 38th Infantry Regiment.

Through gunfire, he worked his way back to American forces over the course of less than four hours.

"I'm here largely because I know how to shiver," he told the paper. "Nothing like shivering all the time to keep the circulation going. Without that, I'd be frozen long ago."

That was one of the two times he was captured in Korea. By 1952, he'd received two Silver Stars and two Bronze Stars and had been recommended for a Distinguished Service Cross for heroism.

But he told the newspaper that he considered the Good Conduct Medal "the best they've got."

"The other medals sort of come to you in the course of things, and I don't even remember exactly what they were given for," he said. But the Good Conduct Medal, that was the "result of your own self."

His obituary credits his "great physical condition and strong faith in God" as allowing him to repeatedly return to duty despite his many injuries. In 2021, regarding his exploits, he told WZTV "I didn't do it. The Holy Spirit did it in my body; he did it in my body."

After serving in Korea, Gwynn ran an appliance repair shop and spent time as a jail minister, the obituary said. He outlived his wife, son, daughter, a brother and three sisters.

The U.S. Army W.T.F! Moments Facebook page put out a call Thursday for soldiers and veterans to pay respects at Gwynn's funeral and burial services, which will be held April 15 in Tullahoma.

MILITARY

Grit: Best Jumpmaster Competition added this year

FROM PAGE 1

the world, show our Army what our experts can do and build lethality."

The Army held its annual International Best Sniper competition, its Best Mortar Competition and its Lacerda All-Army Combatives Competition. The 42nd annual Lt. Gen. David E. Grange Best Ranger Competition kicked off Friday and ran through Sunday.

This year, Fort Benning officials added a new contest — the inaugural Best Jumpmaster Competition, pitting seven four-man teams of jumpmaster-qualified paratroopers from across the Army in a test of their technical airborne skills.

The competitions, Kiniery said, bring out the best in the Army's soldiers and give them an opportunity to showcase their talents and trade knowledge with others from across the service.

"What you're seeing is soldier grit," he said. "The five competitions showcase the essential warfighting capabilities that our soldiers need to be lethal, resilient and ready for any threat across the globe."



PHOTOS BY COREY DICKSTEIN/Stars and Stripes

A jumpmaster team from the 11th Airborne Division carries a helium tank across a drop zone during the inaugural Best Jumpmaster Competition at Fort Benning, Ga., on Thursday. The newest competition for the installation's Infantry Week pitted teams of highly trained paratroopers against each other to test their skills and knowledge of airborne operations.



An 82nd Airborne Division team competes in the inaugural Best Jumpmaster Competition at Fort Benning.



Soldiers drop supply boxes from a CH-47 Chinook helicopter marker during the Best Jumpmaster Competition.

Best Jumpmaster

Army Master Sgt. Steven Bone watched closely as the CH-47 Chinook helicopter swooped over Fort Benning's Fryar Drop Zone on Thursday.

Suddenly, a package rigged to a small parachute dropped from the back of the dual-rotor chopper, sending it slowly falling to the ground — eventually striking just feet from the black pickup truck from which Bone was monitoring the airborne operations.

The package missed the truck. And it landed close to the spot the 11th Airborne Division jumpmaster team competing in the inaugural Best Jumpmaster Competition intended.

"Nice," yelled one of the noncommissioned officers from the unit based at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. "Not bad, guys."

The drop zone test on the second day of the three-day competition was meant to tax the competitors mentally and assess their pathfinder skills, said Capt. Caleb Moreno, a company commander at Fort Benning's Airborne School.

"There's a lot of math, a lot of equations that they need to know coming into the competition before actually executing it," Moreno said. "So, if there's no pathfinders on the team, it's going to be a very rough event for these jumpmaster teams."

The Army's first new Infantry Week competition since the service launched Best Mortar in 2018, the Best Jumpmaster Competition was designed to test airborne units' jumpmasters on their technical and tactical proficiencies.

Bone, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the competition, said he and other soldiers who help run the Army's Airborne and Jumpmaster schools at Fort Benning were inspired about a year ago by the Best Ranger Competition to add a new event focused on the skills their schoolhouse teaches.

"We are specifically testing what makes someone the best jumpmaster," said Bone, the operations sergeant major for the 1st Battalion, 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment, which trains paratroopers and jumpmasters. "So, while there are physical things, jumpmaster is a lot more about technical skills."

Competitors jumped from helicopters and airplanes, prepared supply loads for airdrops and managed drop zone operations during events spanning the three-day event. But the most important tests are those focused on the safety operations jumpmasters are responsible for during any airborne operations, Bone said.

Fort Benning's own Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade took home the top prize on Friday.

While the annual contest attracted seven teams from across the Army, Bone said he hopes to see it expand next year.

He also hopes the new competition will inspire more paratroopers to join the jumpmaster ranks — a skill he only begrudgingly acquired after initially shying away from it, he said.

"We're always going to have to have the capability to drop soldiers behind enemy lines and establish a foothold, so that way we can land additional soldiers after we've secured the airfield," Bone said. "You have to have jumpmasters to do that. They're the leaders, the ones building confidence in paratroopers to exit out in the air. So, that's why this competition is important — we have to be able to continue to build up jumpmasters to ensure our airborne capabilities as an Army."

International Sniper

Snipers from across the Army, the Marine Corps, the Navy and about a dozen allied countries sent nearly 700 rounds downrange over the course of the three-day competition, organizers said.

With their carbines, multiple rifles and pistols, they shot targets ranging from about 25 to 1,000 meters away, said Sgt. 1st Class Craig Mordaunt, an Army Sniper Course instructor who helped plan the 2026 event.

With the competition cut from four days to three days this year, Mordaunt said the cadre focused much of the competition around time management, giving the 34 two-man sniper teams shorter timeframes to hit targets than in past years.

"It's pretty tough. It's stressful," said Mordaunt, who has about a decade of sniper experience. "Everyone wants to represent their unit or their country well. It's difficult, stressful, shooting in front of people — and then we're also testing their physical and mental capabilities through this."

SEE GRIT ON PAGE 7

MILITARY



U.S. Marine from the Marine Corps Shooting Team fires a sniper rifle during the International Sniper Competition at Fort Benning on Friday. The Marine Corps team took first place in the 34-team event.



PHOTOS BY COREY DICKSTEIN/Stars and Stripes

Soldiers from the 7th Army Training Command shoot a 60mm round in the Army's Best Mortar Competition at Fort Benning's Red Cloud Range on Friday during the final day of the Army's annual Best Mortar Competition.

Grit: Lacerda All-Army Combatives still growing

FROM PAGE 6

U.S. Army teams took second, third and fourth place this year — the 75th Ranger Regiment, 3rd Special Forces Group and Michigan National Guard, respectively. But the Marine Corps Shooting Team took top honors on Friday.

Best Mortar

The 2026 Best Mortar Competition tested 15 four-man mortar teams on both broad infantry and specific mortar skills, including their proficiency on multiple mortar systems.

Over three days the teams fired dozens of rounds from their rifles, machine guns, and 120mm and 60mm mortar systems. Army Capt. Patrick Elsonbast, Fort Benning's mortar training company leader and the officer in charge of the competition, said the idea was to test the teams on a wide range of mortar skills relevant to them no matter if they were to serve in the Arctic, the jungle, the desert or the forest.

"We wanted Best Mortar this year to really try and transcend all these different types of infantry, and so we didn't want to make something too difficult, but we wanted to really test them across all different types of platforms and mortar tasks," Elsonbast said.

The competition tested the teams on their physical fitness, placed them inside Stryker armored combat vehicles to conduct fire missions and checked their abilities to fire from mounted and handheld mortar tubes.

The Vilseck, Germany-based 2nd Cavalry Regiment took first place in the competition on Friday. They beat out the second-place team from the 75th Ranger Regiment, which had won the past three competitions.

"When I look at these mortarmen across the competition, we are definitely testing their physical fitness, we're definitely testing their small arms fire with machine guns, and we're definitely testing their fires, because we want them to make a difference on the battlefield," Elsonbast said. "And I think that's what ultimately determines the best mortar team."

All-Army Combatives

While the Army has focused heavily in recent years on implementing drones, robots and other technology into infantry and other formations, the ability to fight hand-to-hand remains essential, said Sgt. 1st Class Nelson Quinones.

That is why the service's annual Lacerda All-Army Combatives competition only continues to grow year after year. This year's Lacerda Cup — won by the 101 st Airborne Division — featured some 136 fighters from 21 teams across the service.



Maj. Marco Lara, of the Army's 4th Infantry Division, controls the fight from the top during an intermediate bout in the service's annual Lacerda Cup All-Army Combatives tournament on Thursday.

"Combatives is the unfortunate reality of war," said Quinones, the Army's top noncommissioned officers for its combatives program. "You're never going to get around it. There will be a time where you will have to go hands on with your enemy, and it's kill or be killed."

The annual mixed martial arts-style competition — named for the combatives tournament champion and Army Ranger, Staff Sgt. Pedro Lacerda, who died of a brain aneurysm in 2010 — tests soldiers' skills and stamina over three days of fights.

The top performers in each weight class for male and female soldiers faced off Friday in full-contact cage fights to earn individual titles.

Quinones, a former competitor in Lacerda, said the competition displays soldiers' toughness and physical fitness just as much as their ability to strike.

"It's months of hard work and training," he said. "When you're fighting somebody, you're going through a decision-making process over and over and over, just like you would in a real-life fist fight.

"That translates over into combat, making rapid decisions in a timely manner and defeating the enemy in that decision making process. And, also, it's just fun. Let's be real: It's awesome that our soldiers get to display their talent."

Army accepts first delivery of XM8 Carbine service rifle

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Army has accepted the first delivery of its new service rifle, the XM8 Carbine, from Sig Sauer.

The XM8 is about 3.5 inches shorter and a pound lighter than the M4A1 carbine it is replacing for soldiers in the Close Combat Force, the Army said in a news release.

The XM8 is a lightweight version of the M7, making it easier for soldiers to move in tight spaces while using the Army's new 6.8 mm ammunition.



U.S. Army

A photo of the XM8 Carbine, manufactured by Sig Sauer.

The service only standardized the M7 as its primary rifle last year, but the XM8 is not intended to replace it.

Instead, it is being developed as a companion weapon. The XM8 is about 5 inches shorter and roughly 1 pound lighter than the M7 and features a fixed buttstock.

Since awarding a 10-year Next Generation Squad Weapon contract to Sig Sauer in early 2022, soldiers have tested the M7 — formerly the XM5 — and the M250 automatic rifle, intended to replace the M4 and M249, respectively.

The "X" designation indicates the weapons were in the experimental phase before standardization.

The program aimed to move away from decades-old 5.56 mm and 7.62 mm ammunition in favor of weapons that chamber 6.8 mm, which the Army's contract release in 2022 said would "increase accuracy and (be) more lethal against emerging threats."

MIDEAST

Navy ships transit strait ahead of mine-clearing

By Angela Cullen
Bloomberg News

Two U.S. Navy destroyers transited the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday, laying the ground for the start of a mine-clearing operation, U.S. Central Command said.

The USS Frank E. Peterson and USS Michael Murphy transited the Strait of Hormuz and operated in the Arabian Gulf, CENTCOM said in a statement posted to X, adding that more U.S. forces, including underwater drones, will join the clearance effort in the coming days.

"Today, we began the process of establishing a new passage and we will share this safe pathway with the maritime industry soon to encourage the free flow of commerce," said CENTCOM commander Adm. Brad Cooper.

Since the start of the war on Feb. 28, Iran has asserted control over the strait through which roughly a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas typically flows, effectively halting most commercial traffic. The country has sporadically attacked ships in and around the Persian Gulf and may have laid mines to deter shipowners and crews from attempting to traverse the narrow waterway.

Several U.S. Navy ships crossed Hormuz on Saturday in an operation that wasn't coordinated with Iran, Axios reported earlier, citing a U.S. official it didn't identify. The ships crossed the strait from east to west to the Gulf before making their way back to the Arabian Sea, according to the report.

However, a regional intelligence official said two U.S. Navy Arleigh Burke-class destroyers that attempted to transit the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday were forced to turn back after encountering threats from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which also launched a UAV in the direction of the vessels.

The incident happened around noon Dubai time, as U.S. and Iranian delegations were in Islamabad for negotiations, the official said, requesting anonymity to discuss confidential matters. The CENTCOM statement didn't mention any Iranian attempt to turn the vessels back.

Iran's semi-official Fars news agency also reported earlier the nation's armed forces monitored a U.S. destroyer seen moving from Fujairah toward the Strait of Hormuz and conveyed this to the U.S. via Pakistani mediators. The U.S. vessel returned from the strait after Tehran warned that it would be targeted, according to Fars.

Pakistan was mediating in peace talks between the U.S. and Iran amid a two-week ceasefire in the 6-week-old hostilities.

Iran: US wants 'affirmative commitment' Tehran won't seek nukes

FROM PAGE 1

made that as clear as we possibly could, and they have chosen not to accept our terms."

Trump, in a post Sunday, said the talks had lasted nearly 20 hours and blamed their failure on Iran's refusal to make enough concessions on its nuclear program, writing: "IRAN IS UNWILLING TO GIVE UP ITS NUCLEAR AMBITIONS!"

Trump said in a interview Sunday on Fox News Channel that the U.S. has deployed "highly sophisticated underwater minesweepers" and is also sending "more traditional minesweepers."

"I understand the U.K. and a couple of other countries are sending minesweepers," he said, adding that "a lot" of U.S. ships would be brought up as part of an effort he described as an "all or none" approach.

"We're not going to let Iran make money selling oil to people they like and not people they don't like or whatever it is," Trump said.

It was not immediately clear how any U.S. blockade would be enforced, raising risks of further escalation.

At a brief press conference in Islamabad on Sunday, Vance said Iran had for now rejected "our final and best offer," while insisting the discussions were substantive and that the U.S. was "quite flexible and accommodating."

Iranian state media said the talks broke down over the U.S. negotiators' "excessive demands," including issues related to control of the Strait of Hormuz and the removal of nuclear materials from Iran.

U.S. negotiators "failed to gain the trust of the Iranian delegation during this round of talks," said Iranian parliamentary speaker and lead negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf in a statement on X.

Pakistan, which hosted the meetings, said the talks were "constructive" and called on both sides to maintain the ceasefire in the more than month-long war, saying it would continue to facilitate discussions between the U.S. and Iran in the coming days. Zev Elkin, an Israeli security Cabinet minister, said Sunday that the two-week ceasefire period hadn't yet ended and "it's possible that there will be attempts to generate more talks."



Jacquelyn Martin/AP

Vice President JD Vance, foreground, walks with Pakistani officials and Charge d'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad Natalie A. Baker, right, before boarding Air Force Two after attending talks on Iran in Islamabad, Pakistan, on Sunday.

"I predict they come back and they give us everything we want. And I tell my people, I want everything. I don't want 90%, I don't want 95%. I told them I want everything."

President Donald Trump, on the Iranians

Esmail Baghaei, the spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry, said an understanding was reached on some issues but disagreement remained "on two or three key points."

"It was natural that one should not have expected to reach an agreement in a single session from the outset," Baghaei said on Iranian state television after the talks. "Diplomacy never ends" and Iran will "continue to pursue national interests under all circumstances," he added.

Iran's virtual closure of the Strait of Hormuz — a crucial waterway for about a fifth of global oil flows — and the continued fighting between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon had been two key points of contention in the talks.

The U.S. had sought concessions they couldn't obtain in the war, including around the Strait of Hormuz and the removal of nuclear materials, Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency said.

Vance arrived in Islamabad on Saturday and was joined by Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff to negotiate with a 71-member strong Iranian delegation led by Ghalibaf.

"We need to see an affirmative commitment that they will not seek a nuclear weapon, and they will not seek the tools that would enable them to quickly achieve a nuclear weapon," Vance said. "That is the core goal of the president of the United States, and that's what we've tried to achieve through these negotiations."

Michael Kugelman, a resident senior fellow for South Asia at the Atlantic Council, said the high-profile nature of the talks shows the U.S.'s commitment to the talks.

"The US, for domestic political reasons, wants a deal that enables it to exit the war," he said in a post on X. "Despite Vance's comments, this likely isn't over. More talks could come," although it's unclear if that would take place in Pakistan or elsewhere, he said.

Direct talks between the two sides started at 5:30 p.m. on Saturday.

A team of technical experts had joined the talks after the first hour, with discussions focused on the Strait of Hormuz, a potential ceasefire extension and phased sanctions relief, according to a U.S. official and a Pakistani official familiar with the matter.

Trump has alternated between suggesting the conflict was nearing completion and that it could be significantly escalated, possibly with the use of U.S. forces who continue to head to the region.

"I predict they come back and they give us everything we want," Trump said in his Sunday Fox News interview. "And I tell my people, I want everything. I don't want 90%, I don't want 95%. I told them I want everything."

U.S. lawmakers expressed mixed reactions to the announcement during Sunday morning news programs.

"I don't understand how blockading the strait is going to somehow push the Iranians into opening it — I don't get the connection there," Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., said on CNN's "State of the Union."

Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., meanwhile, described what he called a "very difficult situation."

"I hope President Trump is successful in this. Because just imagine the world if the ayatollahs, the brutal Iranian regime, is no longer in power. That's what we're trying to achieve," Johnson said on ABC's "This Week."

NATION

White House warns staff on insider trading

Well-timed Iran war wagers placed on Polymarket by new accounts have generated huge profits

BY COURTNEY SUBRAMANIAN
Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — The White House sent an internal staff-wide email that warned employees against using confidential information to place trades on financial markets and fast-growing event betting platforms.

The warning comes after a series of recent well-timed and profitable bets raised questions about potential insider trading around President Donald Trump's decision-making on military maneuvers in Iran and Venezuela.

The email was sent from the White House Management Office on March 24, according to a White House official who asked not to be identified discussing a confidential matter.

President Donald Trump, the previous day, had cited "productive conversations" with Tehran and announced a five-day pause on his threat to attack Iranian power plants in a social media post. Futures for oil and stocks worth billions of dollars changed hands just 15 minutes before Trump's post sent crude prices tumbling and equities soaring.

Contracts corresponding to at least 6 million barrels of Brent and West Texas Intermediate were sold in the two minutes from 6:49 a.m. in New York on March 23, according to exchange data compiled by Bloomberg. The average for the same time period over the previous five trading days was about 700 lots — or 700,000 barrels. Trump's Truth Social post was published at around 7:05 a.m. that day.

The staff-wide email was first reported by The Wall Street Journal.

"President Trump has been crystal clear: while he seeks a strong and profitable stock market for everyone, members of Congress and other government officials should be prohibited from using nonpublic information for financial benefit," White House spokesman Davis Ingle said in a statement. "The only special interest that will ever guide President Trump is the best interest of the American people."

While stocks and oil have shown volatility due to the U.S. and Israeli war on Iran, the unusual pattern in futures trading after Trump's announcement as well as the surge in bets placed in online prediction markets have drawn scrutiny amid questions about whether bettors are trading on inside information.

A series of well-timed Iran wagers placed on Polymarket by freshly created anonymous accounts have generated hundreds of thousands of dollars in profits so far, prompting analysts to scour the trades for tell-tale signs of insider activity. Some payouts on Middle East-related bets are now frozen in a dispute, with traders unable to collect as users debate what constitutes a ceasefire.

Profitable bets placed just before the U.S. capture of Venezuelan strongman Nicolas Maduro earlier this year also sparked questions about the use of confidential information.

Federal employees are banned from gambling while on government property, and ethics rules prohibit use of non-public government information for personal gain. While there has been no evidence White House staff have profited off insider trading, the email to staff highlights the focus on prediction markets, a nascent industry that has exploded in interest and growing concerns that there are insufficient guardrails to prevent insider trading.

"All federal employees are subject to government ethics guidelines that prohibit the use of nonpublic information for financial benefit. However, any implication that Administration officials are engaged in such activity without evidence is baseless and irresponsible reporting," Ingle said.

Pentagon plays down rift with Vatican despite pope's criticism

BY COURTNEY MCBRIDE
Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon and the Vatican denied allegations of a rift following Pope Leo XIV's criticism of the Trump administration and a news report of a contentious meeting between a papal envoy and a top U.S. defense official.

In separate statements, the two sides professed an eagerness to get along, saying the meeting that occurred in January was frank but polite. The Defense Department issued a statement that said "we have nothing but the highest regard and welcome continued dialogue with the Holy See."

"The Apostolic Nunciature is grateful for the opportunities to meet and dialogue with government officials and others in Washington to discuss areas of mutual concern," the Vatican's diplomatic mission in Washington said in a statement.

The episode comes at a moment of friction between the Trump administration and the new pope. In a January address, Pope Leo made a plea for a more peaceful world order and offered oblique criticism of the U.S. days after a U.S. operation to capture Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. "A diplomacy that promotes dialogue and seeks consensus among all parties is being replaced by a diplomacy based on force," he said.

He was even more pointed after President Donald Trump issued a social media threat against Iran that "a whole civilization will die tonight." The pope called that threat "truly unacceptable."

Those tensions were given further fuel in recent days after the Free Press reported that U.S. officials had pressured the Catholic Church to take Washington's side in international affairs — and warned of dire consequences if it failed to do so.



GREGORIO BORGIA/AP

Pope Leo XIV blesses the faithful as he starts his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square, at the Vatican, on Wednesday.

The report said that in a January meeting, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Elbridge Colby had delivered the warning to Cardinal Christophe Pierre, who served as the apostolic nuncio in Washington until his retirement in March.

Both sides confirmed the meeting between Pierre and Colby, who has said in public speeches that he's Catholic and has hailed Pope Benedict XVI as an inspiration. But they rejected the idea that it was contentious.

The apostolic nunciature, which represents the Holy See in Washington, did not characterize the Jan. 22 meeting, saying only that the two sides "discussed current affairs."

But the Trump administration pushed back, calling the report "grossly false and distorted." It said the meeting was "substantive, respectful, and professional."

Trump's ambassador to the Holy See, Brian Burch, also denied a rift. "Cardinal Pierre has been a regular interlocutor since my nomination," he wrote. "When we disagree, we have done so with sincerity and respect. I believe the same could be said of his January meeting with Undersecretary Colby."

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has made his Christian faith central to his leadership of the Pentagon, instituting a voluntary monthly prayer service and invoking God to justify and support military operations.

During a March news conference about the U.S. war against Iran, Hegseth said from the Pentagon podium: "May the Lord grant unyielding strength and refuge to our warriors, unbreakable protection to them and our homeland, and total victory over those who seek to harm them."

Amid criminal inquiry, Swalwell is asked to exit Calif. governor's race

Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — The fallout over sexual misconduct allegations against Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-Calif., grew Saturday as his fellow gubernatorial candidates faced a new race and Democrats were forced into a rapid test of how they respond to accusations of sexual misconduct.

Within hours of the accusations against Swalwell being made public, the Northern California congressman's campaign began to unravel and a chorus of top Democrats urged him to drop out. Staff members resigned, his fundraising website went offline and allies moved quickly to distance themselves from a candidate who had been gaining momentum as a front-runner in the race to lead the Golden State.

The repercussions extended beyond Swalwell's campaign for governor. The Manhattan district attorney's office opened an investigation into sexual assault allegations against Swalwell by a former staffer and issued a statement Saturday that urged "survivors and anyone with knowledge of these allegations to contact our Special Victims Division."

Rep. Anna Paulina Luna, R-Fla., posted a video on X saying that she plans to force a House vote this week to expel Swalwell.

Swalwell has denied the allegations, calling them "flat [out] false."

The speed and severity of the response underscores how quickly political support can erode — and reflects a broader shift in how such allegations are handled in the post-#MeToo era, which has been intensified by the scrutiny surrounding the late financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.



MYUNG J. CHUN, LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-Calif., speaks at a California governor candidate forum in Los Angeles on Jan. 17.

"Ask any woman staffer over the age of 45 what her experience was like, and this was a fairly prevalent sort of situation," said Elizabeth Ashford, a Democratic strategist. "It was allowed. I really think it shows a lot of growth on the part of political professionalism, that these things are taken seriously."

As of Saturday afternoon, Swalwell ignored calls to drop out of the race and resign from Congress, even as outrage and criticism swelled. A Bay Area fundraiser was canceled and major institutional backers abandoned the campaign. The California Labor Federation withdrew its endorsement, SEIU California rescinded its backing and urged Swalwell to exit the race, and the California Police Chiefs Association suspended its support.

NATION

Representative's late disclosure of trades cited

BY SYDNEY KASHIWAGI
The Minnesota Star Tribune

Democratic U.S. Rep. Kelly Morrison violated a law that requires members of Congress to disclose stock trades and other financial trades within 45 days of making them.

The violation was reported by the news outlet NOTUS, which found that Morrison, of Minnesota, was months and in some cases over a year late in reporting several stock trades worth millions.

The trades were mostly made to Minnesota-based windows and doors company Andersen Corp. that were worth between $1.4 million and $2.9 million, according to Morrison's financial disclosures.

A spokesperson from Morrison's office said the congresswoman's stock portfolio is overseen by an investment manager and that she had "no prior knowledge of these transactions before they occurred."

"These transactions were discovered during a yearly audit for her financial disclosure, and the reporting processes have been updated to ensure all future transactions will be reported on time," the spokesperson for Morrison said in a statement.

The federal Stock Act requires members of Congress to disclose stock trades that exceed $1,000 within 45 days.

NOTUS reports that federal lawmakers are responsible for compliance with the Stock Act and that the law does not distinguish between the lawmaker making a trade themselves or an adviser making it on their behalf.

Lawmakers who violate the law are required to pay a $200 fine, which Morrison's office told NOTUS she would pay.

Morrison's run-in with the Stock Act comes after she made another trade that raised concern for government ethics groups.



ALEX KORMANN/TNS

Rep. Kelly Morrison's office said her trades were made by an investment manager.

A little over a week after the start of the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran, the congresswoman invested between $15,000 to $50,000 in stocks that specialize in autonomous naval vessels, NOTUS also reported at the time.

A government ethics expert told NOTUS that the trade raised conflict of interest questions.

Morrison, who has been opposed to the war, told the publication that she had no prior knowledge of the transaction and was not consulted beforehand because her portfolio is managed by an investment adviser.

There are several bills in Congress that would put limits on stock trading and in some cases require members to immediately sell their stocks and refrain from future ownership while in office. But those measures, including a bill from Rep. Angie Craig, D-Minn., haven't had hearings yet.

However, a Republican-backed bill known as the Stop Insider Trading Act has made some progress through committees. That law would ban members of Congress, their spouses and children from buying public stock and require public notice of seven days before they sell their stock.



ALEX WONG/TNS

First lady Melania Trump delivers a statement at the Grand Foyer of the White House on Thursday in Washington, D.C. The first lady made a public statement to deny any ties to Jeffrey Epstein.

Melania Trump denies ties to Epstein, knowledge of crimes

BY ANA CEBALLOS AND BEN WIEDER
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — First lady Melania Trump made a rare public appearance at the White House on Thursday to tell reporters that she did not know about Jeffrey Epstein's crimes and that the convicted sex offender did not introduce her to her husband, President Donald Trump.

"The lies linking me to the disgraceful Jeffrey Epstein need to end today," the first lady said. She added that she was "not Epstein's victim" and emphasized: "Epstein did not introduce me to Donald Trump."

The first lady spoke for less than six minutes and walked out of the room without taking questions from reporters, including one that shouted "Why now?" as she exited the room.

Melania Trump instead decided to read a statement that distanced her from any connection to Epstein and his convicted accomplice, Ghislaine Maxwell. She said she had never been on Epstein's plane or visited his private island and noted that her name has never appeared in court documents, depositions, victim statements or FBI interviews related to the Epstein files.

Melania Trump told reporters she met her husband "by chance" at a party in New York City in 1998. Melania Trump has previously pushed back against claims that Epstein was involved in introducing her and Donald Trump.

Author Michael Wolff said last year that Epstein played a role in introducing the couple in a Daily Beast article that was later retracted. Melania Trump later sent a letter to Wolff demanding that he retract his statements, apologize and offer her a financial settlement. Wolff filed a lawsuit in response, alleging that Melania Trump's letter was designed to "create a climate of fear" and "shut down legitimate inquiry into the Epstein matter with the Trumps." The case is ongoing.

Epstein himself had suggested in a 2016 email that he was with Donald Trump and Melania Knauss, as she was then known, when they met.

Epstein was a known fabulist and there is no indication of where the alleged meeting would have taken place.

The email, whose recipient's name is redacted, was released by the Department of Justice in response to last year's Epstein Files Transparency Act, which required the agency to release all documents related to its investigations into the deceased financier who has been accused of sexually abusing more than 1,000 victims.

The first lady's appearance Thursday itself was striking for its rarity. She has largely stayed out of the public eye during her husband's second term, making it all more notable that she decided to address allegations tied to one of the most high-profile scandals that has dogged the Trump administration.

In a phone interview with an MS NOW reporter, the president said he didn't "know anything about" the first lady's on-camera statement. The White House had sent a notice to the media on Wednesday about her plans to make "a statement."

Armored vehicle runs over detective's suspected killer

Los Angeles Times

A Tulare County sheriff's deputy was fatally shot Thursday while assisting officers serving an eviction notice in Porterville, Calif. The incident turned into an hours-long standoff with the suspected gunman that ended when he was run over and killed by a police armored vehicle.

The bizarre ending to the tragic sequence of events occurred around 6 p.m. just as Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux was providing an update to reporters at a news conference.

After stepping away for a few minutes, Boudreaux returned to say the situation had been resolved.

"The suspect is now dead," he said. "He was not shot. One of our (armored vehicles) ran over him and killed him.

"This story is not about him; this story is about our officer. ... We have a ... baby who will never know his or her father," the sheriff said; the detective is survived by his wife, who is 4 months pregnant.

When asked by a reporter if the officers had intentionally run over the suspect, Boudreaux said they had.

"We intentionally ran him over," he said. "Don't shoot at cops. You shoot at cops, we're going to run you over. He got run over. He got what he deserved."

Boudreaux said the suspect was wearing camouflage clothing and had been shooting at officers as he moved among three homes.

He said that officers in the armored vehicle were searching an area where they believed that he was hiding when they ran him over.

The suspect had initially barricaded himself inside his home.

The detective was Randy Hoppert, 35. Hoppert also served as a Navy corpsman from 2010 to 2015.

Boudreaux identified the suspect as David Morales, 59.

The incident began around 10:20 a.m. after the suspect fired on two officers who were there to serve an eviction notice.

NATION

What it would take for Dems to win Senate

BY STEVEN T. DENNIS
Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — An unpopular war in the Middle East and voters' discontent with the cost of living have put Democrats within striking distance of repeating a historic victory notched exactly two decades ago, when the party pulled off a stunning Senate upset to win control of Congress.

A Democratic-controlled Senate could block President Donald Trump's nominees, including to the Supreme Court, investigate the president and his allies, hold leverage over the federal budget and set the rules for a potential third Trump impeachment trial.

Democrats have long been favored to win the House, where they need to pick up just a handful of seats across the country. The path to Senate victory is narrower and more arduous, requiring the party to pick up at least four seats, including at least three in states Trump won.

It's a stretch, especially with Republicans holding a fundraising advantage, including a plan this week by the GOP-aligned Senate Leadership Fund to allocate $342 million to the key battlegrounds. But Democrats have history and momentum on their side. In 2006, another Republican president with fading popularity in the middle of his second term — George W. Bush — lost both the House and the Senate amid waning support for the war in Iraq.

Democrats' chances likely hinge on four states where they are seen as most competitive, and several more that are potentially in play. They'll then have to stave off well-funded Republican efforts to flip several Democratic-held seats, including two in states won by Trump, with the GOP touting Trump's tax cuts and other issues that helped elect the president, like border security.



CHITOSE SUZUKI/TNS

A sign that reads "Vote Here" in front of University Park United Methodist Church in 2024 in University Park, Texas.

Top Dem targets

■ **Alaska** — Former Democratic Representative Mary Peltola's decision to challenge GOP incumbent Dan Sullivan gives her party a plausible path to victory in what has usually been a reliably Republican state. Peltola massively outperformed Kamala Harris in 2024, though she still narrowly lost her House seat that year.

An Alaskan Native, Peltola ran her previous campaigns on "fish, family and freedom" as a way to frame positions on issues like health care, taxes and abortion that are in line with the Democratic mainstream — as well as support for oil drilling and gun ownership that can be at odds with the national party.

Sullivan faces headwinds from Trump's tariffs, especially on neighboring Canada, as well as the expiration of some Affordable Care Act tax credits for health coverage, which has a disproportionate effect on Alaskans, who already face some of the highest consumer prices in the nation. Sullivan can point to his strong resistance to then-President Joe Biden's restrictions on the state's oil and gas industry.

■ **North Carolina** — Democrats' best pickup opportunity could be in North Carolina, a classic swing state where popular former Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper has been leading Republican Michael Whatley in early polls to succeed retiring Republican Senator Thom Tillis in a race that some experts think will set a new record for Senate campaign spending.

Tillis, a vocal GOP maverick, has been sounding the alarm over the political danger his party faces over Trump's health care cuts, which he said will hit his state's finances harder than any other and risks prompting a Democratic wave election.

■ **Maine** — Republican Susan Collins, the chair of the powerful Appropriations Committee, is seeking a sixth term, but has the tough task of trying to hold onto the only GOP-held Senate seat up for election in a state Trump lost in 2024. Trump lost by 7 percentage points in that race.

As in Alaska, tariffs opposed by Collins have hit Maine's economy, particularly a tourism industry that has long benefited from Canadian visitors crossing the border. And Mainers on ACA health plans face soaring premiums after Collins' fellow Republicans refused to extend expiring subsidies. Collins has long touted her ability to bring appropriations back to the state as well as work with Democrats, and she won handily in 2020 despite massive spending to try and defeat her and many polls suggesting she would lose. But that was also before the conservative Supreme Court majority she helped install overturned Roe v. Wade.

Democrats are divided in a contentious primary between Gov. Janet Mills, 78, and newcomer Graham Platner, a 41-year-old oyster farmer and veteran who is running an outsider campaign that has attracted crowds, millions in funding and a big lead in recent polls.

■ **Ohio** — Former Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown is mounting a comeback bid after his 2024 defeat to Trump-allied car dealer Bernie Moreno. This round, Brown faces off against Republican Senator Jon Husted, the former lieutenant governor who filled the seat JD Vance vacated when Trump tapped him to become vice president. Brown needs to perform better than he did two years ago in traditionally Democratic industrial areas that Trump and Moreno swung to the GOP.

Like other Democrats, Brown, a progressive populist with historically strong ties to unions, has been running on an affordability agenda and against health care cuts and tax cuts for the wealthy. Husted, a reliable vote for Trump, has sought to broaden his appeal by publicly seeking compromises on health care subsidies and voter ID legislation, though he hasn't succeeded in brokering deals on those issues.

GOP race for California governor's office turns vicious

BY SEEMA MEHTA
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — As Republicans vie for their best shot to win the California governor's office in two decades, the fight between the most prominent candidates to win over the party of President Donald Trump has switched from subdued to vicious.

Conservative commentator Steve Hilton, at their first one-on-one debate in Rancho Mirage earlier this month, accused rival Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco of coddling illegal immigrants and called him "wishy-washy." The law enforcement chief called Hilton, a British immigrant, a "fraud" and heartless for denying others the same pathway to U.S. citizenship he received.

"What an outrageous and offensive insult that Chad just made to every legal immigrant in this state and in this country," Hilton fumed.

The heated exchange took place days before the California Republican Party weighs making an endorsement in the 2026 race for California governor. Hundreds of party delegates will gather in San Diego this weekend to decide, though it's unclear if either candidate will be able to win the 60% vote threshold to receive the official party nod.



TNS

Silicon Valley entrepreneur Steve Hilton, left, and Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco.

Most polls have shown the two Republicans as the top candidates in the race, despite registered Democratic voters outnumbering Republicans nearly 2-to-1 in California.

Bianco and Hilton are competing against eight heavyweight Democrats who are splintering their party's votes in the election to replace termed-out Gov. Gavin Newsom. Under California's unique primary system, the two candidates who receive the most votes in the primary will move on to the November general election, regardless of party affiliation.

The prospect has alarmed state Democratic leaders, who unsuccessfully urged struggling candidates to drop out to avoid their party being shut out of the November election.

Still, a lot can happen before the June 2 primary to stir up the race. President Trump endorsed Hilton late Sunday, which could significantly influence the state's GOP voters. More than 6 million Californians voted for Trump in the 2024 presidential election, though he was trounced by Vice President Kamala Harris, one of the state's top Democrats.

On the campaign trail, Bianco and Hilton have frequently raised the prospect of a Republican being elected governor as the result of failed Democratic rule of the nation's most populous state and the world's fourth-largest economy.

"For the first time in probably our lifetimes, really since Ronald Reagan … every legitimate poll has either shown me or Steve Hilton at the top two Republicans at the top of [every] statewide poll," for the last six months, Bianco recently told about 100 attendees at a Valley Unity Republican Women luncheon at the Woodland Hills County Club overlooking verdant fairways.

Hilton, who has participated in more gubernatorial forums and debates than Bianco, said polling that shows him besting Democratic rivals proves that Californians are fed up with 15 years of one-party rule.

"I tell you right now, there is not a single one of them who represents to the slightest degree the change we need in California," he told a few hundred people at Big Bear's Calvary Chapel. "We are going to do it this year."

From afar, Bianco appears to be out of central casting for a GOP candidate for governor: an armed lawman, with a salt-and-pepper mustache and close-cropped hair who has dedicated his life to protecting the vulnerable and locking up criminals.

Bianco, echoing independent pollsters as well as political strategists in both parties, said having "Riverside County Sheriff" next to his name on the official state ballot will be a major boon to his campaign.

"I will tell you this, if we took the names and the party off of the ballot and simply went up with resume — we made you all read a resume of who you're going to put as your next governor — I would win this election 100% to nothing," Bianco told the GOP women's group.

But Bianco's badge hasn't shielded him from Hilton's blistering attacks about the sheriff's past statements about immigration, pandemic mask mandates and Black Lives Matter protests — which is disqualifying for some GOP voters.

NATION

Artemis II astronauts back on Earth

By Richard Tribou
Orlando Sentinel



Joel Kowsky / NASA

NASA's Orion spacecraft is seen as recovery teams work to secure the spacecraft ahead of transferring Artemis II crewmembers to USS John P. Murtha in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of California, on Friday.

Records were set. History was made. All that was left was to get the four Artemis II astronauts home safe. That happened Friday night as they splashed down safe in the Pacific Ocean.

NASA's Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch along with Canadian Space Agency astronaut Jeremy Hansen made the final run of a nearly 700,000-mile trip that began on April 1 when they launched from Kennedy Space Center on the first crewed mission of the Artemis program.

They hit the water at 8:07 p.m. Eastern time off the coast of San Diego after a 13-minute reentry that slowed the vehicle from nearly 24,000 mph down to a gentle, parachute-assisted, 19-mph landing in calm seas.

"Honestly, I'm still at a loss for words," said NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman from a nearby recovery ship, the USS John P. Murtha. "I'm like the childhood Jared right now, can't believe what I just saw. I mean, almost been waiting my whole lifetime to see this."

The capsule bobbing nearby with the crew still inside awaiting the arrival of support personnel from the Navy and NASA. By 9:30 p.m. EDT, all four crew had been helped onto an inflatable area called "the front porch" awaiting helicopter transport back to the recovery ship.

"It's a huge moment for everybody. I mean, we are back in the business of sending astronauts to the moon, bringing them back safely," Isaacman said. "This is not a once-in-a-lifetime, which you hear sometimes around here is like, 'This was a once in a lifetime.' No, it's not. This is just the beginning."

The quartet had made their final course correction burn earlier Friday afternoon and began the final steps to come back to Earth at 7:33 p.m., when the service module separated from the crew module, which the crew had named Integrity.

"We have a great view of the moon out window two. Looks a little smaller today," Wiseman said soon after.

"Guess we'll have to go back," replied Artemis II crew's chief training officer Jacki Mahaffey, who was the crew's main point of contact during the landing.

The next big event was entry interface, hitting the first traces of Earth's atmosphere at 7:53 p.m. at 400,000 feet altitude about 1,900 miles short of the landing site traveling at 23,742 mph.

The spacecraft shortly after went out of contact for six minutes, a blackout period as plasma built up around the spacecraft.

"Houston, Integrity. We have you loud and clear," Wiseman responded when prompted to reestablish contact.

"Your trajectory is nominal and recovery teams have visual," Mahaffey said.

The capsule had no issues with drogue parachute deployment at 22,000 feet at 8:03 p.m. with its three main parachutes one minute later with splashdown officially coming at 8:07 p.m. EDT.

The mission officially lasted nine days, 1 hour, 32 minutes and 15 seconds and traveled 694,481 statue miles.

"The return trajectory correction burn went great. They were right on the money, right down the middle of where there should be coming back," said Paul Sierpinski, assistant Artemis recovery director from the deck of the recovery ship that was located about 200 miles off the California coast. "All our boats are launched or will be imminently."

The ship moved within 1 mile of Orion after splashdown.

"A couple minutes before splashdown, things start happening really, really fast," Sierpinski said. "It just takes a whole lot of effort and a lot of updates back and forth between us and Houston keep track of everything that's happening all in real time. And then after splashdown, that's when the recovery team really takes into high gear."

Their descent took about 13 minutes once they reentered enduring temperatures close to 5,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

"It's 13 minutes of things that have to go right," said Artemis II lead flight director Jeff Radigan on Thursday afternoon. "I have a whole checklist in my head that we're going through of all the things that have to happen."

Once on board, the crew will undergo post-mission medical evaluations. Then they'll be flown to shore and board an aircraft flying to Johnson Space Center in Houston on Saturday.

The seas were not too choppy for the landing, so NASA was able to stick with its primary landing recovery site.

Earlier this week, the quartet surpassed the record for the Apollo 13 mission in 1970 for farthest distance from Earth ever flown by humans.

Glover became the first Black man, Koch the first woman and Hansen the first non-American to ever fly near the moon.

They have now increased the number of humans ever to venture into deep space to 28, and the first since the final flight of the Apollo program in 1972.

Along the way they flew around the far side of the moon, taking in sights never seen before by human eyes, and witnessed a solar eclipse with the moon blocking out the sun from a new perspective.

Sex toys thrown at detention facility in LA ICE protest

Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — A protest in downtown Los Angeles against the ongoing actions of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement grew heated Saturday afternoon, with police declaring an unlawful assembly.

A few dozen anti-ICE protesters had gathered around noon and began adorning the fence surrounding the Metropolitan Detention Center in downtown L.A. with silicone phalli of all colors — pink, purple and human skin-colored.

As the toys piled up outside the facility, a small group of protesters spilled onto Alameda Street, between Aliso and Temple streets. They carried signs reading "Detention centers are concentration camps" and "No ICE."

Protests in L.A. and elsewhere in the U.S., driven by outrage over intensified federal immigration enforcement, have been inflamed in recent months by the fatal shootings of two protesters and the aggressive tactics used by federal agents in Minneapolis earlier this year.

Four L.A. Police Department vehicles pulled up to the protest at about 12:40 p.m. and told demonstrators to move out of the way of passing cars.

"Stay out of the street. You will not block traffic today," an officer said through a megaphone.

Several protesters confronted law enforcement officers, who wore riot gear, before moving back to the sidewalk in front of the detention center.

Officers moved their vehicles back but approached protesters on the sidewalk on foot, where the confrontation continued.

At around 3:30 p.m., the LAPD issued an alert saying it had declared an unlawful assembly in the area "(d)ue to acts of criminal behavior by multiple agitators" and had made arrests.

LAPD Lt. Bruce Coss said the protest was not permitted and that at about 2:30 p.m., protesters were "obstructing the street" and "stopping cars," prompting police to declare an unlawful assembly and evacuate the area.

Five people were arrested for failing to disperse, Coss said.

By about 4 p.m., the street was clear with a few dozen people still in the area, Coss said, who he described as "mostly media."

Saturday's protests come weeks after the March 28 "No Kings" rally that saw thousands of demonstrators packed downtown.

Police made several arrests later that evening after protesters converged outside the Metropolitan Detention Center.



Allen J. Schaben/TNS

An activist faces off with a Los Angeles Police Department skirmish line during a protest against ICE at the Metropolitan Detention Center on Saturday in Los Angeles.

WORLD

Ukraine hit oil pumping station in Russia before 32-hour ceasefire

By Olesia Safronova
Bloomberg News

Ukraine struck a fuel pumping station in Russia's Krasnodar region hours before the start of 32-hour ceasefire for Orthodox Easter and a prisoner-of-war swap.

Kyiv's forces hit the Krymskaya facility, Ukraine's General Staff said on Telegram. Earlier, authorities of the southern Russian region reported on Telegram that a drone attack had caused a fire at a fuel depot, but didn't specifically mention the pumping station. The fire was extinguished by the morning, according to regional authorities.

The facility serves as a main pipeline toward the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk, a key point for Russian oil exports, as well as a link to crude oil from the Afipsky and Ilsky refineries.

Ukraine in recent weeks has intensified attacks on Russia's oil-export infrastructure in the Black Sea and Baltic Sea, aiming to curb Russia's oil export revenue. Transneft's Sheskharis oil terminal in Novorossiysk halted loadings for a time last week after an attack by Ukrainian drones. The port resumed oil loading several days after the attack.

The latest strike happened ahead of a 32-hour ceasefire declared by Russian President Vladimir Putin for Orthodox Easter and also adopted by Ukraine. The halt in hostilities started as planned Saturday at 4 p.m. Moscow time and will last through Sunday. There have been no reports of any serious violations so far.

Also ahead of the ceasefire, Russia and Ukraine exchanged prisoners of war in a swap mediated by the United Arab Emirates.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy confirmed the exchange of 175 POWs from each side — the third so far this year — in a post on social media.

Most of the POWs returned from Russia had been in captivity since 2022, Zelenskyy said, and included members of the armed forces, the national guard and border guard, as well as seven civilians.

Russia's defense ministry commented on the swap in a statement reported by Interfax. The returned soldiers are currently in Belarus and receiving medical and psychological assistance, the ministry said.

Kyiv and Moscow have conducted more than 70 prisoner swaps since the start of the Russian full-scale invasion in February 2022, according to Ukraine's Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, the country's main agency dealing with exchanges.



AFP/TNS

A Russian police officer inspects a destroyed house following an air attack in Yasynuvata, Russia-controlled Donetsk region of Ukraine, on Saturday, amid the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Leader: Cuba will 'resist' US threats, has no political prisoners

By \Nora Gámez Torres
Miami Herald

The chance of a deal between the U.S. and Cuba that would include major economic and political changes on the communist-run island appears remote, as the nation's handpicked president, Miguel Diaz-Canel, told NBC News in an interview that he won't resign and that his government is able to resist pressure from the cutoff of oil supplies and defend from a U.S. military attack.

The interview, recorded in Havana on Thursday and aired in part Sunday morning, lands at a moment of heightened tensions between the two countries, after President Donald Trump has suggested he could "take Cuba" and that the island was "next." Secretary Marco Rubio is leading talks with Cuban leaders and said the country needs to make economic and political reforms and needs a change in leadership.

Díaz-Canel's answers to NBC reinforce the view that any talks are stalled.

Taken together, his statements to "Meet the Press" moderator Kristen Welker portray a picture of a government that believes it can hold on to power without making major concessions to the United States, notwithstanding the severe costs of the humanitarian crisis unfolding on the island. His message bolsters perceptions within the Trump administration that he is an obstacle to efforts to secure a deal with Cuba.

In the interview, Díaz-Canel repeatedly said that Cuba wants a dialogue with the United States, peace and an agreement to "move away from confrontation." But he said little that would suggest Cuba's leadership is considering making significant changes to its socialist economic and political system, a key U.S. demand.

For one, he flatly rejected stepping down, even if that would mean "saving Cuba," as Welker put it in her question. "I have no fear. I am willing to give my life for the revolution," he added.

He said Cuba's political system is not on the table, repeating what he and other Cuban officials have been telling the media for weeks. He also declined to commit to releasing political prisoners, scheduling multiparty elections or recognizing unions and a free press, conditions laid out in U.S. law as prerequisites to lift U.S. sanctions.

"Well, no, nobody has made those demands to us, and we have established that respect to our political system or constitutional order are issues that are not under negotiations with the United States," he said.

Pressed on whether he would release the 1,200 political prisoners in the country, including Grammy Award winner Maykel "Osorbo" Castillo, he denied Cuba holds any political prisoners.

"These people are not in jail because of protesting," he said. "They will be in jail like anyone else in the world, any other country in the world, who are respectful of their constitution and the legal process for engaging in vandalism and crimes. There are no political prisoners in Cuba for that."

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AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Hunter Biden wants cage match with a Trump son

NM ALBUQUERQUE — Hunter Biden wants to fight either of President Donald Trump's elder sons in a cage match.

The 56-year-old son of former President Joe Biden said it's his understanding that popular YouTuber Andrew Callaghan is trying to put him in a ring with either Donald Trump Jr. or Eric Trump.

Much the same way President Donald Trump routinely derides his predecessor, the Trump sons have antagonized the younger Biden in recent years.

Video of Biden accepting the challenge was posted to Callaghan's Channel 5 page on X. It starts with the attorney-turned-artist saying the YouTube host invited him to join the upcoming "Channel 5" Carnival Tour, whatever that might entail.

"I think he's trying to organize a cage match, me versus Eric and Don Jr," Biden said. "I told him I'd do it — 100% in — if he can pull it off."

Biden said either way he'll join the tour that began earlier this month and ends April 26 in New Mexico.

The Trump Organization hasn't responded to a request for comment about Don Jr., 48, or Eric, 42, fighting Biden.

'Ketamine queen' gets lengthy prison sentence

CA LOS ANGELES — A woman known as the "Ketamine queen" who provided the drugs that killed actor Matthew Perry was sentenced Wednesday to 15 years in federal prison.

Jasveen Sangha, who prosecutors said operated a high-volume drug trafficking business out of her North Hollywood home, pleaded guilty in September to one count of maintaining a drug-involved premises, three counts of distribution of ketamine and one count of distribution of ketamine resulting in death or serious bodily injury.

Sangha, 42, was one of five people charged with conspiracy to distribute ketamine to Perry, who died from acute effects of the drug.

During the sentencing hearing, U.S. District Judge Sherilyn Peace Garnett said that of the charged defendants tied to Perry's death, Sangha was "probably one of the most culpable."

Authorities say Sangha sold about 50 vials of ketamine to Perry for $11,000 — including the batch that led to his October 2023 death.

Pro-Palestine protester admits torching cop cars

NY NEW YORK — A pro-Palestine, anti-ICE protester admitted Wednesday he torched 11 parked NYPD vehicles last year as they sat unoccupied in a parking lot near a Brooklyn police stationhouse.

Jakhi Lodgson-McCray, 22, of Brooklyn, pleaded guilty to a federal arson charge Wednesday, admitting to an offense that carries a mandatory minimum of five years behind bars.

"On June 12, 2025, I knowingly and intentionally set fire to NYPD vehicles in a parking lot in Brooklyn, New York, and I knew that the vehicles could be damaged," he told Brooklyn Federal Court Magistrate Judge Seth Eichenholtz, as about 20 of his supporters sat in the courtroom, watching.

Lodgson-McCray set the police vehicles ablaze early on June 12, just hours after a "Speak Out" protest at the stationhouse calling out the NYPD out for its treatment of Puerto Rican Day Parade after-parade celebrants.



MATT ROURKE/AP

Cheered by cherry blossoms

Blossoming cherry trees rain down petals on picnickers along Kelly Drive in Philadelphia last week.

After declines, Chicago shootings tick up in 2026

IL CHICAGO — After four consecutive years of steep drops in gun violence, shootings in Chicago ticked up in the first quarter of 2026.

The city recorded 105 murders through the first week of April, up slightly from the 98 killings seen in the same time period in 2025, according to city violence data. Another 266 people have suffered nonfatal gunshot injuries since the start of the year.

The first three months of the year saw disparate trends in violence within CPD's five patrol areas, records show, with a mixed bag of increases and further drops.

The citywide uptick is largely due to an increase in both murders and nonfatal shootings in CPD's Area 1, which covers the city's South Side north of 79th Street.

The area saw 114 shootings and 32 murders through April 5 — 25% and 52% increases, respectively — according to police data.

Ban on child sex dolls, AI child porn supported

KY FRANKFORT — Kentucky Attorney General Russell Coleman announced last week he filed a brief in support of upholding a state law that bans the possession of child sex dolls and child porn generated by artificial intelligence.

Kenneth Moore, 50, of Sturgis, filed a motion to dismiss his charges in February after he was arrested in July 2025 and charged with possession of three child sex dolls and dozens of AI-generated child sex abuse videos of images.

Moore claimed the Kentucky law outlawing possession of such material, passed unanimously by the Kentucky General Assembly and signed into law in 2024, violated his constitutional rights.

Prosecutors for Coleman's office submitted briefs in opposition of the motion, filed in Union Circuit Court, and in support of the law.

Coleman called Moore's arguments "absurd" and said the brief was in pursuit of "restor(ing) common sense and up(holding) the legislation created to keep Kentucky's children safe."

Settlement near in Baltimore bridge collapse

MD BALTIMORE — Maryland officials said Thursday they have reached a settlement in principle with the owner and operator of the cargo ship involved in the 2024 collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, resolving a portion of the state's claims but stopping short of a final, binding agreement.

Maryland Attorney General Anthony Brown announced the agreement with Grace Ocean Private Limited and Synergy Marine Pte Ltd., which respectively own and operate the M/V Dali.

The settlement addresses claims brought by the state and several of its agencies over the March 26, 2024, collision with the Key Bridge.

In his statement, Brown said the agreement covers claims filed on behalf of agencies including the Maryland Transportation Authority, Maryland Port Administration and Maryland Department of the Environment, but does not resolve potential claims against the shipbuilder, Hyundai.

A settlement in principle means the parties have agreed to the major terms of a deal, but are still working to finalize and formally execute a written agreement before it becomes legally binding.

The collapse of the Key Bridge killed six construction workers, halted shipping at the Port of Baltimore and triggered widespread economic disruption across the region.

The state's lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in September 2024, alleged negligence and mismanagement in the operation of a vessel it said should not have been in service.

Cop sentenced for hurling cooler at fleeing suspect

NY NEW YORK — Sgt. Erik Duran, the NYPD "Cooler Cop" who killed a fleeing drug-deal suspect in the Bronx by hurling a heavy, ice-filled cooler at him, got a three-to-nine-year prison sentence Thursday, drawing cheers from criminal justice reform advocates and vitriol from the former cop's followers.

Duran, 38, wept as he stood before Judge Guy Mitchell in Bronx Supreme Court, telling the judge he "did everything he could" to save Eric Duprey after he crashed his motorcycle almost three years ago.

"I took this job to save lives," Duran told the judge. "I felt terrible once I saw Eric Duprey crashed. I ran up to him immediately. I regret that this day happened."

He spoke directly to Duprey's grieving mother, Gretchen Soto, in Spanish.

"Ma'am, I'm really sorry of the loss of your child," he said. "I never wanted this to happen. I pray for you and your family."

Duran was convicted of second-degree manslaughter in February following a Bronx Criminal Court non-jury trial. He was fired by the NYPD upon his conviction.

The manslaughter conviction meant he faced a maximum sentence of five to 15 years in prison.

From Tribune News Service

FACES/PUZZLES

Chasing relevancy

Q&A: Kevin Smith on ambition and Jay and Silent Bob's future

BY ADAM GRAHAM
The Detroit News

Kevin Smith is a first-rate, grade-A talker. The filmmaker and Generation X poster child has used his voice to build and sustain a fan base for more than three decades, since "Clerks," his breakthrough 1994 comedy about a couple of foul-mouthed New Jersey convenience store workers and the world they inhabit.

His universe expanded with follow-ups "Mallrats," "Chasing Amy" and "Dogma," all of which feature Smith as his trench coat-wearing Silent Bob character, and his sex-crazed stoner bud Jay, played by Jason Mewes. His world outside the movies grew as he became an early adopter of both blogging and podcasting, and he's been a fixture in the world of comic books and fan conventions since before the Marvel Cinematic Universe was a thing.

We talked to the 55-year-old recently about his career and his unassailable sense of ambition. He talked a lot, and we did our best to keep up. (This conversation has been edited for length and clarity, and to clean up a lot of Smith's cuss words.)



AP

Kevin Smith, known for foul-mouthed comedies from the '90s, is a regular at fan conventions.

Detroit News: At this point in your career, what continues to drive you?

Smith: I've realized the main thrust of my entire f—ing existence is this relevancy chase, this hunt for nonstop relevancy. My job every morning is to wake up and make a bunch of strangers care about what I think and what I'm doing. And so I built up this little cottage industry doing just that. And it's a tender trap, man. It was beautiful, the prospect of getting paid just to be me. Oh my god, I've won. I've cracked the code! But that means you then have to figure out how to make people give a f— about you from now until the end of time. And I've been doing that for 32 years now. And let me tell you, it doesn't get easier.

But I've somehow stretched this into a three-decade journey, so, no complaints there. But once you've been doing it this long, then you're like, I don't want to stop. Like now what, go back to Quick Stop? F— that. So, you know, welcome back again, my friends, to the show that never ends. And you try to figure out how to add one more link, let the tail grow a little bit longer. I never saw that s— coming when I began this journey.

How has your perception of relevance shifted during that time?

There's no f—ing manual for any of this, right? So let me give that as a heads up to any artist out there who's like, "I want to make myself part of my art." Just know that's the cost that comes with it. And some people, where they're standing, it's like, "f—, I'll pay that cost," but you don't know. I went crazy a few years ago, and I think the core of it was like, "What would life have been like if I didn't have this incessant f—ing need to make people give a s— about my thoughts?" But then again, I would have been on the outside looking in going, "Oh, what if I had done this? What if I could be somebody like that?" Like, I already know what it's like to be on the inside. And you think once you're in, f—. But then there's another inside. And then there's another inside, inside of that. ... There's no finish line, there's no sense of, "now, I am full." It's not necessarily that you want more, like you're greedy, but ambition just don't let you go to sleep, and it wakes you up at night.

And that's the only thing I'd warn a young Kev about. Like, "Hey man, just know that if you're lucky and you get in, it's not going to end." And I bet you I wouldn't have changed a thing. All I would have heard was, "What? I get to make movies?" That's all that would have mattered, not the cost that comes along with it. That all being said, the cost is minimal, the gains are immense, and I'm not just talking about monetarily. I'm talking about waking up and feeling, like, "I'm heard." One of the greatest gifts you can give a human being is feeling like they've been heard. That's why everyone's all over social media; people want to be heard.

Was that sense of ambition in you before you made "Clerks," or did it kick in after?

It really kind of kicked in after. It's not like I was one of those kids like Spielberg, running around with the Super 8 camera in his backyard. I just loved movies, right? But it never occurred to me to make one.

... And then I go see Richard Linklater's "Slacker" on my 21st birthday, and suddenly it all clicks. Then I'm like, wait, because I'd never seen anything like it. I was entranced, because I was like, "Oh s—, if this counts as a movie, I think I could make a movie, too." And then suddenly I get interested in filmmaking.

Did anyone help you at that time?

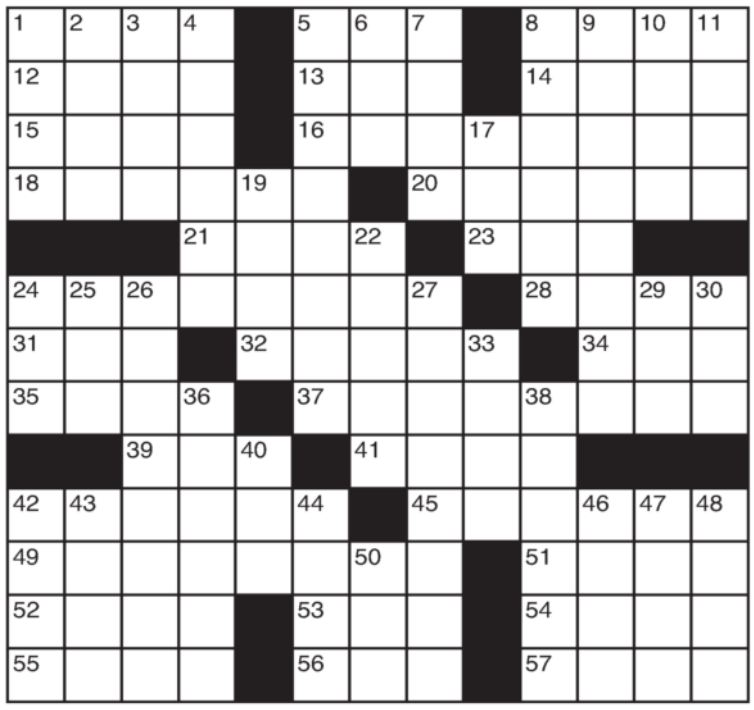
It was my sister that led me there. She was always pushing me, like, "You're meant for more, Kevin. Why are you selling yourself short?" So when I saw "Slacker" and decided I wanted to be a filmmaker, I said to my sister, "I saw this movie in New York and I think I want to be a filmmaker," and she goes, "Oh my god, great. Be a filmmaker. Don't *want* to be a filmmaker, *be* a filmmaker, in your head and heart with everything you do." Powerful words. Magic words, man. You're a filmmaker; you just haven't made your film yet. Boom. And then I just had to convince people along the way, and we all made ("Clerks") together, and we were off to the races.

What's that next turn at the table for you?

We're waiting for our last $500,000 so we can go make "Jay and Silent Bob: Store Wars." Fingers crossed. It's the next Jay and Silent Bob movie, which it's crazy that there's still money out there for Jay and Silent Bob, but it's still happening. It's been written for a red-hot minute. We were building toward doing it by the end of the 2025, but then that got pushed to the beginning of this year, and now we're hoping to start preproduction in late April.

... And I love my career, but there are times when I've kicked myself going like, "Man, you should have been more about the money when you were a kid." Because if you were about the money, you'd have your own f—ing money now, and you wouldn't necessarily be out there going like, "hey, brother, can you spare a dime?" to make your art. That's the only reason I regret not being a financial success, not being a hitmaker, because it would seem that it's easier to get things going if you've got that in your corner.

Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 Galvanizing matter
5 Bud
8 Jr.-year exam
12 "By Jove!"
13 Vein yield
14 Sicilian spouter
15 Smooth-talking
16 Impression left by a pet?
18 Wrapped garment
20 Birthing coaches
21 — avis
23 Jargon suffix
24 Kind of table
28 Engrave
31 Brit. record label
32 Road runners
34 Commonest English word
35 Witty ones
37 Make light of
39 Uplands, for short
41 Secret-protecting docs
42 Main dish
45 Johnson, aka "The Rock"
49 Nutty dessert
51 Starring role
52 Morales of "Ozark"
53 Chemical suffix
54 "— Lisa"
55 "30 for 30" network
56 Scoundrel
57 Did the backstroke

DOWN

1 Veers suddenly
2 Actress Fisher
3 Director Mira
4 Bionic woman, e.g.
5 ABBA, for one
6 Celestial altar
7 Lascivious
8 Read
9 Heel type
10 "— Karenina"
11 Makes lace
17 "Ulalume" writer
19 Wine valley
22 Composer Bruckner
24 Church seat
25 "— Believer"
26 Bedtime drink
27 Act of kindness
29 Comedian Margaret
30 Sneaky chuckle
33 "Candida" playwright
36 Use a sieve
38 Sacred songs
40 Capitol VIP
42 Fencing sword
43 Loch — monster
44 Grand tale
46 Cry of pain
47 "Peter Pan" pooch
48 Wax-coated cheese
50 Hollywood's Lupino

Answer to Previous Puzzle

■	T	A	T	U	M	■	S	H	A	S	T	A
A	R	I	O	S	O	■	T	A	U	P	E	S
B	E	M	O	A	N	■	A	R	G	Y	L	E
C	E	S	T	■	A	A	R	P	■	N	E	A
■	■	■	H	E	R	S	■	O	X	O	■	■
A	O	K	■	S	C	A	R	■	I	V	E	S
F	R	E	N	C	H	R	I	V	I	E	R	A
T	O	N	E	■	S	U	C	H	■	L	A	P
■	■	T	E	A	■	L	E	S	S	■	■	■
T	H	U	■	S	T	E	W	■	O	V	I	D
R	O	C	O	C	O	■	I	G	U	A	N	A
A	S	K	N	O	T	■	N	A	P	P	E	D
P	E	Y	O	T	E	■	E	S	S	E	S	■

4-13 CRYPTOQUIP

WHTJ DU H AJHEBRUEX PXHOORP ODWN TJTDGRHXRFRWN BCJ RWHENEGHX QJHPJ QGRFJ: "BCJ URGOB WDAJX."

Saturday's Cryptoquip: I DISCOVERED WHY MY NEW CURTAIN HAS DEVELOPED SO MANY MYSTERIOUS HOLES. IT HAS A DRAPEWORM.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: N equals G

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Stars and Stripes (USPS 0417900) published daily (except Saturday, Sunday, 25 December and 1 January) for 50 cents (Monday through Thursday) and one dollar on Friday by Stars and Stripes Pacific, OPC 706 BOX 7, APO AP 96301-9001. Periodicals postage paid at San Francisco, CA Postmaster: Send address changes to Pacific Stars and Stripes, OPC 706 BOX 7, AP 96301-9001.

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OPINION



WARRICK PAGE, HBO MAX/TNS

From left: Gerran Howell, Amielynn Abellera, Noah Wyle, Sepideh Moafi and Supriya Ganesh in "The Pitt" Season 2.

Burnout depicted on 'The Pitt' is real, painful

BY JENNIFER OBEL
Chicago Tribune

In between patients at my oncology clinic, I couldn't catch my breath. I asked my nurse to check my oxygen level and pulse. My chest felt heavy, as if something were pressing on it.

I sat in the same examination chair my patients use, watching the monitor and running through possible diagnoses. But I knew what this was.

A panic attack.

My mother had just called. While she felt fine, her routine CT scan showed fluid around her lung. I didn't need anyone to explain what it meant. I'm an oncologist. Pleural effusion, in this context, is definitive: It meant her cancer had spread.

She didn't know yet. I did.

Over the next two years, as she lived with Stage IV lung cancer, I moved between my roles as daughter and doctor, managing my own patients and quietly absorbing her suffering. The message from my oncology division was clear: Keep working. There was no space to feel.

That expectation is not incidental. It is structural. The system holds because the people inside it are asked to absorb more than they should.

That's why a scene in the HBO medical drama "The Pitt" stopped me.

Dr. Samira Mohan is dealing with a chaotic emergency department while fielding calls from her mother. The pace is relentless. Her body gives way to chest pain, sweating and a sense of impending doom. She is triaged as a patient. But it isn't a heart attack.

When she returns to her duties, Dr. Robby, the attending physician, dismisses it as "mommy issues."

It was one of the first times I felt seen, and it came from a TV show.

"The Pitt" reflects the failures of our health care system — overcrowded emergency rooms, too few doctors and too many patients. It shows an uninsured patient who is suffering from diabetic ketoacidosis, a condition in which blood sugar spirals out of control, but who leaves before his treatment is complete because he cannot afford to stay. It shows a son who drives for more than an hour so his critically ill father can get dialysis after they discover their local hospital has closed.

But what the show captures with unusual insight is something more fundamental. "The Pitt" reveals not just what the system lacks, but the self-sacrifice required of the medical team in order for health care to stay afloat. Medicine does not just demand our competence as professionals. It demands that we ignore ourselves and our needs, even when the personal cost is high.

In a recent episode of "The Pitt," a student doctor who leaves promptly at the end of her shift instead of working over tells a senior resident that 60% of emergency physicians report burnout. Hers is a quiet act of refusal. Because in medicine, the expectation is that we should stay through exhaustion, personal crisis and the slow erosion of self we are trained to ignore.

Every part of medicine functions this way. The emergency department is just where the strain is most visible. In the operating room, care depends on layers of people — nurses, anesthesiologists, surgical technicians, assistants — contributing a different piece of the whole. Oncology clinics run on the same coordination, as do inpatient teams.

It is less like a hierarchy than an orchestra, each person entering at the right moment. There is little margin for error. When one note is missed, whether from fatigue, overload or distraction, the entire performance begins to unravel.

"The Pitt" is filmed the same way, the camera moving continuously from one person to the next, as if there is no pause in the system.

Burnout is not simply an individual condition. It is the predictable result of a system that operates without a buffer.

Health care redistributes strain. When one physician is exhausted, others compensate. When a nurse is stretched too thin, someone else absorbs the delay. To patients, the system appears relatively intact because the people in it bend to keep it that way. But when enough people are depleted at the same time, what appears to be an isolated error is often the predictable result of a system pushed past its capacity.

"The Pitt" lays bare these pressures. In the first season, a charge nurse takes a break outside from a relentless shift. A disgruntled patient follows her and punches her in the face, knocking her to the ground. She returns to work.

In the second season, a patient under the influence wraps his arm around a young nurse's neck and chokes her until the charge nurse intervenes. Though shaken, the novice nurse insists on finishing her shift. There is no pause long enough to process what happened and no space for recovery.

I have done this myself. Years ago, I had a nonviable pregnancy and chose a surgical termination — not because it was an emergency but because it fit around my clinic schedule. I saw nine patients that morning before driving to my gynecologist's office for the procedure.

I returned to work the next day without time to mourn. It was practical. I did not feel I could risk miscarrying at work because of the pain, the bleeding and the disruption it would cause me and my patients.

This is what medicine teaches: Endure hardship and organize your life around the expectation that patient care is paramount. While we call resilience a strength, it is often a requirement that does damage over time. The system depends on people carrying on without time to recover or reflect.

At the Art Institute of Chicago, there is a painting I often return to: pointillist Georges Seurat's "A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte." It depicts a calm afternoon along the Seine River in Paris. But step toward it, and the image dissolves into tens of thousands of points, which you can see only up close.

"The Pitt" is that way, too. From a distance, the system seems coherent. Up close, it becomes clear that the system depends on individuals taking on more than they should, persisting when they should be allowed to stop and breathe.

Art preserves a moment by showing a historical portrayal of how people lived. It does not have to define the future.

We should hope that one day, physicians in training will watch "The Pitt" and find the burnout unrecognizable — not because medicine has changed but because what we ask of practitioners finally has.

Dr. Jennifer Obel is a retired oncologist who writes about the intersection of medicine, ethics and public policy.

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SCOREBOARD/MMA

AUTO RACING

Suburban Propane 300

NASCAR O'Reilly Series
Saturday
At Bristol Motor Speedway
Bristol, Tenn.
Lap length: 0.53 miles
Start position in parentheses

1. (15) Connor Zilisch, Chevrolet, 300 laps, 0 points
2. (3) Kyle Larson, Chevrolet, 300, 0
3. (17) Brent Crews, Toyota, 300, 41
4. (7) Justin Allgaier, Chevrolet, 300, 48
5. (8) Carson Kvapil, Chevrolet, 300, 33
6. (2) Sheldon Creed, Chevrolet, 300, 49
7. (1) William Sawalich, Toyota, 300, 40
8. (14) Corey Day, Chevrolet, 300, 32
9. (9) Parker Retzlaff, Chevrolet, 300, 28
10. (6) Taylor Gray, Toyota, 300, 27
11. (11) Ryan Sieg, Chevrolet, 300, 34
12. (12) Jesse Love, Chevrolet, 300, 28
13. (16) Sammy Smith, Chevrolet, 300, 24
14. (38) Rajah Caruth, Chevrolet, 300, 23
15. (19) Jeremy Clements, Chevrolet, 300, 22
16. (13) Jeb Burton, Chevrolet, 300, 21
17. (22) Harrison Burton, Toyota, 300, 20
18. (10) Brennan Poole, Chevrolet, 300, 19
19. (4) Brandon Jones, Toyota, 300, 28
20. (5) Sam Mayer, Chevrolet, 300, 22
21. (23) Austin Hill, Chevrolet, 300, 16
22. (30) Blaine Perkins, Chevrolet, 299, 15
23. (27) Josh Bilicki, Chevrolet, 299, 14
24. (21) Dean Thompson, Toyota, 298, 13
25. (20) Kyle Sieg, Chevrolet, 298, 12
26. (34) JJ Yeley, Ford, 298, 11
27. (32) Patrick Staropoli, Chevrolet, 298, 10
28. (28) Gray Gaulding, Chevrolet, 298, 9
29. (29) Josh Williams, Chevrolet, 297, 8
30. (33) Ryan Ellis, Chevrolet, 297, 7
31. (36) Joey Gase, Chevrolet, 297, 6
32. (26) Lavar Scott, Chevrolet, 295, 5
33. (24) Logan Bearden, Chevrolet, 295, 4
34. (37) Blake Lothian, Toyota, 295, 3
35. (25) Austin Green, Chevrolet, 290, 2
36. (18) Anthony Alfredo, Chevrolet, 287, 1
37. (31) Mason Maggio, Chevrolet, engine, 191, 1
38. (35) Garrett Smithley, Chevrolet, suspension, 176, 1

Race statistics

Average speed of race winner: 77.882 mph.
Time of race: 2 hours, 3 minutes, 11 seconds
Margin of victory: 0.703 seconds
Caution flags: 8 for 59 laps
Lead changes: 13 among 7 drivers
Lap leaders: W.Sawalich 0-27; K.Larson 28-64; B.Jones 65; R.Sieg 66-69; J.Clements 70; R.Sieg 71-79; K.Larson 80-175; B.Jones 176; K.Larson 177-272; C.Zilisch 273-288; K.Larson 289; C.Zilisch 290; B.Crews 291-293; C.Zilisch 294-300
Leaders summary (driver, times led, laps led): K.Larson, 4 times for 230 laps; W.Sawalich, 1 time for 27 laps; C.Zilisch, 3 times for 24 laps; R.Sieg, 2 times for 13 laps; B.Crews, 1 time for 3 laps; B.Jones, 2 times for 2 laps; J.Clements, 1 time for 1 lap
Wins: J.Allgaier, 3; S.Creed, 1; A.Hill, 1; W.Sawalich, 1
Top 16 in points: 1. J.Allgaier, 470; 2. S.Creed, 340; 3. J.Love, 324; 4. C.Day, 304; 5. C.Kvapil, 300; 6. A.Hill, 293; 7. S.Smith, 284; 8. B.Jones, 275; 9. P.Retzlaff, 257; 10. W.Sawalich, 254; 11. R.Caruth, 238; 12. T.Gray, 230; 13. R.Sieg, 202; 14. S.Mayer, 195; 15. B.Poole, 181; 16. J.Burton, 163

TENNIS

Monte Carlo Masters

ATP
Saturday
At Monte Carlo Country Club
Monte Carlo, Monaco
Purse: Euro 6,309,095
Surface: Red clay
Seedings in parentheses
Men's Singles
Semifinals

Jannik Sinner (2), Italy, def. Alexander Zverev (3), Germany, 6-1, 6-4
Carlos Alcaraz (1), Spain, def. Valentin Vacherot, Monaco, 6-4, 6-4

Men's Doubles
Semifinals

Mate Pavic, Croatia, and Marcelo Arevalo (5), El Salvador, def. Guido Andreozzi, Argentina, and Manuel Guinard (8), France, 6-3, 7-5
Kevin Krawietz and Tim Putz (6), Germany, def. Edouard Roger-Vasselin, France, and Hugo Nys, Monaco, 7-6 (3), 4-6, 10-8

Generali Ladies Linz

WTA
Saturday
At Intersport Arena Linz
Linz, Austria
Purse: Euro 1,049,083
Surface: Red clay indoor
Seedings in parentheses
Women's Singles
Semifinals

Mirra Andreeva (1), Russia, def. Elena-Gabriela Ruse, Romania, 6-4, 6-1
Anastasia Potapova, Russia, def. Donna Vekic, Croatia, 6-4, 6-2

Women's Doubles
Semifinals

Zhang Shuai, China, and Sorana Cirstea (1), Romania, def. Ulrikke Eikeri, Norway, and Quinn Gleason (4), United States, 7-5, 6-2

DEALS

Saturday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
American League

BALTIMORE ORIOLES — Selected the contract of C Maverick Handley from Chesapeake (EL). Placed C Adley Rutschman on the 10-day IL. Designated RHP Chayce McDermott for assignment.
BOSTON RED SOX — Sent RHP Kutter Crawford to Worcester (IL) on a rehab assignment.
DETROIT TIGERS — Agreed to terms with OF Tyler Gentry on a minor league contract. Claimed RHP Grant Holman off waivers from the Los Angeles Dodgers.
HOUSTON ASTROS — Sent LHP Bennett Sousa to Sugar Land (PCL) on a rehab assignment. Recalled RHP Jayden Murray from Sugar Land. Optioned RHP J.P. France to Sugar Land.
LOS ANGELES ANGELS — Designated 3B Jeimer Candelario for assignment. Reinstated 2B Vaughn Grissom from the 10-day IL.
MINNESOTA TWINS — Placed RHP Cody Laweryson on the 15-day IL, retroactive to April 9. Placed 3B Royce Lewis on the 10-day IL, retroactive to April 10. Recalled RHP Andrew Morris and OF Ryan Kreidler from St. Paul (IL).
TAMPA BAY RAYS — Placed RHP Joe Boyle on the 15-day IL, retroactive tom April 10. Recalled RHP Jesse Scholtens from Durham (IL). Transferred Drew Rasmussen from the paternity list to the family medical emergency list.

National League

ATLANTA BRAVES — Reinstated RHP Daysbel Hernández from the 15-day IL and optioned him to Gwinnett (IL). Placed OF Michael Harris II on paternity list. Transferred LHP Danny Young to the 60-day IL. Selected the contract of SS Luke Williams from Gwinnett.
NEW YORK METS — Designated LHP Richard Lovelady for assignment. Selected the contract of RHP Craig Kimbrel from St. Lucie (FSL).

BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association

BOSTON CELTICS — Signed F Dalano Banton to a rest-of-season contract.
MIAMI HEAT — Re-signed G Jahmir Young to a rest-of-season contract.
TORONTO RAPTORS — Converted the contract of G A.J. Lawson to an NBA contract.
UTAH JAZZ — Signed G Hayden Gray to a rest-of-season contract.

Women's National Basketball Association

ATLANTA DREAM — Re-signed Fs Naz Hillmon and Brionna Jones and Gs Ryne Howard, Allisha Gray and Jordin Canada.
CHICAGO SKY — Acquired G Jacy Sheldon from Washington in exchange for a 2028 first-round pick. Signed Gs Rachel Banham and Skylar Diggins and F/Cs Elizabeth Williams and Azurá Stevens.
CONNECTICUT SUN — Signed C Brittney Griner. Re-signed C Olivia Nelson-Ododa.
DALLAS WINGS — Re-signed F Awak Kuier. Signed F Jessica Shepard.
GOLDEN STATE VALKYRIES — Re-signed G Veronica Burton.
PORTLAND FIRE — Signed F Bridget Carleton and G Karlie Samuelson.
SEATTLE STORM — Re-signed G Zia Cooke and F Mackenzie Holmes. Signed G Natisha Hiedeman.
TORONTO TEMPO — Signed Gs Brittney Sykes and Julie Allemand to multi-year contracts. Signed Gs Lexi Held, María Conde and Kristy Wallace, Fs Nikolina Milic, Laura Juškaite and Elizabeth Balogun to training camp contracts. Tendered an offer sheet to F/C Shakira Austin.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League

BOSTON BRUINS — Recalled F Lukas Reichel from Providence (AHL).
COLORADO AVALANCHE — Signed F T.J. Hughes to a one year, entry-level contract.
DETROIT RED WINGS — Reassigned G Michal Postava to Grand Rapids (AHL).
FLORIDA PANTHERS — Recalled F Wilmer Skoog from Charlotte (AHL).
NASHVILLE PREDATORS — Recalled D Kevin Gravel from Milwaukee (AHL).
PITTSBURGH PENGUINS — Recalled Fs Ville Koivunen, Rutger McGroarty and Joona Koppanen from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton (AHL).
SEATTLE KRAKEN — Recalled G Victor Ostman from Coachella Valley (AHL).
TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING — Reassigned F Jakob Pelletier to Syracuse (AHL).
UTAH MAMMOTH — Reassigned F Kevin Rooney to Tucson (AHL).
VANCOUVER CANUCKS — Recalled D Kirill Kudryavtsev from Abbotsford (AHL). Reassigned G Jiri Patera to Abbotsford.

AP SPORTLIGHT

April 13

1954 — The Milwaukee Braves' Hank Aaron plays his first major league game.
1963 — Pete Rose triples for his first major league hit.
1972 — The first player strike in baseball history ends with the season set to start April 15.
1980 — The United States and its allies boycott the Summer Olympics in Moscow in protest against Russia's invasion of Afghanistan.
1984 — Pete Rose of the Montreal Expos collects the 4,000th hit of his career with a double off the Philadelphia Phillies' Jerry Koosman.
1986 — Jack Nicklaus wins the Masters for a record sixth time and at 46 becomes the oldest to win the event.

PRO SOCCER

MLS

Eastern Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Nashville	5	1	1	16	15	4
Chicago	4	2	1	13	9	5
Inter Miami CF	3	1	3	12	13	12
NYC FC	3	2	2	11	14	9
Charlotte FC	3	2	2	11	13	9
Toronto FC	3	2	2	11	10	11
New York	3	2	2	11	11	15
New England	3	3	0	9	12	9
D.C. United	2	4	1	7	4	9
Cincinnati	2	4	1	7	10	16
Columbus	1	3	2	5	8	9
Atlanta	1	5	1	4	6	12
Philadelphia	1	6	0	3	6	12
CF Montréal	1	6	0	3	8	19
Orlando City	1	5	0	3	5	23

Western Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Vancouver	6	1	0	18	19	4
San Jose	6	1	0	18	13	2
LAFC	5	1	1	16	15	2
Real Salt Lake	4	1	1	13	12	8
Seattle	4	1	1	13	6	2
Colorado	4	3	0	12	19	12
FC Dallas	3	1	3	12	15	10
San Diego FC	3	2	2	11	14	10
Minn. United	3	2	2	11	8	13
LA Galaxy	2	3	2	8	10	11
Portland	2	4	1	7	11	16
Houston	2	4	0	6	10	16
Austin FC	1	3	3	6	8	11
St Louis City	1	3	3	6	6	9
Sporting KC	1	5	1	4	7	17

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

Saturday's games

Cincinnati 1, Toronto FC 1, tie
LA Galaxy 2, Austin FC 1
Philadelphia 2, CF Montréal 1
Portland 2, Los Angeles FC 1
Nashville 2, Charlotte FC 1
New York 2, Miami 2, tie
New England 1, D.C. United 0
Vancouver 2, New York City FC 0
Chicago 1, Atlanta 0
St Louis City 1, FC Dallas 1, tie
San Jose 3, Sporting Kansas City 1
Colorado 6, Houston 2
Minnesota 2, San Diego FC 1

Sunday's games

Orlando City at Columbus
Real Salt Lake at Seattle ppd.

Friday, April 17

Sporting Kansas City at Vancouver

Saturday, April 18

Austin FC at Toronto FC
New York at CF Montréal
Miami at Colorado
Nashville at Atlanta
Chicago at Cincinnati
Columbus at New England
Charlotte FC at New York City FC
Houston at Orlando City
D.C. United at Philadelphia
LA Galaxy at FC Dallas
Portland at Minnesota
San Diego FC at Real Salt Lake
St Louis City at Seattle

Sunday, April 19

San Jose at Los Angeles FC

Wednesday, April 22

New England at Atlanta
LA Galaxy at Columbus
Cincinnati at New York City FC
D.C. United at New York
Charlotte FC at Orlando City
Philadelphia at Toronto FC
Minnesota at FC Dallas
San Diego FC at Houston
Miami at Real Salt Lake
Colorado at Los Angeles FC
Austin FC at San Jose

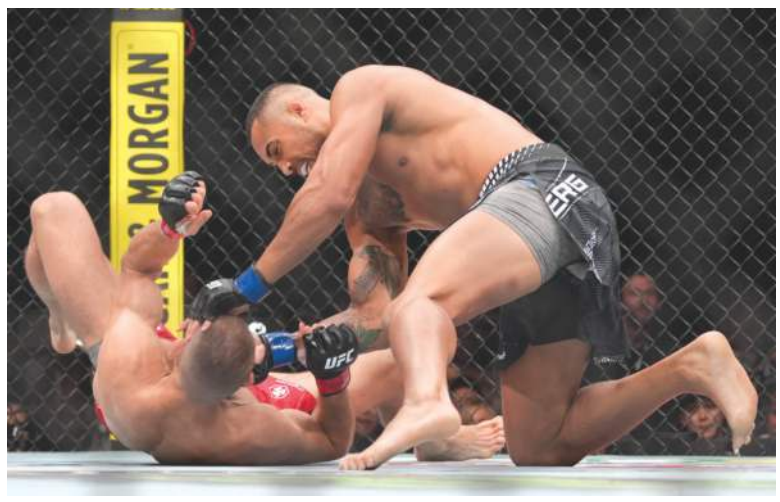
NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
San Diego	4	1	0	12	8	3
Portland	3	1	1	10	8	5
Seattle	3	1	1	10	7	4
Angel City	3	1	0	9	10	4
Houston	3	1	0	9	9	5
Orlando	2	1	2	8	7	4
Utah Royals FC	2	2	1	7	6	6
Washington	1	1	3	6	5	4
Denver FC	1	1	3	6	4	3
Bay FC	2	2	0	6	6	7
Kansas City	2	3	0	6	5	9
North Carolina	1	1	2	5	5	6
Gotham FC	1	2	2	5	2	4
Chicago	1	4	0	3	2	11
Louisville	0	3	1	1	7	10
Boston FC	0	4	0	0	1	7

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

Friday, April 24

Orlando at Louisville
Kansas City at Washington



REBECCA BLACKWELL/AP

Carlos Ulberg strikes Jiri Prochazka on his way to a KO win in their light heavyweight title bout at UFC 327 on Saturday in Miami.

Ulberg wins belt with 1st-round KO

Associated Press

MIAMI — Hobbling on one leg, Carlos Ulberg refused to let an injured knee ruin the opportunity he earned at UFC 327 on Saturday night.

With President Donald Trump sitting cageside, Ulberg delivered a perfect left hook to Jiri Prochazka's chin and won the undisputed light heavyweight belt with a knockout at the 3:45 mark of the first round.

"I blew out my knee, but I never counted myself out," Ulberg said. "I knew all I needed was that one shot and I ended up getting it. So I knew that Jiri was hesitant to come forward. And as soon as I landed my left hand he's going.

"It's about getting those moments."

Ulberg (15-1-0) appeared to tweak something early in the first round when he planted his foot and his right knee buckled awkwardly. Prochazka (32-6-1) immediately went to work on Ulberg's left leg, repeatedly landing leg kicks with hopes of taking both legs away, rather than attacking aggressively to end it.

"I felt sorry (for) him, and this is one of the biggest lessons in my life," Prochazka said. "That fight was won, I had it, it was in my hands. I saw his injury, and ... I will be back. Life is about that, learn and be better."

The matchup was made after former champion Alex Pereira vacated the belt to move up and challenge for the interim heavyweight crown at UFC Freedom 250 at the White House on June 14, on what will be Trump's 80th birthday.

Earlier, on his way to the arena, Trump's Truth Social account posted an advertisement for the event.

Trump entered the Kaseya Center shortly after 9 p.m., accompanied by UFC president Dana White and several members of the Trump family.

As a Kid Rock song blasted from the speakers, Trump walked to his seat, where Secretary of State Marco Rubio was waiting. Also nearby was Sergio Gor, the U.S. ambassador to India.

Trump, who shared several smiles with the cameras, shook hands with attendees on the floor and made a point of greeting the UFC broadcast team, including podcaster Joe Rogan.

A crowd of onlookers could be seen filming the presidential motorcade upon arrival.

In the co-main event, Paulo Costa (16-4-0) used a right roundhouse to the head to drop Azamat Murzakanov (16-1-0) and end the bout at the 1:23 mark of the third round. Costa stepped onto the apron of the Octagon after his victory to shake Trump's hand, and the president praised him. Costa acknowledged Trump during his post-fight interview with Rogan.

Josh Hokit (9-0-0) and Curtis Blaydes (19-6-0) battered each other in the slugfest of the night, with Trump excitedly watching the heavyweights as fans chanted "This is awesome!" as the fighters bloodied each other's faces. Hokit won by unanimous decision (29-28, 29-28, 29-28).

White took to social media after Hokit's win to reveal that a matchup between Hokit and Derrick Lewis had been added to UFC Freedom 250. According to White's video, Trump asked why Lewis wasn't on the White House card. White said he called Lewis and offered him a fight, and when Rogan jokingly asked during the broadcast if there was room for Hokit on the card, the match came together.

"President Trump built half of that fight, Rogan built the other half," White said in the video. "Both guys have agreed and accepted the fight."

MASTERS

Low scores, except for McIlroy, close gap

BY STEVE REED
Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — The Masters looked as if it might be a runaway entering the weekend.

Moving day changed all of that.

When the sun set on one of the wildest Saturdays in Masters history that featured dramatic movement on the leaderboard, Rory McIlroy's six-shot lead had evaporated, leaving the defending champion tied with Cameron Young at 11-under 205 and a dozen players within six shots of the lead, including two-time champion Scottie Scheffler.

Only two players were within six shots of the lead at the start of the third round.

What is left is a dream final round scenario for the Masters and TV partner CBS Sports — a championship that any number of high-profile players can win, setting up a potentially dramatic finish.

While McIlroy was spraying his driver, others were bearing down on flagsticks. Birdies at every turn, and eagles there for the taking.

Shane Lowry even had a hole-in-one in the difficult par-3 sixth hole, vaulting into contention and becoming first player in Masters history with two career aces at Augusta National.

The field's average score on Saturday was 70.63 — a Masters record for the third round — besting the previous lows of 70.769 in 2019 and 70.979 in 1986.

This was moving day on steroids as 10 players shot 68 or better.

The way things went Saturday, Jason Day said it might be better not to be atop the leaderboard.

"I feel like the guys that are leading right now have all the pressure," said Day, who is at 8 under. "I'm just kind of, I'm the chaser. Usually the chasers don't really have a lot of the pressure. Guys at the top of the leaderboard always are trying to defend the lead, whereas I'm pushing forward trying to cut into the lead."

Scheffler seemed to get the landslide started.

Starting the round 12 shots back, he rolled in an eagle putt on the par-5 second hole and went on to shoot 31 on the front nine. He briefly threatened the championship record of 63 before finishing with a 65 after leaving some shots on the course over the back nine.

By the time he walked up to 18th green to a rousing applause, the the field behind him was posting some low scores, too.

Young matched Scheffler's 65.

Sam Burns, who is one shot behind the leaders, shot 68. Lowry also shot 68 and is two shots back. Day (68) and Justin Rose (69) had clawed to within three of the lead and Scheffler was tied for seventh, four back and well within striking distance.

"I was aware that (McIlroy) wasn't kind of stretching (the lead) out, so kind of made it feel like, yeah, all to play for," Rose said.

Rose is well aware that anything can happen on Sunday at the Masters.

Last year, he trailed McIlroy by seven shots entering the final round, only to catch him before losing in a playoff.

"I think I had to have a big mental reset going into the final round last year," Rose said. "You know, this year it's like — it feels like a little bit of a free run at it."

Burns, who played in the final pairing with McIlroy, said he simply tried to focus on his own game.

That will be his plan again Sunday.

"I can't control anything anyone else does," Burns said.

"I can only control myself, and so that's kind of what the mentality we took today. Just focus on our process and go out there and compete."

On Sunday, Young will go off in the final pairing with McIlroy.

He has some history on his side.

In the previous two years, the winner of the Players Championship has gone on to win the Masters.

One thing is for certain: McIlroy's rounds of 67 and 65 to start the Masters now seem like ancient history and a testament to how quickly things can change at Augusta National.

That's why Young planned to put his 65 behind him quickly as possible.

"Yeah, I'll probably give myself some time to think about it right now for the next 30 minutes or so," Young said.

"After that, it's kind of a battle of managing how you want to react to those things. To me, it's just a matter of going right back to how am I going to run my day tomorrow."



MATT SLOCUM/AP

Cameron Young hits from the fairway on the first hole during the third round of the Masters on Saturday. He shot 65 to tie for the lead.

Scoreboard

Saturday

At Augusta National
Augusta, Ga.
Purse: $9.8 million
Yardage: 7,565; Par: 72
Third round

Rory McIlroy, N. Ireland	67-65-73—205	-11
Cameron Young, US	73-67-65—205	-11
Sam Burns, United States	67-71-68—206	-10
Shane Lowry, Ireland	70-69-68—207	-9
Jason Day, Australia	69-71-68—208	-8
Justin Rose, England	70-69-69—208	-8
Hao-Tong Li, China	71-69-69—209	-7
Scottie Scheffler, US	70-74-65—209	-7
Patrick Cantlay, US	77-67-66—210	-6
Russell Henley, United States	73-71-66—210	-6
Patrick Reed, United States	69-69-72—210	-6
Ben Griffin, United States	72-69-70—211	-5
Jake Knapp, United States	73-69-69—211	-5
Collin Morikawa, US	74-69-68—211	-5
Wyndham Clark, US	72-68-72—212	-4
Tommy Fleetwood, England	71-68-73—212	-4
Ryan Gerard, United States	72-72-68—212	-4
Tyrrell Hatton, England	74-66-72—212	-4
Brooks Koepka, United States	72-69-71—212	-4
Xander Schauffele, US	70-72-70—212	-4
Ludvig Aberg, Sweden	74-70-69—213	-3
Michael Brennan, US	72-71-70—213	-3
Brian Campbell, United States	71-73-69—213	-3
Matt Fitzpatrick, England	74-69-70—213	-3
Chris Gotterup, United States	72-69-72—213	-3
Max Homa, United States	72-70-71—213	-3
Kristoffer Reitan, Norway	72-68-73—213	-3
Nick Taylor, Canada	71-72-70—213	-3
Jacob Bridgeman, US	71-74-69—214	-2
Sungjae Im, South Korea	76-69-69—214	-2
Hideki Matsuyama, Japan	72-70-72—214	-2
Sepp Straka, Austria	73-72-69—214	-2
Harris English, United States	73-71-71—215	-1
Brian Harman, United States	79-69-67—215	-1
Jordan Spieth, United States	72-73-70—215	-1
Marco Penge, England	76-69-71—216	E
Adam Scott, Australia	72-74-70—216	E
Sam Stevens, United States	72-74-70—216	E
Viktor Hovland, Norway	75-71-71—217	+1
Matthew McCarty, US	72-73-72—217	+1
Maverick McNealy, US	77-70-70—217	+1
Alex Noren, Sweden	77-71-69—217	+1
Justin Thomas, United States	72-74-71—217	+1
Keegan Bradley, United States	72-74-73—219	+3
Corey Conners, Canada	75-73-71—219	+3
Dustin Johnson, United States	73-71-75—219	+3
Si Woo Kim, South Korea	75-73-72—220	+4
Sergio Garcia, Spain	72-75-74—221	+5
Rasmus Hojgaard, Denmark	78-70-73—221	+5
Jon Rahm, Spain	78-70-73—221	+5
Gary Woodland, United States	71-75-76—222	+6
Kurt Kitayama, United States	69-79-75—223	+7
Aaron Rai, England	71-74-78—223	+7
Charl Schwartzel, South Africa	75-73-77—225	+9

Lowry posts his second hole-in-one

BY DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Shane Lowry became the first player with two career holes-in-one at the Masters on Saturday.

More importantly, his ace at the par-3 sixth put him in contention for his first green jacket.

Playing with Tommy Fleetwood and trying to chase down good buddy Rory McIlroy, Lowry hit a 7-iron from 190 yards and watched the ball hop three times before disappearing into the cup. He reared back and shook his arms in celebration, almost exactly like he did a decade ago, when Lowry aced the par-3 16th during the final round of the Masters.

"You don't ever expect to make a hole-in-one. I just couldn't believe it," he said.

"Obviously, you know, you're out here, and you're in the hunt at the Masters, and you're making a hole-in-one — it's pretty cool."

Even cooler: Lowry ended up shooting 68, leaving him 9 under for the tournament and two back of McIlroy and Cameron Young.

"We all know it's all about tomorrow. You know what I mean?" asked Lowry, whose only major victory came at the 2019 British Open.

"Obviously it matters, today, but when we get to tomorrow, that's when, you know, we'll see what everyone is made of."

Perhaps more incredible than his second ace in the Masters was the fact that it was Lowry's second ace in as many events.

He had a hole-in-one on the second hole at Memorial Park during the Houston Open, using the same 7-iron he used on Saturday.

As for the Masters, it was the first hole-in-one since Stewart Cink's on the 16th in 2022. And it was just the seventh ace to happen on the difficult, downhill sixth hole; Corey Conners had the last one during the 2021 tournament.

Anyone who makes a hole-in-one during the Masters is rewarded with a crystal bowl. Now, Lowry's the first with two of them.

He has a rapidly growing list of aces at some of golf's iconic venues, too.

Along with his two at Augusta National, and his recent one in Houston, the Irishman has aced the 17th at TPC Sawgrass — the famed island green — and the seventh at Pebble Beach.

"Maybe I'm just good. I don't know," Lowry said, laughing. "I don't know."



ASHLEY LANDIS/AP

Shane Lowry, of Ireland, swings off the tee for a hole-in-one on the sixth hole during the third round of the Masters on Saturday.

MLB

ROUNDUP

Crawford, Mariners rally over Astros

Associated Press

SEATTLE — J.P. Crawford singled home the winning run after Bryan Abreu walked the bases loaded with one out in the ninth inning, and the Seattle Mariners rallied past the skidding Houston Astros 8-7 on Saturday night.

Cal Raleigh homered and had three RBIs for Seattle, which trailed 7-2 before scoring five times in the fifth. Crawford hit a two-run single, Raleigh followed with a sacrifice fly and Julio Rodríguez tied it with a two-run homer.

The 426-foot shot to center field was Rodríguez's first home run this season.

Yordan Alvarez homered and had three of Houston's 17 hits, but the Astros lost their sixth straight game. Taylor Trammell delivered an early three-run double, and Cam Smith had a career-high four hits — including a two-run single that capped a 13-pitch at-bat.



LINDSEY WASSON/AP

J.P. Crawford celebrates hitting a game-winning RBI single to score Cole Young against the Houston Astros during the ninth inning Saturday in Seattle. The Mariners overcame a 7-2 deficit to win.

Pirates 4, Cubs 3 (11): Yohan Ramírez escaped bases-loaded jams in the 10th and 11th innings, and visiting Pittsburgh took advantage of a throwing error by Caleb Thielbar to score the go-ahead run in a win over Chicago that clinched the three-game series.

Alex Bregman's RBI single with two outs in the ninth inning on an 0-2 pitch off Dennis Santana tied the score 3-3 but the NL Central-leading Pirates (9-5) rebounded and won for the eighth time in 10 games, improving to 2-0 this season in series against division rivals.

Pittsburgh went ahead in the 11th when Brandon Lowe hit a two-out grounder to Thielbar (1-2), who bounced his throw to the infield side of first, and the ball bounced off Matt Shaw's mitt for an error that allowed Mitt Gonzales to score from second.

Tigers 6, Marlins 1: Riley Greene had a three-run homer and four RBIs, Drew Anderson ended the game by retiring Jakob Marsee in a 14-pitch at-bat for his first major league save and host Detroit beat Miami to get A.J Hinch his 400th win as Tigers manager.

Rookie Kevin McGonigle scored twice for Detroit, which has won two straight following a five-game losing streak. Spencer Torkelson reached base three times, including an eighth-inning RBI single.

Marlins catcher Agustín Ramírez and first baseman Connor Norby made errors, raising the Marlins' NL-high total to 15 in 15 games.

Phillies 4, Diamondbacks 3: Kyle Schwarber hit a go-ahead, three-run homer in the third inning and Bryce Harper went deep two pitches later, boosting host Philadelphia over Arizona to stop a three-game losing streak.

Taijuan Walker (1-2) allowed two runs and four hits in five innings. Brad Keller gave up a two-out RBI single to Jose Fernandez in the eighth, then struck out Nolan Arenado to strand a runner on third.

The Diamondbacks, who had won three straight, did not use catcher Gabriel Moreno, who left Friday's game because of left lower back tightness and was sent for an MRI.

Twins 7, Blue Jays 4: Trevor Larnach hit a three-run home run, Brooks Lee added a solo shot and visiting Minnesota used a seven-run third inning to beat Toronto for its fifth win in six games.

Blue Jays designated hitter George Springer left in the sixth inning because of a fractured big toe on his left foot. Springer fouled a ball off his foot in the third inning but completed his at bat, grounding out to third base.

Royals 2, White Sox 0: Michael Wacha (2-0) struck out seven while pitching four-hit ball through eight innings, Maikel Garcia homered and host Kansas City beat Chicago as its scoreless streak reached 20 innings.

Garcia opened the game with a leadoff homer and the Royals added another run in the eighth inning when Garcia doubled and scored on a sacrifice fly by Vinnie Pasquantino.

Reds 7, Angels 3: Nathaniel Lowe hit a three-run double in a four-run first inning, and host Cincinnati stopped a three-game losing streak with a victory over Los Angeles.

New Angels manager Kurt Suzuki was ejected for the first time in the eighth inning when Logan O'Hoppe was called out for interference for not staying in the runner's box while heading to first base on a strike three pitch that bounced to the backstop. Suzuki had left the dugout in the sixth to argue Reds catcher Tyler Stephenson did not properly execute a ABS challenge.

Athletics 11, Mets 6: Tyler Soderstrom hit his first two homers this season and drove in five runs Saturday as the visiting Athletics roughed up Kodai Senga in a victory over struggling New York.

Carlos Cortes launched a three-run shot for the A's, who have won four straight games — two apiece against the Yankees and Mets in New York.

Rays 5, Yankees 4 (10): Taylor Walls and Jonathan Aranda had run-scoring infield grounders in the 10th inning, and host Tampa Bay rallied late twice to beat New York and extend the Yankees' losing streak to four.

Former Ray José Caballero had an RBI single in the 10th against Cole Sulser (1-0) for a 4-3 lead, but Chandler Simpson reached on a bunt single off David Bednar (0-2) leading off the bottom half, moving automatic runner Cedric Mullins to third, and Walls bunted to Bednar, whose throw home was too late to catch Mullins on what was ruled a single.

Guardians 6, Braves 0: Rookie left-hander Parker Messick (2-0) pitched four-hit ball into the seventh inning and José Ramírez hit his second home run of the season as visiting Cleveland beat Atlanta.

Chase DeLauter had an RBI double and Daniel Schneemann added a two-run single off the bench.

Nationals 3, Brewers 1: Foster Griffin didn't allow a hit through five innings and hot-hitting James Wood drove in a pair of runs as visiting Washington held on for the win, handing Milwaukee its fourth consecutive loss.

Griffin (2-0) held the Brewers hitless until a lead-off single by Joey Ortiz, the Brewers' No. 9 hitter, in the sixth. Milwaukee eventually loaded the bases in the inning but came up empty when pinch-hitter Jake Bauers grounded out against Brad Lord, who relieved Griffin.

Red Sox 7, Cardinals 1: Willson Contreras drove in three runs against his former team, Ranger Suárez (1-1) pitched six scoreless innings and visiting Boston set a season high for runs with a win over St. Louis.

The Red Sox, who broke open the game with a five-run ninth inning, have won three of four after a 2-8 start.

Orioles 6, Giants 2: Jeremiah Jackson finished a triple short of the cycle, Gunnar Henderson homered and host Baltimore beat San Francisco.

Colton Cowser had two hits and Coby Mayo drove in two runs for the Orioles, who have won four of five.

Padres 9, Rockies 5: Ramón Laureano hit a go-ahead, three-run homer in the fourth inning and Manny Machado had a two-run shot for host San Diego, which rallied from an early 4-0 deficit to beat Colorado for its fourth straight win.

Former Rockies starter Germán Márquez (2-1) faced his old team for the first time after spending 10 seasons in Colorado. Márquez allowed four runs and four hits in five innings. He struck out five and walked two.

Dodgers 6, Rangers 3: Shohei Ohtani hit a leadoff homer and Teoscar Hernández followed with a three-run shot in the first inning of host Los Angeles' seventh victory in eight games, beating Texas.

Emmet Sheehan (2-0) pitched six innings of four-hit ball with six strikeouts for the defending World Series champion Dodgers, whose 11-3 start is the best in the majors. Will Smith reached base four times and scored two runs.

Scoreboard

American League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	8	6	.571	—
Baltimore	7	7	.500	1
Tampa Bay	7	7	.500	1
Toronto	6	8	.429	2
Boston	5	9	.357	3

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	9	6	.600	—
Minnesota	8	7	.533	1
Kansas City	7	8	.467	2
Detroit	6	9	.400	3
Chicago	5	10	.333	4

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Athletics	7	7	.500	—
Texas	7	7	.500	—
Los Angeles	7	8	.467	½
Houston	6	9	.400	1½
Seattle	6	9	.400	1½

National League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	9	6	.600	—
Miami	8	7	.533	1
Philadelphia	7	7	.500	1½
New York	7	8	.467	2
Washington	6	8	.429	2½

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Pittsburgh	9	5	.643	—
Cincinnati	9	6	.600	½
Milwaukee	8	6	.571	1
St. Louis	8	6	.571	1
Chicago	6	8	.429	3

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	11	3	.786	—
San Diego	9	6	.600	2½
Arizona	8	7	.533	3½
Colorado	6	9	.400	5½
San Francisco	6	9	.400	5½

Friday's games

Pittsburgh 2, Chicago Cubs 0
Arizona 5, Philadelphia 4
Detroit 2, Miami 0
L.A. Angels 10, Cincinnati 2
Toronto 10, Minnesota 4
Athletics 4, N.Y. Mets 0
Tampa Bay 5, N.Y. Yankees 3
San Francisco 6, Baltimore 3
Atlanta 11, Cleveland 5
Kansas City 2, Chicago White Sox 0
Washington 7, Milwaukee 3
St. Louis 3, Boston 2
San Diego 5, Colorado 2
Seattle 9, Houston 6
L.A. Dodgers 8, Texas 7

Saturday's games

Seattle 8, Houston 7
Pittsburgh 4, Chicago Cubs 3, 11 innings
Detroit 6, Miami 1
Philadelphia 4, Arizona 3
Minnesota 7, Toronto 4
Kansas City 2, Chicago White Sox 0
Cincinnati 7, L.A. Angels 3
Athletics 11, N.Y. Mets 6
Tampa Bay 5, N.Y. Yankees 4, 10 innings
Cleveland 6, Atlanta 0
Washington 3, Milwaukee 1
Boston 7, St. Louis 1
Baltimore 6, San Francisco 2
San Diego 9, Colorado 5
L.A. Dodgers 6, Texas 3

Sunday's games

Arizona at Philadelphia
San Francisco at Baltimore
Minnesota at Toronto
Athletics at N.Y. Mets
L.A. Angels at Cincinnati
Miami at Detroit
N.Y. Yankees at Tampa Bay
Chicago White Sox at Kansas City
Washington at Milwaukee
Boston at St. Louis
Pittsburgh at Chicago Cubs
Colorado at San Diego
Houston at Seattle
Texas at L.A. Dodgers
Cleveland at Atlanta

Monday's games

Houston (Burrows 1-2) at Seattle (Kirby 1-2)
Arizona (Nelson 1-1) at Baltimore (Rogers 2-0)
Chicago Cubs (Assad 1-0) at Philadelphia (Sánchez 1-1)
Washington (Cavalli 0-0) at Pittsburgh (Skenes 2-1)
L.A. Angels (Kikuchi 0-2) at N.Y. Yankees (Warren 1-0)
Miami (Pérez 1-1) at Atlanta (Holmes 1-1)
Boston (Crochet 2-1) at Minnesota (Ober 1-0)
Cleveland (Williams 1-1) at St. Louis (Liberatore 0-0)
Texas (Eovaldi 1-2) at Athletics (Severino 0-1)
N.Y. Mets (Peterson 0-2) at L.A. Dodgers (Wrobleski 1-0)

NBA

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
z-Detroit	59	22	.728	—
y-Boston	55	26	.679	4
x-New York	53	28	.654	6
x-Cleveland	51	30	.630	8
y-Atlanta	46	35	.568	13
Toronto	45	36	.556	14
Orlando	45	36	.556	14
Philadelphia	44	37	.543	15
Charlotte	43	38	.531	16
Miami	42	39	.519	17
Milwaukee	32	49	.395	27
Chicago	31	50	.383	28
Brooklyn	20	61	.247	39
Indiana	19	62	.235	40
Washington	17	64	.210	42

Western Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
z-Oklahoma City	64	17	.790	—
y-San Antonio	62	19	.765	2
x-Denver	53	28	.654	11
y-L.A. Lakers	52	29	.642	12
x-Houston	51	30	.630	13
x-Minnesota	48	33	.593	16
Phoenix	44	37	.543	20
Portland	41	40	.506	23
L.A. Clippers	41	40	.506	23
Golden State	37	44	.457	27
New Orleans	26	55	.321	38
Memphis	25	56	.309	39
Dallas	25	56	.309	39
Sacramento	22	59	.272	42
Utah	22	59	.272	42

x-clinched playoff spot
y-clinched division
z-clinched conference

Sunday's games

Atlanta at Miami
Brooklyn at Toronto
Charlotte at New York
Detroit at Indiana
Orlando at Boston
Washington at Cleveland
Chicago at Dallas
Denver at San Antonio
Golden State at L.A. Clippers
Memphis at Houston
New Orleans at Minnesota
Phoenix at Oklahoma City
Sacramento at Portland
Utah at L.A. Lakers

Monday's games

No games scheduled.

Tuesday's games

Team TBD at Team TBD
Team TBD at Phoenix

Wednesday's games

Team TBD at Team TBD
Golden State at Team TBD

Plenty of resting as season wraps up

BY TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

The Oklahoma City-Denver game could have starred the NBA's two most recent MVPs: the reigning one in Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and a three-time winner in Nuggets forward Nikola Jokic.

Except they both sat out. They weren't alone.

All the other regular starters for OKC and Denver were ruled out, too. And around the league, no fewer than 168 players — including 14 players for Memphis, which used only six players in a blowout loss at Utah — were held out Friday night because of injuries or illnesses.

Every team in the league was playing game 81 — the next-to-last game — of their seasons Friday night. They were all off Saturday, and then all teams played again Sunday to close the regular season.

Some teams had something to play for Friday. Some did not. Sometimes, that didn't seem to matter.

"If we didn't clinch (the No. 1 overall seed) coming into tonight, everybody would be playing," Thunder coach Mark Daigneault told reporters before the game. "We've earned the right through 80 games to manage their bodies and stuff like that."

Oklahoma City already had the No. 1 seed for the entirety of the postseason wrapped up, so rest and health appear to be the priority for the Thunder.

The Nuggets entered Friday still having seeding to play for, and in Jokic's case, there's still award eligibility to obtain. He needed to play in one more game, which would've had to be Sunday if he's going to get on the ballot for MVP, All-NBA and other awards.



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

From left, Oklahoma City Thunder players Chet Holmgren, Isaiah Hartenstein, Jaylin Williams, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, Jalen Williams and Isaiah Joe watch on the bench against the Nuggets on Friday in Denver.

"We're all aware of that," Denver coach David Adelman told reporters before the game, then said postgame that "an adult conversation" would be had Saturday about the best course of action.

Some players got to award eligibility with a few extra minutes to spare.

San Antonio's Victor Wembanyama, needing to play 20 minutes to reach the 65-game standard and be eligible for postseason awards, was taken out after hitting exactly that number of minutes — then went back into the game, evidently having persuaded the Spurs that he needed a bit more on-court work.

He finished with 40 points, 13 rebounds and five assists in 26 minutes.

"If I had 65 (games) before, I for sure wouldn't have played," Wembanyama said.

Said San Antonio coach Mitch Johnson: "We need as much on-the-job training, on-the-court experience together as we can. That's what we're trying to do without overdoing it."

There was also a record shooting effort Friday: Boston made 29 3-pointers, tying the record for 3s in a game. It was the fourth time in NBA history a team made 29, and the second time this week after the Grizzlies did it Monday in a loss to Cleveland.

"Hopefully, we didn't use them all up in one game," Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said.

Not everybody was resting for the playoffs.

Golden State was building for the postseason — or, at least, what it hopes will be a playoff run. The Warriors are going to the play-in tournament and tuned up by getting Stephen Curry, Draymond Green and Kristaps Porzingis in the starting lineup together for the first time this season.

"We'll just take a look at that tonight," Golden State coach Steve Kerr said before playing Sacramento. "We have a season full of data and film on some of the combinations. But some of decisions we have to make, there's no data. It's just kind of a hunch so we have give some of that a look tonight."

Honors: 65-game threshold questioned as major stars fall short

FROM PAGE 24

Adelman said he hopes the rule is changed, somehow, this summer. He said if players like Jokic can play 64 games, never wanting to come out, and not be award-eligible, then something is wrong.

"That's not the spirit of what that rule is," Adelman said.

The 65-game rule — which was hammered out in talks between the league and the players' union as part of the current collective bargaining agreement — has been a hot topic in recent weeks. The Los Angeles Lakers' Luka Doncic, currently out with a hamstring injury, is going to win the scoring title but he's one game short of being award-eligible.

If neither Doncic nor Jokic is awards-eligible, the league's scoring, rebound and assist champions will all miss the All-NBA team. The games-played threshold for being eligible for statistical titles is 58, or 70% of the season.

Doncic's agent, Bill Duffy, has said an appeal will be filed with the NBA to cite special circumstances and get the scoring champ on the awards ballots. An appeal could be filed on behalf of Detroit star Cade Cunningham — who will finish just short of the awards threshold — and Minnesota's Anthony Edwards won't get to 65 games, either.



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokic went into Sunday needing just one more game to be eligible for the NBA's major awards.

And even Wembanyama isn't sure if 65 is the right number.

"It's an interesting question. It's a very interesting question," Wembanyama said, when told Doncic, Cunningham and Edwards are among those certain to fall short of 65 games. "If those three aren't — especially Cade and Luka — if they aren't in the end-of-season awards, for sure it's not going to reflect their impact on the season. But at the same time, in my opinion, it's good to have a threshold, a limit. Where do we need to put it? I don't know. It's a good question."

Wembanyama was well on his way to winning the defensive player award last season when a diagnosis of deep vein thrombosis cut his season short at the All-Star break and left him far below the 65-game standard.

He almost didn't get there this year, either.

"Means a lot. Means a lot. More than people know," Wembanyama said. "Coming back from a terrible place a little bit more than a year ago, and if I'm here today it's because of all the people that have allowed me to work through this and get better and all the work that we've put in all year long. I wouldn't be able to do what I've done this season if I hadn't worked so hard in the summer."

Wembanyama's primary wish for the season is a championship. Jokic would surely say the same.

But there is a balance, and individual awards do matter, Spurs coach Mitch Johnson said.

"Individual awards, accolades, recognition, accomplishment is important," Johnson said. "And I think when you have a team that understands that the greater good for the team and the group is the most important thing, it allows people to feel good about not only acknowledging others but also being acknowledged in the moment."

NHL

ROUNDUP

Devils end Red Wings playoff hopes

Associated Press

DETROIT — Jesper Bratt's scored his second goal with 3:34 left in the third period, helping the New Jersey Devils eliminate the Detroit Red Wings from the NHL playoff picture with a 5-3 win on Saturday.

Detroit extended the league's longest active postseason drought, dating to the 2016 season when the franchise earned a berth for the 25th consecutive season in what was a remarkable run that included four Stanley Cup championships.

The Red Wings were in a playoff position for 148 days of the season, according to Sportradar, to raise expectations higher than they've been since the hockey-crazed state experienced the playoffs a long time ago.

They went ahead against New Jersey in the first, second and third periods — and lost every lead.

On an odd-man rush, Bratt scored the go-ahead goal from the left circle off a perfect pass from Jack Hughes in the right circle with John Gibson flailing around in an attempt to stop the puck. Dawson Mercer added an empty-net goal with a minute left.

Gibson had 27 saves for the Red Wings and Jake Allen stopped 25 shots for the Devils.



JOSE JUAREZ/AP

New Jersey Devils left wing Jesper Bratt, center, is congratulated by teammates Dennis Cholowski, left, and Connor Brown after scoring during the third period against the Detroit Red Wings on Saturday in Detroit.

Lightning 2, Bruins 1: Emil Lilleberg scored on a rebound with 95 seconds left to help visiting Tampa Bay beat Boston, snapping a three-game losing streak and depriving the Bruins of a chance to clinch a playoff berth.

Boston clinched hours later when Detroit lost in regulation to New Jersey and the Red Wings were eliminated from contention.

Morgan Geekie scored and Jeremy Swayman made 22 saves for Boston, which has lost five in a row

Senators 3, Islanders 0: Ridly Greig scored a short-handed goal, Linus Ullmark stopped all 23 shots he faced and visiting Ottawa moved to the verge of clinching a playoff spot by shutting out New York.

Ottawa got into the playoffs a few hours later when Detroit lost at home in regulation to New Jersey and the Red Wings were eliminated.

Senators captain Brady Tkachuk took a puck up high late in the second period, returned for one shift in the third and then did not return.

Capitals 6, Penguins 3: Ilya Protas scored his first NHL goal and added two assists as visiting Washington beat Pittsburgh on Saturday.

The 100th career matchup between Sidney Crosby and Alex Ovechkin didn't materialize. The Penguins opted to sit Crosby and several other regulars after clinching a playoff berth for the first time since the 2021-22 season and home ice advantage for the first round.

Kings 1, Oilers 0: Anton Forsberg made 27 saves in his third shutout of the season, and Los Angeles greatly bolstered its playoff chances with a home victory over Edmonton.

Artemi Panarin scored on a first-period breakaway in the regular-season home finale for the Kings (34-26-19), who won their fourth straight game and moved three points clear of their nearest competitor for the final wild-card spot in the Western Conference.

Stars 2, Rangers 0: Jason Robertson scored a power-play goal midway through the third period and added an empty-netter in the final minute while Jake Oettinger made 22 saves for his fourth shutout of the season as host Dallas beat New York and clinched second place in the Central Division.

The Stars will face the Minnesota Wild in the first round of the NHL playoffs. They secured the position late in the third period when the Wild lost in regulation to the Nashville Predators.

Predators 2, Wild 1: Steven Stamkos scored a goal and added an assist to lead Nashville to a victory over Minnesota, locking the Wild into the third seed in the Western Conference for the playoffs.

Matthew Wood also scored and Justus Annunen made 21 saves for the Predators, 4-1-1 in their last six.

The Predators are now three points behind the Los Angeles Kings for the Western Conference's second wild card.

Hurricanes 4, Mammoth 1: Jordan Staal scored and reached 20 goals in a season for the first time in a decade, and Carolina killed four of five penalties in a road win over Utah for its sixth win in seven games.

Andrei Svechnikov, Sean Walker and Sebastian Aho also scored for Metropolitan Division champion Carolina.

The Hurricanes are within one point of securing the top seed in the Eastern Conference. Any loss by Buffalo or any point earned by Carolina will clinch it.

Blues 5, Blackhawks 3: Jordan Kyrou, Cam Fowler and Alexey Toropchenko scored in the second period, helping visiting St. Louis beat Chicago.

St. Louis (34-33-12) evened its season series with Chicago at two wins apiece. But the Blues were eliminated from playoff contention with the Los Angeles Kings' 1-0 victory over the Edmonton Oilers.

Kraken 4, Flames 1: Nikke Kokko stopped 26 shots in his first NHL start and Matty Beniers scored his 20th goal of the season as host Seattle beat Calgary.

The Kraken won their second straight after learning before the game they had been eliminated from playoff contention when the Los Angeles Kings beat the Edmonton Oilers 1-0.

Panthers 6, Maple Leafs 2: Eetu Luostarinen and Mackie Samoskevich had a goal and two assists each as visiting Florida cruised past Toronto.

Tomas Nosek, with two goals, Cole Reinhardt and A.J. Greer, into the empty net to go along with an assist, provided the rest of the offense for Florida.

Blue Jackets 5, Canadiens 2: Charlie Coyle scored twice as desperate Columbus rolled to a road victory over Montreal.

The Blue Jackets sit outside the playoff picture, two points behind the Philadelphia Flyers for third place in the Metropolitan Division.

Flyers 7, Jets 1: Sean Couturier had two goals and an assist and Noah Cates added a short-handed goal and two assists to lead Philadelphia to a road win over Winnipeg.

Philadelphia earned a valuable two points to maintain its grip on third place in the Metropolitan Division and remain in the hunt for a playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

Golden Knights 3, Avalanche 2 (OT): Jack Eichel scored 1:19 into overtime, and visiting Vegas beat Colorado to secure a playoff berth.

Vegas (91 points) took over the Pacific Division lead from Edmonton with its fifth win in six games since coach John Tortorella was hired to replace Bruce Cassidy. The Oilers, who lost 1-0 at Los Angeles earlier, have 90 points and Anaheim is third with 89 points.

Canucks 4, Sharks 3 (SO): Linus Karlsson scored in the sixth round of the shootout and Vancouver put San Jose on the brink of playoff elimination with a road win.

After finishing last in the league the past two seasons, the Sharks have jumped 30 points in the standings. But they trail Los Angeles by five points with three games remaining in the race for the final wild-card spot in the Western Conference.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
y-Carolina	80	52	22	6	110	292	236
x-Buffalo	80	49	23	8	106	280	236
x-Tampa Bay	80	49	25	6	104	284	224
x-Montreal	80	47	23	10	104	277	251
x-Pittsburgh	80	41	23	16	98	288	258
x-Ottawa	80	43	27	10	96	272	241
x-Boston	80	43	27	10	96	265	248
m-Philadelphia	80	41	27	12	94	243	239
Columbus	80	40	28	12	92	250	248
Washington	80	41	30	9	91	258	243
Detroit	80	41	30	9	91	237	246
N.Y. Islanders	80	43	32	5	91	231	235
New Jersey	80	41	36	3	85	226	247
Florida	80	38	38	4	80	240	273
Toronto	80	32	34	14	78	247	290
N.Y. Rangers	80	33	38	9	75	232	245

Western Conference

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
z-Colorado	79	52	16	11	115	295	201
x-Dallas	80	48	20	12	108	269	218
x-Minnesota	80	45	23	12	102	266	232
p-Vegas	80	37	26	17	91	255	247
x-Utah	79	42	31	6	90	259	228
p-Edmonton	80	40	30	10	90	275	266
p-Anaheim	79	42	32	5	89	263	277
Los Angeles	79	34	26	19	87	216	237
Nashville	80	38	32	10	86	241	261
Winnipeg	79	35	32	12	82	225	243
San Jose	79	37	34	8	82	240	284
St. Louis	79	34	33	12	80	213	247
Seattle	79	34	34	11	79	222	252
Calgary	79	32	38	9	73	204	254
Chicago	80	28	38	14	70	207	268
Vancouver	79	23	48	8	54	207	304

Note: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.
x-clinched playoff spot
y-clinched division
z-clinched conference
(a, c, m, p)-top three in their division

Friday's games

No games scheduled

Saturday's games

Tampa Bay 2, Boston 1
Ottawa 3, N.Y. Islanders 0
Washington 6, Pittsburgh 3
Los Angeles 1, Edmonton 0
Nashville 2, Minnesota 1
New Jersey 5, Detroit 3
St. Louis 5, Chicago 3
Dallas 2, N.Y. Rangers 0
Carolina 4, Utah 1
Seattle 4, Calgary 1
Philadelphia 7, Winnipeg 1
Florida 6, Toronto 2
Columbus 5, Montreal 2
Vegas 3, Colorado 2, OT
Vancouver 4, San Jose 3, SO

Sunday's games

Pittsburgh at Washington
Boston at Columbus
Montreal at N.Y. Islanders
Ottawa at New Jersey
Vancouver at Anaheim
Utah at Calgary

Monday's games

Carolina at Philadelphia
Detroit at Tampa Bay
N.Y. Rangers at Florida
Dallas at Toronto
Minnesota at St. Louis
San Jose at Nashville
Buffalo at Chicago
Colorado at Edmonton
Los Angeles at Seattle
Winnipeg at Vegas

Tuesday's games

Carolina at N.Y. Islanders
Montreal at Philadelphia
New Jersey at Boston
Washington at Columbus
Anaheim at Minnesota
Colorado at Calgary
Winnipeg at Utah
Pittsburgh at St. Louis
Los Angeles at Vancouver

Scoring leaders

Through Saturday

	GP	G	A	PTS
Connor McDavid, EDM	80	47	86	133
Nikita Kucherov, TB	74	43	85	128
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	78	52	74	126
Macklin Celebrini, SJ	79	42	68	110
Nick Suzuki, MTL	80	28	71	99
David Pastrnak, BOS	75	29	70	99
Mark Scheifele, WPG	79	34	65	99
Martin Necas, COL	76	38	61	99
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	65	35	62	97
Jason Robertson, DAL	80	44	50	94

NHL

Utah reaches playoffs after rebuilding effort

By John Marshall
Associated Press

Utah's rebuilding process began in the Arizona desert, where the team was known as the Coyotes and progress was incremental.

In the first year after a move to Salt Lake City, the team became the Utah Hockey Club and took a bigger step, winning eight more games than the previous season to inch closer to the NHL playoffs.

Now known as the Mammoth, the young players who served as the rebuild foundation have developed into a skilled, cohesive unit that's reached the postseason for the first time in six years.

"The guys are getting older, more mature, and they learn from what happens," Mammoth coach André Tourigny said after his team's playoff-clinching 4-1 win over Nashville on Thursday night.

The win over Nashville put Utah (42-30-6) in the top Western Conference playoff wild-card spot, six points ahead of the Predators. The Mammoth are the third team in 45 years to make the playoffs in the first two seasons as a franchise — with Vegas and Seattle — but did it with a foundation of players who played in Arizona before the team moved.

The Mammoth already have four more wins than last season and their 90 points is two more than last season, which had been highest since 2013-14. Utah has won five straight, eight of its last 11 and are 21-14-3 at home.

That puts the Mammoth in the postseason for the first time since the 2020 NHL playoff bubble — then as the Coyotes — and second since reaching the 2012 Western Conference finals.

"A lot of us haven't played in the playoffs in a while and we want to taste that. You want to play against the best teams and see what it's all about," said Utah captain and leading scorer Clayton Keller.

Karel Vejmelka has been solid since joining the Coyotes in 2021, superb this season.

The 29-year-old has a career-high 36 wins, 10 more than his previous best and second only to Tampa Bay's Andrei Vasilevskiy's 37 in the NHL. Vejmelka's 36 wins also are the most by a Czech goaltender since Dominik Hasek's 38 in 2006-07 and he had a career-best eight-game win streak (8-0-0) in January.

The offense has been a nice change for a franchise that's long lacked in that aspect.

Utah is 10th in the NHL at 3.31 goals per game and scored at least six goals in four straight games, eight of the last 10, before putting up four against Nashville.

The Mammoth have six players with at least 20 goals, matching Vegas and Colorado for most in the NHL.

Keller has been his usual steady self. The four-time NHL All-Star leads the team with 80 points and 54 assists, and is third with 26 goals.

Dylan Guenther has continued to get better in his fourth NHL season, setting career highs with 38 goals and 69 points.

Then there's Nick Schmaltz.

Schmaltz is an elite defensive forward, but also creative with the puck and his movement. He's having a career year, reaching 30 goals and 70 points for the first time in 10 NHL seasons.

"He's just go gifted; fast, skilled, thinks the game such a high level, has such a good stick," Keller said. "There's so many things about his game that people don't recognize or truly appreciate as much as all of us do in this room, just how good he is."

Same could be said for the Mammoth, who now get to show the rest of the hockey world in this year's playoffs.



Melissa Majchrzak/AP

Utah Mammoth center and captain Clayton Keller shoots the winning goal against the Edmonton Oilers on April 7 in Salt Lake City.



David Zalubowski/AP

Colorado Avalanche left wing Gabriel Landeskog, center, redirects the puck past Calgary Flames goaltender Dustin Wolf, left, in the third period on Thursday in Denver.

For Avs, top seed failures a reminder to keep focus

By Pat Graham
Associated Press

DENVER — The Colorado Avalanche realize history isn't exactly on their side and they're just fine with that.

Fresh off winning the Presidents' Trophy, they now contend with this stat: Just eight teams since 1986 have earned the NHL's top overall seed and proceeded to capture the Stanley Cup title.

But that's not a sign so much as a reminder to keep them focused. The franchise is 1 for 3 in winning both — a cast led by Joe Sakic accomplished the feat in 2001 — with this one pending.

"I don't know if history necessarily means anything," Avalanche captain Gabriel Landeskog said after a 3-1 win over Calgary on Thursday night to clinch the top spot. "Listen, you're trying to prove yourself every single day. There have been plenty of people and teams have done things that nobody's done before, haven't been done in a long time. So those things aren't necessarily something that we're thinking about much."

Home-ice advantage

The last time a team captured the Presidents' Trophy and then the Stanley Cup title was the Chicago Blackhawks in 2012-13. That season was abbreviated to 48 games because of a lockout. The last team to play a full 82-game schedule to earn the best record and then win the title was the Detroit Red Wings in 2008.

It's not like a team wants to avoid the top seed or anything. A Game 7 at home certainly could've come in handy last season when the Avalanche lost to the Stars in Dallas during a first-round series that went seven.

Landeskog, Nathan MacKinnon, Cale Makar and several others have been in this position before when they won the Presidents' Trophy in 2021. Colorado lost to Vegas in six games in the second round.

The Avalanche were up 2-0 in the series heading Vegas and had a late lead in Game 3, only to see the Golden Knights rally for four straight wins.

The following season they went 16-4 over their playoff run to hoist the Stanley Cup.

"Individual playoff runs and playoff series gives you lessons that can apply throughout your career, after the fact," Landeskog said. "It had nothing to do with the Presidents' Trophy that year (2021). It had nothing to do with anything but just some lessons here and there, some things you take from it. I think this group is more experienced than that one, hungrier than that one."

Presidents' Trophy

Colorado has won at least one playoff round in all three seasons where it was the Presidents' Trophy winner. In 1996-97, the Avalanche reached the conference final before losing to Detroit — the eventual Stanley Cup winner — in six games.

Once the playoffs start, records of any sort no longer matter — a point of emphasis to coach Jared Bednar.

"This game has a way of humbling you if you don't play your best hockey," Bednar said. "If you're not playing your best and you're making too many mistakes, or you're not dialed in as a group of 20-plus, then you can expect it to be a tough road."

The Avalanche are getting closer to full strength, missing only Nazem Kadri (finger) and Makar (upper body). With four games remaining, Bednar will hold meetings and talk to the players about who needs rest and who may want to play.

MacKinnon is currently the league's goal-scoring leader with a career-best 52 this season. He's three goals away from tying Mikko Rantanen for the most in a season in Colorado history and five away from matching Quebec's Michel Goulet for most in franchise history.

On the team front, the Avalanche (114 points) have a chance at their first 120-point season. There have been only 12 teams that have reached 120 or more points, with the most recent being Boston in 2022-23. The Bruins won the Presidents' Trophy and lost in the first round.

"It fuels us knowing that we've won a lot of hockey games in a lot of different ways," Landeskog said. "That's important to remember. You're not winning the Presidents' Trophy if you haven't been finding ways to win hockey games."

SPORTS

Falling short
Devils win to extend Red Wings' playoff drought ›› NHL, Page 22



DARREN ABATE/AP

Spurs center Victor Wembanyama goes to the basket against the Dallas Mavericks during the second half Friday in San Antonio. It was Wembanyama's 65th game of the season, making him eligible for NBA awards.

NBA

Making honors

Wemby now eligible for awards as Jokic wavering on edge

BY TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

Victor Wembanyama got to 65 games. Nikola Jokic might not have gotten there.

And the NBA's award eligibility rule was a talking point yet again Friday night.

The 65-game standard was the biggest reason Wembanyama played through bruised ribs in San Antonio's next-to-last — and standings-wise, meaningless — game of the season against Dallas. He needed to play 20 minutes to ensure he'd get a 65th qualifying game and make it to the awards ballot, and wound up playing 26 to secure that spot.

"Feels like it's a box that's checked," Wembanyama said.

He's the favorite to win NBA Defensive Player of the Year, he'll almost certainly be an All-NBA pick and he'll get some votes for MVP — an award he clearly wants — as well.

But Jokic, the three-time MVP who will finish the season as the league's rebounding champion, assist champion and only player averaging a triple-double, didn't play in Denver's game against Oklahoma City, with the Nuggets citing a right wrist injury. That left Jokic at 64 games for the season, one away from the magic 65 number.

It was possible, but hardly guaranteed, that Jokic would get that 65th game Sunday in the regular-season finale. Denver coach David Adelman said "an adult conversation" would take place Saturday.

"Obviously, the success in the playoffs matters more than anything else," Adelman said. "But this rule stares at us right now. And so, we've got to make a proper decision and we need to go in there with a real plan of 'this is what it's going to be.' Either he gets those minutes, or we say 'let's just move on.'"

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Crawford, Mariners rally to walk off Astros ›› MLB, Page 20

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