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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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World navies work to improve sea policing

By SCOTT WYLAND
Stars and Stripes

A U.S.-led exercise designed to improve protection of vital shipping lanes in the Mediterranean Sea and thwart sea-borne crimes in North Africa wraps up this weekend, amid growing tensions in the region.

Fourteen countries participated in the weeklong Phoenix Express exercise near Morocco, U.S. Africa Command's third and final sea policing drill this year, where the navies worked together on training to combat drug smuggling, illegal immigration, unlawful fishing and other activities that can hurt local economies and fund violent extremism.

The exercise, focused on the waters between Europe and Africa, is smaller than its predecessors — Obangame Express in West Africa and Cutlass Express in East Africa — but is still considered an important part of bolstering security in and around Africa, where U.S. forces are helping battle terrorist threats and seeking to bring stability.

Navy leaders have said that improving sea policing there falls in line with the White House's Africa strategy, which seeks to further U.S. interests partly by helping counter threats in the region.

Africa's security challenges are "some of the most diverse in the world," with threats that range from insurgency and armed conflict to smuggling and illegal fisheries, Maj. Gen. Roger L. Cloutier, U.S. Army Africa commander, said in a statement.

Stronger maritime policing reduces the number of illegal

African immigrants making the dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean, Navy officials have said. Those migrants can fall prey to human traffickers and are increasingly unwelcome in countries that had accepted them in the past, such as Italy.

More recently, Italy's government has refused to let refugee ships enter its ports, including one this week loaded with 64 migrants that were rescued near Libya.

One of the participants in the exercise, Libya, has been divided by conflict since the 2011 ouster of dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

While the Trump administration has sought to shift its focus to countering inroads being made by Moscow and Beijing, the White House's Africa strategy still acknowledges the need to quell both terrorism and crime that can weaken local economies there.

In the Central African region, such groups profit from drug trafficking, said Christopher Jaspardo, national security affairs professor at the Naval War College.

With hashish coming from Morocco, cocaine from South America and heroin from the Indian Ocean region, the Mediterranean is a gateway for the illicit drug trade, Jaspardo said.

As part of the exercise, the participating navies worked together to spot, raid and search suspicious ships, and detain suspects in simulations designed to improve international teamwork to combat traffickers and other criminals.

AFRICOM: Mother, child killed in Somalia airstrike

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — A U.S. counterterrorism unit inaccurately reported the deaths of two civilians in Somalia following an airstrike, U.S. Africa Command said Friday, marking the first public acknowledgement that noncombatants have been killed in the military's expanded bombing campaign in the country.

AFRICOM determined that the deaths in 2018 were not reported to its headquarters, following a command review of more than two years of airstrikes.

"Because of the reporting error, U.S. Africa Command was not informed of the assessment's conclusion — and subsequently the information was not reported to external authorities, such as the host nation and Congress," AFRICOM said in a statement.

Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Gregg Olson, AFRICOM's director of operations, said Friday it's too early to say whether a lower level unit in Somalia intentionally concealed the casualties, and that a broader review is ongoing.

"We are looking into this breakdown in reporting ... and how different information would be held at two different levels of AFRICOM particularly for as long as it has been," Olson said.

Olson told reporters that the counterterrorism unit determined by the summer of 2018 that there were two civilian casualties — a woman and a child — but had failed to report it up the chain of command.

The information came to light after AFRICOM boss Gen. Thomas Waldhauser ordered a review on March 22 to examine airstrikes and allegations of civilian casualties.

Olson said the command is unaware of other incidents, but "our review continues and should we find additional information we will be transparent about that."

The April 1, 2018, airstrike that killed the civilians also killed four members of the militant al-Shabab group, AFRICOM said.

The airstrike was not one of the cases presented by Amnesty International, which released a report in March alleging that at least 18 civilians have been killed in five airstrikes that it reviewed.

AFRICOM denied the group's allegations, saying no civilians were killed during those strikes.

"Credibility, transparency and accountability are fundamental to military operations," Waldhauser said in a statement. "It is critically important that people understand we adhere to exacting standards and when we fall short, we acknowledge shortcomings and take appropriate action."

AFRICOM said it was notified about the deaths on March 30 of this year. The information was the result of a poststrike internal assessment conducted in April 2018 that found credible evidence of the two civilian deaths.

AFRICOM first reported in 2018 that it killed five al-Shabab terrorists and assessed that "no civilians were killed in this airstrike."

Because they were unaware of their subordinate unit's findings, they said, senior leaders stated during congressional testimony and media engagements that U.S. forces had caused zero civilian casualties in Africa.

Somali officials have been notified of the civilian deaths, AFRICOM said.

Officer to conduct review of Niger attack

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Acting Defense Secretary Pat Shanahan has appointed a four-star officer to take another look at the military's investigation into the 2017 attack in Niger that killed four U.S. soldiers and review whether additional punishments should be meted out.

In a statement Thursday, the Pentagon said the investigating officer will do a "new, narrowly scoped review" and give Shanahan recommendations on whether the reprimands already made were appropriate. The officer's name was not released.

Officials have said nine indi-

viduals have been held accountable for lapses in training and other mission preparedness. The punishments have largely been letters of reprimand.

But officials and members of Congress have questioned whether more senior officers should be disciplined. Officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss personnel actions.

The initial investigation found multiple failures leading up to the October 2017 attack but determined that none of those shortfalls directly caused the overwhelming enemy ambush and firefight, which also killed four Nigerien troops, wounded a number of forces from both countries and sent

troops running for their lives.

That investigation report came out last May, detailing a series of "individual, organizational and institutional failures and deficiencies that contributed to the tragic events." But it concluded that "no single failure or deficiency was the sole reason" for what happened.

It said the U.S. forces didn't have time to train together before they deployed and did not do preparatory battle drills with their Nigerien partners.

Also, the report said lax communication and poor attention to details led to a "general lack of situational awareness and command oversight at every echelon."

Since then, administrative actions — mainly the letters of reprimand — were taken against nine individuals, including Maj. Gen. Marcus Hicks, who was serving as the commander of special operations forces in Africa at the time.

He was the most senior officer punished, leading some to question whether other, more senior leaders had unfairly escaped unscathed.

In addition, a number of troops, including those killed, have been recommended for valor awards, mainly Silver Stars and Bronze Stars. But none of those have been announced, either.

Pentagon will continue training Turkish pilots

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon said Thursday that it will not halt training for Turkish pilots flying the F-35A Lightning II fighters that country has purchased, even as the United States threatens to expel its ally from the advanced jet program over its intentions to purchase a Russian missile defense system.

The F-35 training, which

started last year at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona, "will continue," the Pentagon's acting chief spokesman, Charlie Summers, told reporters.

His announcement came just one day after Vice President Mike Pence warned the Turks would be kicked out of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program and even risked expulsion from NATO should they move forward with plans to buy the S-400 system from Russia.

Summers said Turkey remained an important ally to the United States and added that acting Defense Secretary Pat Shanahan was "working very hard on this particular issue." That work includes the U.S. offer to sell the Turks its Patriot missile defense system.

"This issue with the S-400 is a very serious issue," Summers said. "Should they accept the S-400, that would definitely affect the F-35."

At issue are fears among

U.S. and NATO officials that the S-400's radar system could learn how to detect and track the stealthy jets when they operate closely within Turkey. That would decrease the F-35's usefulness as a weapon to penetrate Russian air defenses in the case of a war against the adversary.

Turkey, however, has publicly rejected American calls for it to choose the Patriot over the S-400.

Sailor dead, another hospitalized in shooting at Va. NAS

By ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

One sailor is dead and another hospitalized in a domestic shooting early Friday morning in a parking lot at Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia, Navy officials said.

A male sailor shot a female sailor with a handgun several times at about 6:45 a.m. in the parking lot of Strike Fighter Squadron 37, Hangar 145 of the

Virginia Beach base, according to Navy officials. Security responded to the shooting and fatally shot the male sailor.

The female sailor was transported to Sentara Virginia Beach General Hospital with multiple gunshot wounds that were not life-threatening, according to a news release from Navy Mid-Atlantic Region. The sailors were members of the Strike Fighter Squadron 37. The incident ended within

five minutes, said Capt. Chad Vincelette, commander of NAS Oceana.

The shooting forced the base into a lockdown, which was lifted at 7:40 a.m., and the base resumed normal operations. Naval Criminal Investigative Service is investigating this incident.

The base has a no-weapons policy, and how the sailor was able to get a weapon on base is part of the investigation, Vince-

lette said. Security on base "regularly conducts random and periodic inspections for prohibited items."

Aside from base security, the city of Virginia Beach police, fire department and emergency crews responded to the incident.

"I would like to thank these agencies and my team for resolving the situation quickly and professionally," Vincelette said.

The border shutdown delayed, tariffs on vehicles proposed

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Abandoning his threat to immediately seal the southern border, President Donald Trump warned instead that he'd slap tariffs on cars coming to the U.S. from Mexico unless the Mexicans do more to stop the flow of migrants and drugs to the U.S.

In his latest backtrack in recent days, Trump told reporters Thursday he would try the "less drastic measure" before resorting to his standing border-closure threat.

"Mexico understands that we're going to close the border or I'm going to tariff the cars. I'll do one or the other. And probably start off with the tariffs," Trump said.

It was the latest attempt at new leverage by a president struggling to solve what his administration has called a

border "crisis." And it was a dramatic departure for Trump, who last week tweeted that he would close the border or large swaths of it this week unless Mexico immediately halted "ALL illegal immigration coming into the United States" — a seemingly impossible task.

Trump said at the time that he was "not kidding around," and his acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney said in a television interview Sunday that it would take "something dramatic" for Trump not to close down the crossings.

Since then, however, White House advisers, border city leaders and U.S. economists have warned that such a move would have enormous economic consequences on both sides of the border, interrupting supply chains and boosting U.S. consumer prices on everything from avocados to autos.

Trump had already appeared to be easing off his border threat earlier this week. Though he said Tuesday all options remained on the table, he shifted his goal posts, calling on Congress to pass immigration legislation to avert a closure and praising the Mexican government for doing more to apprehend migrants traveling through the country from Central America — though it's unclear anything has changed.

Marcelo Ebrard, Mexico's foreign relations secretary, said Tuesday his government hadn't changed its policies. And on Thursday, Mexico's ambassador to the U.S. Martha Barcena told The Associated Press the country was working to make its own border "more orderly" but "migration will never be stopped."

Barr defends handling of Mueller report

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Attorney General William Barr is defending his handling of special counsel Robert Mueller's report on the Russia investigation, saying the confidential document contains sensitive grand jury material that prevented it from being immediately released to the public.

The statement Thursday came as Barr confronts concerns that his four-page letter summarizing Mueller's conclusions unduly sanitized the full report in President Donald Trump's favor, including on the key question of whether the president obstructed justice. House Democrats on Wednesday approved subpoenas for Mueller's entire report and any exhibits and other underlying evidence that the Justice Department might withhold.

The disparity in length between Barr's letter and Mueller's full report, which totals nearly 400 pages, raises the likelihood of additional significant information that was put forward by the special counsel's office but not immediately shared by the attorney general.

In Thursday's statement, Barr defended the decision to release a brief summary letter two days after receiving the report on March 22. He has previously said he did not believe it would be in the public's interest to release the full document in piecemeal or gradual fashion, and that he did not intend for his letter summarizing Mueller's "principal conclusions" to be an "exhaustive recounting" of the special counsel's investigation.

Barr is now expected to release the entire report, with redactions, by mid-April.

The statement also said every page of Mueller's report was marked that it may contain grand jury material "and, therefore, could not immediately be released."

Barr said he was continuing to work with Mueller's office on redactions to the report so that it could be released to Congress and the public.

States move to legalize CBD, end confusion

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — CBD oil-infused gummy bears, lattes and other food, drinks and dietary supplements are selling quickly even though the U.S. government says they're illegal and local authorities have forced some retailers to pull products. The confusion has the nation's two largest states and others moving to legalize the cannabis compound that many see as beneficial to their health.

Lawmakers in Texas and California are often in opposition, but they're both pushing bipartisan legislation to side-step federal law and allow sales of the compound found in hemp and marijuana. Republicans and Democrats in Congress also are urging the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to change its stance.

The FDA announced Tuesday that it will hold a public hearing in May to gather more information.

Resolving the confusion can't come quick enough for Jonathan Eppers, who makes Vybes, a popular CBD oil-infused beverage. California health inspectors raided his Los Angeles warehouse in January and impounded \$100,000 worth of the drink.

Eppers said about 50 California retailers have since dropped his product and he's moved production to Texas. He estimates lost sales, legal costs and relocation expenses have cost him at least \$500,000.

Eppers and CBD fans are mystified by the legal insecurity. After all, they say, retailers in California and nine other states that have broadly legalized marijuana sell edibles and other products that get people

high, though pot is illegal under federal law. U.S. officials generally have taken a hands-off approach in states where pot is legal.

The FDA has oversight of CBD because it is the active ingredient in an approved prescription drug to treat two rare seizure disorders. The agency says CBD can't be added to food or sold as a dietary supplement because officials haven't determined if it's safe or effective for other conditions.

FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb told Congress last week that enforcement is being limited to sellers who make false health claims. He says the agency recently sent warning letters to three companies touting CBD as a treatment for cancer, Alzheimer's disease, fibromyalgia and drug addiction.

Duterte: Few options in disputes with China

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has described his dilemma in dealing with a more powerful China in territorial disputes in the South China Sea, saying he has few options other than to order troops to “prepare for suicide missions” if a Philippine-occupied island comes under threat.

Duterte reminded China in a speech Thursday night of its closer ties with the Philippines under his leadership, but said if an island occupied by Filipinos in the disputed waters is threatened, “things would be different.”

Duterte has adopted a non-confrontational approach in territorial spats with

Beijing while seeking Chinese infrastructure funds, trade and investment. He has often lashed out at the security policies of the United States, a treaty ally, while praising China and Russia.

Duterte has often had to walk a tightrope when discussing China’s increasingly assertive actions in the disputed waters, where Manila and Beijing, along with four other governments, have wrangled for control of territory.

The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs on Thursday issued a rare public rebuke of large numbers of Chinese vessels near islands and islets occupied by the Philippines in the disputed waters, saying the Chinese presence was illegal. The

Philippine military has monitored more than 200 Chinese vessels from January to March in a disputed area named Sandy Cay near a Philippine-occupied island called Pag-asa by Filipinos.

“I’m trying to tell China, Pag-asa is ours ... so let us be friends but do not touch Pag-asa Island and the rest. Otherwise, things would be different,” Duterte said. “This is not a warning, this is just a word of advice to my friends because China is our friend.”

“I will not plead or beg, but I’m just telling you (to) lay off (of) Pag-asa because I have soldiers there,” he said. “If you touch it, that’s another story. Then I will tell my soldiers ‘prepare for suicide missions.’”

May urges short Brexit delay; EU seeks ‘flexextension’

Associated Press

LONDON — British Prime Minister Theresa May on Friday sought to delay Brexit until June 30 to avoid a crash-out in one week’s time, but a key European Union leader suggested an even longer pause in the difficult divorce proceedings.

In a letter to European Council President Donald Tusk, May sought an extension until June 30 and agreed to make contingency plans to take part in European Parliament elections in late May if necessary. Tusk proposed a longer time frame. He urged the 27 remaining EU nations to offer the U.K. a flexible extension of up to a year to make sure the nation doesn’t leave the bloc in a chaotic and costly way.

Two EU officials, who requested ano-

nymity because they weren’t authorized to disclose information before it was made public, said Tusk wants a one-year “flexextension” and hopes to get it approved at next Wednesday’s EU summit.

Such a move would mean the U.K. needs to take part in the May 23 to May 26 European elections, something which the U.K. prime minister has long argued would not be in either side’s interest.

The elections pose a substantial stumbling block because Britain would be expected to take part, if it is still an EU member, so its people have representation in the European Parliament. Officials worry the legitimacy of European institutions could be jeopardized if the population of a member state is not involved in the process.

Any extension of the deadline will need unanimous approval from the 27 remaining EU nations. French President Emmanuel Macron has thus far seemed cautious about giving Britain more time, saying the EU cannot be held hostage by Britain’s political deadlock over Brexit.

If any EU nation refuses to back an extension, Britain will be expected to leave as scheduled on April 12. The complex maneuvering comes as Britain’s Parliament considers legislation designed to prevent such a “no-deal” departure.

There are concerns that an abrupt exit without an agreed withdrawal deal could lead to an economic slowdown and a breakdown in food and medical supplies as border checks and tariffs are added overnight.

Drinking water problems linger after Midwest floods

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Several communities along the Missouri River continue to struggle to restore drinking water service weeks after massive flooding swept through the area.

People who live in the affected Nebraska and Iowa towns have had to adjust to boiling water before drinking it or relying on bottled water while officials work to repair the damage. The challenges each town faces after last month’s flooding differs, but they share the goal of restoring safe drinking water service quickly.

Last month’s flooding caused more than \$3 billion damage in Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and Missouri when spring rain and

melting snow combined to overwhelm area rivers and inundate towns and land. But the damage is still being tallied.

In Glenwood, Iowa, officials used a boat this week to reach one of their three wells inside the water treatment plant and make repairs, while the other two wells remain underwater. But getting a well up and running is only part of the process. Glenwood City Administrator Angie Winquist said the city’s water pipes and towers need to be flushed and refilled before the water can be tested.

“It will be at least a couple more weeks, but that’s better than a couple months,” Winquist said.

Restoring drinking water is so time-con-

suming, in part, because of all the steps required to ensure the water is safe. For instance, once the damage has been repaired and the system refilled, the water must test clean several times on different days.

So Glenwood will continue trucking in more than 6,000-gallon tanks of water to provide the roughly 275,000 gallons its residents are using each day.

Across the Missouri River in Plattsmouth, Neb., officials said it could be six months before they get their water treatment plant operating again. Fortunately, that Omaha-area city was able to connect to a nearby rural water system, but it doesn’t have the same capacity, meaning residents must continue conserving water.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Snowmobilers trigger avalanche, survive

AK FAIRBANKS — An Alaska man said he and his friends are lucky to be alive after triggering an avalanche while riding snowmobiles in the eastern Alaska Range.

The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner reported the avalanche north of Paxson last Saturday caught three of the four men and partially buried two of them.

Dustin Scalisi said they were aware there was a risk of slides, but their years of riding in the area had made them “apathetic to avalanches.”

One of the men had set off a slab avalanche on the Pegmatite Glacier, but the group managed to make it out unharmed.

Scalisi said the avalanche created a debris pile about 300 yards across and 500 yards long.

Checkout line dispute leads to gunfire

MO ST. LOUIS — A St. Louis woman has been charged with shooting at another woman after a dispute in a grocery store checkout line.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that Tationna Thompson, 20, was charged Tuesday with first-degree assault and three other felonies. Charging documents said the confrontation began on St. Patrick's Day when the fellow shopper made a comment to Thompson about the amount of groceries in Thompson's cart. It wasn't clear if the women were in an express line.

The documents said Thompson became angry, followed the woman into the parking lot, pointed a gun at her and fired

two shots at the woman's vehicle after she drove off. No one was hurt.

Police dogs no longer trained to sniff out pot

NJ TRENTON — New Jersey has halted training state police dogs to sniff out pot.

Attorney General Gurbir Grewal told lawmakers Wednesday that a pending proposal to legalize recreational marijuana led police to stop training them to detect the odor of burnt cannabis.

He said dogs already trained to detect the scent could be used in other settings where marijuana would be prohibited, such as jails and schools. He added that it's possible to train the dogs to detect marijuana in the future if needed, but it's impossible to “un-train” dogs who already recognize the odor.

Deteriorating Sept. 11 memorial removed

WI GREEN BAY — A memorial to the victims of the September 11 attacks is being torn down in Green Bay after fundraising efforts to repair it failed to generate even a dime.

The memorial along the Fox River was dedicated in 2005 and featured a piece of steel from the Twin Towers in New York. But, over the years the memorial began to deteriorate. Outgoing Green Bay Mayor Jim Schmitt said the deterioration wasn't respectful to those who lost their lives that day.

WLUK-TV reported about a year ago, the City Council authorized a fundraiser to generate \$100,000 to repair the memorial. But, Schmitt said no money was ever raised. So this week, city crews began taking down the memorial with a hope

of eventually constructing a replacement.

Ex-plant owner admits to discharging sewage

WV MARTINSBURG — The former owner of a West Virginia water treatment plant has admitted to discharging untreated sewage into the Potomac River.

Federal prosecutors on Wednesday announced that Timothy Peer has admitted to violating the Clean Water Act.

Peer, 55, was the owner of the Mountaineer Village Utility plant near Ridgeley, W.V.

Authorities said he failed to maintain the plant, leading to untreated sewage discharging into the North Branch of the Potomac River.

Fire chief charged with driving drunk

MN DULUTH — Authorities said Duluth's fire chief had a blood alcohol content more than 2½ times the legal limit when he was arrested for driving drunk last weekend.

Chief Dennis Edwards Jr. has been placed on administrative leave after being charged with third-degree driving while impaired. He was pulled over about 11:30 p.m. Saturday by a St. Louis County sheriff's deputy. The officer said he saw Edwards attempting to pass a vehicle in a no-passing zone on a hill.

A criminal complaint said Edwards performed poorly on a field sobriety test.

Winning card drawn in yearlong fundraiser

SD HUDSON — The right card has finally been drawn to win a fundraiser

jackpot that has been growing for a year in a tiny South Dakota town.

A charitable group called the Southeast Area Pink Ladies set up the “Chase the Queen” fundraiser last year in Waddy's Bar in Hudson to help people in the area who were struggling with cancer.

The Argus Leader said thousands of people were drawn to the town of about 300 to buy tickets for a chance at drawing the queen of diamonds card that would win the jackpot which had grown to about \$320,000.

A group of family and friends from Montrose had the winning ticket and sent Ryan Gordon to make the card draw Wednesday night. He picked the queen of diamonds to win the jackpot that he and 11 others will split.

Cops: Woman burns bar she was buying

NE ARNOLD — A woman has been accused of setting fire to a bar she was buying in the central Nebraska town of Arnold.

Custer County Court records said Jane Chestnutt, 54, is charged with three felonies: arson, criminal mischief and burning to defraud an insurer. Her attorney didn't immediately return a call.

The March 27 blaze last year heavily damaged Jim's Bar. The bar owner said he was selling it to Chestnutt and her husband and that she had said she was having trouble making the payments.

Court records said she told an investigator that she accidentally knocked over and broke a whiskey bottle and then set a flame to the spilled whiskey to see whether it would burn. She said it ignited and that she fled the bar when she was unable to put out the fire.

From wire reports

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This year may be Izzo's best coaching

Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. — Tom Izzo struggled with tears of joy as Michigan State knocked off top-seeded Duke to reach the Final Four. He was emotional again only a few hours later when fans packed the Breslin Center to welcome the gritty Spartans back to campus.

This season might be remembered as the best coaching job in Izzo's long career at Michigan State, reaching his eighth Final Four with a short-handed team that lost two underclassmen to the pros last year. It has also been an emotional time for the Hall of Fame coach.

Last season, some wondered if the Larry Nassar sexual abuse scandal and its deep ties to Michigan State would drive Izzo away as he answered questions about the behavior of some of his former players. Years ago, the Cleveland Cavaliers and Atlanta Hawks tried to lure him to the NBA and other college programs have taken runs at hiring him.

Each time there was a chance for him to go, Izzo stayed at the school that hired him as a part-time assistant in 1983 and promoted him to head coach in 1995.

"There's nothing like this," Izzo told The Associated Press this week while walking across his program's practice court. "I haven't been in the NBA Finals, so I can't say I know everything. But the number of people you impact is off the charts here. If that many alums are that excited, it really does excite me and makes my day. That's why I coach. I coach for our players and our alums."

Izzo will coach one more game, and maybe two, to close out his 24th season in charge of a solid program he has turned into one of the best in college basketball. Second-seeded Michigan State faces third-seeded Texas Tech on Saturday night, playing for a spot in the championship game Monday night against the winner of the Virginia-Auburn game.

Izzo has led the Spartans to

the Final Four for an eighth time, a total no coach or program can match since 1999.

He has cut down the nets on the biggest stage of all only once — and that drives him daily, if not every minute he is awake.

How would he respond to critics who say he needs another national title to validate his tenure?

"Five years ago, fire and brimstone in me would have wanted to fight that person," Izzo said. "Now I want to say, 'You're right.' I don't want to say it to get them off my back. I want to say it because if that's your goal for me, I promise you my goals are bigger than your goals for me."

Izzo desperately wants a second national championship to get in a club that currently includes 15 coaches. Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski (five), North Carolina's Roy Williams (three) and Villanova's Jay Wright (three) are the only active coaches in college basketball with multiple national titles.

Izzo is in a much larger group

of coaches with one college basketball title since the NCAA had its first championship game in the sport 80 years ago.

Michigan State was not expected to be in the hunt for a national title this season.

Miles Bridges and Jaren Jackson left last year as underclassmen and became NBA lottery picks, adding to the losses of a trio of role-playing seniors. The hits kept coming during the season, with Joshua Langford lost to a season-ending ankle injury, Nick Ward for some games late in the season with a broken hand and Kyle Ahrens with an ankle injury in the Big Ten Tournament.

The obstacles only seemed to motivate Izzo to work harder and get more out of the players he had left, including All-America guard Cassius Winston. The Spartans (32-6) shared the Big Ten regular-season championship, won the Big Ten Tournament and sent Krzyzewski's Blue Devils home. They are a win away from matching a school record for victories.

Texas Tech's Beard selected as AP coach of the year

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Chris Beard of Texas Tech had a cheering, boisterous audience as he took the stage Thursday to accept the trophy as The Associated Press men's college basketball coach of the year — his players and family filling the front row to celebrate his success as their own. He was happy to share a moment he said belonged to them, too.

"I don't know what I possibly could have that John Wooden and Bob Knight and (Michigan State coach Tom) Izzo didn't have, but I don't think that they probably had their team — 30 minutes removed from practice — sitting on the front row when we got the award, so this is special," Beard told his players from the stage. "So I want to thank each player that

played on this year's team. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you guys."

The players' presence — full of cheers and even a news conference question from graduate transfer Tariq Owens — was an unusual sight for the annual award presentation. It was also a sign of how the Red Raiders are bonded by their well-traveled coach's work, work, work approach that guided his career on its winding path through obscure, overlooked coaching jobs to the college basketball's biggest stage.

"I've always believed you have to be who you are," Beard said in an interview with the AP. "You can never forget who you are. ... Sometimes as you advance in the profession and the logo on your shirt changes or the title next to your name changes, you kind of change.

I've never wanted to do that."

Beard earned 20 of 64 votes from the same panel that selects the weekly AP Top 25, with voters submitting ballots before the start of the NCAA Tournament. Beard's team had won a share of its first Big 12 regular-season title at the time of the voting. In the tournament, Texas Tech pushed past top-seeded Gonzaga to win the West and earn its ticket to Minneapolis.

In this Final Four, Izzo and Tony Bennett of Virginia have also won the award.

Houston's Kelvin Sampson was second with 13 votes after the Cougars finished with a program-record 33 wins before losing in the Sweet 16.

Beard and Sampson were the only coaches to receive at least 10 votes, with 12 coaches splitting the rest of the ballots.

Beard has guided the Red Raiders to the program's first Final Four behind the growth of sophomore Jarrett Culver and a rugged defense that is locks down opponents with an efficiency not seen in years.

Not bad for a team that lost six of its top eight scorers from last year's Elite Eight run. Nor for a 46-year-old coach who is only in his third season at Texas Tech since making stops at Division II and III programs within the past seven years.

It's sheer force of will that helped Beard get here, a tireless work ethic rooted in the simple belief that anything less won't be enough, along with the feeling of being an underdog no matter how many games his team wins.

"It's just reality, it's not a made-up story," Beard said.

Indians remove Bauer during no-hitter

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Trevor Bauer never backs down from any challenge or debate. He accepted this call.

Health mattered more than history.

Bauer was pulled by manager Terry Francona after seven hitless innings and 117 pitches, and sat in the dugout watching as Toronto's Freddy Galvis broke up Cleveland's bid for a combined no-hitter with a lead-off single in the ninth inning of the Indians' 4-1 win Thursday night.

Bauer was attempting to throw Cleveland's first no-hitter in 38 years — on the 25th anniversary of Progressive Field's opening — but was taken out when his pitch count climbed too high for Francona.

Bauer understood the move.

"It was the right decision,"

he said.

Once Bauer was out, Jon Edwards came in and got two outs before closer Brad Hand worked out of a bases-loaded jam. Hand, however, gave up a hard single to center by Galvis. Moments later, Alen Hanson followed with Toronto's second hit and the Blue Jays scored before Hand struck out two for his third save.

Bauer (1-0) was six outs away from completing his no-hitter, when Francona removed him as a precautionary measure. The right-hander might have been able to go farther — he threw a career-high 127 pitches last season — but on a chilly night and with so much season left, Francona played it cautiously.

"I didn't want to take him out," Francona said. "He said he knew it was the right thing. I told him I hate it. He goes, 'I

hate it, too, but I know it's the right thing.' I care too much about him and this organization to hurt somebody. I would have loved to have seen it because I don't doubt that he would have kept pitching and probably not given up a hit the way he was throwing.

"I just have an obligation to do the right thing, even when it's not the funnest thing to do," he said.

The enigmatic Bauer, best known for his quirky personality and unorthodox training methods, had only himself to blame for throwing too many pitches earlier in the game against Toronto's weak lineup.

"I knew it was probably time to come out," he said. "That being said, I think my velocity was higher in that last inning probably than all innings. My stuff was sharp. If I'd gone back out, I feel like I would have

gotten it, but it's a long season. We're in the second week of it."

The odd developments prevented Bauer from ending Cleveland's no-hit drought, which dates to May 15, 1981, when Len Barker threw a perfect game against the Blue Jays.

Bauer's performance was anything but pristine. He walked six — including two in the third when he also hit a batter — and even though he struck out eight, was never dominant against a Blue Jays team that has come close to being no-hit several times this season.

On opening day, Detroit's Jordan Zimmermann was perfect against the Blue Jays until giving up an infield single with two outs in the seventh. Baltimore's David Hess was pulled with a no-hitter intact after 6¹/₃ innings Monday at Toronto.

MLB roundup

Fried takes perfect game into 6th inning of Braves' win

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Max Fried credits time spent in the bullpen with helping his mentality as he becomes more confident in his talent and more aggressive with his approach.

Now the Braves' young left-hander doesn't want to go back to a relief role.

Fried took a perfect game into the sixth inning, Nick Markakis drove in five runs with five hits and Atlanta beat Yu Darvish and the Chicago Cubs 9-4 on Thursday night to complete a three-game sweep.

Fried said he has learned to "just trust my stuff."

Fried mixed his fastball clocked at 97 mph with a curve and slider and threw them all for consistent strikes.

"When a kid figures something out with all that assortment, then you've really got something," Braves manager Brian Snitker said.

Fried (1-0) made a strong bid to keep a spot in Atlanta's rotation after Kevin Gausman and Mike Foltynewicz come off the injured list. Gausman is expected to make his debut against Miami on Friday night, and Foltynewicz, a 2018 All-Star, could return in about 10 days.

Making only his 10th career start and his first this season after two scoreless relief appearances, the 25-year-old Fried recorded 17 straight outs to open the game. Mark Zagnis singled up the middle with two outs in the sixth to become Chicago's first baserunner.

Fried allowed one hit with no walks and five strikeouts in six innings.

The Braves led 9-0 before the Cubs scored four runs in the ninth. Anthony Rizzo hit a two-run homer and Javier Baez followed with another homer off Chad Sobotka.

The Cubs have lost five

straight and are 1-5 for the first time since 2012, when they lost 101 games.

"It sucks but that's the beauty of this game," Rizzo said. "We get to come in tomorrow and write our own script."

Three Chicago relievers gave up six runs in four innings.

It was a troubling series for the Cubs, who committed six errors in an 8-0 loss on Monday night and walked five batters in the eighth inning of a 6-4 loss on Wednesday night.

Darvish (0-1) gave up three runs on five hits and four walks, one intentional, in four-plus innings.

Rangers 11, Angels 4: Joey Gallo hit a three-run homer and Ronald Guzman added a two-run shot in the first inning, and Texas extended its strong start.

Athletics 7, Red Sox 3: Center fielder Ramon Laureano threw out another Boston runner in a key spot, and host

Oakland kept the its opponent stumbling.

Nationals 4, Mets 0: Stephen Strasburg outpitched Noah Syndergaard, rookie Victor Robles homered for his team's only hit until the ninth inning and Washington spoiled New York's home opener.

Yankees 8, Orioles 4: Gleyber Torres homered twice, had a career-high four hits and drove in four runs, and New York ruined Baltimore's home opener.

Pirates 2, Reds 0: Jordan Lyles pitched five effective innings in his debut with his new team and host Pittsburgh extended Cincinnati's scoreless streak.

Tigers 5, Royals 4: Spencer Turnbull struck out 10 in six innings, and host Detroit drew four straight walks to start the bottom of the seventh, taking the lead for good against Kansas City.

NHL roundup

Capitals wrap up Metropolitan Division

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Washington Capitals won their division again. Perhaps more importantly, they clinched it with playoff-style hockey.

Nic Dowd put Washington ahead for good early in the second period, Braden Holtby made 33 stops and the Capitals secured their fourth straight Metropolitan Division title with a 2-1 victory over the Montreal Canadiens on Thursday night.

Lars Eller also scored for the Capitals.

After sealing their fifth playoff appearance and 11th in 12 seasons last week, the defending Stanley Cup champions enter the postseason having won five of six. They've allowed only one goal in three of those victories, and on Thursday did so against a team desperate to boost its own postseason chances.

Islanders 2, Panthers 1 (SO): Brock Nelson scored in the second period and then got the winner in the fourth round of the shootout to lead visiting New York to its third win in four games.

New York remained two points ahead of Pittsburgh for second place in the Metropolitan Division and home-ice advantage in the first round of the playoffs. The Islanders need to earn just one point in the season finale at Washington on Saturday to clinch second.

Penguins 4, Red Wings 1: Phil Kessel scored twice, Sidney Crosby added a goal and two assists and Matt Murray stopped 33 shots as host Pittsburgh clinched a postseason berth for the 13th straight year — the longest active streak in the NHL.

Avalanche 3, Jets 2 (OT): Erik Johnson scored 1:49 into overtime, Philipp Grubauer made 34 saves and host Colorado rallied from two goals down to clinch a playoff berth.

Winnipeg's loss was a big blow in its quest to capture the Central Division crown. The Jets fell a point behind Nashville and dropped into a tie with St. Louis with one game remaining. It was the fifth loss in six games for Winnipeg.

Sharks 3, Oilers 2: Brent Burns had a goal and an assist

to help visiting San Jose win for just the second time in 11 games.

San Jose has clinched second place in the Pacific Division and will face Vegas in the first round of the playoffs.

Predators 3, Canucks 2: Ryan Johansen scored with 19.5 seconds remaining, and host Nashville preserved its hopes for a second straight Central Division title.

Lightning 3, Maple Leafs 1: Steven Stamkos had a goal and an assist, Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 29 shots, and visiting Tampa Bay became the second team in NHL history to win more than 60 games in a season.

Hurricanes 3, Devils 1: Justin Faulk scored the go-ahead goal in the second period, and host Carolina clinched its first playoff berth in a decade.

The victory — coupled with Montreal's loss at Washington — wrapped up Carolina's first postseason berth since 2009 and just its second since winning the Stanley Cup in 2006.

Sabres 5, Senators 2: Jack Eichel had a goal and two as-

sists, and host Buffalo snapped an eight-game skid in its final home game of the season.

Bruins 3, Wild 0: Jaroslav Halak made 26 saves for his fifth shutout of the season and 47th of his career, and short-handed Boston beat host Minnesota.

Blues 7, Flyers 3: Alex Pietrangolo had three assists during his team's five-goal first-period outburst, Alexander Steen finished with two goals and host St. Louis preserved its Central Division title hopes.

St. Louis, which improved to 8-1-2 since March 16, remains one point behind Nashville, which beat Vancouver 3-2.

Coyotes 4, Golden Knights 1: Derek Stepan scored twice, Darcy Kuemper made 35 saves and visiting Arizona defeated Vegas.

Arizona entered the day needing a win to stay in playoff contention, but was officially eliminated from the postseason when Colorado went into overtime with Winnipeg earlier in the night.

NBA roundup

Antetokounmpo, Bucks clinch top seed for postseason

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA—Giannis Antetokounmpo outdueled fellow MVP candidate Joel Embiid, finishing with 45 points and 13 rebounds and leading Milwaukee to a 128-122 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers on Thursday night as the Bucks clinched the No. 1 seed in the Eastern Conference and the top overall seed for the NBA playoffs.

Khris Middleton added 22 points and George Hill had 20 for the Bucks, who locked up home-court advantage with three regular-season games remaining.

Embiid returned from a three-game absence and had 34 points, 13 rebounds, 13 assists and three blocks.

JJ Redick scored 29 points and Mike Scott, starting for the injured Jimmy Butler, had 22 points for the 76ers, who are two games in front of Boston in the race for the No. 3 seed in the East with three games left.

Philadelphia played without Butler, who missed for the second time in three games due to back tightness.

Kings 117, Cavaliers 104: De'Aaron Fox had 16 points and 10 assists, Buddy Hield scored 23 points and host Sacramento

beat Cleveland.

Marvin Bagley III scored seven of his 15 points in the fourth quarter, and Bogdan Bogdanovic added 15 points and eight rebounds for the Kings.

Collin Sexton scored 19 points and joined LeBron James and Ron Harper as the only Cavaliers rookies to score 1,300 points. Sexton is the 10th rookie in the NBA to reach the milestone.

Ante Zizic had 14 points and 10 rebounds, and Larry Nance Jr. added 11 points and 16 boards for Cleveland. The Cavs (19-60) have lost seven

straight.

Warriors 108, Lakers 90: DeMarcus Cousins had 21 points and 10 rebounds, and Golden State rolled to a win at Los Angeles in pursuit of the No. 1 seed in the West.

With four regular-season games remaining, the Warriors own the best record in the West (54-24) and have a two-game lead over idle second-place Denver. The defending NBA champions also hold the tiebreaker over the Nuggets in the race for the top seed.

Kevin Durant added 15 points, eight assists and six rebounds.