

8 killed in shooting at FedEx facility

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Police scoured a FedEx facility in Indianapolis and interviewed scores of witnesses Friday in search of a motive for the latest mass shooting to rock the U.S., as family members of the eight victims spent agonizing hours waiting for word on their loved ones.

Authorities identified the shooter as a young man in his 20s. They said they could not yet say why he opened fire with a rifle late Thursday night at a FedEx processing center near the Indianapolis airport.

Police Chief Randal Taylor also noted that a “significant” number of employees at the facility are members of the Sikh community. Taylor spoke from a hotel where family members are awaiting word on their loved ones. He says he will stay with the families until they get more information.

Deputy Chief Craig McCartt of the Indianapolis police said the gunman started randomly shooting at people in the parking

lot and then went into the building and continued firing. He said the gunman apparently died by suicide shortly before police entered the building.

“There was no confrontation with anyone that was there,” he said. “There was no disturbance, there was no argument. He just appeared to randomly start shooting.”

McCartt said four people were killed outside the building and another four inside. Several people were also wounded, including five taken to the hospital.

The carnage took just a couple of minutes. “It did not last very long,” he said.

Officials with the coroner’s office said they had not been able to get to the scene to identify the victims because evidence is still being collected.

The families’ agonizing waiting was exacerbated by the fact that most employees aren’t allowed to carry cellphones inside the FedEx building, making contact with them difficult.

“When you see notifications on your

phone, but you’re not getting a text back from your kid and you’re not getting information and you still don’t know where they are ... what are you supposed to do?” Mindy Carson said early Friday, fighting back tears.

At 11:30 a.m., Carson said she had just heard from her daughter, Jessica, who works in the facility. She said her daughter was OK and she was going to meet her, but didn’t say where.

It was the latest in a recent string of mass shootings across the U.S. Last month, eight people were fatally shot at massage businesses across the Atlanta area, and 10 died in gunfire at a supermarket in Boulder, Colo.

It was at least the third mass shooting this year in Indianapolis alone. Five people, including a pregnant woman, were shot and killed in January, and a man was accused of killing three adults and a child before abducting his daughter during an argument at a home in March.

Afghan towns warily brace for departure of US troops

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Over the last 20 years, Bagram and other towns in Afghanistan became dependent on the sprawling U.S. military bases nearby for their economy and their security.

In a few months, they may not have much of either.

The flow of discarded goods from Bagram Airfield slowed to a trickle last year when U.S. troop levels in the country went from 12,000 down to about 2,500. What’s left of that commerce is expected to run out by Sept. 11, the date set for all U.S. and NATO troops to have left the country.

“People are becoming jobless,” said Abdul Shokoor Qudoosi, governor of the district around Bagram Airfield, and “they fear if the Taliban comes again, there will be problems for the people who worked with the Americans.”

People in the towns so readily identified with coalition troops could fall victim to a new

wave of violence, said Qudoosi, who recalled the viciousness of battles the Taliban fought around Bagram as they took over the country in the 1990s.

But while the U.S. presence endures, shops outside the base continue selling their dwindling supplies of energy drinks, shampoos, protein bars and other items. Children at a cart hawk items such as Meals, Ready to Eat, the food rations issued to U.S. troops. A stick of American beef jerky sells for about 13 cents.

Thousands of Afghan workers once worked on America’s largest base, pumping money into the economy and indirectly affecting nearly every person in the district, Qudoosi said.

But the boom times are over. Business crashed about eight months ago, said Shaiq Ghafouri, a 16-year-old shopkeeper outside the base. His customers cannot afford to buy much and his sales are one-fifth of what they were before.

“If business keeps decreasing, I’ll have to close my store,” Ghafouri said.

Last year’s drawdown was a smaller version of the “retrograde” of 2014 that closed hundreds of bases across the country. That drawdown was disastrous for the Afghan economy and a repeat could destabilize the country, said Jonathan Schroden, special operations program director at the Center for Naval Analyses.

“The departure of large numbers of US forces — as we saw in 2014 — leads to uncertainty about the future of the country, which reduces people’s willingness to start businesses, invest in new infrastructure and spend money in Afghanistan,” Schroden said.

If the economy gets worse, people may take up weapons again to feed their families, said Thomas Ruttig, co-director of Afghanistan Analysts Network.

“Afghanistan might become worse off (economically) than during the Soviet era,” Ruttig said.

Iran closer to weapons-grade uranium

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Iran began enriching uranium Friday to its highest level ever, edging closer to weapons-grade levels to pressure talks in Vienna aimed at restoring its nuclear deal with world powers after an attack on its main atomic site.

A top official said only a few grams an hour of uranium gas would be enriched up to 60% purity — triple the level it once did but at a rate far slower than what Tehran could produce. International inspectors already said Iran planned to do so above-ground at its Natanz nuclear site, not deep within its underground halls hardened to withstand airstrikes.

The move is likely to raise tensions even as Iran negotiates in Vienna over a way to allow the U.S. back into the agreement and lift the

crushing economic sanctions it faces. However, its scope also provides Iran with a way to quickly de-escalate if it chose. The announcement also marks a significant escalation after the attack that damaged centrifuges at Natanz, an attack this past weekend suspected of having been carried out by Israel. While Israel has yet to claim it, it comes amid a long-running shadow war between the two Mideast rivals.

Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, Iran's parliament speaker, announced the move in a Twitter post later acknowledged by Iranian state television.

"The young and God-believing Iranian scientists managed to achieve a 60% enriched uranium product," Qalibaf said. "I congratulate the brave nation of Islamic Iran on this success. The Iranian nation's willpower is mi-

raculous and can defuse any conspiracy."

The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, the country's civilian nuclear arm, later acknowledged the move to 60%, according to state TV. Ali Akbar Salehi said the centrifuges now produce 9 grams an hour, but that would drop to 5 grams an hour in the coming days.

"Any enrichment level that we desire is in our reach at the moment and we can do it at any time we want," Salehi said.

State TV later referred to the decision as a "show of power against terrorist rascality." Mahmoud Vaezi, the chief of staff for Iran's president, similarly said it sent the message that Iran's atomic program "will not be stopped through the assassination of nuclear scientists and sabotage in nuclear facilities."

USMC to test new workout uniform this summer

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Marine Corps will pick 500 people to test a new workout uniform during the summer to determine whether it meets the needs for modern athletic gear.

"Active wear has come a long way from when the [general purpose] trunk was first issued," Kristine Bealmear, the physical training uniform project officer at Marine Corps Systems Command, said in a statement. "I feel it's important for our Marines to have these advanced garments to provide them comfort and durability during their [physical training] sessions."

The new physical training, or PT, uniform is

a shirt and shorts with the same olive drab green color scheme as the current uniform, but it will have more features including material that is anti-microbial, moisture-wicking, stretches, is fast-drying and reflective, according to the statement. The uniform will be more fitted and include side mesh panels for breathability. The uniform would not be complete without the Marine Corps insignia — the eagle, globe and anchor — located on the sleeve and on the left leg. The back of the shirt will have "USMC" going down the middle with reflective stripes going down across the shoulder blades.

The shorts will be "basketball-style" with a longer inseam than the current shorts, a "bike-

style" liner, and pockets with zippers. Shorter inseam shorts will come later for those who prefer it for running, according to the statement. The Marine Corps is also developing a maternity PT shirt and shorts with the new uniform. The current running suit and sweat suit will still be part of the PT uniform. The new PT shirt will not replace the green shirt worn with the utility uniforms, according to the statement.

The Marine Corps is giving 500 uniforms to men and women — enlisted troops and officers in school environments — to test them out and give feedback. The testing is expected to be completed by August. Marines should expect to purchase the new uniform next spring.

No response as divers knock on capsized oil industry ship

Associated Press

PORT FOURCHON, La. — Families anxiously awaited news of the 12 people missing from a capsized oil industry vessel Thursday while divers searching for survivors knocked on the ship's hull without response.

Rescuers don't know whether any of the missing might be caught inside the lift boat called the Seacor Power that flipped over Tuesday in hurricane-force winds and high seas about 8 miles off the coast of Louisiana,

Coast Guard spokesmen said.

"There is the potential they are still there, but we don't know," Petty Officer 2nd Class Jonathan Lally said Thursday. "We're still searching for 12 people because there are 12 still missing."

The Coast Guard said on Twitter that divers conducted operations Thursday but didn't hear anything when they knocked on the ship's hull. The Guard said dive operations would resume Friday. They will continue to

search overnight by air and sea.

A handful of the missing workers' family gathered at a two-story fire station at Port Fourchon, a sprawling port where much of the industry that services the oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico is based.

Workers from across Louisiana and other parts of the country arrive at the port to load up on the fleet of helicopters and ships that take them to the oil rigs miles out for long stretches of work.

US opens more distance in race to contain virus

Associated Press

The United States opened more distance between itself and much of the rest of the world Thursday, nearing the 200 millionth vaccine administered in a race to protect the population against COVID-19, even as other countries, rich and poor, struggle with stubbornly high infection rates and deaths.

Nearly half of American adults have gotten at least one dose of the vaccine, and about 30% of adults in the U.S. have been fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But the picture is still relentlessly grim in parts of Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia as variants of the virus fuel an increase in new cases and the worldwide death toll closes in on 3 million.

France on Thursday passed 100,000 virus deaths, becoming

only the eighth country to do so.

India's two largest cities, New Delhi and Mumbai, imposed business shutdowns and stringent restrictions on movement as new infections shot past 200,000. Some hotels and banquet halls were ordered to convert their space into wards for treating virus patients, and the surge forced India — a major vaccine producer — to delay exports of doses to other countries.

Japan also saw a rapid resurgence of infections just three months before it's scheduled to host the Olympics. The country's western metropolis of Osaka reported over 1,200 new infections Thursday, its highest since the pandemic began. A top ruling party official suggested the possibility of canceling the games if the infections make them impossible.

Troubling signs also emerged

in the U.S., despite the good news that more than 198 million coronavirus shots have been administered nationwide. The seven-day average of daily shots given hit 2.9 million last week.

New daily infections in the U.S. have increased 11% in the past two weeks. Many U.S. states have lifted mask mandates and restrictions on businesses and public gatherings. But more sick people are being admitted to hospitals in some states, including Michigan, which leads the nation with nearly 8,000 new infections per day.

In suburban Detroit, Dr. Nick Gilpin of Beaumont Health likened a rising crush of coronavirus patients to a "runaway train." Staff were using tents to handle the flow of people seeking emergency care from Michigan's largest hospital system,

which on Thursday was treating more than 800 patients for COVID-19. That's up from about 500 two weeks ago.

"Our COVID-19 numbers are climbing higher and faster, and it's very troubling and alarming to see this," said John Fox, chief executive of Beaumont Health, which operates eight hospitals.

Even though half of U.S. adults are still completely unvaccinated, dwindling demand for coronavirus shots was reported by some hospitals in Alabama and Missouri. Both states already lag the nation overall in vaccinating their populations.

In Alabama, only 37% of adults have received even one vaccine dose. Yet East Alabama Medical Center near Auburn University said it was preparing to wind down its vaccination program in a county where fewer than 18% are fully vaccinated.

US: Russia was given 2016 Trump campaign polling data

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — It was one of the more tantalizing, yet unresolved, questions of the investigation into possible connections between Russia and Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign: Why was a business associate of campaign chairman Paul Manafort given internal polling data — and what did he do with it?

A Treasury Department statement Thursday offered a potentially significant clue, asserting that Konstantin Kilimnik, a Russian and Ukrainian political consultant, had shared sensitive campaign and polling information with Russian intelligence services.

Kilimnik has long been alleged by U.S. officials as having ties to Russian intelligence. But the statement in a broader Treasury Department sanctions announcement was the first time the U.S. government had so directly drawn a connection from the

Trump campaign to the Kremlin's intelligence services. The revelation was all the more startling because it went beyond any allegation made in either special counsel Robert Mueller's 2019 report or in an even more damning and detailed document released last year by the Senate Intelligence Committee.

The issue resurfaced Thursday because Kilimnik was one of 32 people and entities sanctioned by the U.S. government for interference in the 2020 election. Officials say Kilimnik sought to promote the bogus narrative that Ukraine, not Russia, had interfered in the 2016 election.

Kilimnik is mentioned by name 156 times in the Mueller report. He was also indicted alongside Manafort on witness tampering allegations, but has not appeared in the U.S. to face those charges. The FBI has issued a \$250,000 award for information leading to his arrest.

Dems launch push to add 4 seats to Supreme Court

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A group of congressional Democrats introduced legislation Thursday to add four seats to the Supreme Court, a long-shot bid designed to counter the court's rightward tilt during the Trump administration and criticized by Republicans as a potential power grab that would reduce the public's trust in the judiciary.

President Joe Biden last week created a commission to spend the next six months examining the politically incendiary issues of expanding the court and instituting term limits for justices.

The fight over the composition of the nine-member court has become increasingly contentious over the past two decades.

But the bill's introduction had an inauspicious start. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said she might not bring it up for a vote if it advanced out of commit-

tee and Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin, of Illinois, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, was noncommittal as well.

"Some people say we're packing the court. We're not packing it. We're unpacking it," said the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y. He said Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, of Kentucky, and the GOP had "packed the court over the last couple of years. This is a reaction to that. It's a necessary step in the evolution of the court."

McConnell quoted Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who warned before her death that adding justices to the Supreme Court would make it appear partisan and that "nine seems to be a good number."

"But the farthest-left activists aren't interested in the common good. They want power," McConnell said.

Biden, Japan's PM meet to boost China-facing alliance

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden was welcoming Japan's prime minister to the White House on Friday in his first face-to-face meeting with a foreign leader, a choice that reflects Biden's emphasis on strengthening alliances to deal with a more assertive China and other global challenges.

Biden and Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga also look to counter messaging from Chinese President Xi Jinping that America and democracies in general are on the decline, after the political turmoil and international withdrawal that marked Donald Trump's presidency.

The Biden administration calls managing U.S. policies toward the Indo-Pacific, where China under Xi is flexing growing economic and military power, the primary challenge for the United States. That helped guide Biden's decision, announced this week, to pull U.S. troops out of Afghanistan and free the administration to focus more on East Asia.

For Biden and Suga, "our approach to China and our shared coordination and cooperation on that front will be part of the discussion," press secretary Jen Psaki said Thursday. The two will discuss other re-

gional security issues, including North Korea's nuclear program.

Suga looks to showcase security commitments with the United States, Japan's only treaty ally. He expected to be "discussing a wide range of challenges ... and reconfirm the bond of our alliance," he said Friday at a meeting with Vice President Kamala Harris, ahead of his talks with Biden.

"The Japan-U.S. alliance needs to be strong," he added.

The months-old Biden administration, for its part, looks to Suga to keep going on alliance-strengthening moves by both countries.

The two governments have been working to strengthen technology supply chains independent of China during a shortage of semiconductors that's worrying businesses around the world. Japan is expected to announce an investment in 5G cellular networks, boosting alternatives to China's network, as part of that supply chain cooperation.

Both countries are expected in coming days to make deeper commitments to cutting climate-wrecking fossil fuel emissions, in line with Biden's climate summit with 40 world leaders next week.

Kremlin to expel 10 US diplomats amid sanctions

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Friday that Moscow will order 10 U.S. diplomats to leave Russia in a retaliatory response to the U.S. sanctions.

Lavrov also said that Moscow will add eight U.S. officials to its sanctions list and move to restrict and stop the activities of U.S. nongovernment organizations from interfering in Russia's politics.

He added that while Russia has a possibility to take "painful measures" against the American business in Russia, it wouldn't immediately move to do that.

The moves follow a barrage of new sanctions on Russia announced this week by the Biden administration.

While the U.S. wields the power to cripple the Russian economy, Moscow lacks levers to respond in kind, although it potentially could hurt American interests in many other ways around the globe.

Despite its heated rhetoric, Moscow will likely refrain from raising the stakes too high, for now, to avoid provoking even harder-hitting punitive measures from the U.S. But some observers predict that Russia and China will quickly edge closer to coordinate their policies amid the growing U.S. pressure.

Russia has denied interfering in the 2020 U.S. presidential election and involvement in the SolarWind hack of federal agencies — the activities punished by the latest U.S. sanctions. The Russian Foreign Ministry warned of an "inevitable" retaliation, charging that "Washington should realize that it will have to pay a price for the degradation of bilateral ties."

The U.S. on Thursday ordered 10 Russian diplomats expelled, targeted dozens of companies and people, and imposed new curbs on Russia's ability to borrow money. Pundits predicted Moscow would almost certainly respond in kind to the expulsions but would refrain from any other significant moves to avoid a further escalation.

President Vladimir Putin's foreign policy aide, Yuri Ushakov, invited U.S. Ambassador John Sullivan on Friday to tell him about the Russian response, but the Kremlin wouldn't say what measures he announced.

President Joe Biden said he told Putin in Tuesday's call that he chose not to impose tougher sanctions for now and proposed to meet in a third country in the summer.

Ukraine, France and Germany talk security amid Russia tension

Associated Press

PARIS — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is holding talks on Friday with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel amid growing tensions with Russia, which has deployed troops at the border with the country.

Zelenskyy is traveling to Paris to meet with Macron during a working lunch at the Elysee presidential palace. Both heads of state will then talk via videoconference with Merkel, Macron's office said.

The talks come as Ukraine and the West have sounded alarms in recent weeks about the concentration of troops along Russia's border, a buildup that the U.S. and NATO have described as the largest since 2014.

In an interview with French newspaper

Le Figaro, Zelenskyy said "it's time to stop talking and to make decisions."

He said Friday's talks notably aim at discussing security issues. "Europe's security is depending on Ukraine's security," he said, adding his country is seeking support from the European Union and the NATO alliance.

"Our goal ... is to de-escalate tensions," a French official at the French presidency, speaking on condition of anonymity ahead of the talks, said.

"All the work we're doing is in support of Ukraine's sovereignty," the official said.

Zelenskyy said Thursday after chairing a meeting of Ukraine's security council that the discussions in Paris are important for preparing the so-called "Normandy format" talks involving the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman injured in encounter with moose

MT VIRGINIA CITY — Montana wildlife officials say a woman was injured when she was knocked to the ground in a surprise encounter with a moose.

The woman, 66, broke her wrist when the cow moose charged at her from a patch of willow trees and struck her as she was walking her dog in Virginia City recently, said Morgan Jacobson with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks.

The woman told a game warden that the moose was accompanied by a yearling calf. It was unclear if the woman was injured when the moose contacted her or when she struck the ground, Jacobson said. State officials say moose can be defensive and dangerous in surprise encounters, particularly if they are with a calf.

Officials worry statue could be sold for scrap

GA COLUMBUS — An artist and officials in Columbus are pleading for the return of a statue they fear may be sold for scrap.

A statue of a young girl in a raincoat and hat, titled “May Flower,” went missing over the weekend from the spot in downtown Columbus where it has stood since 2007. Someone pried it up from the metal plate it was welded to.

“It’s a sad thing when people are brought down to ripping sculptures off the sidewalk. I’m not taking it personally, but it’s a sad thing,” sculptor Susan Geissler told WRBL-TV. “And I’d probably forgive them.”

Police are investigating and a

downtown development group said it hopes “for the speedy and safe return of the statue with no questions asked.”

Escapee beefalo caught after months on the run

CT PLYMOUTH — After more than 250 days on the run, an 800- to 900-pound beefalo that has been roaming the woods in western Connecticut since it escaped on its way to a slaughterhouse has been captured, police said.

The beefalo—a cross between a bison and domestic cattle—eluded its handlers on Aug. 3, while being loaded off a truck at a meat processing business in Plymouth. Nicknamed “Buddy,” his adventures, including appearances on a wildlife camera set up by police and failed attempts to lure him into a pen with food, gained widespread attention and inspired the creation of social media accounts in his name.

Plymouth police announced his apprehension on Wednesday, posting the animal’s picture on social media with the word “Captured” stamped across it in red letters. A second photo shows Buddy in a pen.

Fraternity brothers pay off cook’s mortgage

LA BAKER — Members of a Louisiana State University fraternity chipped in more than \$50,000 to pay off the mortgage of a woman who fed them when they were students.

About a dozen members of Phi Gamma Delta surprised Jessie Hamilton with the money for her 74th birthday on April 3 in Baker, La., The Advocate reported.

Roughly 90 fraternity members raised \$51,765, with each

brother donating between \$600 and \$1,000 on average, the newspaper said.

“That shows how they all felt about her,” said Andrew Fusaiotti, a member of the fraternity in the 1980s. “Jessie is one of these people that shows up to work and always has a smile on her face, eager to please and never complains.”

Hamilton worked for 14 years as a cook for the fraternity, but Fusaiotti also recalled her helping students with rides to the grocery store and doctor when he was on campus.

Zoo employee bitten by venomous snake

CA SAN DIEGO — A San Diego Zoo employee was hospitalized after being bitten by a venomous snake, officials said.

The incident occurred as the wildlife care specialist was caring for the African bush viper in a non-public area, the zoo said.

The staff member was taken to a hospital in unknown condition, 10 News reported.

“Although the San Diego Zoo cares for a number of venomous reptiles, incidents like this are very rare, and the snake was contained at all times with no risk of an escape,” the zoo said in a statement.

Gray whale could be sick from tracking tag

WA SEATTLE — Marine mammal biologists and veterinarians are treating and monitoring a gray whale that appears to have developed an infection after being darted with a satellite tracking tag.

The whale is part of a group of about 250 gray whales that feed off the coasts of Oregon, Wash-

ington and British Columbia in the summer. The whale is now off the coast of Vancouver Island and appears robust and to be behaving normally, The Seattle Times reported.

But experts became concerned when in March a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries contractor photographed the whale in Barkley Sound, B.C., and reported a lesion around the tagging site and two lesions on the opposite side of the animal. The whale was also coughing up mucus, so the whale was darted with antibiotics on March 31 and April 1 to stave off systemic infection, said Martin Haulena, veterinarian for the Vancouver Aquarium, a member of the response team.

\$1,200 prize offered for turning in moss balls

WY CHEYENNE — People in Wyoming who turn in aquarium moss balls for disposal so they don’t spread an invasive species will be eligible to win \$1,200.

Wyoming officials have been alarmed by the recent discovery of zebra mussels in moss balls sold in pet stores.

So far, the fingernail-sized mussels haven’t become established in Wyoming waters but they’ve devastated ecosystems elsewhere in the U.S. The mussels originated from Eurasia and become so numerous they can clog pipes for water systems.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Wyoming Trout Unlimited and others have teamed up for a moss ball raffle. People who turn in moss balls at any of 10 locations around the state may enter the raffle to win \$1,200. The contest ends May 15.

— From wire reports

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IndyCar season opens with 3 rookies

Associated Press

Jimmie Johnson, Scott McLaughlin and Romain Grosjean, oh my! That's quite the rookie class for IndyCar, which opens the season Sunday at Barber Motorsports Park in Alabama stacked with storylines throughout the grid.

Johnson brings seven NASCAR championships to Chip Ganassi Racing for a career reset at 45 years old. Although he always wanted to be an IndyCar driver, his opportunities came in stock cars until Johnson was able to call his own shots.

The transition will be incredibly difficult. The opening practice Saturday on the road course will be the first for Johnson, who will be doing nearly everything for the first time this weekend.

"If there's a rocky day, am I going to be surprised? Probably not," team owner Ganassi said Wednesday. "He's a damn hard

worker. He sets the bar at a new level for the amount of work a driver puts in. He's always in the simulator, on the computer, on the phone, making calls, asking questions, working out, talking to sponsors, talking to the team.

"I mean, the guy doesn't slow down. I had no idea what I was up against when racing against him in NASCAR, and now I've got a little feel for it."

Grosjean comes to IndyCar from Formula One, where he'd grown frustrated at team disparity that prevented him from winning in nine seasons. His F1 career came to an abrupt halt after a fiery November crash in Bahrain; and instead of taking a ride with another team not capable of winning, the Frenchman signed with Dale Coyne Racing.

Like Johnson, Grosjean does not plan to race the four ovals on IndyCar's 17-race schedule.

McLaughlin is the three-time defending Australian V8 Super-Cars champion who moved to the United States to drive the full season for Team Penske and will resurrect the iconic "Yellow Submarine" paint scheme in the Indianapolis 500 driven by Penske winners Helio Castroneves, Rick Mears and Johnny Rutherford.

"I didn't think I'd be racing Jimmie Johnson and Romain Grosjean. It's crazy. Very exciting," McLaughlin said. "It just shows what IndyCar is all about right now. I hope the fans relish it."

McLaughlin should easily take top rookie honors because he's running the full schedule, but he's got his sights set on winning races and even competing for the championship. But the competition is fierce, starting at the top with six-time champion Scott Dixon and within Team Penske.

Dixon will be trying to tie A.J. Foyt's record seven championships while leading an expanded Ganassi organization. Dixon in 20 seasons has never won back-to-back titles but his current streak of two in the last three years is the best of his career. He turns 41 this July but noted Tom Brady recently won a sixth Super Bowl at 43.

"I don't think you can ever really put a time scale on it or an age or anything like that," Dixon said. "I think we've seen the longevity, not just in our sport but across sports in general, there's so many different ways, whether it's the mental game or training or anything like that."

Penske has three IndyCar champions on its roster: Josef Newgarden has two titles, while Simon Pagenaud and Will Power each have one. Power has confirmed he's in a contract year this season.

Hope for normalcy as MLS season gets underway

Associated Press

Major League Soccer embarks on the 2021 season with a new labor agreement in hand, the return of two big stars, a new team in Austin, Texas, and lessons learned from 2020.

There still won't be full crowds in most places but there are reasons to be optimistic for the league's 26th season as more Americans get vaccinated against the coronavirus.

The league was two games into the season last March when the COVID-19 pandemic shut down sports in the United States. Play resumed in the summer with the MLS is Back tournament in a bubble in Florida before an abbreviated season held in local markets. The Columbus Crew emerged as the MLS Cup champions.

MLS estimated losses at nearly \$1 billion last season, mostly

the result of playing in empty stadiums and charter flights for teams. While that will likely improve, the league is expecting another financial hit. As a result, MLS invoked the force majeure clause in the collective bargaining agreement last year.

After a rather contentious back-and-forth — the players had already agreed to concessions in 2020 — a new agreement was struck in February that will run through the 2027 season.

The season kicked off Friday night with a pair of games: San Jose at Houston and Minnesota at Seattle. The league's newest team, Austin FC, will play its inaugural game Saturday against LAFC in Los Angeles.

Stars return: It appears two of the league's top stars, LAFC's Carlos Vela and Atlanta's Josef Martinez, will be back.

Vela, who had an MLS-record 34 goals in 2019, missed the MLS is Back tournament because of his wife's pregnancy and the birth of their child. Then he was hampered by injuries and appeared in only eight regular-season games.

Martinez was knocked out of last year's season opener with an ACL injury that required multiple surgeries. He's not quite at full strength heading into United's opener, but close.

Martinez got advice and emotional support from Zlatan Ibrahimovic during his recovery.

"Day by day, I am stronger. Obviously not 100%, because I think I'll get there once I start playing more games. But I feel OK," Martinez said.

New team: Austin FC joins this year after overcoming challenges presented by the pandemic, like pulling together a

roster and staff in the Zoom era, selling 15,000 season tickets and building a \$260 million stadium. They were assisted by a bit of star power: Oscar winner Matthew McConaughey is the team's minister of culture.

New stadiums: Austin, Columbus and Cincinnati will have new digs.

Austin will debut its home, Q2 Stadium, on June 19 against the Earthquakes. Cincinnati will inaugurate its West End Stadium on May 16 against Miami. The defending MLS Cup champion Columbus Crew will christen their new stadium on July 3 against New England.

New name: The Montreal Impact has rebranded as Club de Foot Montreal, or CF Montreal. The makeover includes a new crest that has a snowflake-like emblem and a new motto "Droit Devant" or "Always Forward."

Brown leads way with 40 as Celtics hold off Lakers

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Jaylen Brown scored four of his 40 points in the final minute, and the Boston Celtics blew most of a 27-point lead in the fourth quarter before holding on for their fifth straight victory, 121-113 over the Los Angeles Lakers on Thursday night.

Brown made 13 of his first 14 shots and hit three 3-pointers while falling two points shy of his career high for the Celtics, who have won eight of 11 despite an embarrassing finish at Staples Center.

Boston led 113-86 with seven minutes to play, shortly after coach Brad Stevens pulled his starters. But Talen Horton-Tucker and Ben McLemore led a 24-2 run by the Lakers that forced Brown and Boston's first string back into the game.

Brown hit a floater through contact and added a leaning jumper with 32 seconds left to squelch the Lakers' rally, and Boston split the season series between these historic rivals.

"The Celtics-Lakers matchup is a matchup that kids dream about, so regardless of who's on the floor, I'm excited to play," Brown said. "Having that energy with those Lakers fans back in the arena, it feels good to get a win."

Payton Pritchard and Marcus Smart added 15 points apiece for the Celtics, who never trailed despite committing 21 turnovers. Boston also won with just 14 points from Jayson Tatum, whose streak of scoring 20 points in 11 consecutive games ended.

Bucks 120, Hawks 109: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 15 points in his return to the lineup and got plenty of help from his teammates as visiting Milwaukee cooled off surging At-

lanta.

Antetokounmpo had missed six games with an ailing left knee before getting cleared to return in Atlanta, where he starred in the NBA All-Star Game last month.

He played 25 minutes in his return, hitting 7 of 12 shots to go along with five rebounds, three steals, two assists and a block. He didn't have to carry too much of a load as the Bucks put seven players in double figures, led by Jrue Holiday with 23 points.

Bogdan Bogdanovic led the Hawks with 28 points, hitting six three-pointers. Trae Young returned after missing two games with a calf injury but had a terrible night, connecting on just 3 of 17 shots.

Suns 122, Kings 114: Deandre Ayton had 26 points and 11 rebounds, Devin Booker added 23 points and Phoenix won its 10th straight.

The Suns haven't lost in their home arena for nearly a month.

Phoenix improved to 40-15 for the season, hitting 40 wins for the first time since 2014.

The Kings have lost nine straight. Sacramento was led by De'Aaron Fox, who scored 27. Buddy Hield added 24.

Warriors 119, Cavaliers 101: Stephen Curry scored 33 points — topping 30 for a career-best ninth consecutive game — and Golden State beat host Cleveland.

Curry missed his first eight attempts beyond the arc, finishing 4-for-13, in leading Golden State to its season-high fourth straight win.

Andrew Wiggins scored 23 points, Juan Toscano-Anderson had 20 and Draymond Green added five points, 10 rebounds and eight assists for the Warriors.

Collier, Kuier 1-2 to Wings in draft

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Charli Collier said she wrote down goals with her late father when he was hospitalized with cancer five years ago, and being selected No. 1 in the WNBA Draft was one of them.

She checked off that goal on Thursday night when the Dallas Wings took her with the first pick.

"He's here with me. He's with me in the moment," Collier said of her dad, who died in 2016. "My dad is so proud of me. Wish he could see this in real life. Nothing can take this moment away from me."

The Wings also had the No. 2 pick and a rare opportunity to transform the franchise. They chose Awak Kuier, who became the first Finnish player to be drafted in the WNBA.

It's the first time in league history that a team had picks No. 1 and 2. The Wings acquired the top pick in a February trade after being awarded the second choice in the draft lottery.

"Needless to say, we are thrilled with the results of the draft for our organization," Wings president and general manager Greg Bibb said. "We took another big step forward tonight with the progress of our team. Obviously with drafting Charli and Awak we got the two best players in the draft."

The 6-foot-5 Collier helped the Longhorns reach the Elite Eight. The junior center finished the season averaging 19.0 points and 11.3 rebounds per game, while shooting 51.1% from the field.

Kuier, 19, played professionally in Italy, averaging 8.9 points, 6.8 rebounds and 1.5 blocks.

"An elite basketball player, so happy that she will be my teammate," Collier said of Kuier. "Six-foot-5, long, versatile. Can't wait to get to play with her and know her as a player and a team-

mate."

The Wings added Chelsea Dungee of Arkansas with the fifth pick.

Between the Dallas picks, Atlanta chose Arizona guard Aari McDonald, who had a stellar NCAA Tournament, and Kysre Gondrezick of West Virginia went fourth to Indiana.

New York chose Michaela Onyenwere of UCLA with the sixth pick. Los Angeles took Jasmine Walker of Alabama seventh, Chicago drafted Australian Shyla Heal eighth, and Tennessee's Rennia Davis went ninth to Minnesota.

Stephanie Watts of North Carolina went 10th to Los Angeles. The defending champion Seattle Storm took Aaliyah Wilson of Texas A&M. Wilson didn't stay in Seattle for long as she was traded to Indiana for Kennedy Burke. WNBA finalist Las Vegas drafted Iliana Rupert from France to close out the first round.

Dallas closed out its four picks in the first 13 by choosing Dana Evans of Louisville, who had been projected to be taken a lot sooner.

"It's a blessing, excited to finally hear my name," an emotional Evans said. "It's motivation, didn't expect to (fall) this far. I'm ready to take on whatever I got to do."

With potentially as few as 144 roster spots in the WNBA and so many players under contract or still on their rookie-scale deals, there are not many spots open for players to make teams.

"It's really difficult to find a spot in this league and stick," Los Angeles coach Derek Fisher said. "Coming off 2020, last year with the draft where players that got drafted didn't get an opportunity to go to training camp and earn a spot ... it will be difficult for every player who was drafted tonight to stay with the team."

Hall, Rask lead Bruins past Islanders

Associated Press

BOSTON — Taylor Hall scored his first goal for Boston and Tuukka Rask stopped 22 shots to earn his first victory since February — and 300th of his career — in the Bruins' 4-1 victory over the New York Islanders on Thursday night.

Rask had played just once since March 7 because of a back injury. His teammates gave him an easy one, outshooting the Islanders 45-23 — including a 23-7 first period — and getting two goals from Brad Marchand and one from Craig Smith to win their second straight game.

Travis Zajac scored his first goal for New York, and Semyon Varlamov made 41 saves.

The Islanders had won five of their previous six games, and trail the first-place Washington Capitals by two points in the East Division.

Sabres 5, Capitals 2: Anders Bjork scored his first goal with his new team and added an assist, helping visiting Buffalo spoil Nicklas Backstrom's 1,000th game with Washington.

Red Wings 4, Blackhawks 1: Jakub Vrana scored in his debut with his new team, and Troy Stecher added two goals for host Detroit.

Vrana and Richard Panik played for the first time since the Red Wings acquired them in a trade Monday with Washington. Vrana put Detroit up 2-1 with a breakaway goal in

the second period.

Lightning 3, Panthers 2 (OT): Victor Hedman scored 54 seconds into overtime to give host Tampa Bay the victory against Florida.

The Lightning remained tied for first place in the Central Division with Carolina, though the Hurricanes have a game in hand. Florida is one point back.

Rangers 4, Devils 0: Artemi Panarin had two goals and an assist and Igor Shesterkin got his second straight shutout in host New York's win over New Jersey.

Flyers 2, Penguins 1 (SO): Claude Giroux and Sean Couturier scored in the shootout and visiting Philadelphia defeated Pittsburgh.

Hurricanes 4, Predators 1:

Warren Foegele scored the first of three goals by his team in under eight minutes and host Carolina snapped a two-game skid.

Jets 5, Maple Leafs 2: Nikolaj Ehlers scored twice and Connor Hellebuyck made 31 saves to lead visiting Winnipeg past Toronto.

Stars 4, Blue Jackets 1: Denis Gurianov had his first two-goal game of the season, Miro Heiskanen and Joe Pavelski also scored and host Dallas beat Columbus.

The Stars won on a night when Nashville and Chicago, the teams directly ahead of them in the standings, both lost.

Ramírez, Indians bounce back to beat White Sox

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Slumping slugger José Ramírez connected for a go-ahead, two-run homer off Lance Lynn in the sixth inning and the Cleveland Indians bounced back from being no-hit, beating the Chicago White Sox 4-2 on Thursday.

After Carlos Rodón just missed a perfect game Wednesday night, there was a different kind of tension this time as the benches emptied in the bottom of the first.

Adam Eaton singled and tried to advance when Indians right fielder Josh Naylor threw to third, hoping to get the lead runner. Eaton arrived ahead of the throw back to second, but was called out when his hand came off the bag while shortstop Andrés Giménez stood his ground and held the tag.

Eaton grabbed Giménez's leg, began barking and then pushed Giménez in the chest with two hands. Indians starter Aaron Civale plunked Eaton with a pitch in the upper arm in the third.

Civale (3-0) allowed only a run — in the first — and five hits through six innings in his third straight strong start. Nick Wittgren and James Karinchak followed with a scoreless inning each. Emmanuel Clase allowed an unearned run in the ninth, but got his his third save.

Lynn (1-1) permitted his first two earned runs this season on five hits through six innings, while striking out 10 and walking none.

Dodgers 7, Rockies 5: Justin Turner and Max Muncy each hit a three-run homer, and host Los Angeles beat Colorado as David Price earned his first regular-season save.

Muncy's two-out drive in the seventh inning off reliever Yency Almonte (0-1) gave the defending World Series champions a 6-5 lead on the way to their sixth straight victory.

Twins 4, Red Sox 3: Max Kepler's RBI single in the bottom of the ninth inning stopped a five-game losing streak for host Minnesota and broke a nine-game winning streak for Bos-

ton.

The Red Sox, who tied it in the eighth on Alex Verdugo's three-run double, were on their longest winning streak since a 10-game run in 2018.

Braves 7, Marlins 6: Dansby Swanson's RBI single with the bases loaded capped a two-run rally in the ninth inning, and host Atlanta beat Miami to snap a four-game losing streak.

The Braves recovered after blowing a 5-4 lead in the top of the ninth. Garrett Cooper singled to put Miami ahead.

Mariners 4-2, Orioles 2-1: Mitch Haniger became the first player from his franchise to homer out of the leadoff spot in both ends of a doubleheader, hitting a tiebreaking drive in the second game that led visiting Seattle to a sweep of Baltimore.

Haniger's fifth-inning homer to left-center off Bruce Zimmermann (1-1) broke a 1-all tie and gave him four home runs this season.

Padres 8, Pirates 3: Manny Machado hit his third home run

of the season and drove in three runs, Eric Hosmer added two hits and two RBIs and visiting San Diego jumped on Pittsburgh early.

Diamondbacks 11, Nationals 6: Andrew Young delivered a grand slam for his first hit of the season to cap his team's 10-run outburst in just two innings against Patrick Corbin, and visiting Arizona beat struggling Washington.

Royals 7, Blue Jays 5: Jakob Junis ran his consecutive scoreless streak to 14 innings as host Kansas City staked him to a seven-run lead, and a shaky bullpen held on after giving most of it back to beat Toronto.

Rangers 6, Rays 4 (10): Adolis Garcia's first major league homer, a two-run shot in the 10th inning, gave visiting Texas the victory over Tampa Bay.

Athletics 8, Tigers 4: Stephen Piscotty and Matt Olson homered to back Sean Manaea's first victory of the season, and host Oakland won its fifth straight game by beating Detroit.