

## DOD panel seeks independent prosecution of sex cases

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Pentagon panel is recommending that decisions to prosecute service members for sexual assault be made by independent authorities, not commanders, in what would be a major reversal of military practice and a change long sought by members of Congress, The Associated Press has learned.

The recommendation by an independent review commission created by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin goes against decades of vehement Pentagon arguments to keep cases within the chain of command. It was among a number of initial recommendations delivered to Austin on Thursday, according to two senior defense officials.

Austin expects to seek input from military service leaders before making any final decision, said the officials, who

spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal reports not yet made public. But combating sexual assault in the military is a top priority for Austin, and the fact that this recommendation was made so directly and quickly suggests it will carry a lot of weight.

The proposed changes outlined in the report represent Austin's effort to leave his mark on a problem that has long plagued the department, triggered widespread congressional condemnation and frustrated military leaders struggling to find prevention, treatment and prosecution efforts that work.

The review panel said that for certain special victims crimes, designated independent judge advocates reporting to a civilian-led office of the Chief Special Victim Prosecutor should decide two key legal questions: whether to

charge someone and, ultimately, if that charge should go to a court-martial, the officials said. The crimes would include sexual assault, sexual harassment and, potentially, certain hate crimes.

According to the officials, that recommendation would affect a small fraction of the wide range of military discipline cases that commanders regularly handle.

The panel also is recommending that sexual harassment claims be investigated outside the chain of command, and that if a charge is substantiated, the military should immediately begin the process of discharging that person from the force while other legal proceedings continue.

The officials said a driving part of the panel's deliberations was the belief that many service members have lost faith in the system and that

these changes would help restore that faith. Eventually, they said, it could lead to increased reporting by victims of sexual assaults. The changes would require an increase in funding and personnel, but it is not yet clear how much.

Removing legal decisions from the chain of command, however, won't eliminate the role of a commander in addressing sexual misconduct, the officials said. Unit leaders will still be responsible for setting a proper command climate and still must play a role in preventing and addressing sexual assault, harassment and other problems with their service members.

Reports of sexual assaults have steadily gone up since 2006, according to department reports, including a 13% jump in 2018 and a 3% increase in 2019. The 2020 data is not yet available.

## CENTCOM chief: Afghan military will collapse without US help

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Afghanistan's military will collapse without continued support from U.S. forces, though America's original mission in the country has been achieved, the top general for U.S. Central Command told Congress on Thursday.

Marine Corps Gen. Frank McKenzie, the top commander for U.S. forces in the Middle East and parts of Asia, expressed concern over "the Afghans' ability to hold ground" after American forces withdraw from the country by Sept. 11, the deadline set by President Joe Biden.

"The long-term view for the war on terror is this: It's not going to be bloodless," McKenzie

told members of the Senate Armed Services Committee. "The war on terror is probably not going to end."

Later Thursday at the Pentagon, the general told reporters that the pace of the Taliban's attacks in the country "have been as high as any during the entire history of the war in Afghanistan," though the targets have not been U.S. or other forces of the coalition.

"The Taliban has never stopped fighting," McKenzie said. "... Afghan soldiers and policemen are fighting and dying every day in significant numbers."

However, McKenzie said the U.S. achieved its intent in Afghanistan after nearly 20 years of war there.

"I think that we accomplished

the mission that we set out to do, which was to prevent an attack against the United States," he said. "We can all have judgments about what other missions crept in during our 20 years that we were engaged in there, but the core mission — with regard to the United States — was actually accomplished."

McKenzie spent much of the week on Capitol Hill painting a cautious picture for lawmakers of what the impending drawdown and its effect will look like. On Tuesday, he told House Armed Services Committee members that it will be difficult to battle terrorism in Afghanistan without U.S. troops in the country. The drawdown, set to begin May 1 and end by Sept. 11, will mean the only U.S. forces

stationed in Afghanistan will be those needed to protect the American Embassy in Kabul.

Though the permanent forces will be gone, McKenzie said Thursday that the U.S. will continue to remotely support the Afghan forces financially and militarily — the details of which he said were still being worked out.

"We believe that it will be a tough fight for the Afghans, but we intend to continue to support them," he said. "We want them to be successful — that remains a very high priority — so we will look at innovative ways to do that."

"One thing I can tell you is that we're not going to be there on the ground with them," he added.

# AFRICOM chief warns of Somalia risk

By SARAH CAMMARATA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The top general of U.S. Africa Command told a Senate panel on Thursday that the Trump administration's decision to reposition troops outside of Somalia has created fresh challenges in the fight against al-Shabab terrorists.

"There's no denying that the repositioning of forces out of Somalia has introduced new layers of complexity and risk," Army Gen. Stephen Townsend said during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing.

"Our understanding of what's happening in Somalia is less now than it was when we were there on the ground, physically located with our partners," he told senators at a briefing to review the U.S. military posture in Africa, as well as where U.S. Central

Command operates in the Middle East and parts of Asia.

In early December, former President Donald Trump ordered the roughly 700 U.S. troops in Somalia leave the country. Troops were there to assist the East African nation's military with its battle against al-Shabab terrorists.

AFRICOM announced in mid-January that the withdrawal was complete. Most of the troops were relocated to neighboring countries to continue carrying out the mission to defend against the al-Qaida-aligned terrorist network.

Townsend said Thursday that a "small footprint" of about 100 troops remain in Mogadishu, the nation's capital, where their work is tied to the embassy.

While some service members are on the

ground full-time, others "commute to work," he said.

"We work virtually with our partners from our bases in the region. And then we fly in to conduct training, and to advise and assist our partners. We've done four such operations in the last roughly 90 days. One of them is ongoing right now," Townsend said.

Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma, the top Republican on the committee, voiced concern over the previous administration's decision to pull the majority of forces from Somalia.

Inhofe asked Townsend whether an "over the horizon" counterterrorism strategy in Somalia makes combating insurgents there more difficult.

The general responded: "It makes it more difficult; it doesn't make it impossible."

## Lawmakers vow to slow F-35 production amid rising costs

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

Top House Democrats vowed Thursday to fight efforts to hasten the production of F-35 Joint Strike Fighters in next year's defense budget amid surging costs to keep America's most expensive weapons system flying.

"The program's over budget. It fails to deliver on promised capabilities and its mission-capability rates do not even begin to meet the services' thresholds," said Rep. John Garamendi, D-Calif., chairman the House Armed Services Committee's readiness subpanel. "Don't expect more money. Do not expect to have more planes purchased than are in the president's [fiscal year 2022] budget. That's not going to happen."

During a more than four-hour hearing Thursday with officials from the Pentagon and the F-35s' primary manufacturers Lockheed-Martin and Pratt & Whitney, Garamendi repeatedly

expressed anger over the F-35s' long history of problems and blamed newly skyrocketing sustainment costs at least partially on the insistence of Congress to add more planes to the Pentagon's annual budget. Any lawmakers who suggest such additional F-35 purchases this year, Garamendi said, would be in for "a hell of a fight."

The hearing came as the Government Accountability Office, a congressional watchdog, issued a new report on the F-35 program that found the projected sustainment costs for the 2,500 fighters that the Pentagon plans to purchase have increased by some \$160 billion to \$1.27 trillion during the program's planned 66-year life, despite several efforts aimed to drive those costs down. The GAO concluded the Air Force, at current projected cost rates, cannot afford the 1,763 F-35s that the service wants by 2036 unless it reduces the yearly cost to operate each plan by 47%.

## STRATCOM head says no extremism among its forces

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The intelligence and nuclear weapons work within U.S. Strategic Command requires higher clearance levels than many other military components and has helped eliminate extremism from its forces, Adm. Charles Richard told reporters Thursday at the Pentagon.

"Look, the standard is really clear — we don't tolerate extremism," said Richard, the commander of STRATCOM. "My forces live up to an even higher standard based on their responsibility."

On Tuesday, Richard told members of the Senate Armed Services Committee that he was "very confident that the number of extremists in my forces is zero" because of the screening process necessary to serve in the force.

"Every person in my orga-

nization has to have a security clearance, for starters, right?" Richard told the committee members. "And when you fill that form out — and I've been filling it out for 40 years — there is an extensive battery of questions designed to get after that very point."

However, it remains unclear Thursday whether the clearance process is effective at weeding out extremists. At least one man with a secret security clearance at Naval Weapons Station Earle in New Jersey was indicted on charges related to the Jan. 6 riot at the Capitol, according to federal court documents.

"If you are there, then you are hiding it very well and it is just a matter of time before I get to you," the admiral said of extremists in his command. "You are either on team Constitution or you are not — and if you're not, you have no place in my forces."

# Russia pulls back from Ukrainian border

*Associated Press*

MOSCOW — Russian troops began pulling back to their permanent bases Friday after a massive buildup that has caused Ukrainian and Western concerns.

On Thursday, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu declared the sweeping maneuvers in Crimea and wide swaths of western Russia over, and ordered the military to bring the troops that took part in them back to their permanent bases by May 1.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed the announcement.

The Russian Defense Ministry said Friday that its forces that took part in the massive drills in Crimea were moving to board trains, transport aircraft and landing vessels en route to their permanent bases.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Kyiv would await confirmation

from Ukrainian and NATO intelligence.

“We want to see that Russian deeds match Russian words,” Kuleba said Friday during a visit to Romania.

While ordering the pullback of military personnel, Shoigu ordered their heavy weapons kept in western Russia for a massive exercise called Zapad (West) 2021 later this year. The weapons were to be stored at the Pogonovo firing range in the southwestern Voronezh region, 100 miles east of Russia’s border with Ukraine.

The U.S. and NATO have said the troop buildup was the largest since 2014, when Russia annexed Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula and threw its support behind separatists in Ukraine’s eastern industrial heartland of Donbas. More than 14,000 people have been killed in seven years of fighting between Ukrainian troops and the Russia-

backed separatists.

The concentration of Russian troops amid increasing violations of a cease-fire in the conflict in eastern Ukraine raised concerns in the West, which urged the Kremlin to pull its forces back.

Moscow rejected the Ukrainian and Western concerns, arguing that it is free to deploy its forces anywhere on Russian territory. But the Kremlin also sternly warned Ukrainian authorities against trying to use force to retake control of the rebel east, saying it could intervene to protect civilians there.

Asked if the Kremlin thinks that the Russian troop pullback could help ease tensions with the United States, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said the issues were not connected.

“It’s not an issue for Russia-U.S. relations,” Peskov said in a call with reporters.

## States turning down vaccine doses as demand drops

*Associated Press*

JACKSON, Miss. — Louisiana has stopped asking the federal government for its full allotment of COVID-19 vaccine. About three-quarters of Kansas counties have turned down new shipments of the vaccine at least once over the past month. And in Mississippi, officials asked the federal government to ship vials in smaller packages so they don’t go to waste.

As the supply of coronavirus vaccine doses in the U.S. outpaces demand, some places around the country are finding there’s such little interest in the shots, they need to turn down shipments.

“It is kind of stalling. Some people just don’t want it,” said Stacey Hileman, a nurse with the health department in rural Kansas’

Decatur County, where less than a third of the county’s 2,900 residents have received at least one vaccine dose.

The dwindling demand for vaccines illustrates the challenge that the U.S. faces in trying to conquer the pandemic while at the same time dealing with the optics of tens of thousands of doses sitting on shelves when countries like India and Brazil are in the midst of full-blown medical emergencies.

More than half of American adults have received at least one vaccine dose, and President Joe Biden this week celebrated eclipsing 200 million doses administered in his first 100 days in office. He also acknowledged entering a new phase to bolster outreach and overcome hesitancy.

Across the country, pharmacists and pub-

lic health officials seeing the demand wane and supplies build up. About half of Iowa’s counties have stopped asking for new doses from the state, and Louisiana didn’t seek shipment of some vaccine doses over the past week.

In Mississippi, small-town pharmacist Robin Jackson has been practically begging anyone in the community to show up and get shots after she received her first shipment of vaccine earlier this month and demand was weak, despite placing yard signs outside her storefront celebrating the shipment’s arrival. She was wasting more vaccine than she was giving out and started coaxing family members into the pharmacy for shots.

“Nobody was coming,” she said. “And I mean no one.”

## Hospitals in India plead for more oxygen amid surge

*Associated Press*

NEW DELHI — India put oxygen tankers on special express trains as major hospitals in New Delhi on Friday begged on social media for more supplies to save COVID-19 patients who are struggling to breathe. More than a dozen people died when an oxygen-fed fire ripped through a coronavirus ward in a populous western state.

India’s underfunded health system is tattering as the world’s worst coronavirus surge wears out the nation, which set another

global record in daily infections for a second straight day with 332,730.

India has confirmed 16 million cases so far, second only to the United States in a country of nearly 1.4 billion people. India has recorded 2,263 deaths in the past 24 hours for a total of 186,920.

The fire in a hospital intensive care unit killed 13 COVID-19 patients in the Virar area on the outskirts of Mumbai early Friday.

The situation was worsening by the day with hospitals taking to social media plead-

ing with the government to replenish their oxygen supplies and threatening to stop fresh admissions of patients.

A major private hospital chain in the capital, Max Hospital, tweeted that one of its facilities had one hour’s oxygen supply in its system and was waiting for replenishment since early morning. Two days earlier, they had filed a petition in the Delhi High Court that they were running out of oxygen, endangering the lives of 400 patients, of which 262 were being treated with COVID-19.

# Biden's global climate summit closes

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — World leaders joined President Joe Biden Friday to close his virtual climate summit with stories of their own national drives to break free of climate-wrecking fossil fuels — Kenyans leapfrogging from kerosene stoves to geothermal power and Israeli startups scrambling to improve battery storage.

“We’re gonna do this together,” Biden exhorted, speaking live to a Zoom-style screen of leaders of national governments, unions and business executives around the world.

Biden’s closing message echoed the sentiments of Kenyan President Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta, who told the summit: “We cannot win this fight against climate change unless we go globally to fight it together.”

The second and final day of Biden’s summit of 40 world leaders made the case for massive investment now — in the U.S. and around the world — for prosperous as well as cleaner economies in the long run.

Compared with the United States and other wealthy but carbon-dependent nations, Kenya stands out as a poorer nation closing the technology gap despite limited financial resources. It has moved in decades from dirty-burning coal, kerosene and wood fires to become a leading user and producer of geothermal energy, wind and solar power, all aided by mobile-phone banking.

The summit’s opening on Thursday saw a half-dozen nations, including the United States, pledge specific, significant new efforts to cut emissions. Other summit speak-

ers, including Chinese President Xi Jinping, whose country is the world’s top climate polluter, held out the possibility of deepening their commitments, in China’s case by easing back on building of coal-fired plants.

“The commitments we’ve made must become real,” Biden said Friday, speaking to the home audience as much as the international one. “Commitment without doing anything is a lot of hot air, no pun intended.”

Global leaders described their own investments and commitments to break away from reliance on climate-damaging petroleum and coal. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described scientists at hundreds of Israeli startups working to improve crucial battery storage for solar, wind and other renewable energy.

# Caitlyn Jenner to run for Calif. governor

*Associated Press*

LOS ANGELES — Republican Caitlyn Jenner said Friday she will run for governor of California, injecting a jolt of celebrity into an emerging campaign that threatens to oust Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom from office.

Jenner — an Olympic hero, reality TV personality and a transgender rights activist — said in a statement posted on Twitter and on an accompanying website that she has filed initial paperwork to run for the post.

Newsom, a first-term Democrat, is facing a likely recall election this year, though elec-

tion officials are still reviewing petition signatures required to qualify the recall for the ballot. Several other Republicans have also announced plans to run.

In a statement, Jenner called herself “a proven winner” and the only candidate “who can put an end to Gavin Newsom’s disastrous time as governor.”

“I’m in,” she wrote on her website. “For the past decade, we have seen the glimmer of the Golden State reduced by one-party rule that places politics over progress and special interests over people. Sacramento needs an honest leader with a clear vision.”

The 71-year-old celebrity activist imme-

diately stands out in a growing field that so far has failed to attract a nationally known contender. However, Jenner is untested as a candidate and little is known about her positions on critical issues facing the state, from the coronavirus pandemic to managing the economy.

She described herself as “economically conservative, socially progressive” in a People magazine interview last year.

Her run would come nearly two decades after the ascendancy of Arnold Schwarzenegger, another Republican who used his Hollywood fame as a springboard to California’s highest office in a 2003 recall election.

# Tesla tricked into driving in Autopilot mode without driver

*Associated Press*

SILVER SPRING, Md. — Consumer Reports said Thursday it was able to easily trick a Tesla into driving in the car’s Autopilot mode with no one at the wheel.

Its test came just days after a Tesla crashed in Texas, killing the two men in the car. Authorities say neither of the men were in the driver’s seat at the time of the crash.

Tesla’s Autopilot partially automated system can keep a car centered in its lane, keep a distance from cars in front of it, and can even change lanes on its own with a driver’s consent. But Tesla has said the driver must be ready to intervene at all times.

Consumer Reports said that during several trips on its closed tracks with an empty

driver’s seat, its Tesla Model Y automatically steered along painted lane lines without acknowledging that nobody was at the controls. The Tesla that crashed outside of Houston over the weekend was a Model S, but also had an Autopilot function.

“In our evaluation, the system not only failed to make sure the driver was paying attention, but it also couldn’t tell if there was a driver there at all,” said Jake Fisher, Consumer Reports’ senior director of auto testing, who conducted the experiment. “Tesla is falling behind other automakers like GM and Ford that, on models with advanced driver assist systems, use technology to make sure the driver is looking at the road.”

Tesla, which is based in Palo Alto, Calif.,

and has disbanded its press office, did not immediately respond to inquiries about Consumer Reports’ assertions.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board are in the early stages of an investigation into the Texas crash. Local authorities said one man was found in the passenger seat, while another was in the back. The car veered off the road, crashed into a tree and burst into flames, authorities said.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk said on Twitter Monday that data logs “recovered so far” show Autopilot wasn’t turned on in the Texas crash, and “Full Self-Driving” was not purchased for the vehicle.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Passenger hit in the head by flying turtle, survives

**FL** DAYTONA BEACH — It's not unusual for rocks and other debris to crash through a windshield and injure a driver or passenger — but a turtle?

A 71-year-old woman riding with her daughter on Interstate 95 in Florida suffered a gashed forehead Wednesday when a turtle smashed through the windshield of their car, striking her, the Daytona Beach News-Journal reported.

The daughter pulled over and got help from another motorist. According to a 911 recording, both were surprised by what they found.

"There is a turtle in there," the man can be overheard saying.

"A turtle!" the daughter exclaimed. "An actual turtle?"

The gash drew a lot of blood, but the woman was not seriously hurt. The turtle was likely crossing the interstate and got knocked into the air by another vehicle.

### Bakery auction includes vintage aloha shirts

**HI** HONOLULU — Vintage Love's Bakery aloha shirts, signs, equipment, left-over ingredients and some baked goods are being auctioned off after the closure of the state's oldest and largest commercial bakery.

Hawaii News Now reported Oahu Auctions has opened online bidding for the items. The auction will take place in multiple phases, with the first phase ending on Saturday.

The company, which had been in business for 170 years, told state and federal agencies

last month that it would close its doors and lay off more than 230 employees.

The company said it was behind on rent, couldn't secure additional capital and hadn't qualified for the second round of federal Paycheck Protection Program funds aimed at helping companies struggling during the pandemic.

It also experienced major delays from mainland suppliers for ingredients and parts for the company's aging equipment.

### State looks to honor country legend Cash

**AR** LITTLE ROCK — The Man in Black is about to get his own day in Arkansas.

The Arkansas House on Tuesday gave final approval to a bill that would make Feb. 26 "Johnny Cash Day," voting 92-0 to send the measure to Gov. Asa Hutchinson, who will sign it, according to his office. The state Senate approved the bill earlier this month.

The day won't be a legal holiday but will be a memorial day marked by an annual proclamation from the governor.

It is the state's latest effort to honor the country music legend, who was born in Kingsland, 60 miles south of Little Rock.

### Rally cup sales would allow drinking on streets

**SD** STURGIS — A fundraising proposal by Sturgis officials calls for the city to sell souvenir cups to visitors during the city's annual motorcycle rally, which they could then fill with beer or wine and walk the streets of downtown with drinks in hand.

If approved by the city council, the proposed open container permit would last for a nine-day period during the rally and would be allowed between 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. The initiative is labeled as a "case study" to see the positive and negative impacts of open containers on the downtown streets.

Proceeds from the selling of the event cups would be retained by the city and then given back as donations to various organizations through Sturgis Rally Charities and to fund an endowment for future donations, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Sturgis Mayor Mark Carstensen said the money would have a major impact on the rally's future.

"I do understand that people will be drinking on the streets, but in my opinion as you look down the street, they're drinking six inches on the other side of a wall (in bars and restaurants)," he said. "It would create more of an environment of staying downtown, pacing yourself and enjoying the people watching."

### \$13K flute in the wind since 2012 recovered

**MA** BOSTON — A \$13,000 flute that went missing nearly a decade ago has been returned to its owner after police recovered it from a Boston music store, police said Wednesday.

The flute was reported missing in 2012 after its owner left it in a taxi, according to Boston police. It had been a cold case until this February, when a worker at a Boston music store called with a tip.

The worker told police that

someone had come to the store with an expensive flute asking about its value.

The employee took down the person's contact information and took a photo of the flute and its serial number. The worker later realized it might be the flute that was reported missing in 2012.

Earlier this month, detectives spoke with the person who had visited the music store with the flute.

The person said he had bought the instrument from an unknown person, and he turned it over to detectives, police said.

But police said they determined he was actually the driver of the taxi on that day in 2012. Police said they plan to bring a complaint against him in Boston Municipal Court.

### Gopher tortoises released into the wild at age 2

**MS** JACKSON — Close to 40 gopher tortoises were released this past weekend in Mississippi after spending the first two years of their lives in captivity.

WLOX-TV reported that because the gopher tortoise is a threatened species, The Nature Conservancy caretakers wait until they are 2 to release them. At that age, their shells have hardened, and they are able to dig deep burrows.

According to The Nature Conservancy, the 38 gopher tortoises released this past weekend were freed near three different adult tortoise burrows. Within an hour, a number of them began to dig burrows, according to WLOX reported.

— From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com).

Reporting  
World, National  
and Military News

# Nationals rolling with the punches

Associated Press

Juan Soto, the reigning NL batting champion, is on the 10-day injured list. So is Stephen Strasburg, the 2019 World Series MVP. Key relievers Will Harris and Wander Suero, too. Jon Lester has yet to make his debut since arriving as a free agent.

That's just a sampling of the ways in which things already have not gone according to plan for the Washington Nationals in the early going of 2021 — and that substantial list doesn't even include the COVID-19 outbreak that sidelined nine players on opening day, more than a third of the roster.

"We've had a lot thrown at us the first couple weeks of the season," reliever Daniel Hudson said.

And yet Washington headed into the start of a three-game series at the NL East rival New York Mets on Friday with a 7-9 record.

Certainly not where the Nationals want to be — "I'd much prefer being 9-7 or above .500," manager Dave Martinez said — but thanks to a 6-4 stretch, it looks a lot better than the 1-5 mark with which they began.

The Nationals, who finished tied for last in the division in the shortened 2020 season, had Thursday off following a pair of one-run victories that gave them a series win against the St. Louis Cardinals, by a 3-2 score on Tuesday, then 1-0 on Wednesday.

"We're starting to do the right things and what it's going to take," Max Scherzer said after striking out nine in six innings Wednesday. "Winning with starting pitching. Winning with offense. Winning with baserunning. Winning with defense."

His first win of the season came with the help from the back end of the bullpen, which might just turn out to be the team's greatest strength after

being a shaky element that often required shoring up at the trade deadline in recent years.

Tanner Rainey (seventh), Hudson (eighth) and Brad Hand (ninth) each provided a scoreless inning against the Cardinals on Wednesday.

For Hand, it was his third save in three opportunities since signing with Washington in the offseason and stretched his overall run to 24 consecutive converted chances dating to August 2019, the longest active streak in the majors.

"Those are our Big Three back there," Martinez said. "They're huge. We get the lead, you feel pretty good about those three guys coming in."

Which is important when the starting pitching is not whole (Strasburg just started throwing from 75 feet as he comes back from inflammation in his pitching shoulder; Lester, part of the group that missed time because of COVID-19 protocols,

is expected to finally join the club after one more simulated game at the alternate training site) and the lineup is not producing many runs regularly (it doesn't help that Soto is sidelined with a sore left shoulder or that offseason addition Josh Bell is batting .161 with twice as many strikeouts as hits, 10-5).

One thing that might help Washington is that it has a light schedule coming up: just four games and three off-days between now and April 30, when Soto is eligible to come off the IL.

"It takes a few games to consistently — the pitching and the hitting — put it all together. Once we start doing that, we'll take off. We'll have those strings of victories come through," Martinez said.

"We're going to click. Everything's going to work," he added. "Who knows where we'll end up being here in the next week or so?"

## Padres edge rival Dodgers in key series opener

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Jurickson Profar singled and scored the tiebreaking run in the eighth inning, and the San Diego Padres opened the second series of the season in Southern California's lively baseball rivalry with a 3-2 victory over the Los Angeles Dodgers on Thursday night.

Trent Grisham homered and had two hits for the Padres, who snapped a three-game skid as they opened a four-game series at chilly Chavez Ravine with the Dodgers' first home loss of the season.

Los Angeles took two of three in San Diego last weekend, but the Padres answered with timely hits, strong pitching and a fantastic inning-ending double play in the eighth, capping yet another well-played matchup between two stacked rosters.

AJ Pollock and Sheldon Neuse hit back-to-back homers leading off the seventh for the major league-leading Dodgers, who have lost three of four after a 13-2 start to the season. With several key hitters injured, Los Angeles has scored just 10 runs in its

last five games.

**Giants 3, Marlins 0:** Curt Casali caught his fifth consecutive shutout, guiding Aaron Sanchez and four relievers in San Francisco's win over visiting Miami.

**Diamondbacks 14, Reds 11 (10):** David Peralta hit a three-run triple in a six-run 10th to finish with five hits and a career-best seven RBIs, and Arizona overcame six home runs from host Cincinnati.

**Cubs 4, Mets 3 (10):** Jason Heyward had a game-ending, pinch-hit single in the 10th after Dan Winkler stranded the bases loaded in the top of the inning, and Chicago beat visiting New York to complete a three-game sweep.

**Yankees 6, Indians 3:** Rougned Odor's two-out, two-run single broke a seventh-inning tie — and maybe jarred his team from its hitting funk — and sent New York to a win over host Cleveland in the opener of a four-game series.

**Astros 8, Angels 2:** Alex Bregman had three hits and three RBIs, Cristian Javier (2-0) struck out a career-high nine in five

scoreless innings and Houston snapped a three-game skid.

The Astros put their road woes behind them quickly in the opener of an eight-game homestand by jumping on Alex Cobb (1-1) for five runs in less than three innings.

**Mariners 7, Red Sox 3:** Mitch Haniger hit a three-run homer in the 10th inning moments after Sam Haggerty's go-ahead double, and visiting Seattle rallied past Boston despite getting just three hits on a cold, blustery night.

Rafael Devers homered for the Red Sox, who were cruising behind Pivetta but couldn't hold leads of 2-0 and 3-2.

**Pirates 4, Tigers 2:** Phillip Evans kept Akil Baddoo's drive to left field in the park in the seventh inning to help his team escape a jam, and Pittsburgh scored twice in the eighth to beat host Detroit.

Colin Moran and Erik González hit RBI singles with two outs in the eighth in the game played through snow flurries at times.

JaCoby Jones hit a solo homer for Detroit in the fifth.

# Walker leads Celtics to win over Suns

Associated Press

BOSTON— A few days off went a long way for Kemba Walker.

Walker matched his season high with 32 points and the Boston Celtics rolled to a 99-86 victory over the Phoenix Suns on Thursday.

Walker was 11-for-17 from the field, hitting five three-pointers. The Celtics were without Jaylen Brown because of a sore left shoulder, and Jayson Tatum struggled shooting for the second straight game, going 3-for-17. He had 15 points and 11 rebounds.

The Celtics (32-27) led by 21 points in the second half. They have won nine of their last 11.

"I was just taking the shots available to me," Walker said. "Some shots went in."

He also did it on the defensive end, drawing three charges on the night.

"I want to win. And plays like that shows it," Walker said. "I'm just trying to lead by example."

Coming off a victory in Philadelphia on Wednesday night, the Suns (42-17) dropped two games behind idle Utah for the best record in the NBA. Phoenix has the NBA's best road record at 19-8.

Chris Paul had 22 points, eight rebounds and eight assists. Devin Booker finished with 15 points before fouling out with 4:37 left.

**Mavericks 115, Lakers 100:** Luka Dončić scored 30 points, leading host Dallas to a victory in the return of Los Angeles star Anthony Davis from

a 30-game injury absence.

Davis was rusty in his first game since Feb. 14 because of right calf and heel issues, scoring four points on 2-for-10 shooting while limited to 17 minutes in the first half only. The absence was the longest of the eight-time All-Star's career.

**Bucks 124, 76ers 117:** Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 27 points, Khristian Middleton had 24 and Milwaukee beat Philadelphia to end a five-game home losing streak.

Joel Embiid scored 24 points for the 76ers.

**Spurs 106, Pistons 91:** Derrick White had 26 points, Jakob Poeltl added 17 points and 11 rebounds and San Antonio beat Detroit to snap a five-game home losing streak.

The Spurs have won three of four to move into ninth in the Western Conference ahead of the Golden State Warriors. They would face each other in the play-in tournament if the standings remain the same.

**Pelicans 135, Magic 100:** Zion Williamson scored 23 points in 23 minutes in his first game against Orlando, and visiting New Orleans won to snap a four-game losing streak.

Brandon Ingram added 29 points for the Pelicans.

**Bulls 108, Hornets 91:** Nikola Vučević scored 18 points and matched a season high with 16 rebounds in Chicago's victory over visiting Charlotte.

Devonte' Graham led Charlotte with 16 points. The Hornets lost for the sixth time in seven games.

# Fight promotion returns after yearlong break

Associated Press

Anthony Pettis could have kept fighting in UFC or considered other mixed martial arts promotions where the potential of a championship fight might be years down the road — if it developed at all.

Pettis instead became the latest former MMA champion to sign with Professional Fighters League, which competes in a seasonlong format that includes playoffs and championship fights. Oh, and for the champion of each weight class — a \$1 million prize.

"I can earn a belt by the end of the year, that's huge for me," Pettis said. "I'm in the sport to be a champion and I have the opportunity to be a champion by the end of the year. And also that \$1 million bag is obviously nice."

Pettis (24-10) fought in the main event of PFL's season in Atlantic City, N.J., on Friday night when he took on Clay Colclard (18-8) in a 155-pound bout.

The fight marks a new beginning for Pettis after nine years under the UFC banner where he won the lightweight crown and became the first champion to appear on a Wheaties box.

It's also a restart for the PFL after the league went on hiatus in 2020 because of the pandemic. It largely stayed out of the MMA spotlight while UFC and Bellator pressed on, running cards in bubbles or overseas without fans.

Pettis was the most well-known of the fighters on the four-fight main card at Ocean Casino Resort but PFL came into 2021 full of big names — inside and out of the cage. Former UFC heavyweight champion Fabrício Werdum signed with PFL and former Bellator welterweight champ Rory MacDonald is set to make his debut after signing with the league in 2019.

Two-time judo Olympic gold medalist Kayla Harrison is back as the face of PFL after winning

all seven of her fights for the company. Two-time Olympic boxing gold medalist Claressa Shields makes her MMA debut June 10.

PFL also added football Hall of Famer Ray Lewis in an advisory role to recruit talent, and the company announced Thursday that rapper Wiz Khalifa has joined the ownership group.

"He's an owner," CEO Peter Murray said. "He'll play a role. For the brand, he's going to help us open the aperture of our brand by bringing in music culture, fashion culture."

The remaining regular-season cards take place April 29, May 6, June 10, June 17 and June 25. The league has yet to announce sites for its playoffs and championship night, which had been held on New Year's Eve at Madison Square Garden.

The PFL — which has boasted it's the No. 2 MMA company in the world — raised \$65 million this year in new financing. The promotion was known as

the World Series of Fighting from 2012 to 2017, when it was bought and rebranded. The PFL has six weight classes and held full-season competitions in 2018 and 2019.

Murray said the financing will be spent in part on talent acquisition and expanding its reach, including staging fights outside the U.S. The PFL said it is available in 160 countries and has seen its popularity rise domestically in large part because of live, prime-time events on ESPN-plus and ESPN2. Shields' anticipated debut fight is not part of the promotion's seasonlong competition format.

"She trusts our team to develop her into the sport," Murray said. "We also give her flexibility. Her goal is to be a two-sport champion in boxing and MMA."

Lance Palmer and Natan Schulte are fighting for their third straight \$1 million prize, and Schulte stands in Pettis' path on the road to the lightweight crown.

# Judo seeks solutions in police training

Associated Press

DOUGLAS, Wyo. — The stakes were clear to the two dozen police officers who gathered for a workshop with an ambitious and increasingly urgent mission — recalibrating the way police interact with the public in America.

The class took place the same week as jury selection for the trial of Derek Chauvin, the former Minneapolis officer who was convicted Tuesday of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter in the death of George Floyd.

No one attending the conference would deny that the profession failed the day Floyd died with Chauvin's knee on his neck. They came to the classes with

the idea that judo, the martial art with a deep global history and an imprint at the Olympics, but still shallow roots in the United States, might be able to help fix it.

"The social contract between police officers and the public is degrading a bit," said Joe Yungwirth, a trainer at the workshop who built his career doing counterterrorism work for the FBI and now runs a judo academy in North Carolina. "All law-enforcement officers I know, we feel we need to bring that back in line somehow."

That's been a common refrain over a year's worth of police shootings and protests, all of which have been underscored by calls for police reform.

The judo project is, by any ac-

count, an outside-the-box idea. Because the sport, known by insiders as "the gentle way" of martial arts, has little emphasis on striking and is considered less violent than some of its brethren, some leaders in judo, and in policing, saw an opportunity to use the discipline to rethink officer training. Last summer's headlines pushed these courses, which had been in development since 2018, to the top of the priority list.

The main concept over the week of classes held at the Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy centered on teaching cops how to engage suspects verbally, then employ physical judo techniques if needed, to deescalate confrontations without using deadly force.

The goal is to avoid situations the likes of which led to Floyd's death and, just last week, to the death of Daunte Wright, whose funeral was Thursday. Wright was shot and killed by an officer who thought she was reaching for her taser when it was, in fact, her gun.

Jim Bacon, a former athlete on the U.S. judo team who now serves as a police officer in Lafayette, Colo., says the most damning police-on-suspect encounters — many now caught on police body cameras or by onlookers holding iPhones — have this in common: "The cop resorts to higher levels of force than should've been used. If they have more skills, they might not have to rely on the gadgets on the belt," he said.

# Capitals down Islanders, reclaim sole lead in East

Associated Press

UNIONDALE, N.Y. — Evgeny Kuznetsov scored the deciding goal in a shootout, giving the Washington Capitals a 1-0 win over the New York Islanders on Thursday night to reclaim sole possession of first place in the East Division.

Ilya Samsonov stopped 26 shots through overtime for his second shutout of the season and third of his career. Washington won for the seventh time in 11 games.

Semyon Varlamov, who had a 29-save shutout in the teams' last meeting on April 6, finished with 28 saves through overtime in this one. However, he gave up two goals on three attempts in the shootout.

The Islanders fell one point behind the Capitals, tied for second place with Pittsburgh — which beat New Jersey 5-1. Boston is another three points back in fourth.

**Red Wings 7, Stars 3:** Jakub Vrana scored four goals in a game for the first time to help host Detroit rout Dallas and

match its victory total from last season.

Detroit picked up its 17th victory in its 49th game, a year after winning 17 of 71 games in the previous pandemic-shortened season.

**Penguins 5, Devils 1:** Sidney Crosby and Bryan Rust each scored their 19th goals of the season and host Pittsburgh beat New Jersey.

Kasperii Kapanen returned to Pittsburgh's lineup after missing 13 games with a left foot injury and had a goal and an assist. Teddy Blueger scored a short-handed goal, and Cody Ceci also scored for the Penguins.

**Maple Leafs 5, Jets 3:** Mitch Marner had two goals and an assist, Auston Matthews scored his NHL-leading 34th goal and visiting Toronto beat Winnipeg.

Wayne Simmonds and Jason Spezza also scored and Jack Campbell made 34 saves to help the North Division-leading Maple Leafs move six points ahead of Winnipeg.

**Avalanche 4, Blues 2:** Andre

Burakovsky scored twice, Brandon Saad and Pierre-Edouard Bellemare scored goals and visiting Colorado beat St. Louis to clinch a playoff spot.

Colorado improved to 18-1-2 in its last 21 games. The Avalanche are 8-1-0 in April after finishing a league-best 12-2-3 in March, setting franchise records for wins and points in a month. The Avalanche are 5-1-0 against the Blues this season.

**Lightning 3, Blue Jackets 1:** Ondrej Palat scored the tie-breaking goal in the third period and Curtis McElhinney stopped 24 shots, leading host Tampa Bay past Columbus.

Blake Coleman had two goals, including an empty-netter with 25 seconds left.

**Hurricanes 4, Panthers 2:** Sebastian Aho scored two short-handed goals and to help visiting Carolina beat Florida.

Nino Niederreiter and Jordan Martinook also scored, Alex Nedeljkovic made 30 saves, and Martin Necas had three assists. The Hurricanes have won six consecutive games against the

Panthers this season.

**Bruins 5, Sabres 1:** David Pastrnak had a goal and two assists and visiting Boston beat Buffalo for its season-best sixth straight victory.

Matt Grzelcyk scored the go-ahead goal 12:50 into the second period, and rookie Jeremy Swayman stopped 29 shots.

**Flyers 3, Rangers 2:** James van Riemsdyk scored two power-play goals and visiting Philadelphia beat New York to snap a two-game slide.

Jakub Voracek scored the deciding goal for Philadelphia, and Brian Elliott made 33 saves. Ivan Provorov had two assists.

**Senators 3, Canucks 0:** Matt Murray stopped 31 shots for his second shutout in six days and visiting Ottawa beat Vancouver for its third straight victory.

Drake Batherson had a goal and an assist, and rookie Tim Stutzle and Connor Brown also scored as the Senators won the first of four straight games between the teams. It was Ottawa's first win in the teams' five meetings this season