

Strike on Russian oil depot is reported

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Talks to stop the fighting in Ukraine resumed Friday, as another attempt to rescue civilians from the shattered and encircled city of Mariupol failed and Russia accused the Ukrainians of a cross-border helicopter attack on a fuel depot.

The governor of Russia's Belgorod region, Vyacheslav Gladkov, said a fiery raid on Russian soil by two helicopter gunships left two people wounded, though state oil company Rosneft denied anyone was hurt.

"Certainly, this is not something that can be perceived as creating comfortable conditions for the continuation of the talks," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, five weeks into the war that has left thousands dead and driven more than 4 million refugees from Ukraine.

The Russian claim could not immediately be verified. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said he could "neither confirm nor reject the claim that Ukraine was involved in this, simply because I do not possess all the military information."

Russia has reported cross-border shelling from Ukraine before, including an incident last week that killed a military chaplain, but not an incursion of its airspace. The depot, run by Russian energy giant Rosneft, is about 21 miles from the Ukraine

border.

Meanwhile, Russian troops continued withdrawing from areas around Kyiv, three days after Moscow said it would reduce military activity near the Ukrainian capital and the northern city of Chernihiv to promote trust between the two sides.

And Ukrainian forces exploited the pull-back by mounting counterattacks and retaking towns and villages.

But Ukraine and its allies warned that the Kremlin is not de-escalating but resupplying its troops and redeploying them to the country's east for an intensified assault on the predominantly Russian-speaking Donbas region, which includes Mariupol.

The latest negotiations, taking place by video, follow a meeting Tuesday in Turkey, where Ukraine reiterated its willingness to abandon a bid to join NATO and declare itself neutral. In return, it proposed that its security be guaranteed by several other countries.

The head of the Russian delegation, Vladimir Medinsky, wrote on social media that Moscow's positions on retaining control of the Crimean Peninsula — seized from Ukraine in 2014 — and expanding the territory in eastern Ukraine held by Russia-backed separatists "are unchanged."

On the outskirts of Kyiv, where Russian troops have withdrawn, damaged cars lined

the streets of Irpin, a once-quiet suburban area popular with young families, now in ruins. Emergency workers carried elderly people on stretchers over a destroyed bridge to safety.

An Irpin resident who gave his name only as Andriy said the Russians packed up their equipment and left on Tuesday. The next day, they shelled the town for close to an hour before Ukrainian soldiers retook it.

"I don't think this is over," Andriy said. "They will be back."

To the south, the International Committee for the Red Cross said it was unable to carry out an operation to bring civilians out of Mariupol by bus. It said a team had been on its way but had to turn back.

City authorities said the Russians were blocking access to Mariupol.

"We do not see a real desire on the part of the Russians and their satellites to provide an opportunity for Mariupol residents to evacuate to territory controlled by Ukraine," Petro Andryushchenko, an adviser to the mayor of Mariupol, wrote on the Telegram messaging app.

The strategic port city on the Sea of Azov has seen some of the worst suffering of the war, with weeks of heavy fighting and shortages of water, food and medicine. Around 100,000 people are believed to be in the city, down from a prewar 430,000.

Report: US military must better avoid civilian deaths

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military needs to adjust its planning, training, targeting and use of weapons in order to better avoid widespread civilian deaths and damage such as the devastating 2017 battle to liberate the Syrian city of Raqqa from Islamic State militants, a new RAND report said Thursday.

The report requested by the Pentagon reflects criticism of the military's airstrike campaign that, according to some estimates, killed more than 1,600 civilians in Raqqa, as the U.S.-led coalition worked to destroy the Islamic State caliphate that wrested control of large swaths of Iraq and Syria.

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said

the report, which lays out a series of recommendations to improve military procedures and strategy, will be used as the department develops its own broader plan to reduce civilian harm.

"No other military works as hard as we do to mitigate civilian harm, and yet we still cause it," said Kirby. "We're going to continue to try to learn from past issues."

RAND concluded that the battle for Raqqa provided important lessons.

Michael McNeerney, lead author of the RAND report, called Raqqa "a cautionary tale about civilian harm in urban combat." He said it "should serve as an extra incentive to the DOD to strengthen its policies and procedures to mitigate, document and re-

spond to civilian harm."

The RAND report noted that there has been a wide range of estimated civilian casualties during the siege, but also said it believes that 60%-80% of Raqqa was left uninhabitable by the time the city was liberated in October 2017.

Initially the U.S.-led coalition estimated that it was responsible for 38 incidents involving 240 civilian casualties — including 178 who were killed. A consortium of local Syrian and international groups, including Amnesty International and Airwars, put the number of casualties at a "high estimate" of 1,600, but said that about 774 of them could specifically be "verified" by data as the result of coalition action.

House urges wider access for military aid

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — House lawmakers are urging the Pentagon to provide generous access to a new basic needs allowance for low-income service members, arguing wide eligibility and enrollment are needed to combat food and financial insecurity in the military.

In a letter to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Democratic lawmakers this week asked for housing stipends to be excluded from eligibility calculations “to the greatest extent possible” and recommended eligible families automatically receive the stipend unless they specifically opt-out of it.

“We look forward to working with the [Defense] Department to ensure that no one who serves our country has to worry

about putting food on their table,” wrote Reps. Adam Smith, D-Wash., Jackie Speier, D-Calif., David Scott, D-Ga., and Jahana Hayes, D-Conn.

An estimated 160,000 active-duty service members, particularly those in junior ranks, struggle to feed themselves and their families, according to a 2021 estimate by the nonprofit organization Feeding America. Low pay, high rates of unemployment for military spouses, and high costs of living all contribute to food insecurity, the organization said.

In November, Austin announced new guidelines to help military leaders identify service members who experience hunger and connect them to support programs. He also tasked Pentagon officials with drafting a long-term plan to strengthen food secur-

ity.

Congress authorized the basic needs allowance last year to help the military’s most vulnerable families, targeting households with incomes that fall below 130% of the federal poverty level. For a family of three, that amounts to \$28,550 in 2022.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated that 10,200 service members would receive the new benefit, which would average \$400 per month. Rules for how allowances will be calculated are still being drafted and the first checks are not expected to be distributed until next year.

Lawmakers are also recommending the Defense Department certify eligibility for the allowance annually to remove administrative burdens for the neediest members of the armed services.

Renaming commission IDs items tied to Confederacy

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

A federal commission created by Congress has published for the first time its official list of Defense Department assets it will consider for name changes over links to the Confederacy.

The Naming Commission on Wednesday released the list of 758 Defense Department items at U.S. military installations around the world that it said likely honor Confederate officials and causes, including hundreds of signs, roads, memorials, vessels and buildings on posts in the U.S., Germany and Japan. The commission, which was created in 2020, said decisions about which items the panel would recommend for changes or estimated costs associated with those actions had yet to be determined.

“We will update the inventory list in collaboration with the Department of Defense, including its sub-agencies and the

military branches, as we continue to identify assets within our area of consideration,” said retired Navy Adm. Michelle Howard, the Naming Commission’s chairwoman. “This work is vital to understand the scope and estimated cost of renaming or removing Confederate-named assets and will enable us to provide the most accurate report possible to Congress.”

The commission’s final report is due to Congress on Oct. 1, a deadline the commission said it is likely to meet. A spokesperson for the commission said cost estimates for the name changes, which include nine Army installations across the U.S. southeast, would not be released until that report was provided to lawmakers. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is expected to make final decisions on renaming installations and other Defense Department assets as soon as next year, based on the commission’s work.

Lapses in military medical care continue, GAO finds

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Congressional efforts to reform the military health care system have not led to marked improvements in patient care, House lawmakers said this week as a new watchdog study showed facilities struggling with credentialing and documentation failures.

A preliminary review of four medical facilities and the Defense Health Agency found lapses in verifying providers’ medical licenses and other credentials, evaluating their performance and properly documenting events that endangered patients, according to the Government Accountability Office.

Concerns over preventable deaths and injuries of service members led Congress in 2017 to unify the health care systems of the Navy, Army and Air Force under the singular ad-

ministration of the Defense Health Agency. More reforms followed with the standardization of policies and the 2019 passage of the Richard Stayskal Act, which allowed medical malpractice claims for injuries and deaths caused by military hospitals.

The lead proponent of the malpractice legislation, Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., said she was frustrated with the slow implementation of the bill and disappointed with the lack of noticeable changes in patient treatment overall, as evidenced by the government review.

The weaknesses highlighted by the government report are due to a lack of awareness and understanding of new procedures that were implemented in 2019, said Sharon Silas, director of the Government Accountability Office’s health care team. Unclear language in the procedures has led to differing interpretations and inconsistent actions, she said.

US added 431,000 jobs in March, a sign of recovery

Associated Press

America's employers extended a streak of robust hiring in March, adding 431,000 jobs in a sign of the economy's resilience in the face of a still-destructive pandemic and the highest inflation in 40 years.

The Labor Department's report Friday showed that last month's job growth helped shrink the unemployment rate to 3.6%, the lowest level since the pandemic erupted two years ago.

Despite the inflation surge, persistent supply bottlenecks, the damaging effects of COVID-19 and now a war in Europe, employers have added at least 400,000 jobs for 11 straight months. In its report Friday, the government also revised sharply up its estimate of hiring in January and February by a combined 95,000 jobs.

In an encouraging sign for the economy, 418,000 people began looking for a job in March, and many found one. Since the pandemic struck in 2020, many people have remained on the sidelines of the job market, a trend that has contributed to a chronic worker shortage in many industries.

Across the economy in March, hiring gains were widespread. Restaurants and bars added 61,000 jobs, retailers 49,000,

manufacturers 38,000 and hotels 25,000.

Average hourly pay is up a strong 5.6% over the past 12 months. Though that is welcome news for employees, it is contributing to surging inflation pressures that have put the Federal Reserve on track to raise rates multiple times, perhaps aggressively, in the coming months. Those rate hikes will result in more expensive loans for many consumers and businesses.

For now, though, the job market has continued to rebound with unexpected speed from the coronavirus recession. Job openings are at a near-record level, and applications for unemployment benefits have dropped to near their lowest point since 1969.

The still-solid U.S. job market reflects a robust rebound from the brief but devastating coronavirus recession, which wiped out 22 million jobs in March and April 2020 as businesses shut down or cut hours and Americans stayed home to avoid infection.

But the recovery has been swift. U.S. consumers have spent so fast that many factories, warehouses, shipping companies and ports have failed to keep pace with their customer demand. Supply chains have snarled, forcing up prices.

Bipartisan deal near on trimmed down \$10 billion COVID-19 bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers have moved to the brink of shaking hands on a scaled-back bipartisan compromise providing a fresh \$10 billion to combat COVID-19, a deal that could set up final congressional approval next week.

The price tag was down from an earlier \$15.6 billion agreement between the two parties that collapsed weeks ago after House Democrats rejected cutting unused pandemic aid to states to help pay for it. President Joe Biden requested \$22.5 billion in early March. With leaders hoping to move the package through Congress quickly, the lowered cost seemed to reflect both parties' calculations that agreeing soon to additional savings would be too hard.

The effort, which would finance steps like vaccines, treatments and tests, comes as Bi-

den and other Democrats have warned the government is running out of money to counter the pandemic. At the same time, the more transmissible omicron variant BA.2 has been spreading quickly in the U.S. and abroad.

"We've reached an agreement in principle on all the spending and all of the offsets," Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah, the lead Republican bargainer, told reporters Thursday, using Washington-speak for savings. "It's entirely balanced by offsets."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and others were more circumspect.

"We are getting close to a final agreement that would garner bipartisan support," Schumer said on the Senate floor. He said lawmakers were still finalizing the bill's components and language, and awaiting a cost estimate from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

House approves \$35-a-month cap on cost of insulin

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House has passed a bill capping the monthly cost of insulin at \$35 for insured patients, part of an election-year push by Democrats for price curbs on prescription drugs at a time of rising inflation.

Experts say the legislation, which passed 232-193 Thursday, would provide significant relief for privately insured patients with skimpier plans and for Medicare enrollees facing rising out-of-pocket costs for their insulin. Some could save hundreds of dollars annually, and all insured patients would get the benefit of predictable monthly costs for insulin. The bill would not help the uninsured.

But the Affordable Insulin Now Act will serve as a political vehicle to rally Democrats and force Republicans who oppose it into uncomfortable votes ahead of the midterms. For the legislation to pass Congress, 10 Republican senators would have to vote in favor. Democrats acknowledge they don't have an answer for how that's going to happen.

"If 10 Republicans stand between the American people being able to get access to affordable insulin, that's a good question for 10 Republicans to answer," said Rep. Dan Kildee, D-Mich., a cosponsor of the House bill. "Republicans get diabetes, too. Republicans die from diabetes."

Public opinion polls have consistently shown support across party lines for congressional action to limit drug costs.

But Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., complained the legislation is only "a small piece of a larger package around government price controls for prescription drugs." Critics say the bill would raise premiums and fails to target pharmaceutical middlemen seen as contributing to high list prices for insulin.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, said Democrats could have a deal on prescription drugs if they drop their bid to authorize Medicare to negotiate prices.

The insulin bill, which would take effect in 2023, represents just one provision of a much broader prescription drug package in President Joe Biden's social and climate legislation.

In addition to a similar \$35 cap on insulin, the Biden bill would authorize Medicare to negotiate prices for a range of drugs, including insulin.

Whitmer plot jurors urged to convict

Associated Press

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — A prosecutor urged jurors Friday to convict four men in a plot to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, saying they were anti-government extremists “filled with rage” and intent on igniting a civil war.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Nils Kessler summed up the evidence in federal court in Grand Rapids, Mich.. The case was built with informants, undercover agents, secret recordings and two star witnesses who pleaded guilty and cooperated.

Adam Fox, Barry Croft Jr., Daniel Harris and Brandon Caserta are charged with conspiracy. Three of the men also face additional charges involving weapons.

“They were filled with rage,” Kessler

told jurors. “They were paranoid because they knew what they were doing was wrong and they feared they could be caught.”

The four men deny any scheme to get Whitmer at her vacation home, though they were livid with the government as well as restrictions the governor imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fox’s attorney, Christopher Gibbons, said Fox was a hapless man living in the basement of a vacuum shop, smoking marijuana whenever possible and totally incapable of leading the wild scheme.

“The plan was utter nonsense. It wasn’t real to Adam Fox. He was LARPing,” Gibbons said, referring to role playing. “Adam Fox is usually impaired. He’s just playing

his game.”

The men were arrested in October 2020 amid talk of raising \$4,000 for an explosive that could blow up a bridge and stymie police after a kidnapping, according to trial evidence.

Kessler highlighted the testimony of Ty Garbin, who was arrested with the group but quickly agreed to cooperate and pleaded guilty.

“The boogaloo is this whole idea of kicking off a second civil war in the United States. That’s what bound these defendants together,” the prosecutor told jurors.

Defense attorneys insist the men were under the spell of informants and agents who got them to say and do violent, provocative things.

Recreational pot legalized in New Mexico

Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. — New Mexico is bringing sales of recreational marijuana to the doorstep of Texas, the largest prohibition state, as the movement toward broad legalization sweeps up even more of the American West.

As of midnight Friday in New Mexico, anyone 21 and older can purchase up to 2 ounces of marijuana — enough to roll about 60 joints or cigarettes — or comparable amounts of marijuana liquid concentrates and edible treats.

New Mexico has nurtured a medical marijuana program since 2007 under tight restrictions. Friday’s changes still represent a sea change for local law enforcement, taxation officials, commercial growers and residents who thought full-blown legal access to pot would never come.

New Mexico is among 18 states that have legalized pot for recreational use, with implications for cannabis tourism and conservative Texas, where legalization efforts have made little headway.

In Clovis, N.M., a high plains town of about 40,000 residents less than 10 miles from Texas, Earl Henson and two business partners have pooled resources to convert a former gun shop and shooting range into a cannabis store and companion growing room at a Main Street address.

“I can’t explain how happy I am,” said Henson, a former real estate agent who says his affection for marijuana was a burden in the past. “I think these cities that are near Texas, for the next two years it is going

to change their economies.”

In the state capital of Santa Fe, marijuana is going on sale across the street from the city’s newly built visitors center on a block lined with galleries, clothing boutiques and restaurants.

LeRoy Roybal, manager of Minerva Canna’s downtown cannabis store, said he hopes the stigma of cannabis use quickly fades.

“I think we’re liberating a lot of hearts and souls,” he said. “It’s going to be like getting a cup of joe at Starbucks.”

Amazon workers in NYC vote to be 1st to unionize

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Amazon workers in Staten Island voted to unionize on Friday, marking the first successful U.S. organizing effort in the retail giant’s history and handing an unexpected win to a nascent group that fueled the union drive.

Warehouse workers cast 2,654 votes in favor of a union, giving the fledgling Amazon Labor Union enough support to pull off a victory. According to the National Labor Relations Board, which is overseeing the process, 2,131 workers rejected the union bid.

The 67 ballots that were challenged by either Amazon or the ALU were not enough to sway the outcome. About 57% of the more than 8,300 workers on the voter list cast their ballots.

Federal labor officials said the results of the count in New York City won’t be verified until they process any objections that both parties may file. Any objections are due by April 8.

The victory was an uphill battle for the independent group, made up of former and current workers who lacked official backing from an established union and

were out-gunned by the deep-pocketed retail giant. Despite obstacles, organizers believed their grassroots approach was more relatable to workers and could help them overcome where established unions have failed in the past.

Meanwhile, Amazon workers in Bessemer, Ala., appear to have rejected a union bid but outstanding challenged ballots could change the outcome. The votes were 993-to-875 against the union. A hearing to review 416 challenged ballots is expected to begin in the next few days.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

15 homes purchased for \$10 million

CA PACIFIC GROVE — An entire block of 15 family homes in Northern California was purchased by a single buyer for \$10 million.

The cottage-style homes built in the 1920s are located on Laurel Avenue in Pacific Grove and include a mix of studios, and one- and two-bedrooms, KSBW-TV reported.

The buyer owns multiple historic properties in Pacific Grove and wishes to be identified as Whispering Pines LLC, a nod to the homes' history, said Debby Beck, the real estate broker who represented the buyer.

Fourteen of the 15 cottages were built in 1924 by Dr. Andrew Jackson Hart, the owner of Hart Mansion, a well-known landmark on the Monterey Peninsula. The homes, bounded by Cedar and Locust streets and Laurel and Pine avenues, became known as the Whispering Pines of Pacific Grove.

Beck said the new owner has no plans of subdividing the block given the historic significance of the homes.

No trial for 96-year-old in living center slaying

CO BOULDER — A judge on Wednesday dismissed the murder case against a 96-year-old man accused of fatally shooting a maintenance worker at an assisted living center north of Denver.

Okey Payne had been charged with first-degree murder after deliberation and two felony counts of menacing stemming from the 2021, death of Ricardo Medina-Rojas, 44.

Defense attorneys filed a motion to dismiss the case after Payne was deemed incompetent to stand trial, and prosecutors did not object, the Boulder Daily Camera reported. Payne will now be admitted to a secure unit at the Colorado Mental Health Institute at Pueblo.

Legislation to ban 'ghost guns' passes

MD ANNAPOLIS — The Maryland General Assembly approved a measure on Tuesday to ban so-called ghost guns, which don't have serial numbers.

The House gave the measure final passage 92-41, sending it to Gov. Larry Hogan.

The Senate approved the bill 35-11 last month.

Hogan's spokesman Michael Ricci said the governor will consider this legislation now that it's on his desk, but "he continues to call on the General Assembly to take action to hold those who use guns to commit violent crimes accountable."

Under the measure, guns made after 1968, will have to have a serial number on them.

4 officers hurt breaking up large skirmish

MN BROOKLYN CENTER — Authorities say four Brooklyn Center police officers suffered minor injuries while breaking up a fight Tuesday that involved a large group of people.

Police said officers arrived on scene about 5 p.m. on a report of a clash among about 15 females, including several juveniles. While police were trying to clear the scene, a man showed

up and began assaulting a homeowner. About that time, fights broke out among a gathering crowd, police said.

Several people were cited for various offenses and released, police said. The man who allegedly attacked the homeowner was arrested for obstructing the legal process with force and for fifth-degree assault.

None of the four officers required significant medical attention and there were no reports of injuries among those involved in the melee.

Guns found at 5 major airports' checkpoints

TN MEMPHIS — Security screeners found guns in carry-on baggage at all five of Tennessee's major airports last week, the Transportation Security Administration said.

Guns were found at security checkpoints March 20 through 27 at Nashville International Airport, Memphis International Airport, Chattanooga Metropolitan Airport, McGhee Tyson Airport in Knoxville and Tri-Cities Airport in Blountville, the TSA said.

Four loaded weapons were found in carry-on baggage at the Nashville airport, the TSA said. One loaded gun was found in each of the airports in Memphis, Knoxville and Chattanooga, and an unloaded weapon was found in the Blountville airport, TSA spokesman Mark Howell said in the news release.

Man stabbed in fight between 2 employees

WA AUBURN — Authorities say a fight

between two employees Wednesday resulted in a stabbing at a Walmart Supercenter in Auburn, Wash.

A 31-year-old man was taken to Harborview Medical Center in critical condition with life-threatening injuries.

The victim was stabbed four to six times and suffered significant blood loss just before 5 a.m. The store was closed at the time.

KOMO reported a 26-year-old man was taken into custody and is speaking with detectives.

Auburn police's crime response unit and additional detectives were on the scene to investigate.

Police chief: Student accidentally shot in leg

AZ KINGMAN — One high school student accidentally shot and injured another student on a school bus with a handgun brought to school, Kingman police said Wednesday.

Police Chief Rusty Cooper said juvenile charges of endangerment and other crimes would likely be sought against the 14-year-old boy who took the gun to school on March 23 and who was handling it while riding home on the bus to Dolan Springs that day when it fired, shooting a 15-year-old boy in the leg.

The injury was serious but not life-threatening, Cooper said in a statement.

The 14-year-old discarded the gun after getting off the bus and it wasn't found in a subsequent search after the wounded boy's family contacted authorities, Cooper said.

— From Associated Press

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Final Four sees big experience boost

Associated Press

A bunch of one-and-done phenoms brought together by Kentucky coach John Calipari stepped onto the floor into the spotlight of the cavernous Superdome 10 years ago, oozing with the kind of NBA potential that made it clear their college basketball careers were about to end at the Final Four.

Anthony Davis, Michael Kidd-Gilchrist and the rest of them went out on top, too, beating Kansas in the Big Easy to deliver the Wildcats their eighth national championship and Calipari the first of his career.

Fast-forward to the present, and the return of the Final Four to New Orleans, and there is a much more old-school feel to the national semifinals as each of the participants — Duke, North Carolina, Kansas and Villanova — benefited in one way or another from COVID-19 waivers, medical redshirts and the explosion of the transfer portal.

“It’s the oldest that college basketball has ever been,” acknowledged Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski, “so as a result of that, it’s going to be tougher to win. I mean, I think (Shane) Battier played the most games here, 130-something. We’re playing against guys that have played 160 games, sometimes three of them are on the other team. That’s a lot.”

Indeed, all four teams in the Big Easy have the kind of savvy veterans once seemed endangered in the world of big-time college hoops, and together they are proving on the game’s biggest stage that experience still matters.

“That’s why we shouldn’t be shocked at anything that’s happened in the tournament,” the retiring Krzyzewski said, “because the age differential is so dramatic. For us, it’s been dramatic.”

Yes, the Blue Devils are the youngest team in New Orleans, but everything is relative. They still feature senior Joey Baker and fifth-year senior Theo John, who began his career at Marquette and is about to play in his 162nd game.

The experience has paid off. Young, talented teams like Memphis were bounced from the tournament early, while hardened teams such as Providence, Saint Peter’s and Miami made runs into the second weekend.

“It takes a significant amount of time to get everyone to buy into your program,” explained Jayhawks coach Bill Self, who has had more success with veteran teams than with one-and-dones such as Andrew Wiggins and Joel Embiid.

“But,” Self cautioned, “I would say that talent plus experience is what wins.”

Good luck finding a team more experienced than Kansas.

n Backup guard Jalen-Coleman Lands will play in his 171st game spanning stints at Illinois, DePaul and Iowa State when the Jayhawks face Villanova, trailing Iowa’s Jordan Bohannon and USC’s Chevez Goodwin for the most in Division I history.

n Mitch Lightfoot will play in his 167th game and second Final Four after making it with the Jayhawks in 2018.

n Arizona State transfer Remy Martin and big man David McCormack will have surpassed 130 games by the time their season ends, while All-American guard Ochai Agbaji is about to play his 121st game for Kansas.

In fact, the Jayhawks’ top eight scorers have appeared in 965 games — almost certainly a record for a Final Four team.

Maybe for any team.

The Jayhawks aren’t alone. Brady Manek spent four seasons at Oklahoma, transferred to North Carolina for one more, and will play in his 160th game against Duke in the second semifinal Saturday night. Villanova has two players, Collin Gillespie and Jermaine Samuels, who have played more than 150 games apiece, and two more who have topped 100.

The combined experience of Duke, again the youngest of the

bunch, still far outpaces that 2012 Kentucky team or another collection of one-and-done champs: the Blue Devils of Jahliil Okafor, Tyus Jones and Justise Winslow.

Their title in 2015 might have been the high-water mark of the one-and-done championship era, though. The rise of the G League, Overtime Elite and more overseas opportunities are providing alternative pathways to some of the best prep prospects. As a result the talent level of programs relying primarily on freshmen and sophomores is not quite the same.

Meanwhile, the recent passage of NIL legislation is allowing college athletes to earn endorsement money in college, giving them another reason to stick around.

“Some of these teams, they’ve got kids, some of them are in their sixth year of school, because maybe they redshirted and now they’ve got the COVID year,” Florida Gulf Coast athletic director Ken Kavanagh said. “You’ve got older teams and they are maybe not good enough (players) to go to the NBA, but they’re really good, talented players who can make a difference.”

Four of those older teams are the last ones standing in New Orleans this week.

MLB, players keep automatic runners in extra innings for 2022

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Major League Baseball finalized the rules change Thursday to bring back automatic runners in extra innings for a third straight season.

Despite an easing of pandemic restrictions, MLB and the players’ association agreed to keep the controversial rule that starts each team with a runner on second base during extra innings for the 2022 regular season.

The agreement regarding on-

field rules modifications also includes expanding active rosters from 26 players to 28 from opening day on April 7 through May 1 this year, due to the delayed start of spring training.

Another new rule benefits Angels two-way star Shohei Ohtani. With the designated hitter adopted in both leagues, pitchers who start games in the batting order can remain in the game as a DH after leaving the mound. A DH can also enter the game to pitch. That change will

apply to multiple seasons.

“The expansion of the designated hitter and giving two-way players enhanced flexibility to showcase their talents will benefit the game for the foreseeable future,” union director of player services Kevin Slowey said in a statement. “The roster and extra-inning adjustments will also serve to protect the health and safety of players during what will be a unique 2022 season.”

The “zombie” runner modification was applied to the 2020

and 2021 regular seasons as part of adjustments due to COVID-19.

The modification for 2020 and 2021 that shortened doubleheaders to scheduled seven-inning games was not continued for 2022.

Active rosters will be 28 from opening day through May 1; 26 from May 2 through Aug. 31; and 28 for the rest of the regular season. Last season, the limit was 26 from opening day through Aug. 31, then 28.

Boston selected as top women's player

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Aliyah Boston dominated women's college basketball on both ends of the court this season.

The junior forward helped South Carolina go wire-to-wire as the No. 1 team in the country, putting up an SEC-record 27 consecutive double-doubles, and she has helped put the Gamecocks two wins away from the program's second national championship.

Boston was honored as The Associated Press women's basketball player of the year on Thursday. She is the second player from South Carolina to be recognized with the award, joining former Gamecocks

great A'ja Wilson.

"Not often do you get the complete package. I think this recognition is for what she was able to do on both sides of the ball," South Carolina coach Dawn Staley said. "The player of the year is usually for offensive-minded people who think that when you put the ball in the hole, you should be bestowed the player of the year. She's the full package. Every single day."

Boston's parents and aunt as well as the entire South Carolina team were in the audience of the ceremony that also honored AP Coach of the Year Kim Mulkey.

"Coming into this year I said in the back of my mind I wanted

to change the narrative this year about women's basketball," Boston said. "To get this award means a lot and I can't wait to do more in the future."

Boston received 23 votes from the 30-member national media panel that votes weekly for the AP Top 25. Iowa's Caitlin Clark received six votes and Baylor's NaLyssa Smith got one.

Boston averaged 16.8 points, 12 rebounds and 2.6 blocks this year.

"I think Aliyah is so unselfish that she's not very comfortable taking over basketball games," Staley said. "She doesn't want to be seen by her teammates as selfish and chasing numbers."

Boston's parents surprised the unanimous first-team AP All-American with the news on Zoom that she had won the award.

"I'm in shock, I got the chills," Boston said to her parents on the call.

Staley said that Boston is one of the hardest workers on the team.

"Young people will follow anyone, good or bad," the coach said. "Aliyah has the personality where you'd follow her because of how hard she works, how unselfish she is, how giving she is. When it's time to make plays she delivers. She's a leader to follow for all the right reasons."

LSU's Mulkey wins coach of year

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Kim Mulkey knew she had a rebuilding project when she took over as coach of LSU this season.

The longtime Baylor coach quickly was able to orchestrate an incredible turnaround for the Tigers, who won 26 games — 17 more than last season.

Mulkey was honored Thursday as The Associated Press women's basketball Coach of the Year, the third time she has won the award. Geno Auriemma and Muffet McGraw are the only other coaches to have accomplished the feat.

"I'm certainly honored to be in that group," Mulkey said. "This doesn't happen without players who allow you to coach them and buy into a system. We had a really, really good year."

Mulkey received 10 votes from the 30-member national media panel that votes on the AP Top 25 each week. South Carolina's Dawn Staley was second with eight votes. Stanford's Tara VanDerveer received three while Nicki Collen, who replaced Mulkey at Baylor, got two along with Wes Moore of N.C. State. Five coaches got one vote apiece.

The veteran coach shared the stage with AP Player of the Year Aliyah Boston, who she coached against this year.

Mulkey, who was surprised by her team last week who told her she won, thanked her coaches and individually named each of her players in the ceremony. She choked up when

talking about her family, who were still in Texas.

LSU rose to No. 6 in the AP poll and hosted the first two rounds of the NCAA Tournament. The Tigers lost to Ohio State in the second round and finished with more than 25 wins for the first time since the 2007-08 season. Mulkey compared this season to her first at Baylor when she inherited a team that won just seven games the year before she took over.

"You make goals that are realistic such as having a winning season," she said. "Beat your first ranked team, we're going to celebrate that. In conference if we finish in the top half of SEC we can then potentially get to the NCAA Tournament. It sounds so simple. but you have to crawl before you can walk, and have to walk before you can run. We were just realistic."

The Tigers went 13-3 in the tough Southeastern Conference and had wins over Georgia, Tennessee and Kentucky. Mulkey's squad also played South Carolina tough, only falling by six points.

After the ceremony, Mulkey bumped into Nikki Fargas, the coach she replaced at LSU. The two hugged and had a 15-minute conversation. It was the first time they had talked since Mulkey got the job.

Mulkey grew up in Louisiana and won national titles with Louisiana Tech as both a player and assistant coach before a 21-year run at Baylor in which she won three national titles.

Mets' deGrom has shoulder tightness

Associated Press

PORT ST. LUCIE, Fla. — Mets ace Jacob deGrom was scratched from his scheduled start Friday morning and will get an MRI after feeling tightness in his pitching shoulder, putting his status for opening day in jeopardy.

New York manager Buck Showalter told reporters Thursday night at spring training in Florida that deGrom would probably be scratched Friday afternoon against the St. Louis Cardinals. He began to feel the tightness while playing catch Thursday.

"We are going to see how he is in the morning before we scratch him," Showalter said, according to MLB.com. "But he has to be pretty convincing to pitch him tomorrow. I'll be surprised if he pitches tomorrow — rain or no rain."

The two-time Cy Young Award winner is slated to start the season opener next Thursday in Washington.

It's concerning news for the Mets, who have big plans this season after signing fellow ace Max Scherzer to join deGrom atop a terrific rotation.

After getting off to a sensational start last year, deGrom didn't pitch during the second half because of a sprained elbow. He was 7-2 with a 1.08 ERA in 15 outings, but New York collapsed without him to finish 77-85 after leading the NL East for 103 days. His final start was July 7 against Milwaukee.

Leafs' Matthews nets 50th goal

Associated Press

TORONTO — Auston Matthews scored his NHL-leading 50th goal of the season and the Toronto Maple Leafs beat the Winnipeg Jets 7-3 on Thursday night.

Matthews scored Toronto's sixth goal of the game into an empty net with 2:06 left in regulation. He moved past Leon Draisaitl (49 goals) of idle Edmonton for the league goal lead and became the first Maple Leafs player to reach the milestone since Dave Andreychuk scored 53 in 1993-94.

"I don't know if I ever really envisioned it being an empty-netter goal, but I'll take it," Matthews said. "I had some good chances tonight, just didn't go in.

"Fortunately that last one did."

William Nylander had two power-play goals and an assist and Ilya Mikheyev scored short-handed and had a three-point game. Mark Giordano added a goal and an assist and John Tavares and Timothy Liljengren also scored for Toronto, which got 20 saves from Erik Kallgren. Mitch Marner added three assists.

Nikolaj Ehlers had a goal and an assist, Blake Wheeler and Paul Stastny also scored for Winnipeg. Eric Comrie stopped 31 shots.

"We need to win games," Ehlers said after Winnipeg blew an early 2-0 lead. "Besides playoffs, this is the toughest time of the year."

Matthews joined Andreychuk, Rick Vaive (three times) and Gary Leeman as the only Maple Leafs players to reach the half-century goal mark.

"Really special to be able to do it here in front of all the fans," said Matthews, whose team hits the road for four straight starting Saturday in Philadelphia. "The energy, the atmosphere and all that goes into it just makes it much more fun."

Kallgren got the start with Petr Mrazek likely to be out at least six weeks with his third groin injury of the season suffered in Tuesday's 6-4 victory over Boston. No. 1 goalie Jack Campbell (rib ailment) has been cleared medically to resume action for the first time since March 8, but didn't dress.

Trailing 2-1 after the first period, Toronto tied things up 1:58 into the second when Nylander banged a Matthews rebound off the end boards past Comrie for his 25th goal of the season.

Ehlers scored his 21st — and seventh in the last 10 games — on a Winnipeg power play at 3:45 past a screened Kallgren.

The Leafs got even at 3-all 23 seconds later when Tavares swatted his 23rd past Comrie, who got the start in place of Connor

Hellebuyck in the second of a back-to-back.

Penguins 4, Wild 3: Evgeni Malkin scored 3:57 into overtime and Rickard Rakell had two goals as Pittsburgh halted host Minnesota's seven-game winning streak Thursday.

Jake Guentzel added his 32nd goal of the season for Pittsburgh. Rakell has three goals in six games since being acquired from the Anaheim Ducks for three players and a second-round draft choice.

Penguins goalie Casey DeSmith made 28 saves.

Pittsburgh moved one point behind the idle New York Rangers for second in the Metropolitan Division. First-place Carolina, which beat Montreal 4-0 on Thursday, is six points ahead of the Penguins.

"I thought we showed really good resilience," DeSmith said after his team squandered a 3-1 lead. "Obviously, tie game in the third, I thought we did a great job bouncing back, not letting the momentum get away from us. I thought we carried it in overtime, which is great, great to see. Star players stepped up for us."

Kirill Kaprizov scored his 38th goal for Minnesota to tie the franchise record for points in a season with 83.

Panthers 4, Blackhawks 0: Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 37 shots for his third shutout of the season, leading host Florida past Chicago.

Hurricanes 4, Canadiens 0: Frederik Andersen made 32 saves for his fourth shutout of the season and Andrei Svechnikov scored twice as host Carolina dominated Montreal.

Bruins 8, Devils 1: Former Boston College captain Marc McLaughlin scored in his NHL debut, capping a six-goal second-period outburst that propelled host Boston over New Jersey.

Islanders 5, Blue Jackets 2: Kyle Palmieri scored the go-ahead goal early in the third period to lift host New York past Columbus.

Avalanche 4, Sharks 2: Mikko Rantanen scored the go-ahead goal on a power play with 7:43 remaining, Pavel Francouz stopped 25 shots and host Colorado beat San Jose.

Kings 3, Flames 2 (SO): Lias Andersson scored the deciding goal in the shootout and Cal Petersen made 26 saves for visiting Los Angeles.

Stars 3, Ducks 2 (OT): Jamie Benn scored 53 seconds into overtime and visiting Dallas completed a two-game sweep of Anaheim.

Giannis, Bucks knock off Nets

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Giannis Antetokounmpo passed Kareem Abdul-Jabbar to become Milwaukee's career scoring leader on a three-pointer that forced overtime, and then made two free throws in the final seconds to give the Bucks a 120-119 victory over the Brooklyn Nets on Thursday night.

The defending NBA champions clinched a return to the postseason with the win, in which Antetokounmpo had 44 points, 14 rebounds and six assists. Jrue Holiday added 19 points and Khris Middleton had 16.

Kevin Durant had 26 points, 11 assists and seven rebounds for the Nets, but missed a three-pointer that would have won it.

Antetokounmpo entered the game 39 points behind Abdul-Jabbar, the NBA's career scoring leader who had 14,211 points after beginning his career in Milwaukee.

Hawks 131, Cavaliers 107: Trae Young scored 30 points and surging Atlanta never trailed at home while beating short-handed Cleveland and clinching a spot in the Eastern Conference play-in tournament.

Cleveland has lost two straight and five of six as it attempts to keep the No. 7 spot in the Eastern Conference.

Young had nine assists as the Hawks' fourth consecutive win clinched no worse than the No. 10 spot in the Eastern Conference.

Pistons 102, 76ers 94: Saddiq Bey scored 10 of his 20 points in the final 4:23 as Detroit pulled away down the stretch and beat visiting Philadelphia.

Cade Cunningham scored 27 points for Detroit, which snapped a three-game losing streak.

Joel Embiid had 37 points and 15 rebounds for the 76ers.

Bulls 135, Clippers 130 (OT): DeMar DeRozan scored a season-high 50 points and host Chicago rallied to beat Los Angeles in overtime.

Chicago moved a half-game ahead of sixth-place Toronto with five remaining.

Reggie Jackson led Los Angeles with 34 points.

Jazz 122, Lakers 109: Donovan Mitchell scored 29 points and Rudy Gobert had 25 points and 17 rebounds as Utah snapped a five-game losing streak with a win over visiting Los Angeles.

Jordan Clarkson scored 19 points, Mike Conley added 18 and Bojan Bogdanovic 11 in his return from injury as the Jazz continued their fight to stay out of a Western Conference play-in game.