

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Strike kills 50 at Ukrainian rail station

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — A missile hit a train station where thousands of people had flocked to flee in eastern Ukraine, killing 50 people Friday, Ukrainian authorities said, while warning they expect to find more evidence of war crimes in areas abandoned by Russian troops.

Photos from the scene showed bodies covered with tarps on the ground and the remnants of a rocket with the words “For the children” painted on it in Russian. About 4,000 civilians were in and around the station, the office of Ukraine’s prosecutor-general said, adding that most were women and children heeding calls to leave the area before Russia launches a full-scale offensive in the country’s east.

The Russian Defense Ministry denied attacking the station in Kramatorsk, a city in Ukraine’s contested Donbas region, but President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other Ukrainian leaders accused Russia’s military of deliberately targeting a location where only civilians were assembled.

“The inhuman Russians are not changing their methods. Without the strength or courage to stand up to us on the battlefield, they are cynically destroying the civilian population,” the president said on social media. “This is an evil without limits. And if it is not punished, then it will never stop.”

Britain’s Defense Minister Ben Wallace denounced the attack, saying “the striking

of civilians and critical infrastructure is a war crime.”

“These were precision missiles aimed at people trying to seek humanitarian shelter,” Wallace said.

Pavlo Kyrylenko, the regional governor of Donetsk, which lies in the Donbas, said that 50 people were killed, including five children, and many dozens more were wounded.

“The people just wanted to get away for evacuation,” Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova said while visiting Bucha, a town north of Kyiv, Ukraine’s capital, where journalists and returning Ukrainians discovered scores of bodies on streets and in mass graves after Russian troops withdrew.

Venediktova spoke as workers pulled corpses from a mass grave near a church under spitting rain. Black body bags were laid out in rows in the mud. None of the dead were Russians, she said. Most of them had been shot. The prosecutor general’s office is investigating the deaths, and other mass casualties involving civilians, as possible war crimes.

After failing to take Ukraine’s capital and withdrawing from northern Ukraine, Russia has shifted its focus to the Donbas, a mostly Russian-speaking, industrial region in eastern Ukraine where Moscow-backed rebels have been fighting Ukrainian forces for eight years and control some areas. The train station is located in government-con-

trolled territory.

Ukrainian officials warned residents this week to leave as soon as possible for safer parts of the country and said they and Russia had agreed to establish multiple evacuation routes in the east.

One analyst said only Russia would have a reason to attack civilian railway infrastructure in the Donbas, and that Ukraine would not deliberately kill its own civilians in “a war of survival.”

“The Ukrainian military is desperately trying to reinforce units in the area ... and the railway stations in that area in Ukrainian-held territory are critical for movement of equipment and people,” said Justin Bronk, a research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute in London.

Elsewhere in the Donbas, the governor of Luhansk, Serhiy Haidai, said Russia was concentrating equipment and troops and increasing shelling and bombing to aid their advance.

“We sense the end of preparations for that massive breakthrough, for that great battle which will happen here around us, in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions,” he said in a televised address.

In his nightly video address, Zelenskyy said horrors worse than the ones in Bucha already had surfaced in Borodyanka, another settlement outside the capital.

Navy is offering \$25K enlistment bonuses to recruits

BY ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

The Navy announced Thursday that for the first time the service will offer an active-duty enlistment bonus of \$25,000 to anyone joining for any job in the service. However, they must be able to ship out to boot camp by the end of June.

“It’s a very competitive job market this year. We’re offering these bonuses because we want to remain competitive,” said Cmdr. David Benham, spokesman for Navy Recruiting Command.

Higher bonuses up to \$50,000 could be available for certain jobs such as some on

submarines and some in the information technology fields, according to the Navy. Recruits already scheduled for basic training between July and September can receive the \$25,000 bonus as well, if they are willing to move their ship out date to before the end of June.

The military services are now competing in a post-pandemic job market in which the unemployment rate continues to decline, leaving employers fighting for workers. The unemployment rate in March dropped to 3.6%, near the 3.5% it was in February 2020 before the coronavirus pandemic began, according to the Labor Department.

The duration of this offer hinges on the budget, Benham said. He did not say how much money is available, but once it runs out, the bonuses will no longer be offered.

“The sooner they apply, the more likely it is that they will be able to take advantage of this unprecedented bonus structure,” he said.

Former service members — either from the Navy or other service branches — re-enlisting for active duty in the Navy at pay grades E-4 or below, and who meet specific bonus eligibility and did not receive a bonus in their first enlistment also qualify for the \$25,000 bonus, the Navy said.

Navy plans to decommission 9 ships

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine — The Navy that once wanted smaller, speedy warships to chase down pirates has made a speedy pivot to Russia and China — and many of those recently built ships could be retired.

The U.S. Navy wants to decommission nine ships in the Freedom class of littoral combat ships — warships that cost about \$4.5 billion altogether to build.

The Navy contends in its budget proposal that the move would free up \$50 million per

ship annually for other priorities. But it would also reduce the size of the fleet that's already surpassed by China in sheer numbers, something that could cause members of Congress to balk.

Adm. Mike Gilday, chief of naval operations, defended the proposal that emphasizes long-range weapons and modern warships, while shedding other ships ill equipped to face current threats.

“We need a ready, capable, lethal force more than we need a bigger force that's less ready,

less lethal, and less capable,” he said Monday at the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space symposium in Maryland.

All told, the Navy wants to scrap 24 ships, including five cruisers and a pair of Los Angeles-class submarines, as part of cost-cutting needed to maintain the existing fleet and build modern warships. Those cuts surpass the proposed nine ships to be built.

Most of them are older vessels. However, the littoral combat ships that are targeted are young. The oldest of them is 10

years old.

Some detractors proclaimed littoral combat ships to be the Navy's “Little Crappy Ship,” but that's not fair, said defense analyst Loren Thompson.

“It's not a little crappy ship. It does what it was supposed to do. What it was supposed to do isn't enough for the kind of threats that we face today,” said Thompson, from the Lexington Institute.

Congress must sign off on the Navy's proposal to decommission ships ahead of their projected service life.

4 US troops injured after attack in Syria

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

Four U.S. service members were being evaluated for injuries after their base in northeastern Syria was struck by indirect fire Thursday in the early morning hours, military officials said.

The injuries were described as minor and included “possible traumatic brain injuries,” according to a brief statement released Thursday by the U.S.-led anti-Islam-

ic State coalition known as Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve. The attack on the small base known as Green Village occurred at about 1 a.m. local time and was under investigation, according to the statement.

The officials said the rounds struck two buildings in Green Village, where several hundred U.S. and coalition forces are stationed alongside the Syrian Democratic Forces they train and advise to fight rem-

nants of ISIS. The post sits just east of the Euphrates River and adjacent to major oil fields.

Operation Inherent Resolve officials did not indicate who was likely responsible for the attack in their statement, but similar rocket and mortar attacks in recent years — including on Green Village — have been attributed to Iran-backed militia groups that have long sought to drive American forces and their partners out of the region.

Army nearly doubles number of vaccine discharges

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Army nearly doubled the number of soldiers discharged for refusing the coronavirus vaccine in the past week, according to service data released Thursday.

The Army has now separated 176 soldiers as of Thursday for “refusing the lawful order to receive the [coronavirus] vaccine.” That's up from 90 last week.

Comparatively, the Marine Corps has separated 1,409 Marines as of March 30, the Navy has separated 763 sailors as of Thursday and the Air Force has separated 250 airmen as of Tuesday, according to the latest data from the services.

The Army was the last of the service branches to begin kicking out troops who do not get the shots. Army Secretary Christine Wormuth ordered commanders in January to begin the process of booting soldiers who outright refused the vaccine. The first three soldiers were separated for that reason on March 18.

The Army has also relieved six service leaders from command — including two battalion commanders — and issued 3,330 general officer written reprimands to soldiers for refusing the vaccination order, according to the data.

Some 97% of the Army's about 486,000 active-duty soldiers have been fully vaccinated, the service said Thursday. Those

percentages remain unchanged from the previous week.

So far, the Army has approved two permanent religious waivers for the vaccine order, according to the data.

About 836 active-duty soldiers have been denied a religious exemption, and another 4,165 are awaiting decisions on their religious waiver requests. That number is up slightly from previous weeks as soldiers continue applying for such exemptions.

The Army has approved 20 permanent medical exemptions to the vaccine, as of Thursday. The service has denied 657 permanent waiver requests and another 699 are awaiting decisions.

Jackson, 1st Black woman on High Court

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Senate voted Thursday to confirm Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court, felling one of the most significant remaining racial barriers in American government and sending the first Democratic nominee to the high court in 12 years.

Jackson, a daughter of schoolteachers who has risen steadily through America's elite legal ranks, will become the first Black woman to sit on the court and only the eighth who is not a white man. She will replace Associate Justice Stephen Breyer after the Supreme Court's term ends in late June or early July.

Thursday's 53-to-47 vote represented the culmination of a six-week whirlwind confirmation process for the 51-year-old federal appeals judge.

It began in February with President Joe Biden introducing Jackson as a distinguished nominee who would "help write the next chapter in the history of the journey of America" and reached a climax during two days of tense Senate hearings last month as Republicans sought to paint her as a left-wing radical who had coddled criminals and terrorists, only for three GOP senators to ultimately reject those claims and support her confirmation.

Underscoring the partisan tensions, Jackson's confirmation came only after the Senate Judiciary Committee deadlocked on her nomination along party lines and Republicans forced three procedural votes on the Senate floor this week. Still, Democrats said Thursday that her confirmation should be a cause for national reflection and jubilation.

"This milestone should have happened

generations ago—generations ago—but we are always trotting on a path towards a more perfect union," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said. "America today is taking a giant step towards making our union more perfect."

Democrats in the chamber erupted in loud applause when the final tally was called, with hundreds of House members, aides and guests watching from the sidelines. Vice President Kamala Harris, the first Black woman to hold that post, presided over the vote, while Biden and Jackson watched the proceedings from the White House; a photo showed them embracing when the outcome was clear.

When Jackson is sworn in, the nine-member Supreme Court for the first time will have four women. Also for the first time, a majority of the justices will not be white men.

Judge: Military with HIV can stay, become officers

Bloomberg News

A federal judge issued a pair of landmark rulings barring the U.S. military from discharging service members who contract HIV and ordering the Pentagon to allow those who have the virus but no symptoms to become officers.

The decisions Wednesday by U.S. District Judge Leonie Brinkema in Virginia pave the way for career advancements for HIV-positive service members who have long been blocked by policies barring them from deploying overseas, even when their symptoms are suppressed indefinitely by highly effective drugs.

"The court ruled that the Pentagon's policies regarding service members with HIV are not only outdated, but unlawful," said Lambda Legal's Scott Schoettes, who represented plaintiffs in both cases. The findings are among "the strongest judicial rulings in over two decades for people living with HIV," he added.

The rulings could impact the Defense Department's broader

policy of barring people with HIV from enlisting. A parallel suit challenging that rule was put on hold in 2020 pending the rulings by Brinkema over the deployment of HIV-positive service members. The judge in that case denied the Pentagon's motion to dismiss the suit and said the broader policy appeared to have "no rational basis."

The Defense Department didn't immediately respond to a message seeking comment.

Brinkema's rulings Wednesday granted motions for summary judgment in a pair of 2018 lawsuits, handing victory to the plaintiffs without trial. Her ruling will be kept under seal for a few weeks while the parties agree on a redacted version, she said.

About 2,000 people with HIV are serving in the military, according to court records filed in the case. Defense Department records say that from 2011 to 2016, the Navy diagnosed 388 sailors with HIV, while the Air Force diagnosed 181 airmen.

Biden: Strong job market will protect the economy

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. economy faces plenty of threats: War in Ukraine, high grocery bills, spiking gasoline prices, splintered supply chains, the lingering pandemic and rising interest rates that slow growth.

The Biden White House is betting the U.S. economy is strong enough to withstand these threats, but there are growing fears of a coming economic slump among voters and some Wall Street analysts.

The next few months will test whether President Joe Biden built a durable recovery full of jobs with last year's \$1.9 trillion relief package, or an economy overfed by government aid that could tip into a downturn.

Brian Deese, director of the White House National Economic Council, told reporters this week that the 3.6% unemployment rate and last year's robust growth puts the U.S. in a safe place compared to the rest of the world.

"The core question is whether the strength of the U.S. economy is now an asset or a liability,"

Deese said. "What we have done over the course of the last 15 months is driven a uniquely strong economic recovery in the United States, which positions us uniquely well to deal with the challenges ahead."

But others see an economy that could struggle to preserve growth while reducing inflation now running at a 40-year high of 7.9%. The Federal Reserve has signaled a series of benchmark interest rate increases and other policies to slow inflation this year, yet Russia's invasion of Ukraine has destabilized the global energy and food markets in ways that could push prices upward.

Nearly 7 in 10 Americans believe the economy is in poor shape, according to a poll last month by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Yet Bank of America noted that total debit and credit card spending in March was up 11% from a year ago, and its analysts concluded households are "strong enough to weather the storm provided it doesn't persist too long."

Many Puerto Ricans still in dark after major outage

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — More than a million customers in Puerto Rico remained without electricity on Thursday after a fire at a main power plant caused the biggest blackout so far this year across the U.S. territory, forcing it to cancel classes and shutter government offices.

The blackout also left nearly 170,000 customers without water, forced authorities to close some main roads and snarled traffic elsewhere across the island of 3.2 million people, where the roar of generators and smell of diesel filled the air.

“We urge you to stay home if possible,” said Puerto Rico Justice Secretary Domingo Emanuelli, who is serving as interim governor since Gov. Pedro Pierluisi is on an official trip in Spain.

Those who could not afford generators and have medical conditions such as diabetes, which depends on refrigerated insulin, worried about how much longer they’d be without power. Owners of shuttered businesses also wondered when they could reopen.

Long lines formed at some gas stations as people sought fuel for generators. Others tried to charge their cellphones at

businesses in scenes reminiscent of the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, which struck as a Category 4 storm in 2017.

Frustration and anger grew throughout the day as officials warned the outage could stretch into Friday.

“No one can say exactly when” power would be fully restored, said Kevin Acevedo, a vice president of Luma, the company that took over transmission and distribution from Puerto Rico’s Electric Power Authority last year. “We have to be realistic. The system is complex, delicate.”

As of late Thursday afternoon, crews had restored power to some 500,000 customers out of nearly 1.5 million.

Officials in at least one city distributed food to hundreds of elderly people as well as ice to those whose medication must be kept cool.

Luma said the blackout could have been caused by a circuit-breaker failure at the Costa Sur generation plant — one of four main plants on the island. But company officials said the exact cause of the interruption is unknown.

“It’s going to require an exhaustive investigation,” Acevedo said, adding that the equipment whose failure sparked the fire had been properly maintained.

Israeli forces kill Palestinian shooter

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — A third Israeli has died following the attack by a Palestinian man who opened fire into a crowded bar in central Tel Aviv. Israeli security forces said they hunted down and killed the attacker early Friday.

The shooting Thursday evening in a downtown area packed with people in bars and restaurants caused scenes of mass panic in the heart of the bustling city. Two people were instantly killed and over 10 people were wounded.

A Tel Aviv hospital on Friday afternoon announced that Barak Lufan, 35, who was wounded in the shooting, had succumbed to his injuries.

It was the fourth deadly attack in Israel by Palestinians in three weeks, and came at a time of heightened tensions around the start of Ramadan. Tens of thousands of Palesti-

nians attended the first Friday prayers of the Muslim holy month in Jerusalem amid a heavy Israeli security presence, with no immediate reports of unrest.

Hundreds of Israeli police officers, canine units and army special forces, conducted a massive manhunt throughout the night across Tel Aviv, searching building by building through densely populated residential neighborhoods.

Early Friday, authorities said they found the attacker hiding near a mosque in Jaffa, an Arab neighborhood in southern Tel Aviv, and killed him in a shootout.

The Shin Bet internal security service identified the attacker as Raad Hazem, a 28-year-old Palestinian from Jenin, in the occupied West Bank. It said he did not belong to an organized militant group and had no prior record. It said he had entered Israel illegally without a permit.

Man posed as US agent, said to be Pakistani intel

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — One of two men accused of impersonating federal agents and giving actual Secret Service agents gifts and free apartments in Washington has claimed to have ties to Pakistani intelligence and had visas showing travel to Pakistan and Iran, federal prosecutors said Thursday.

The men, Arian Taherzadeh, 40, and Haider Ali, 35, were arrested Wednesday. The FBI raided a luxury apartment building in Southeast Washington, where the men were staying and had been offering free apartments and other gifts to U.S. Secret Service agents and officers.

During a court appearance Thursday, Assistant U.S. Attorney Joshua Rothstein said Ali had told witnesses that he was affiliated with the Inter-Services Intelligence agency in Pakistan and that he had multiple visas from Pakistan and Iran in the months before prosecutors believe the men began impersonating U.S. law enforcement officials. Rothstein said the U.S. has not yet been able to verify the veracity of Ali’s claims to the witnesses.

Prosecutors believe the men were trying to “ingratiate themselves” and “integrate” with U.S. federal agents and people who worked in the U.S. defense community, Rothstein said.

The FBI searched five residences at the building on Wednesday and three vehicles. They found body armor, gas masks, zip ties, handcuffs, equipment to break through doors, drones, radios and police training manuals, Rothstein said.

The two men also had surveillance equipment and a high-power telescope, he said. The FBI found evidence that they may have been creating surveillance devices and also found a binder with information on all the residents in the luxury apartment building, which is home to law enforcement officers, defense officials and congressional staffers.

Prosecutors say the men had also set up surveillance in the building.

The FBI also found several firearms and disassembled rifle pieces and sniper scopes, Rothstein said.

Prosecutors allege Taherzadeh and Ali had falsely claimed to work for the Department of Homeland Security and work on a special task force investigating gangs and violence connected to the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Theft of Sasquatch lawn ornament investigated

MI PARK TOWNSHIP — Police are investigating the theft of a 7-foot-tall metal Sasquatch lawn ornament from a home in southern Michigan.

The item crafted from sheet metal was stolen from a home in St. Joseph County's Park Township on or after March 22, Michigan State Police said.

It has a rusty brown color with various sharp edges to resemble the fur of the mythical, ape-like Bigfoot.

It appeared the Sasquatch was cut away from a steel post with a pair of bolt cutters or a similar instrument, police said.

A white panel van with dark driver- and passenger-side windows was observed parked in the area on March 22, police said.

Man falls to death trying to retrieve drone

NY DEERPARK — A New York man fell to his death when he tried to retrieve a drone that had crashed into a steep river bank, police said.

Binh Ledinh, 42, of Lumberland, was flying a drone at Hawk's Nest in Orange County when the drone crashed 17 feet down an embankment overlooking the Delaware River, the New York state police said in a news release.

Ledinh tried to retrieve the drone and fell about 250 feet, police said.

Police located Ledinh after his wife reported him missing, but they could not reach him by foot because of the steep ter-

rain.

Orange County rescue team members lowered themselves to Ledinh and determined he was dead, police said. Ledinh's body was then lowered into a boat and transported to the Orange County medical examiner's office.

Jail officer fired over PepperBall incident

IN MUNCIE — A correctional officer at the Delaware County jail has been fired after allegedly firing a PepperBall into a cellblock, striking a prisoner with the projectile, authorities said.

The officer "discharged a PepperBall launcher with inert powder from the jail's control room into one of the cellblocks," Jeff Stanley, chief deputy of the Delaware County Sheriff's Office, said in a news release.

"One inmate was struck in the back by one of the projectiles which resulted in minor bruising but didn't require medical attention," Stanley said.

PepperBalls are projectiles that break on impact and disperse an irritating powder.

Friends of inmate Mickey Reese Joyce Jr., 32, of Muncie, told The Star Press that he was the inmate who was struck.

The name of the jail officer hasn't been released.

Woman is critically injured by falling debris

IL CHICAGO — A woman was hospitalized in critical condition after she was struck by debris falling from a building on Chicago's Northwest Side, police said.

The woman in her 20s was walking in the Wicker Park

neighborhood when she was struck by the debris from a commercial building, Chicago police said.

She suffered a laceration to the head and was taken to a hospital in critical condition, police said.

No other injuries were reported.

Video from the scene showed pieces of the building's stone facade and a sign had fallen to the sidewalk.

A vehicle also was struck by the debris but the driver was not injured, police said.

Distillery plans full-scale operation, 14 jobs

KY AUGUSTA — Augusta Distillery LLC is opening its first full-scale operation in Kentucky, located in a building in Bracken County.

The company is investing \$23 million in the project and expects to create 14 jobs, Gov. Andy Beshear said. Construction is expected to start this summer, and the facility will be operational by summer 2024, Beshear's office said in a news release.

The company is based in Augusta and was founded in 2018. Its initial product is Buckner's 13-year single barrel cask strength bourbon.

The Kentucky Economic Development Finance Authority approved Augusta Distillery for up to \$200,000 in tax incentives.

Sheriff's recruit accused of bringing drugs to jail

LA NEW ORLEANS — The Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office has fired and arrested one of its recruits, alleging he brought marijuana into

the New Orleans jail to reportedly deliver it to an inmate.

Derrick Webb, 20, was arrested on three counts each of possession with the intent to distribute marijuana, introducing contraband in prison and malfeasance in office, the sheriff's office said in a news release.

Investigators found two bags of marijuana during a search and "Webb admitted that the packages were intended to be delivered to an inmate in exchange for money received from a civilian," the sheriff's office said.

Webb also admitted to delivering marijuana to inmates at least two previous times, the sheriff's office said.

Wind farm sentenced in eagles' turbine deaths

MT BILLINGS — A wind energy company was sentenced to probation and ordered to pay more than \$8 million in fines and restitution after at least 150 eagles were killed over the past decade at its wind farms in eight states, federal prosecutors said.

NextEra Energy subsidiary ESI Energy pleaded guilty to three counts of violating the Migratory Bird Treaty Act during a court appearance in Cheyenne, Wyo. It was charged in the deaths of eagles at three of its wind farms in Wyoming and New Mexico.

In addition to those deaths, golden and bald eagles were killed at wind farms affiliated with ESI and NextEra since 2012 in six other states, prosecutors said.

-From Associated Press

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and Military News

Opening Day a fresh start for baseball

Associated Press

Andrew McCutchen got the first hit of the year, up against the still-dormant ivy at Wrigley Field. He delivered as a National League designated hitter. Wearing a Roberto Clemente No. 21 patch, too.

A little later on opening day, Nico Hoerner hit the first home run of 2022. He connected off a pitcher who used an electronic wristband to receive his signals from the catcher.

Soon after that, in another yard, the Cleveland Guardians took the field for the first time.

New season, and definitely a new look all across Major League Baseball.

And if the weather wasn't quite summer-like in some spots, well, who cares?

"It might be cold, it might be windy. But it's opening day," Cardinals fan Mary Welsh of Belleville, Ill., said at Busch Stadium before St. Louis hosted Pittsburgh.

Out near Disneyland, where temperatures neared 100 degrees, AL MVP Shohei Ohtani flashed his 100 mph heat and took his swings for the Los Angeles Angels.

Late night in Phoenix, after Padres starter Yu Darvish threw six no-hit innings, rookie Seth Beer cracked a three-run homer in the ninth to give Arizona a comeback win on National

Beer Day in the United States. No joke.

In Atlanta, the Braves celebrated their World Series championship with a pregame parade. At every ballpark, umpires started to get their say — this year, they've joined referees from other sports in announcing replay review decisions to the crowd.

As seats filled up in rainy Washington, chilly Kansas City and more, it seemed fans decided the 99-day owners' lockout that delayed spring training and pushed back opening day by a week wouldn't deter them from coming back.

Wearing an Ernie Banks jersey, 23-year-old Philip Lijewski from Guthrie, Okla., enjoyed the view at Wrigley as the Chicago Cubs and Milwaukee Brewers loosened up. He said the anger and acrimony over the labor strife didn't dampen his enthusiasm for the game.

"Not really," Lijewski said. "I'm glad that they came to a conclusion sooner rather than later. I was bummed that we didn't get to do it April 4. But it's April 7, so not too many days after."

More than eight months after announcing a new change, Cleveland played its first regular-season game as the Guardians. Known as the Indians since 1915, the club made the switch

in the interest of social justice.

Cleveland wore its road uniforms for the game in Kansas City, with the city name on the jersey.

"Supporting the city is what it comes down to," star pitcher Shane Bieber said a day before the opener. "Going out there with my teammates, doing it the right way is really all we can do. It was a little bit different getting used to the change, but I'd say we're all getting used to it day by day."

After earlier rainouts at Yankee Stadium and Target Field, the Brewers-Cubs game became the first one of the season.

It was a raw 44 degrees when Chicago right-hander Kyle Hendricks threw the first pitch, which Kolten Wong lofted for a wind-blown popout.

McCutchen sliced a double in the second inning for the season's first hit, then singled and scored in the fourth for the first run. The 2013 NL MVP, the 35-year-old McCutchen was Milwaukee's designated hitter.

As part of the MLB labor deal, the National League has now permanently adopted the designated hitter — the American League began using it in 1973, and the NL added it for the pandemic-shortened 2020 season before going back to letting pitchers hit last year.

Before the Cubs batted in the

bottom of the third, the video-board in left field showed a clip dedicated to pitchers hitting with Sarah McLachlan's "I Will Remember You" serving as the soundtrack.

"Thank you pitchers. See you in a pinch," it said at the end.

McCutchen is among several active Roberto Clemente Award winners who will wear No. 21 — the number worn by the late Pirates Hall of Famer — on the backs of their hats and helmets for the rest of their careers.

MLB said it was a "special tribute to his enduring legacy." The announcement was timed for the 50th anniversary of the year in which Clemente, the Pittsburgh great from Puerto Rico, died in a plane crash while on a humanitarian relief effort.

Hoerner launched the first homer, a two-run drive for the Cubs off NL Cy Young Award winner Corbin Burnes. Brewers catcher Omar Narváez and Burnes used the newly approved electronic pitch calling system — Narváez could push a button on his wristband to signal what he wanted thrown, without fear of wiggling his fingers and having the sign stolen.

Not that Hoerner needed any help, apparently.

"Who had Nico in the first homer pool?" Cubs manager David Ross kidded after the 5-4 win.

Cardinals welcome back slugger Pujols, rout Pirates

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Adam Wainwright (1-0) pitched six scoreless innings, Tyler O'Neill hit a three-run homer and drove in five, and the St. Louis Cardinals celebrated Albert Pujols' return with a 9-0 win over the Pittsburgh Pirates on Thursday.

Fans stood and cheered Pujols for nearly a full minute prior to his first at-bat, a flyout to left in the first inning. Pujols, who signed a one-year deal with

St. Louis last month, was 0-for-5.

Astros 3, Angels 1: Framber Valdez outpitched Shohei Ohtani with 6 ²/₃ innings of two-hit ball, and visiting Houston tied the longest opening day winning streak in major league history with a victory over Los Angeles.

Mets 5, Nationals 1: At Washington, Mark Canha and Starling Marte — two products of the franchise's quarter-billion dollar offseason spending

spree — drove in runs to back five shutout innings from Tylor Megill, and New York won manager Buck Showalter's debut.

Reds 6, Braves 3: Tyler Mahle allowed only an unearned run in five innings, Brandon Drury hit a three-run homer and Cincinnati spoiled host Atlanta's World Series celebration.

Royals 3, Guardians 1: Bobby Witt Jr. capped his highly anticipated big league debut with

his first hit, a go-ahead double with two outs in the eighth inning, sending host Kansas City over rechristened Cleveland.

Cubs 5, Brewers 4: Ian Happ had three hits, including a tiebreaking two-run double in the seventh inning, and Chicago beat visiting Milwaukee.

Diamondbacks 4, Padres 2: Seth Beer launched a three-run homer in the bottom of the ninth inning to lift host Arizona over San Diego.

Tiger shoots 1 under in Masters return

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Tiger Woods playing the Masters again, his shirt as pink as the azaleas at Augusta National, would have been enough reason to celebrate Thursday.

It felt that way to him, too.

Woods twirled his club after good shots, and there were enough. He pumped his fist after his longest birdie putt. And then normalcy gave way to reality when he used his wedge as a walking stick for his once-battered and now weary legs for a final climb toward the 18th green.

Another par save for a 1-under 71, four shots behind Sungjae Im.

But this wasn't just about a score. Woods was competing in a major, the first time in 508 days since a car crash some 14 months ago that shattered his right leg. That much was clear when asked if simply being able to play felt like a victory. His answer: "Yes."

"If you would have seen how my leg looked to where it's at now, the pictures — some of the guys know; they've seen the pictures — to see where I've been, to get from there to here, it was no easy task," Woods said.

It doesn't figure to get any easier the rest of the way.

Still to come is Friday, the first time he will have walked 18 holes at Augusta National on consecutive days since the accident with what he described as "lots of ice" in between.

Ahead of him are a collection of players who have won majors, who have won at Augusta, and who have spent the last year honing their games instead of figuring out how to get from a hospital bed to finding joy in the simple pleasure of walking.

Im, the 24-year-old South Korean known for rarely missing the center of the club face, ran off three straight birdies at the start, recovered from a pair of bogeys with a 12-foot eagle putt on the 13th and added a late birdie for a 5-under 67.

He was one shot ahead of Cameron Smith, playing for the first time since winning The Players Championship a month ago. The Aussie with the mullet had the most dynamic round of the day with his eight birdies, all between a double bogey at the start and the finish.

"To be honest, those couple of double bogeys really didn't have too bad a shot in them. It's not like I was scratching it out of the trees," Smith said. "Just misjudged the wind on both wedges. Just left myself in a bit

of a tough spot. Other than that, it was just really solid."

Im's 67 was the highest score to lead after 18 holes at the Masters since 2014, and that was to be expected. Even with 2 inches of rain that softened the course, the front that cleared out the clouds brought enough wind to jangle the nerves at every turn.

Dustin Johnson, who held off Im and Smith when he won the Masters in November 2020, was 4 under through 10 holes and poised to present a daunting target with the scoring holes ahead of him. He had to settle for pars, dropped a shot late and was in the large group at 69.

Also at 69 were former Masters champion Danny Willett, world No. 1 Scottie Scheffler and Joaquin Niemann, who holed out for eagle on No. 9 and still didn't get the biggest roar of the round. He was playing with Woods, who heard them all day.

"The place was electric," Woods said. "I hadn't played like this since '19 when I won because in '20 we had COVID and we had no one here, and I didn't play last year. So to have the patrons fully out and to have that type of energy out there was awesome to feel."

Bucks knock off Celtics, take over 2nd place in East

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Giannis Antetokounmpo and Jrue Holiday each scored 29 points and the Milwaukee Bucks beat the short-handed Boston Celtics 127-121 on Thursday night to take over second place in the Eastern Conference.

The Bucks (50-30) scored the final nine points to move a half-game ahead of the Celtics (50-31) and a full game ahead of Philadelphia (49-31), who lost at Toronto on Thursday.

Milwaukee withstood a triple-double from Jaylen Brown, who had 22 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds for the Celtics.

Warriors 128, Lakers 112: Klay Thompson scored 33 points with six three-pointers and host Golden State won its third straight after dropping four in a row, running away late from depleted Los Angeles.

Jordan Poole added 19 points and a career-high 11 assists for the Warriors in their final regular-season home game.

Raptors 119, 76ers 114: Pascal Siakam had 37 points, 12 assists and 11 rebounds for his third career triple-double, Gary Trent Jr. scored 30 points and Toronto

beat visiting Philadelphia.

Precious Achiuwa scored 20 points and made a career-high five three-pointers, and Scottie Barnes had 13 points and 10 rebounds to help the Raptors win for the seventh time in eight games.

Joel Embiid had 30 points and 10 rebounds, and James Harden had 13 points and 15 assists for the 76ers, whose hopes of winning the Atlantic Division title took a hit.

Nuggets 122, Grizzlies 109: Nikola Jokic scored 35 points, Aaron Gordon had 22 and Denver beat Memphis to wrap up a playoff spot.

The Nuggets clinched a top-six spot in the Western Conference playoffs and avoided the four-team play-in. They can still win the Northwest Division with a victory Sunday night against the Lakers and two losses by Utah.

Desmond Bane had 14 points for the Grizzlies, who were coming off an overtime loss at Utah on Wednesday night, have already captured the first division title in their history along with securing the second seed in the West.

Timberwolves 127, Spurs 121: Antho-

ny Edwards set a career high with 49 points, Karl-Anthony Towns had 21 points and 13 rebounds and Minnesota beat San Antonio.

Edwards was 16-for-28 from the field, making 6 of 14 from three-point range.

Hornets 128, Magic 101: LaMelo Ball had 26 points, nine assists and eight rebounds and host Charlotte routed short-handed Orlando.

Charlotte pulled within one game of Atlanta and Brooklyn, who are tied for eighth in the Eastern Conference with two games left in the regular season. The Hornets have already locked up a spot in the play-in tournament. At 41-39, they guaranteed their first non-losing season since 2015-16.

Pelicans 127, Trail Blazers 94: CJ McCollum scored 23 points in 29 minutes against his former team and New Orleans beat visiting Portland to move closer to clinching a home play-in game.

The victory, combined with San Antonio's loss at Minnesota, left New Orleans needing either one more victory or one more Spurs loss to lock up a home play-in game Wednesday.

Canes top Sabres, clinch playoff berth

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Sebastian Aho and Jordan Staal each scored two goals and the Carolina Hurricanes rallied from a pair of two-goal deficits to beat the Buffalo Sabres 5-3 on Thursday night and clinch a playoff berth.

Aho's go-ahead goal came with 8:21 remaining, propelling the Hurricanes to the 100-point mark (46-17-8) for the just the second time in franchise history. They have 11 games remaining.

Teuvo Teravainen also scored for the Hurricanes, while Staal's second goal was an empty-netter with 54.3 seconds to play. Antti Raanta stopped 18 for his first victory since March 26.

Tage Thompson, Alex Tuch and Victor Olofsson scored for the Sabres, who lost in regulation for the second time in the last 11 games. Former Hurricanes standout Jeff Skinner set up Buffalo's first two goals. Craig Anderson made 27 saves.

Maple Leafs 4, Stars 3 (OT):

Auston Matthews has the most goals ever in a single season for Toronto — and the most in the NHL by an American-born player.

Matthews set the franchise record with his 55th goal in regulation, then scored No. 56 in overtime to break the American record and give the visiting Maple Leafs the victory over Dallas.

Rangers 4, Penguins 0: Frank Vatrano and Artemi Panarin scored in the second period, Igor Shesterkin stopped 30 shots for his fourth shutout of the season and host New York beat Pittsburgh.

Dryden Hunt added an empty-net goal in the final minute and Mika Zibanejad had two assists for New York, which is 6-1-1 in its last eight games — including three victories against Pittsburgh.

Oilers 3, Kings 2: Connor McDavid set a career high with his 42nd goal and became the seventh player in NHL history

to record multiple point streaks of at least 15 games in a season as visiting Edmonton defeated Los Angeles.

McDavid, who also had an assist, remained the league's top scorer with 109 points. McDavid extended his goal streak to six straight games 3:17 into the first period. He's the first player since Wayne Gretzky in 1990-91 to have at least two point streaks of at least 15 games in a season. Gretzky did it seven times, while Mike Bossy, Marcel Dionne, Guy Lafleur, Denis Savard and Bobby Orr were the others.

Canucks 5, Coyotes 1: Bo Horvat and Alex Chiasson each had two goals and an assist and visiting Vancouver continued a late playoff push with a victory over Arizona.

Elias Pettersson had a goal and two assists for the Canucks, who have won two straight and earned five points in their last three games. The Canucks have 78 points, six behind Dallas for the second wild card in the

Western Conference with 10 games to play.

Predators 3, Senators 2: Roman Josi had three assists and visiting Nashville erased a one-goal deficit in the third period to defeat Ottawa.

Canadiens 7, Devils 4: Kale Clague had a goal and two assists, Cole Caufield and Nick Suzuki each had a goal and an assist as part of a three-goal first period and visiting Montreal beat New Jersey.

Flyers 4, Blue Jackets 1: Kevin Connauton, Owen Tippett and Noah Cates scored in their team's three-goal second period and Philadelphia beat Columbus for its second straight road win.

Kraken 2, Blackhawks 0: Philipp Grubauer made 29 saves for his team's second shutout, and expansion Seattle blanked host Chicago.

Flames 4, Sharks 2: Elias Lindholm scored twice, Matthew Tkachuk added a goal and two assists, and visiting Calgary beat San Jose.

Minnesota State, Denver win Frozen Four semifinals

Associated Press

BOSTON — Reggie Lutz broke a second-period tie and Minnesota State scored three times in the third in the Frozen Four semifinal on Thursday night to beat big-city rival Minnesota 5-1 and advance to the national championship game.

Minnesota State will play for its first NCAA hockey title Saturday night against Denver, which beat Michigan 3-2 in overtime in the the early semifinal.

"We'll see," Mavericks coach Mike Hastings said. "We'll take a kick at the can on Saturday."

Hobey Baker Award finalist Dryden McKay stopped 16 shots for the Mavericks to earn his 38th win of the season. Benton Maass, Ondrej Pavel, David

Silye and Brendan Furry also scored for Minnesota State.

"For big parts of the game, they kicked our butt," Minnesota coach Bob Motzko said. "They scored exactly how we knew we had to defend. And then we were chasing the entire game."

Justen Close made 27 saves for Minnesota before he was pulled for an extra skater with 3:51 left. But the Gophers, who have five NCAA championships in their Twin Cities trophy case, couldn't convert.

Furry delivered an empty-netter to seal the victory over the Mavericks' bigger, more decorated rivals.

Carter Savoie scored with 14:53 gone in overtime, converting on his own rebound to put

Denver in the NCAA championship game. A victory on Saturday would give Denver its ninth hockey title — a total only Michigan has reached.

"When we talk about what we want to do at Denver, it's about winning championships and getting opportunities to hang banners," said coach David Carle.

"To have this opportunity is very special. To do it against Michigan, who is at nine and we're at eight, is even sweeter," Carle said. "And hopefully we can tie them and close the gap and reach our goal to getting to 10 first."

Magnus Chrona made 19 saves for the Pioneers, who went ahead in regulation on goals from Brett Stapley and

Cameron Wright. But Jimmy Lambert and Thomas Bordeleau each tied it, the latter with 11 minutes left in regulation.

It stayed that way until Michigan failed to clear the puck from its own zone, with two Wolverines skating past it near the blue line, each leaving it for the other. Savoie grabbed it, sent it on a deflection to Hobey Baker finalist Bobby Brink in the corner and then skated through the middle, waving his stick in the air to call for the pass.

Brink found him, and he delivered the winner on his second try. The Pioneers swarmed around him against the boards while the outnumbered Denver fans celebrated behind the team's bench.