

Ukraine digs in to fight looming offensive

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian forces dug in while Russia lined up more firepower Sunday and tapped a decorated general as war commander ahead of a potentially decisive showdown in eastern Ukraine that experts said could start within days with a full-scale offensive.

The outcome of that confrontation could determine the course of the war, which has flattened cities, killed untold thousands and isolated Moscow economically and politically. Questions remain about the ability of Russia's depleted and demoralized forces to conquer much ground after their advance on the capital, Kyiv, was repelled by determined Ukrainian defenders.

Britain's Defense Ministry reported Sunday that Russia's armed forces were trying to compensate for mounting casualties by recalling veterans discharged in the past decade.

Meanwhile, a senior U.S. offi-

cial said Russia appointed Gen. Alexander Dvornikov, one of its most seasoned military chiefs, to oversee the invasion that Moscow refers to as a "special military operation." The official was not authorized to be identified and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The new battlefield leadership comes as the Russian military prepares for what is expected to be a large, focused push to expand control in the country's east. Russia-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian forces in the eastern Donbas region since 2014 and declared some territory there as independent republics.

Western military analysts say Russia's assault was increasingly focusing on a sickle-shaped arc of eastern Ukraine — from Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, in the north to Kherson in the south.

Newly released Maxar Technologies satellite imagery showed an 8-mile convoy of military vehicles headed south to the Donbas, recalling images of one

that got stalled on roads to Kyiv for weeks before Russia gave up on trying to take the capital.

On Sunday, Russian forces shelled government-controlled Kharkiv and sent reinforcements toward Izyum to the southeast in a bid to break Ukraine's defenses, the Ukrainian military command said. The Russians also kept up their siege of Mariupol, a key southern port that has been under attack and surrounded for nearly 1½ months.

A Russian Defense Ministry spokesman, Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, said Russia's military used air-launched missiles to hit Ukraine's S-300 air defense missile systems in the southern Mykolaiv region and at an air base in Chuhuiv, a city not far from Kharkiv. Sea-launched Russian cruise missiles destroyed the headquarters of a Ukrainian military unit stationed farther west in the Dnipro region, Konashenkov said. Neither the Ukrainian nor the Russian military claims could be

independently verified.

The airport in Dnipro, Ukraine's fourth-largest city, was also hit by missiles twice on Sunday, according to the regional governor.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appealed for stronger military and political support from the West, including NATO members that have funneled weapons and military equipment to Ukraine but denied some requests for fear of getting drawn into the war. In a late-night video message, Zelenskyy argued that Russia's aggression "was not intended to be limited to Ukraine alone." The "entire European project is a target," he said.

Ukrainian authorities have accused Russian forces of committing war crimes against civilians, including airstrikes on hospitals, a missile attack that killed 52 people at a train station and other violence that was revealed as Russian soldiers withdrew from the outskirts of Kyiv.

China makes semi-secret delivery of missiles to Serbia

Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia — Russian ally Serbia took the delivery of a sophisticated Chinese anti-aircraft system in a veiled operation this weekend, amid Western concerns that an arms buildup in the Balkans at the time of the war in Ukraine could threaten the fragile peace in the region.

Media and military experts said Sunday that six Chinese Air Force Y-20 transport planes landed at Belgrade's civilian airport early Saturday, reportedly carrying HQ-22 surface-to-air missile systems for the Serbian military.

The Chinese cargo planes with military markings were pictured at Belgrade's Nikola Tesla air-

port. Serbia's defense ministry did not immediately respond to AP's request for comment.

The arms delivery over the territory of at least two NATO member states, Turkey and Bulgaria, was seen by experts as a demonstration of China's growing global reach.

"The Y-20s' appearance raised eyebrows because they flew en masse as opposed to a series of single-aircraft flights," wrote The Warzone online magazine. "The Y-20's presence in Europe in any numbers is also still a fairly new development."

Serbian military analyst Aleksandar Radic said that "the Chinese carried out their demonstra-

tion of force."

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic all but confirmed the delivery of the medium-range system that was agreed in 2019, saying on Saturday that he will present "the newest pride" of the Serbian military on Tuesday or Wednesday.

He had earlier complained that NATO countries, which represent most of Serbia's neighbors, are refusing to allow the system's delivery flights over their territories amid tensions over Russia's aggression on Ukraine.

Although Serbia has voted in favor of U.N. resolutions that condemn Russian attacks in Ukraine, it has refused to join international sanctions against its allies in Mos-

cow or outright criticize apparent atrocities committed by Russian troops there.

In 2020, U.S. officials warned Belgrade against the purchase of HQ-22 anti-aircraft systems, whose export version is known as FK-3. They said that if Serbia wants to join the European Union and other Western alliances, it must align its military equipment with Western standards.

The Chinese system has been widely compared to the American Patriot and the Russian S-300 surface-to-air missile systems, although it has a shorter range than more advanced S-300s. Serbia will be the first operator of the Chinese missiles in Europe.

Lead pollution detected at joint base in Hawaii

Honolulu Star-Advertiser

The Navy and Hawaii's state Department of Health are working to validate the detection of lead contamination at a school and a house at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

The first water sample found to have elevated levels of lead came from an indoor staff bathroom sink at the Montessori Center and was collected on March 22, the Navy said in a news release Wednesday. The Navy on Saturday notified the DOH of the contamination at the school sink.

The second contaminated sample came from a sink in a house in Radford Terrace and was collected Friday. The Navy reported it to the DOH on Tuesday.

The Montessori Center sample tested positive for lead at a level of 30.2 parts per billion; the Radford Terrace sample was at 20.6 ppb. The action level under the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, the Lead and Copper Rule is 15 ppb.

The two contaminated samples were among 122 collected so far in the two zones, Zone E1 and F2. Zone E1 includes Makalapa, while Zone F2 includes Catlin Park, Mal-

oelap, Doris Miller and Halsey Terrace and Radford Terrace.

The samples were taken while the Navy was conducting long-term monitoring of the Navy's water system at JBPHH to ensure that the water in the system remains safe. For months the DOH had declared the water in the Navy's system unsafe to use after it was contaminated by fuel from the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility.

"The water in the Navy's water distribution system is safe, and we are conducting long-term monitoring efforts to ensure that," said Rear Adm. Tim Kott, commander, Navy Region Hawaii, in a statement. "In each of these cases, the Navy immediately contacted the building occupants and the Hawaii Department of Health. With DOH's concurrence, the Navy is conducting further analysis and remedial actions including taking those fixtures out of service and conducting additional sampling to determine the sources of the exceedances."

Additional sampling is taking place for all the fixtures in the house to determine the source of the elevated lead level.

Sailors, Marines end drills with Japanese troops

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The U.S. military's seagoing first responders in Japan are at peak readiness after a three-month series of drills with their counterparts in the Japan Self-Defense Forces, according to Navy and Marine Corps officers on Thursday.

The 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit and the Navy's Amphibious Squadron 11 honed warfighting and humanitarian-response skills during their "spring patrol," which included training in Thailand, at the foot of Mount Fuji and off Okinawa's coast, Marine Capt. Nicole Gallegos wrote in an email to Stars and Stripes.

"Our patrols are our rehearsals for those crisis response scenarios," 31st MEU commander Col. Michael Nakonieczny said during a phone-in press conference. "I don't think anybody does it better than us."

Amphibious Squadron 11 — five major vessels homeported at Sasebo Naval Base and led by the amphibious assault ship USS America — is the Navy's amphibious assault force in the western Pacific. It works in conjunction with the 31st MEU, a first-response unit of 2,200 Marines and sailors based on Okinawa that includes a Marine battalion landing team, a logistics battalion and a contingent of MV-22 Ospreys and F-35B Lightning II stealth fighters.

The patrol began in January and ended in late March and focused on sea-denial operations, freedom of navigation and seizing key terrain, Gallegos said. Sea denial is essentially targeting adversaries' plans or attempts to exploit sea space, according to the Center of International Maritime Security.

This year's patrol included Exercise Cobra Gold in Thailand and unit-level training like Noble Arashi on Guam and Noble Fusion off the Okinawa coast, Gallegos said.

The exercises included every service branch except the Coast Guard and at their height saw over 15,000 U.S. sailors and Marines and 1,000 members of the Japan Self-Defense Forces operating off Okinawa.

The exercises were not aimed at any specific nation, but peer adversaries like China would be wise not to disrupt peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific, nor deny access to regional seas, Nakonieczny said.

Japan and Philippines seek pact to further defense cooperation

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan and the Philippines agreed Saturday to start talks toward a possible defense agreement that would allow closer cooperation between their militaries amid regional tensions with China and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi and Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi and their Philippine counterparts, Teodoro Locsin and Delfin Lorenzana, in their first so-called "2+2" security meeting agreed to begin formal discussions about a possible reciprocal access agreement — a defense pact that would allow their troops to visit each other's countries for training and to exchange defense equipment to increase interoperability

and cooperation.

Japan and the Philippines, both U.S. allies, have in recent years stepped up joint exercises and defense cooperation. In 2020, Tokyo and Manila agreed on the export of Japanese air radar systems to the Philippine military.

On Saturday, the four ministers strongly opposed "actions that may increase tensions" in the East and South China seas and affirmed their commitment to a rules-based approach to resolving competing claims under international law. They also said Russia's aggression in Ukraine affects not only Europe but also Asia under the international order, which does not accept any unilateral change to internationally recognized borders by force.

US approves Taiwan air-defense upgrade

By **SETH ROBSON**
Stars and Stripes

The United States has approved a \$95 million military sale to boost Taiwan's air defenses, as China sends increasing numbers of warplanes near the island democracy.

Details of a contract to support "training, planning, fielding, deployment, operation, maintenance and sustainment of the Patriot Air Defense System" on Taiwan were released by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency on Tuesday.

Chinese military planes enter Taiwan's air defense identification zone on an almost daily basis, according to data published by Taiwan's Defense Ministry.

In the past few months, 250 Chinese aircraft have entered the island's zone, double the number from the same period last year, Japanese broadcaster NHK reported Thursday. An air defense identification zone, which typically extends beyond a nation's airspace, is an area defined by that country to control and identify approaching aircraft.

"This proposed sale serves U.S. national,

economic and security interests by supporting the recipient's continuing efforts to modernize its armed forces and to maintain a credible defensive capability," the Defense Security Cooperation Agency said in its statement.

Raytheon Technologies, which makes the Patriot system, referred questions about the sale to the U.S. and Taiwanese governments.

The Communist Party of China considers Taiwan a renegade province that must ultimately be unified politically with the mainland.

The U.S. has continued to help Taiwan maintain sufficient self-defense capabilities, Taiwan's Defense Ministry said in a statement posted on its website following the U.S. announcement.

"This arms sale shows that the United States attaches great importance to [Taiwan's] national defense and security," the statement said. "The two sides will continue to consolidate the security partnership and jointly maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the Indo-Pacific region."

North demolishing hotel that was symbolic of Koreas' engagement

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea is demolishing a South Korean-owned hotel at a North Korean resort that was one of the last symbols of inter-Korean engagement, according to Seoul officials who called for the North to stop the "unilateral" destruction.

South Korea built dozens of facilities at North Korea's Diamond Mountain resort to accommodate tourism by its citizens during a high period of engagement between the rivals in the 1990s. But North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in 2019 called the South Korean facilities there "shabby" and ordered them destroyed after months of frustration over Seoul's unwillingness to defy U.S.-led sanctions that kept the tours from resuming.

The North postponed the demolition

work in 2020 as part of stringent measures to prevent COVID-19.

South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, said Friday that North Korea was proceeding with the demolition of the Haegumgang Hotel. The floating hotel, docked at a coastal area of the resort, was a major property among dozens of facilities South Korea established to accommodate Diamond Mountain tours, which began in 1998.

The demolition comes amid heightened tensions over recent missile launches. North Korea conducted its first intercontinental ballistic missile test since 2017 on March 24, as Kim revives brinkmanship aimed at forcing the United States and other rivals to accept the North as a nuclear power and remove crippling sanctions.

Ousted Pakistan PM vows to fight

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — The ouster of Prime Minister Imran Khan in a parliamentary no-confidence vote early Sunday set Pakistan on an uncertain political path, with Khan calling on supporters to take to the streets in protest and the political opposition preparing to install his replacement.

Khan was brought down after a day of drama and often vitriolic remarks. His supporters accused Washington of orchestrating his ouster and his party walked out of Parliament shortly before the vote. In the end, 174 lawmakers in the 342-seat Parliament voted to depose him, two more than the required simple majority.

Khan's successor is to be elected and sworn in by Parliament on Monday. The leading contender is Shahbaz Sharif, a brother of disgraced former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Shahbaz Sharif heads the largest party in a diverse alliance of opposition factions that span the spectrum from the left to radically religious. Khan's nominee for prime minister will be his foreign minister, Shah Mahmood Qureshi.

Khan's ouster comes amid his cooling relations with the powerful military and an economy struggling with high inflation and a plummeting Pakistani rupee. The opposition has charged Khan's government with economic mismanagement.

Khan has claimed the United States worked behind the scenes to bring him down, purportedly because of Washington's displeasure over his independent foreign policy choices, which often favor China and Russia. He has occasionally defied America and stridently criticized America's post-9/11 war on terror. Khan said America was deeply disturbed by his visit to Russia and his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Feb. 24, the start of the devastating war in Ukraine.

The U.S. State Department has denied his allegations.

Khan would seem to have few options going forward.

General elections are not scheduled before August 2023. Even if the new prime minister favors early elections, this would likely not happen before October. The Pakistan Election Commission, which oversees polls, told the Supreme Court last week that it had still to finish realigning constituencies in line with the results of a 2017 census before polls could be held.

At least 3 dead in Ga. gun range shooting

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Police are searching for at least one armed suspect in connection with the killing of the owner of a Georgia gun range, his wife and grandson, authorities said Saturday.

The Grantville Police Department said via Facebook that the robbery occurred Friday evening. When officers arrived at the scene around 8 p.m., they discovered the bodies of the owner of Lock Stock & Barrel Shooting Range, along with his wife and grandson.

According to WSB-TV, Grantville Police identified the victims as Thomas Hawk, 75; his wife, Evelyn, 75; and their grandson, Luke, 17.

Police Chief Steve Whitlock said the Hawk family was well-known and well-respected in their small, tight-knit commun-

ity. The Hawks had operated Lock Stock & Barrel for nearly 30 years. Their grandson was on spring break, helping his grandparents at the shop.

“This is just a shock to everybody in the community,” Whitlock told The Associated Press. “We’re trying to do the best that we can to figure this out.”

Whitlock said investigators believe the robbery and shooting happened around 5:30 p.m. Friday, which is when the range normally closes. He said Hawk’s son, Richard, came by the business and was the person who found the victims.

There were no suspects as of early Saturday and no arrests have been made, he said. Investigators said as many as 40 guns and the range’s surveillance camera were also stolen.

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation is investigating, but

when contacted Saturday referred all inquiries to Grantville Police. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives was also called in due to the amount of weapons taken. Whitlock said he’s grateful for the help from other law enforcement agencies in the investigation.

“We’re just a small town, 12 officers. I’ve been here eight years and have never had to investigate anything like this. It’s been kind of hard on us. The crime rate is really, really low,” he said.

A reward of \$15,000 has been posted for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the killer or killers in the case, according to the ATF Atlanta office’s Twitter feed.

“ATF and our law enforcement partners will work tirelessly to bring the killer(s) to

justice,” ATF Atlanta Field Division Special Agent in Charge Benjamin P. Gibbons said in a statement. “The brutality of these senseless murders along with the fact that these killer(s) have acquired additional firearms makes solving this case our top priority.”

Police are asking any witnesses to come forward. Whitlock said they don’t have any video evidence to work with right now.

Coweta County Sheriff Lenn Wood said in a statement on Facebook that the entire community was forever broken by the “senseless and tragic” killings of the Hawk family members.

“I am also fervently praying that God will use our law enforcement community and the Coweta Community,” he said, “to bring justice swiftly.”

Woman faces murder charge after self-induced abortion

Associated Press

A 26-year-old woman has been charged with murder in Texas after authorities said she caused “the death of an individual by self-induced abortion,” in a state that has the most restrictive abortion laws in the United States.

It’s unclear whether Lizelle Herrera is accused of having an abortion or whether she helped someone else get an abortion.

Herrera was arrested Thursday and remained jailed Saturday on a \$500,000 bond in the Starr County jail in Rio Grande City, on the U.S.-Mexico border, sheriff’s Maj. Carlos Delgado said in a statement.

“Herrera was arrested and served with an indictment on the charge of murder after Herrera did then and there intentionally and knowingly cause the death of an individual by self-induced abortion,” Delgado said.

Delgado did not say under what law Herrera has been charged. He said no other information will be released until at least Monday because the case remains under investigation.

Texas law exempts her from a criminal homicide charge for aborting her own pregnancy, University of Texas law professor Stephen Vladeck told The Associated Press.

“(Homicide) doesn’t apply to the murder of an unborn child if the conduct charged is ‘conduct committed by the mother of the unborn child,’” Vladeck said.

A 2021 state law that bans abortions in Texas for women who are as early as six weeks pregnant has sharply curtailed the number of abortions in the state. The law leaves enforcement to private citizens, who can sue doctors or anyone who helps a woman get an abortion.

The woman receiving the abortion is exempted from the law.

Some states, however, still have laws that criminalize self-induced abortions “and there have been a handful of prosecutions here and there over the years,” Vladeck said.

“It is murder in Texas to take steps that terminate a fetus, but when a medical provider does it, it can’t be prosecuted” due to U.S. Supreme Court rulings upholding the constitutionality of abortion, Vladeck said.

Lynn Paltrow, the executive director of National Advocates for Pregnant Women, also noted the state law exemption.

“What’s a little mysterious in this case is, what crime has this woman been charged with?” Paltrow said. “There is no statute in

Texas that, even on its face, authorizes the arrest of a woman for a self-managed abortion.”

Another Texas law prohibits doctors and clinics from prescribing abortion-inducing medications after the seventh week of pregnancy and prohibits delivery of the pills by mail.

Medication abortions are not considered self-induced under federal Food and Drug Administration regulations, Vladeck said.

“You can only receive the medication under medical supervision,” according to Vladeck. “I realize this sounds weird because you are taking the pill yourself, but it is under a provider’s at least theoretical care.”

In Rio Grande City on Saturday, the abortion rights group Frontera Fund called for Herrera’s release.

“We don’t yet know all the details surrounding this tragic event,” said Rockie Gonzales, founder and board chair of the organization. “What we do know is that criminalizing pregnant people’s choices or pregnancy outcomes, which the state of Texas has done, takes away people’s autonomy over their own bodies and leaves them with no safe options when they choose not to become a parent.”

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man with screwdrivers attacks 2 police officers

IN SOUTH BEND — Two South Bend police officers were injured when a man armed with two screwdrivers attacked them, authorities said.

One officer was diagnosed with a broken cheekbone at a hospital after his face was cut, and the other suffered a minor hand injury, police said.

The suspect was arrested and charged with four counts of resisting arrest and battery against a police officer, police said.

The incident happened at a gas station near downtown South Bend after a store employee reported a man was trespassing on the property, the South Bend Tribune reported.

Beachgoers warned of dueling stallions

NC BEAUFORT — Wild stallions are tangling with each other on the North Carolina coast, and a nonprofit group is warning beachgoers to steer clear of the fights.

Foundation for Shackelford Horses said on its Facebook page that the stallions are fighting over mares, for territory and herd dominance. They're described in the post as "Stallion Wars."

"These stallions are not like domesticated pasture mates, engaging in friendly banter. These battles are deadly serious," the post said. "Winning the battle can mean the difference between a stallion holding onto mares and his prominence in the herd, or being relegated to life as a part of a bachelor band."

"If you aren't paying attention, you, your children or your dog could be caught in the fray and potentially injured," the foundation said.

Inmate accused of bomb, assassination threats

ND MINOT — A Ward County Jail inmate is charged with felony terrorizing after he was accused of calling in a bomb and assassination threat to prosecutors and judges.

According to authorities, the 38-year-old man called from the jail and threatened the Ward County State's Attorney Office and judges.

The courthouse and the administration building were evacuated and temporarily closed.

The Minot Area Bomb Team and Minot Air Force Base Explosives Ordinance Disposal responded and searched the buildings, but no explosives were found.

Vehicle collides with food truck; 11 people injured

TX AUSTIN — Eleven people were injured in a "major collision" in Austin, Texas, involving pedestrians and two vehicles, one of which hit a food truck, authorities said.

Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services tweeted that two of the victims sustained potentially life-threatening injuries. Seven others sustained non-life-threatening injuries requiring medical evaluation. The other two didn't require hospitalization.

The collision occurred in a popular area near downtown Austin where there are frequently several food carts sta-

tioned.

Jennifer Dunn, an employee at a nearby restaurant, told The Associated Press that a group of 25 people had just left to get ice cream at a food truck a few feet away when patrons inside the restaurant heard a loud boom.

Dunn said several members of the group then ran back inside injured and asking for help. Dunn said she and others ran to the scene where several people, including the drivers, appeared severely hurt.

Execution scheduled with firing squad as option

SC COLUMBIA — South Carolina has scheduled its first execution after corrections officials finished updating the death chamber to prepare for executions by firing squad.

The clerk of the State Supreme Court has set an April 29 execution date for Richard Bernard Moore, a 57-year-old man who has spent more than two decades on death row after he was convicted of killing convenience store clerk James Mahoney in Spartanburg.

Moore could face a choice between the electric chair and the firing squad, two options available to death row prisoners after legislators altered the state's capital punishment law last year in an effort to work around a decade-long pause in executions, attributed to the corrections agency's inability to procure lethal injection drugs.

The new law made the electric chair the state's primary means of execution while giving prisoners the option of choosing death by firing squad or lethal injection, if those methods are available.

Fox on Capitol grounds euthanized; had rabies

DC WASHINGTON — A mother red fox captured recently on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol was euthanized and has tested positive for rabies, said a spokeswoman for the Humane Rescue Alliance.

The Washington, D.C., public health lab "has confirmed the fox tested positive for the rabies virus," said Sam Miller, the spokesperson.

The Washington, D.C. Department of Health said in an email that there were nine "confirmed" bites by the fox and that it had been "humanely euthanized so that rabies testing" could be done.

Meanwhile, her kits — what fox babies are called — were found and "captured," according to city officials. Officials would not disclose where the kits were being kept or whether they, too, would be euthanized.

Power outage strands 11 on Universal Studios ride

CA LOS ANGELES — A power outage at Universal Studios Hollywood left nearly a dozen people stranded on a ride until crews rescued them, Los Angeles authorities said.

Emergency crews were called to the park's Transformers ride around 3:45 p.m. after 11 people got stuck on the indoor ride, according to the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

The riders were freed by 6 p.m., supervising dispatcher Bernard Peters told the Los Angeles Times. No injuries were reported.

— From wire reports

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Suzuki powers Cubs in game with 5 hit batters

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Seiya Suzuki drove in three runs for his first big league RBIs and the Chicago Cubs routed the Milwaukee Brewers 9-0 for a testy win during which five batters were hit by pitches and the benches cleared.

The teams exchanged words but no punches in the eighth after Andrew McCutchen was hit by a pitch from Cubs reliever Keegan Thompson, who was ejected for the first time in his career. As McCutchen slowly headed to first base while looking at Thompson, players from both bullpens ran onto the field.

Justin Steele (1-0) struck out five in five scoreless innings for the rebuilding Cubs. The left-hander was 4-4 with a 4.26 ERA in his first major league season in 2021.

Brandon Woodruff (0-1) struggled for the reigning NL Central champions. The right-hander allowed seven runs, six hits and three walks, striking out two in 3½ innings for his shortest outing since Aug. 12, also against the Cubs.

Yankees 4, Red Sox 2: Giancarlo Stanton became the first player to homer against Boston in six straight games, hitting a tie-breaking, two-run drive in the sixth inning that gave host New York a win.

Anthony Rizzo homered for the second straight day to start the Yankees' comeback from an early deficit, a tying two-run drive in the fourth. Luis Severino made his first start for New York since the 2019 AL Championship Series as the Yankees improved to 2-0 for the first time since 2018.

Stanton broke a 2-2 tie when he drove an 0-1 slider from Nick Pivetta (0-1). Stanton and Rizzo became the first players in New York history to homer together in both of a season's first two games.

Alex Verdugo hit a two-run homer off Severino, who was followed by six relievers. Lucas Luetge (1-0) pitched the sixth, and Aroldis Chapman worked around a throwing error by new shortstop Isiah Kiner-Falefa for his first save.

Mets 5, Nationals 0: Pete Alonso twirled his bat when his first career grand slam broke a scoreless tie in the fifth inning, then put his index fingers to his mouth as if hushing the crowd after celebrating with teammates near the plate, propelling New York to a win at Washington.

Chris Bassitt (1-0) cruised through six innings in his Mets debut, and New York won its third straight to open Buck Showalter's tenure as manager.

The Mets have outscored Washington 17-4 and go for a series sweep Sunday.

About 48 hours removed from getting his lower lip bloodied by a pitch — part of a string of Mets who have been plunked during the season's first three games, leading to a benches-clearing interruption Friday — Alonso sent a 91 mph fastball from Joan Adon (0-1) over the fence in left on a 2-1 count.

Blue Jays 4, Rangers 3: Pinch-hitter Santiago Espinal doubled home the go-ahead run in the sixth inning, Bo Bichette hit a solo home run and host Toronto beat Texas.

George Springer and Vladimir Guerrero Jr. each had two hits, and Bichette scored twice as the Blue Jays improved to 2-0 for the first time since 2016.

Facing left-hander Brett Martin (0-1), Espinal hit for Cavan Biggio with a runner at first and two out. Speedy Raimel Tapia scored without a play at the plate on Espinal's double to left-center.

Blue Jays right-hander Trevor Richards (1-0) worked one inning for the win. Yimi García pitched the seventh, Tim Lincecum worked the eighth and Jordan Romano finished for his second save.

Angels 2, Astros 0: Noah Syndergaard pitched two-hit ball into the sixth inning in a strong Los Angeles debut, narrowly outdueling fellow Tommy John surgery returnee Justin Verlander in a win over visiting Houston.

Mike Trout and Jared Walsh homered in the Angels' first victory of the season. The Halos held the defending AL champion Astros to two hits, with Raisel Iglesias' save capping 3½ hitless innings from the bullpen.

Syndergaard (1-0) and Verlander (0-1) both are back this season from lengthy absences after elbow surgery, and both veterans performed impressively at Angel Stadium.

Syndergaard yielded two weak singles and two walks over 5½ innings. While the imposing right-hander known as Thor had just one strikeout, he induced 11 groundouts from the Astros' powerful lineup.

Marlins 2, Giants 1: Jesús Sánchez hit a tiebreaking single in the seventh inning, and Miami held on to win at San Francisco despite a strong outing from starter Carlos Rodón in his Giants debut.

The All-Star left-hander struck out 12 and allowed one run in five innings. His strikeouts are the most by a Giants pitcher through five innings since at least 1974.

Cardinals 6, Pirates 2: Nolan Arenado hit three doubles and a single, Paul DeJong homered and host St. Louis, minus its rookie manager, beat Pittsburgh.

Oliver Marmol, a winner in his debut

Thursday as a major league manager, was at Busch Stadium before the game and diagnosed with the flu. He tested negative for COVID-19 and left the ballpark, and bench coach Skip Schumaker filled in.

Mariners 4, Twins 3: Ty France had three hits and drove in two runs, including a go-ahead single in the ninth inning that lifted Seattle to a win at Minnesota.

Byron Buxton had given the Twins a 3-2 lead with a two-run homer in eighth against Andrés Muñoz (1-0), who got his first big league decision since 2019 with San Diego.

Rockies 3, Dodgers 2: Connor Joe drove in two runs, including a go-ahead solo homer in the eighth inning, and closer Daniel Bard struck out the side in the ninth to help host Colorado beat Los Angeles.

Joe lined a cutter from reliever Blake Treinen (0-1) into the seats in left-center. The Rockies first baseman also had an RBI single in the sixth.

Rays 5, Orioles 3: Francisco Mejía homered and drove in three runs, helping host Tampa Bay win its 14th straight against Baltimore.

Royals 1, Guardians 0 (10): Prized rookie Bobby Witt Jr. made an eye-popping play at third base to nail a runner at the plate in the top of the 10th inning, then Adalberto Mondesi's RBI single in the bottom half lifted host Kansas City over Cleveland.

With a runner at third and one out in the Cleveland 10th, Oscar Mercado hit a hard grounder down the line that looked like it might break the scoreless tie. But the 21-year-old Witt, the top-rated prospect in the majors, skidded onto his knees to make a backhanded stop. All in one motion, he made an off-balance throw home, where All-Star catcher Salvador Perez backhanded the ball on the second hop and made a swipe tag to get Owen Miller.

Braves 2, Reds 1: Kyle Wright picked up a World Series ring along with many of his Atlanta teammates, then pitched two-hit ball over six scoreless innings against visiting Cincinnati.

Phillies 4, Athletics 2: Kyle Gibson struck out 10 and tossed two-hit ball over seven shutout innings to lead host Philadelphia over Oakland.

White Sox 5, Tigers 2: Dylan Cease remained unbeaten in 10 career starts against host Detroit and Yasmani Grandal hit a two-run homer for Chicago.

Padres 5, Diamondbacks 2: Eric Hosmer hit a go-ahead RBI single in the eighth, Manny Machado added an RBI double and San Diego won at Arizona.

In the bag? Scheffler, caddie connect

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Scottie Scheffler has never been here before. Never gone to any course with the lead on Sunday in a major championship. Been close a few times, but never in the spotlight as the favorite heading into the final round.

It's daunting, anywhere. At Augusta National, even more so.

Luckily for him, someone will be with Scheffler every step of the way, someone who has taken a few rides around the pressure cooker that is a final round with a Masters win at stake. He hired Ted Scott, who caddied in both of Bubba Watson's Masters wins, on a test basis five months ago. They'll try for their fourth win in the span of six

starts together on Sunday.

"Teddy's been a great addition to the team," Scheffler said. "I have a lot of faith in him. He works really hard. I respect him as a person. It's really nice just having someone I can trust so much out there with me."

Watson had to rally to win his first Masters in 2012, after starting the final round in fourth. In 2014, he held the lead coming into the final round and held it together on the way to another green jacket. He and Scott were peanut butter-and-jelly level of inseparable for 15 years, before deciding to part ways last season. Scheffler heard Scott was available and gave him a call. Scheffler was hovering around the mid-20s in the world rankings then. He's No. 1 in the world now

and in position to win the Masters.

"It's going to give him confidence," Watson said of Scheffler having Scott with him on Sunday. "Knowing that he's got a guy on the bag that's won around here, that has notes ... he's going to have mental notes that he knows (from what) he's been through with me."

Cameron Smith is Scheffler's closest pursuer, starting Sunday three shots back after a 4-under round of 68 in Round 3. At Augusta, three shots is nothing. And Smith has experience in being a chaser, after he and Sungjae Im — who is in third, five shots back — were the ones closest to Dustin Johnson at the end of the pandemic-delayed Masters in November 2020.

Byron earns Cup-leading 2nd win

Associated Press

MARTINSVILLE, Va. — William Byron knew he was in for a big challenge with a two-lap overtime sprint about to start and the very aggressive Joey Logano right behind him.

He also felt like he had a pretty remarkable co-pilot in his corner.

"This one is for my mom," Byron said. "This same weekend last year she had kind of a mini-stroke and was diagnosed with brain cancer. It means a lot to have her here and it's been a crazy year. But she's doing great. I kind of felt like she was riding in there with me."

Byron took the lead on pit road after Stage 2 stops and held it pretty much the rest of the way at Martinsville Speedway — he led 212 laps — to become the first repeat winner this season in NASCAR's Cup Series on Saturday night.

Byron needed to hold off a challenge — and a nudge — from Logano on a two-lap overtime sprint to finish it, but won for the fourth time in his career and gave Hendrick Motorsports four victories in eight races this season.

When the final caution, and only the second for an on-track issue of the night, came with five laps to go, Byron and the seven drivers behind him opted to stay out for the final dash.

"I thought everyone behind us would pit, and luckily we stayed out," he said. "We were aggressive; we felt like we could refire on the tires and be OK, and you've got one of the most aggressive guys behind you in Logano."

Byron had both a fast car that allowed him to pull away on restarts and a strong one on long runs, critical since there wasn't a caution for anything but the end of a stage until the 311th of 400 laps on the 0.526-mile oval.

That changed when Todd Gilliland had a flat tire and hit the wall with five laps to go. Byron and the top eight cars on the track opted not to pit, with Byron picking the inside lane and Austin Dillon, running second, on the outside.

That gave Logano a prime opportunity to bump the leader out of the way, especially when Dillon spun his tires on the restart. Logano bumped Byron in Turn 2 on the last lap, but Byron held on for his second win of the weekend. He won in the Truck Series on Thursday night, earning him a pair of the raceway's unique grandfather clock trophies for three days of solid racing.

"Willy kind of messed up off of 4 and let me get to him, and he did a really good job of brake checking into third, right, which is a good job," Logano said. "He did what he was supposed to do, and kind of got me all stuffed up behind him and I couldn't accelerate off the corner and be as close as I needed to be."

Logano was second, followed by Dillon, Ryan Blaney and Ross Chastain.

Dillon appeared to have a car likely to challenge on a long green-flag run, and beat Logano for second on a restart with 80 laps to go, but after Byron pulled away, lapped traffic and consistency helped him build a nearly three-second lead.

Volkanovski mauls Jung to retain UFC belt

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Alexander Volkanovski mauled Chan Sung Jung at UFC 273 early Sunday, earning a technical knockout second into the fourth round to retain the featherweight belt.

The 33-year-old Volkanovski (24-1) extended his professional winning streak to 21, including an 11-0 mark in UFC competition.

Jung, better known as "the Korean Zombie," was battered, bloodied and struggling to breathe after the first three rounds. He insisted he wanted to keep going, but the referee stopped the bout 45 seconds into the fourth of five championship rounds.

"Alexander the Great" delivered most of the blows in a fight that looked like it might end much earlier than it actually did. Volkanovski's last four fights went the distance. But he was considerably quicker than Jung, essentially putting on a clinic in mixed martial arts.

"I'm on another level right now and I can't be stopped," Volkanovski said, adding he was hoping the ref would halt the fight sooner and that he felt bad for Jung in the final minutes.

The main event was the most lopsided on UFC 273's main card.

Aljamain Sterling became the undisputed bantamweight champion by defending his belt against Petr Yan. They were involved in a controversial disqualification a little more than a year ago.

Rangers earn playoff spot

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Chris Kreider scored twice, Artemi Panarin added a goal and two assists and the New York Rangers routed the Ottawa Senators 5-1 on Saturday night to clinch their first postseason berth since 2017.

Ryan Strome and Andrew Copp also had goals and Igor Shesterkin needed just 21 saves to thwart the Senators as the surging Rangers improved to 7-1-1 in their last nine and moved into a tie with Carolina atop the Metropolitan Division with 100 points.

New York has nine games left, while the Hurricanes have 10. The teams meet Tuesday night in New York after Carolina hosts Anaheim on Sunday.

"It feels great. ... We got that accomplished," said first-year Rangers coach Gerard Gallant. "From start to finish, it was an excellent game. We came to the rink wanting to win and get into the playoffs."

Shesterkin improved to 34-10-4, becoming the fourth goalie in franchise history with 34 victories in a season, joining Henrik Lundqvist, Ed Giacomin and Mike Richter.

Capitals 6, Penguins 3: Tom Wilson broke a tie with 8:25 left and visiting Washington beat Pittsburgh.

Alex Ovechkin tied it for the Capitals on a power play at 4:49 of the third period with his 44th goal of the season, and Wilson matched his career high with his 22nd — sending a wrist shot over Tristan Jarry's glove from the left circle during a two-on-one.

Washington has won two second straight to move four points behind Pittsburgh for third place in the Metropolitan Division. The Capitals have won five road games in a row.

Panthers 4, Predators 1: Anton Lundell scored the winning goal in the second period, and visiting Florida beat Nashville for its seventh straight victory.

With the victory, the Panthers padded their margin atop the Eastern Conference and in the Atlantic Division. They also added another victory to the club record with No. 51 of the season.

Ryan Johansen scored a goal as the Predators, who still have a two-point lead over Dallas, a 3-1 loser to the Devils earlier Saturday, for the first wild card berth in the Western Conference.

Blues 6, Islanders 1: Justin Faulk scored twice in a 96-second span in the second period and Jordan Binnington made 29 saves to lift host St. Louis to its fifth straight victory.

Binnington, who lost the No. 1 spot to Ville

Husso, recorded his first win since Feb. 27 and improved to 14-13-4.

Devils 3, Stars 1: Nico Hischier and Pavel Zacha scored 10 seconds apart in the third period in visiting New Jersey's victory over Dallas.

Ty Smith also scored in the third period, and Nico Daws made 27 saves to help the Devils end a five-game losing streak.

Stars defenseman Ryan Suter scored his 100th NHL goal.

Avalanche 2, Oilers 1 (SO): Nathan MacKinnon scored the shootout winner after having Colorado's lone goal in regulation, leading the visiting Avalanche to their sixth straight victory.

Darcy Kuemper made 49 saves for Colorado, which is 11-1-1 in its past 13 games.

Warren Foegele scored for the Oilers, whose six-game winning streak ended.

Flames 4, Kraken 1: Noah Hanifin had four assists and visiting Calgary beat Seattle for its fourth straight victory.

Blake Coleman, Trevor Lewis and Michael Stone scored off primary assists from Hanifin; he also had a secondary assist on a goal from Tyler Toffoli.

Ducks 5, Flyers 3: Trevor Zegras scored two goals to lead visiting Anaheim past Philadelphia.

Sonny Milano, Zach Aston-Reese and Derek Grant also scored for the Ducks, who opened a four-game trip by winning for just the second time in the last 15 contests.

Canucks 4, Sharks 2: Alex Chiasson had a goal and an assist, Thatcher Demko made 34 saves for his career-high 30th win and host Vancouver kept its slim playoff hopes alive with a victory over San Jose.

Jason Dickinson, Conor Garland and Luke Schenn also scored for the Canucks, who moved within four points of Dallas and Vegas for the second wild card spot in the Western Conference.

Golden Knights 6, Coyotes 1: Brayden McNabb scored a goal and assisted on two others, and host Vegas beat Arizona.

The Knights, who have won six of their past seven, moved into an eighth-place tie with Dallas in the Western Conference, each with 84 points, and within two points of third-place Los Angeles in the Pacific Division.

Zach Whitecloud, Max Pacioretty, Evgenii Dadonov, Jake Leschyshyn and Jack Eichel also scored for Vegas.

Blue Jackets 5, Red Wings 4 (OT): Jack Roslovic had three goals, including the winner at 3:19 of overtime, and added an assist to lead visiting Columbus past Detroit.

Morant returns to help Grizzlies trounce Pelicans

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Ja Morant had 21 points and nine assists in his return from soreness in his right knee, Dillon Brooks scored 23 points and the Memphis Grizzlies routed the New Orleans Pelicans 141-114 on Saturday night to tie the 2012-13 franchise record for victories in a season at 56.

After missing nine games, Morant played almost 27 minutes as the second-seeded Grizzlies got their starting lineup back together as they prepare for the postseason. They will close the regular season at home against Boston on Sunday night.

Morant had not played since he was injured in a loss at Atlanta on March 18.

"Being out there with my team is something I've been waiting on since March 19," Morant said. "I was finally able to do that. Excited to be out there. Had a lot of fun. Just preparing for this stretch we're about to go on in the playoffs."

Brandon Clarke added 20 points for Memphis, making all 10 of his field goal attempts. Ziaire Williams had 19 points, and Desmond Bane had 18. The Grizzlies shot better than 60% through three quarters. They snapped a two-game losing streak.

76ers 133, Pacers 120: Joel Embiid made his closing argument for MVP votes and all but wrapped up the NBA scoring title, finishing with 41 points and 20 rebounds in Philadelphia's victory over visiting Indiana.

Embiid shot 14-for-17 from the floor, went 11 of 15 from the foul line and made of both his three-point attempts in a game that the 76ers needed to win to remain alive for the third seed in the Eastern Conference playoffs.

Warriors 100, Spurs 94: Jonathan Kuminga and Jordan Poole each had 18 points as visiting Golden State won its fourth straight to strengthen its hopes for a top-three seed.

The Warriors are a game ahead of Dallas in the Western Conference and can secure the third seed with a victory Sunday at New Orleans in the season finale. If Golden State loses, and the Mavericks beat the Spurs on Sunday, Dallas will finish third after going 3-1 in its season series with the Warriors.

Clippers 117, Kings 98: Paul George scored 23 points, Ivica Zubac had 15 points and 12 rebounds and host Los Angeles beat Sacramento for its fourth consecutive victory.

Norman Powell added 20 points off the bench for the Clippers.