

Russia says attacks on Kyiv to increase

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia's Defense Ministry promised to ramp up missile attacks on the Ukrainian capital in response to Ukraine's alleged aggression on Russian territory, an ominous warning that followed Moscow's stinging loss of its flagship in the Black Sea.

The threat of intensified attacks on Kyiv came after Russian authorities accused Ukraine of wounding seven people and damaging about 100 residential buildings with airstrikes in Bryansk, a region bordering Ukraine. Authorities in another border region of Russia also reported Ukrainian shelling Thursday.

"The number and the scale of missile attacks on objects in Kyiv will be ramped up in response to the Kyiv nationalist regime committing any terrorist attacks or diversions on the Russian territory," Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian police said more than 900 civilian bodies have been discovered in the region surrounding the Ukrainian capital following the withdrawal of Russian forces — most of them fatally shot,

an indication that many people were "simply executed." The number of dead is double that announced by Ukrainian authorities almost two weeks ago.

Andriy Nebytov, the head of Kyiv's regional police force, said the bodies were abandoned in the streets or given temporary burials. He cited police data indicating that 95% died from gunshot wounds.

"Consequently, we understand that under the (Russian) occupation, people were simply executed in the streets," Nebytov said.

More bodies are being found every day, under rubble and in mass graves, he added. The largest number of victims were found in Bucha, where there were more than 350, he said.

According to Nebytov, utility workers in Bucha gathered and buried bodies in the Kyiv suburb while it remained under Russian control. Russian troops, he added, were "tracking down" people who expressed strong pro-Ukrainian views.

Russia issued the warning about attacks on Kyiv while it continued to prepare for a renewed offensive in eastern Ukraine. Meanwhile, locals in the pummeled south-eastern city of Mariupol reported seeing

Russian troops digging up bodies.

In Kyiv, a renewed bombardment could mean a return to the steady wail of air raid sirens heard during the early days of the invasion and to fearful nights sheltering in subway stations. Tentative signs of pre-war life have resurfaced in the capital after Russian troops failed to capture the city and retreated to concentrate on eastern Ukraine, leaving behind evidence of possible war crimes.

Ukrainian officials have not confirmed striking targets in Russia, and the reports could not be independently verified.

However, Ukrainian officials said their forces did strike a key Russian warship with missiles. And after more than a day of the Pentagon saying it could not confirm the claim, a senior U.S. defense official said it now believes the Moskva was hit Wednesday by at least one, and probably two, missiles, creating the large fire aboard. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an intelligence assessment.

The guided-missile cruiser Moskva, named for the Russian capital, then sank while being towed to port Thursday after suffering heavy damage.

Russia warns US to stop shipping arms to Ukraine

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Russia this week sent a formal diplomatic note to the United States warning that U.S. and NATO shipments of the "most sensitive" weapons systems to Ukraine were "adding fuel" to the conflict there and could bring "unpredictable consequences."

The diplomatic démarche, a copy of which was reviewed by The Washington Post, came as President Joe Biden approved a dramatic expansion in the scope of weapons being provided to Ukraine, an \$800 million package including 155 mm Howitzers — a serious upgrade in long-range artillery to match Russian systems — coastal defense drones and armored vehicles, as well as additional portable anti-air and anti-tank weapons and millions of rounds of ammunition.

The United States has also facilitated the

shipment to Ukraine of long-range air defense systems, including Slovakia's shipment of Russian-manufactured Soviet-era S-300 launchers on which Ukrainian forces have already been trained.

Shipment of the weapons, the first wave of which U.S. officials said would arrive in Ukraine within days, follows an urgent appeal to Biden from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as Russian forces were said to be mobilizing for a major assault on eastern Ukraine's Donbas region and along the coastal strip connecting it with Russian-occupied Crimea in the south. Russian troops have largely withdrawn from much of the northern part of the country, including around the capital, Kyiv, following humiliating defeats by the Ukrainian military and local resistance forces.

"What the Russians are telling us privately is precisely what we've been telling the

world publicly — that the massive amount of assistance that we've been providing our Ukrainian partners is proving extraordinarily effective," said a senior administration official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity about the sensitive diplomatic document.

The State Department declined to comment on the contents of the note or any U.S. response.

Russia experts suggested Moscow, which has labeled weapons convoys coming into the country as legitimate military targets but has not thus far attacked them, may be preparing to do so.

The diplomatic note was dated Tuesday, as word first leaked of the new arms package that brought the total amount of U.S. military aid provided to Ukraine since the Feb. 24 invasion to \$3.2 billion, according to Pentagon spokesman John Kirby.

US wants robot ships to replace sailors

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — On a sunny day last September, a ship with no humans aboard fired its missiles into the sky, inching the military toward a sought-after goal: building an armada of drone ships that use artificial intelligence instead of sailors to fight at sea.

The missile test was a crucial step for the Navy's autonomous vessel program, an extensive initiative to develop 21 robot ships over the next few years. The program is a direct response to countries such as China, which have been building sophisticated missile technology to target ships that approach their shores. Robot vessels could be a cheaper and more effective way to protect the seas while putting fewer sailors' lives at risk, former naval officers said.

But in recent weeks, a growing chorus of watchdogs, experts, analysts and former naval officers have cautioned that any grand plans to use artificial intelligence to modernize naval fleets are unrealistic, because of budgetary constraints and the difficulty of building artificial intelligence that can adequately replace sailors.

Moreover, ethicists and experts raise red flags that deploying drone ships that can patrol the seas and shoot enemies carries geopolitical repercussions.

"It raises the stakes a lot," said Peter Asaro, an artificial intelligence expert at the New School in New York. "Small countries like North Korea or the Philippines could just crank out a bunch of little [naval] robots and suddenly have a very strong defense mechanism against a big military or Navy like the U.S.'s."

After conducting an 18-month-long study on the program, Shelby S. Oakley, a director at the Government Accountability Office, said there are a number of issues.

According to her report, the ships will cost "billions" to build, deploy and outfit with software than estimated — and, at present, the military has only vague plans for how they'll be used. But most notably, the Navy doesn't have a good grasp of the technological challenges it is going to face in trying to make these vessels autonomous, the report found.

For example, Oakley said, if the Navy envisions autonomous vessels being out at sea for 30 to 60 days on end, artificial intelligence software will have to do many things sailors normally would do to maintain the ship: things like keeping the ship's hull intact and performing oil changes.

"It's going to require a huge investment in this digital infrastructure, in the artificial intelligence ... to achieve that," she said.

"And that's where we've seen underfunding on the part of the Navy."

The end goal is ambitious. In December 2020, the Navy's 30-year shipbuilding plan called for 143 autonomous ships to be in service by 2045, with the first 21 to be ready by 2025. The Navy estimates those initial vessels' cost at \$4.3 billion. For the rest, the Congressional Budget Office estimated an average of \$1.2 billion per year, reports show.

According to Defense Department regulations, humans are required to be involved in deploying weapons from vessels. But experts said it is possible that rule might change if China develops the capability to jam signals that autonomous vessels would use to talk with command centers and other ships in the area.

Tom Shugart, an adjunct senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, said the Navy is building these ships with one enemy primarily in mind: China.

Having autonomous ships can help shift battle calculus into American favor, Shugart said. With unmanned vessels, fewer lives are at risk of being lost to Chinese missiles. Also, naval attack formations could be larger, more spread-out and monitored by command centers far away from an enemy's missile range.

Officials: Explosive charges placed on base in Syria

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

An explosion last week that wounded four U.S. service members in Syria came from explosive charges placed inside the base and not from a rocket or mortar attack, military officials said.

New information suggests that someone deliberately placed the explosive material in an ammunition storage room and a shower area, a statement by Combined Joint Task Force—Inherent Resolve officials said Thursday.

The U.S. previously blamed indirect fire for an early morning attack on April 7 that tar-

geted a small base known as Green Village, which sits east of the Euphrates River and is adjacent to major oil fields.

The attack remains under investigation and the culprits have not been identified, the statement said.

The injuries to the four U.S. service members were described as minor and included "possible traumatic brain injuries," U.S. officials said at the time.

The service members were cleared to return to Green Village on Wednesday, a statement Friday by the coalition said. They will ramp up their activities over the next week as

part of a "progressive return to duty," the statement said.

Several hundred U.S. and coalition forces are stationed at Green Village as they train local forces to fight remnants of the Islamic State.

They are part of a contingent of about 1,000 American troops still in Syria and 2,500 counterparts stationed in neighboring Iraq.

In recent years, Green Village and other bases in the two countries have experienced rocket and mortar attacks, which have been attributed to Iran-backed militia groups that oppose the presence of American forces and their

partners.

Also in Syria, Israel fired several missiles shortly before midnight Thursday toward Syrian military positions about 300 miles west of Green Village, near Damascus, The Associated Press reported Friday.

The attack caused material damage, the report said, citing Syrian state media.

There was no comment from the Israeli military, which has staged hundreds of strikes on targets inside government-controlled Syria over the years but rarely acknowledges or discusses such operations, the AP report said.

Fla. bans abortions after 15 weeks

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a 15-week abortion ban into law Thursday as the state joined a growing conservative push to restrict access to the procedure ahead of a U.S. Supreme Court decision that could roll back abortion rights in America.

“This will represent the most significant protections for life that have been enacted in this state in a generation,” DeSantis said as he signed the bill at an

evangelical church in the city of Kissimmee.

Republicans nationwide have moved to place new restrictions on abortion after the U.S. Supreme Court signaled it would uphold a Mississippi law banning abortions after 15 weeks. The high court’s decision, expected this summer, could potentially weaken or overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark 1973 decision that established a nationwide right to abortion.

The law DeSantis signed Thursday also deals a blow to

overall abortion access in the South, where Florida has provided wider access to the procedure than its regional neighbors.

The new law, which takes effect July 1, contains exceptions if the abortion is necessary to save a mother’s life, prevent serious injury or if the fetus has a fatal abnormality. It does not allow for exemptions in cases where pregnancies were caused by rape, incest or human trafficking, despite several Democratic attempts to amend

the bill. Under current law, Florida allows abortions up to 24 weeks.

A federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report said about 2% of the nearly 72,000 abortions reported in Florida in 2019 were performed after 15 weeks. That same year, 2,256 out-of-state residents got abortions in Florida, with about 1,200 coming, from Georgia and more than 300 from Alabama, according to the CDC. The origin of the remaining patients was not clear.

Texas moves to ease gridlock at US border

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — The logjam of trucks at the U.S.-Mexico border finally began breaking Thursday after nearly a week as Texas Gov. Greg Abbott eased off his latest dramatic action over immigration that has gridlocked some of the world’s busiest trade ports and taken a mounting economic toll.

“There is a sense of urgency now to reach deals that did not exist before,” Abbott said.

The two-term Republican governor, who for days has allowed commercial trucks to backup for miles into Mexico after requiring them to stop for additional inspections in Texas, lifted that order for bridges in El Paso and other cities after announcing a new security agreement with the neighboring Mexican states of Chihuahua and Coahuila.

The rollbacks come as Abbott has faced

intensifying pressure over the policy he rushed into place April 6 as part of an ongoing fight with the Biden administration over the flow of migrants and drugs. Inspection orders remain in other parts along Texas’ 1,200-mile border, including the busy Rio Grande Valley, but Mexican trade leaders were optimistic those would also end soon.

The deal with Gov. Maria Campos Galvan of Chihuahua, who joined Abbott for the announcement in the Texas Capitol, set in motion the biggest relief yet for traffic that has snarled the Texas-Mexico border and raised warnings of higher prices for U.S. shoppers and spare grocery store shelves.

The inspections ordered by Abbott came in response to the Biden administration announcing last month it would wind down a public health law that has limited asylum-

seekers in the name of preventing the spread of COVID-19.

It was the second consecutive day Abbott has lifted inspections at some bridges, starting Wednesday with Laredo, which was the busiest U.S. port of entry for trucks last year. Traffic coming into Texas at the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge, where more produce crosses than at any other land port in the U.S., has also resumed after a dayslong protest by Mexican truckers came to an end.

Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller, a Republican who has urged Abbott to walk back the inspections order, said Thursday one major agricultural company told him that 100 trucks sent to Mexico for deliveries have been unable to come back across because of the congestion.

Fuel leak thwarts dress rehearsal for moon rocket

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — NASA’s latest attempt to fuel its huge moon rocket for a countdown test was thwarted Thursday by a hazardous hydrogen leak, the latest in a series of vexing equipment trouble.

The launch team had just begun loading fuel into the core stage of the rocket when the leak cropped up. This was NASA’s third shot at a dress rehearsal, a required step ahead of a test flight to the moon.

This time, the launch team managed to load some super-cold liquid hydrogen and oxygen into the core stage of the 30-story

Space Launch System rocket, but fell far short of the full amount. Liquid hydrogen is extremely hazardous, with officials noting that the systems had been checked for leaks prior to the test.

Technicians deliberately left the smaller upper stage empty, after discovering a bad valve last week. The helium valve inside the upper stage cannot be replaced until the rocket is back in its hangar at Kennedy Space Center.

Two previous countdown attempts were marred by balky fans and a large hand-operated valve that workers mistakenly left

closed at the pad last week.

Officials said via Twitter that they’re assessing their next steps.

NASA had been targeting June for the launch debut of the 322-foot SLS rocket. The empty Orion capsule on top will be sent on a four- to six-week mission around the moon and back.

Astronauts will strap in for the second test flight around the moon, planned for 2024. That would be followed as early as 2025 with the first lunar landing by astronauts since 1972. NASA plans to announce the crews for these two missions this summer.

NM fire burns over 200 homes; 2 dead

Associated Press

Firefighters took advantage of a brief break in the weather but gusty winds were expected to return Friday to southern New Mexico where a wildfire has claimed two lives and charred more than 200 homes.

The fire has forced the evacuation of about 5,000 people in the mountain community of Ruidoso, where the remains of a couple were found near a burned home as they tried to flee.

New Mexico State Police confirmed the blaze killed the two people after it started Tuesday from a windblown, downed power line.

Thousands of customers in the area remain without power, and Ruidoso schools

have been closed until next week.

“We’ve had students who’ve lost their homes. We have to support them on Tuesday” when school resumes, said high school English teacher Sara Ames Brown.

Fire crews used a break in what had been a steady stream of relentless gusts to make headway against the flames on Thursday.

Incident Commander Dave Bales said the strategy was “attack while we can,” noting that winds were expected to pick up again Friday.

“We’re trying to keep this fire as small as possible, especially because it’s right in the community,” he said. “We’ve had a loss of a lot of structures so our crews are right there on the fire front going as direct as

possible.”

The fire moved into a more densely populated area on Ruidoso’s northeastern side Wednesday afternoon, prompting more evacuations. Crews kept the flames from pushing further into the village on Wednesday, and Rabon said that progress continued Thursday as helicopters dropped water and ground crews secured lines on the east and south sides. They also put out hot spots in the neighborhoods where the flames raced through earlier this week.

The fire has torched an estimated 9 square miles of forest and grass, and the strong winds that battered the area have left behind toppled trees and down power lines.

NJ recreational marijuana sales begin April 21

Associated Press

TRENTON, N.J. — Recreational marijuana sales in New Jersey for those 21 and older will begin April 21, Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy said Thursday.

“This is a historic step in our work to create a new cannabis industry,” said Murphy, who made the announcement via Twitter.

The news comes just three

days after state regulators greenlighted permits for seven facilities, which already sell medical cannabis, to begin retailing recreational marijuana. It’s also about a year after the state’s regulatory commission started operating, and a year and a half after voters overwhelmingly approved a ballot question to allow recreational marijuana for people 21 and older.

New Jersey and 17 other states, along with the District of Columbia, have legalized recreational marijuana. Thirty-seven states, including New Jersey, have legalized medical marijuana.

There are about 130,000 medical marijuana patients in the state, with an estimated roughly 800,000 potential recreational consumers, and fewer than 800,000 estimated “tourism”

consumers, according to the commission.

Ben Kovler, the CEO of Green Thumb Industries, which operates dispensaries in several states, is preparing for the start of recreational sales at facilities in Paterson and Bloomfield. Kovler said he expects a “tidal wave” of demand.

“We are witnessing the end of prohibition 2.0,” he said in an emailed statement.

China’s military holds drills amid US visit to Taiwan

Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan — China said its military staged exercises Friday to reinforce its threat to use force to bring Taiwan under its control, as U.S. lawmakers visiting Taiwan made a pointed and public declaration of their support for the self-governing island democracy while issuing a warning to China.

The six lawmakers met with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen on Friday morning and were also scheduled to meet with the island’s defense minister.

The military drills conducted by the People’s Liberation Army’s Eastern Theater Command in areas opposite Taiwan were “a countermeasure to the recent negative actions of the U.S., including the visit of a delegation of lawmakers to Taiwan,” Chinese

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said.

China would “continue to take strong measures to resolutely safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity,” Zhao added.

China is against any official exchanges between Taiwan’s government and other foreign governments because it claims Taiwan is part of its national territory and not an independent country. China and Taiwan split after a civil war in 1949.

The Eastern Theater Command described the exercises in a statement as “a necessary action based on the present security situation in the Taiwan Strait and the need to safeguard national sovereignty.”

“Taiwan is a sacred and inalienable part of Chinese territory. There is no room for any foreign interference on the Taiwan issue,”

the statement said.

As part of the delegation of visiting U.S. lawmakers, Sen. Robert Menendez of New Jersey gave a speech Friday praising Taiwan’s democracy and its global status as a manufacturer of semi-conductor chips used in everything from cars to smartphones, and warned of consequences if that status were jeopardized.

“It is a country of global significance, of global consequence, of global impact, and therefore it should be understood the security of Taiwan has a global impact for those who would wish it ill,” said Menendez, the head of the Senate’s Foreign Relations Committee, in a speech at Taiwan’s Presidential Office. He emphasized that “we seek no conflict with China as I believe Taiwan seeks no conflict with China.”

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Dogs owned by Iditarod veteran kill family pet

AK ANCHORAGE — A pack of sled dogs belonging to an Iditarod veteran and reality TV star killed a family pet in Alaska, officials said.

Authorities in Wasilla are investigating the March 30 incident involving dogs owned by musher Jessie Holmes, who finished third in year's Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race and stars in "Life Below Zero: Alaska" on the National Geographic channel.

Holmes, who lives in rural Alaska, was staying with his dog team at a Wasilla hotel that backs up to the adjacent homeowner's yard. He let the dogs loose to relieve themselves when they attacked a pet dog named Lucky, who was attached to a lead in the yard.

School district to give teachers panic devices

NV LAS VEGAS — The metro Las Vegas school district will provide electronic panic-button devices to teachers as it moves to boost security in the wake of incidents that include a violent after-school attack that left a teacher injured and unconscious in her classroom.

In addition to providing teachers with panic devices equipped with Bluetooth connectivity, the Clark County School District will upgrade security cameras and ask police agencies to increase their presence at schools, officials said Tuesday.

The panic devices will be issued first at El Dorado High School, the site of last week's at-

tack. A 16-year-old student faces sex assault and attempted murder charges in the incident.

Arrest yields dozens of ghost guns, 3D printer

CT NEW BRITAIN — Dozens of ghost guns, a 3D printer and homemade bombs have been seized in Connecticut as police arrested a man they believe was manufacturing and selling a variety of illegal firearms, law enforcement officials said Wednesday.

A task force of state and local police and federal agents charged Steven Gerent-Mastrianni, 39, of New Britain, on Tuesday with numerous crimes including firearms trafficking, selling assault weapons, possession of a machine gun and selling large-capacity magazines.

Gerent-Mastrianni was detained on \$500,000 bail. Police said Gerent-Mastrianni, who holds a valid pistol permit, had an illegal ghost gun pistol on him when he was arrested.

Police obtained warrants to search Gerent-Mastrianni's home and vehicles and seized about 125 firearms — most of them ghost guns — as well as components capable of making guns fully automatic.

Authorities said they also found a 3D printer, hundreds of high-capacity magazines, 30,000 to 40,000 rounds of ammunition and three homemade explosive devices.

Man accused of driving 115 mph before crash

AZ PHOENIX — A man accused of driving 115 mph has been arrested after allegedly causing a crash in

south Phoenix that left a woman dead and her 4-year-old daughter critically injured, police said Wednesday.

They said 18-year-old Eulalio Juarez Rodriguez was booked into jail on suspicion of manslaughter, but impairment doesn't appear to be a factor in Tuesday night's crash.

Police said Rodriguez allegedly was driving at more than 115 mph 2½ seconds before the crash and was clocked at 88 mph a half-second before impact.

The speed limit in the area is 45 mph.

According to police, the impact of the collision sent the woman's vehicle into a wooden power pole and she died at the scene.

Police identified the woman as 35-year-old Katrina Dean.

Dean's young daughter was in the back of the car in a child restraint seat and was rushed to a hospital in extremely critical condition, police said.

Deaths of firefighters in blaze ruled homicides

MD BALTIMORE — The deaths of three Baltimore firefighters who got trapped in a burning vacant home when it partially collapsed were determined to be homicides, city police said Wednesday.

Investigators from the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives also classified the January fire as "incendiary," according to a Wednesday news release. That means it was set or spread into an area where flames should not be and involves a violation of law, whether intentional or not.

A person of interest has been identified, and authorities said additional tips from the public are not needed.

"The incendiary classification is an important step forward in this investigation," said Toni M. Crosby, the ATF special agent in charge.

Four firefighters were battling a blaze the morning of Jan. 24 when part of the unoccupied, three-story rowhouse collapsed.

Engineer sentenced for intentional derailment

CA LOS ANGELES — A train engineer who intentionally derailed a locomotive near a U.S. Navy hospital ship that was deployed in Los Angeles harbor to help during the COVID-19 pandemic was sentenced Wednesday to three years in prison, prosecutors said.

Eduardo Moreno was also ordered to pay more than \$755,000 in restitution, the U.S. Attorney's Office said in a statement. Moreno, 46, pleaded guilty in December 2021 to one count of committing a terrorist attack.

Moreno, who worked at the Port of Los Angeles, acknowledged in his plea agreement that on March 31, 2020, he drove a locomotive at full speed off the end of the tracks near where the Mercy was docked because he believed it might be involved in a sinister conspiracy, prosecutors said.

Nobody was hurt, but the derailment caused about \$755,880 in damage. The train also spilled fuel that required a hazardous-materials cleanup.

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Antetokounmpo goes after second title

Associated Press

Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo acknowledges there is pressure in the NBA playoffs and after the winning the first title, “your mind wants to win a second time or a third time.”

A leading MVP candidate again this season, Antetokounmpo likes to compare playing basketball to creating a work of art and he’ll try to produce another postseason masterpiece this weekend.

His last time on the playoff stage, Antetokounmpo scored 50 points in a Game 6 victory over the Phoenix Suns that gave the Bucks their first championship in a half-century.

Antetokounmpo and the third-seeded Bucks face the sixth-seeded Chicago Bulls in an Eastern Conference first-round series starting Sunday in Milwaukee.

“At the end of the day, the mindset doesn’t change,” Antetokounmpo said this week. “Enjoy the game as much as possible because we worked hard for this moment. We can’t take this moment for granted.”

On the surface, it appears that winning a title last year took a weight off the 27-year-old’s shoulders.

Having been there, done that, Antetokounmpo appears more relaxed.

The father of two has begun several postgame news conferences by making “dad jokes,” a practice he continued this week while getting ready for the playoffs.

“What do you call a cow on a rollercoaster?” Antetokounmpo asked reporters who gathered around him. “A milkshake.”

But the postseason is no laughing matter for Antetokounmpo. The Bucks leader insists he feels just as much pressure now as he did before he’d won a title.

“Obviously a lot of people think once you win a championship and

you succeed in life, there’s no pressure,” Antetokounmpo said. “I don’t really agree. Obviously I do not try to focus on the pressure as much. I try to focus and enjoy the game. But at the end of the day, your mind always is going to find something to replace that.

“Almost like, ‘OK, you won one time.’ Now your mind wants to win a second time or a third time.”

That attitude reflects Antetokounmpo’s artistic approach to the game

He believes a player enters each contest with a new opportunity to create, as if he’s an artist staring at a blank canvas.

“If you play well and you hold on to the past, it prevents you from playing well again,” Antetokounmpo said. “If you had 40 the previous game, you’re like, ‘OK, I had 40 the previous game. Today I can just be sloppy with the ball.’ That was that art that was created.

“Today I reset. I get a new canvas and try to create new art.”

The approach helped Antetokounmpo follow up the Bucks’ championship with one of his finest NBA seasons.

He enters the playoffs as the Eastern Conference player of the month for March and April. Antetokounmpo averaged a career-high 29.9 points — behind only Philadelphia’s Joel Embiid — along with 11.6 rebounds and 5.8 assists.

“He doesn’t settle,” Bucks guard George Hill said. “One thing I do know about him: Him winning a championship doesn’t define who he is. He’s still in there every day, every morning, every night working his butt off to get better. He still feels like he has a lot to prove.”

Teammate Jrue Holiday argued late in the season that Antetokounmpo merits consideration for the NBA’s most improved player award because of the way the 6-foot-11 forward diversified his game.

Four-time Stanley Cup champion Bossy dies at 65

Associated Press

Mike Bossy, one of hockey’s most prolific goal-scorers and a star for the New York Islanders during their 1980s Stanley Cup dynasty, has died after a battle with lung cancer. He was 65.

TVA Sports, the French-language network in Canada where he worked as a hockey analyst, confirmed Bossy died Thursday night. An Islanders spokesman said Bossy was in his native Montreal, where the team played Friday night against the Canadiens.

Bossy helped the Islanders win the Stanley Cup four straight years from 1980-83, earning the Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP in 1982. He scored the Cup-winning goal in 1982 and ’83.

Bossy was a first-round pick in 1977 and played his entire 10-year NHL career with New York. He won the Calder Trophy as rookie of the year, got the Lady Byng Trophy for gentlemanly conduct three times and led the league in goals twice.

Bossy scored 50 or more goals in each of his first nine seasons — the league’s longest streak. He and Wayne Gretzky are the only

players in hockey history with nine 50-goal seasons.

Bossy was an eight-time All-Star and finished with 573 goals and 553 assists for 1,126 points in 752 regular-season games. He was the fastest player to reach the 100-goal mark and currently ranks 22nd on the career goals list. In the playoffs, Bossy had 160 points in 129 games.

Hornets’ Bridges fined \$50K

The NBA fined Charlotte Hornets forward Miles Bridges \$50,000 Thursday for throwing his mouthpiece into the crowd after he was ejected from Wednesday night’s play-in game loss to the Hawks in Atlanta.

After picking up two technical fouls for arguing a call, an agitated Bridges left the floor for the locker room and was heckled by a male fan in the tunnel. He then heaved his mouthpiece in that direction, hitting a young female.

Bridges apologized after the game for the incident and again Thursday following his exit interview in Charlotte.

“I lost my cool last night with a lot of stuff

that went on,” Bridges said. “I normally don’t act like that and that was an embarrassment on my part and for the organization.”

Bridges said he was ready to take “full responsibility” for any punishment the league handed down.

Curry optimistic about playing

SAN FRANCISCO — Stephen Curry threw down a two-handed slam dunk during practice and the Golden State star is optimistic about his chances of being on the court again for the Warriors in their playoff opener Saturday against Denver.

Curry took a key step in his recovery from a sprained ligament in his left foot when he scrimmaged Thursday. If he plays in Game 1, “for sure I’ll start,” Curry said.

“I’ve never enjoyed practice so much,” Curry said after an extensive, hours-long workout. “... I see the light at the end of the tunnel.”

The two-time MVP participated in three six-minute stretches in full team scrimmaging work then his full individual shooting routine, too.

Heim hits grand slam in Rangers' win

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Jonah Heim hit a grand slam off Shohei Ohtani, Corey Seager crushed his first home run with the Rangers right after the two-way Los Angeles Angels stand-out was off the mound, and Texas won 10-5 on Thursday night.

Ohtani (0-2) struck out five over 3 ⅓ innings, but the reigning AL MVP allowed six runs on six hits and threw only 70 pitches.

Heim's first career grand slam put Texas up 4-2 in the second inning. The switch-hitting catcher, who later added an RBI single, pulled an 0-2 pitch into the right-field seats. It was the first grand slam allowed by Ohtani in his 37 big-league starts.

The Angels led 2-0 before Ohtani threw his first pitch of the game. Mike Trout's second homer of the season was a massive 472-foot solo shot to straightaway center and Brandon Marsh added an RBI single.

John King (1-0) threw 1 ½ scoreless innings in relief of Texas starter Dane Dunning.

Padres 12, Braves 1: Joe Musgrove pitched 6 ⅓ brilliant

innings, Manny Machado homered and tied his career high with five hits, and San Diego routed visiting Atlanta.

Braves starter Charlie Morton (1-1) allowed five runs and nine hits, struck out five, walked three and hit two batters. Ozzie Albies homered in the ninth for Atlanta.

Cubs 5, Rockies 2: Seiya Suzuki stayed hot with an RBI double in a three-run first inning, Frank Schwindel homered and drove in two, and Chicago cooled off Kris Bryant and host Colorado.

Bryant went 2-for-5 as the Rockies had their four-game winning streak snapped in the opener of Bryant's second series against his former team.

Yankees 3, Blue Jays 0: Michael King escaped a bases-loaded, no-outs jam created by Aroldis Chapman to preserve New York's win over visiting Toronto after Luis Severino became the first pitcher to strike out Vladimir Guerrero Jr. three times.

Guerrero struck out four times in all for the first time in his career, a night after hitting three homers and going 4-for-4.

Brewers 5, Cardinals 1: Brandon Woodruff threw five shutout innings, Omar Narváez homered and doubled, and Milwaukee opened its home schedule with a victory over St. Louis.

Woodruff struck out two and allowed three hits and a walk to bounce back from an uncharacteristically poor performance in his first start, a 9-0 loss to the Chicago Cubs.

Marlins 4, Phillies 3: Sandy Alcantara allowed two runs in 6 ⅓ innings, Joey Wendle had two RBIs and Miami won its home opener, downing Philadelphia.

Bryce Harper drove in three runs and J.T. Realmuto reached base five times — four singles and a walk — for the Phillies, who have lost three straight and four of five following a 2-0 start.

Mariners 5, White Sox 1: Jared Kelenic hit a two-run homer off the right-field foul pole in the second inning, and visiting Seattle stopped a four-game losing streak, beating Chicago on a windy day when pups became adventures.

Logan Gilbert (1-0) allowed an unearned run and four hits in five innings, and four pitchers

followed with an inning each of hitless relief.

Athletics 6, Rays 3: Cole Irvin pitched into the seventh inning and Oakland took three of four from host Tampa Bay.

Irvin (1-1) allowed three runs and five hits in 6 ⅓ innings as the rebuilding A's improved to 4-3. Two of the runs off Irvin were in his final inning.

Pirates 9, Nationals 4: Bryan Reynolds hit a two-run home run after settling his arbitration case with a \$13.5 million, two-year contract, helping Pittsburgh overcome a three-run deficit to beat visiting Washington.

Reynolds, an All-Star center fielder, tied the score 3-3 with a drive to right-center in a four-run third inning, and Kevin Newman hit a go-ahead, two-run double.

Tigers 4, Royals 2: Victor Reyes and Austin Meadows had RBI singles in the seventh inning, and Detroit beat host Kansas City.

Miguel Cabrera had three of the Tigers' nine hits, leaving him six shy of 3,000 for his career. All of Detroit's hits were singles.

Average baseball salary goes up 5.9% after lockout

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The average salary in the major leagues rebounded to \$4.4 million on opening day, boosted by a frenzy of free-agent signings before and after the 99-day lockout, according to a study of baseball contracts by The Associated Press.

New York Mets pitcher Max Scherzer set a season record at \$43.3 million, topping the previous mark established last year by Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Trevor Bauer at \$38 million. Scherzer earns more than all the current players on the Baltimore Orioles combined.

The average of \$4,414,184 was up 5.9% from the \$4,167,164 at the start of last season and just below the record of \$4,451,508 set in 2017, before the salary slide that angered players during the labor contract that expired last December.

Major League Baseball projects opening-day payrolls at about \$4.5 billion, up almost 10% from the previous high of approximately \$4.1 billion.

This year's average would have been higher had active rosters not been expanded from 26 to 28 through May 1 following the shortened spring training. Factoring out the added players

who are at the \$700,000 minimum or close to it, the average would have been a record \$4.62 million.

In addition, this year's final average will be boosted by the new labor contract's \$50 million bonus pool for lower-salaried players not yet eligible for arbitration. Adding that figure and dropping the added 60 players, the average would be \$4.68 million.

The average salary declines over the course of a season as higher-paid veterans are released and replaced by lower-salaried players.

The Los Angeles Dodgers top

the major leagues at nearly \$285 million, up from \$241 million at the start of last season.

The Mets are second at \$266 million in their second season under owner Steven Cohen, up from \$186 million last year and \$154 million in 2019, the last full season under the Wilpon and Katz families.

The New York Yankees are third at just under \$237 million, followed by Philadelphia (\$224 million) and San Diego and Boston (\$212 million each).

World Series champion Atlanta is eighth at \$184 million, and AL champion Houston is 10th at \$174 million.

Penguins top Isles, earn playoff berth

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Jake Guentzel scored twice, Sidney Crosby also had a goal and the Pittsburgh Penguins earned a playoff berth for the 16th straight season with a 6-3 victory over the New York Islanders on Thursday night.

Guentzel scored his 36th and 37th goals and Crosby his 29th as the Penguins extended the longest active postseason streak among teams in major North American professional sports.

Danton Heinen equaled a career high with his 16th goal, while Kris Letang and Brock McGinn also scored for Pittsburgh, which tied Calgary for the seventh-longest playoff streak in the NHL since 1967. Tristan Jarry made 36 saves for the Penguins, who have won two of three overall. Pittsburgh has 11 wins and points in 15 of its last 17 against the Islanders.

Zach Parise, Anders Lee and Zdeno Chara scored for the Islanders, who have lost three of their last five following a four-game winning streak. Ilya Sorokin stopped 22

shots.

Lightning 4, Ducks 3 (OT): Anthony Cirelli scored 1:58 into overtime and host Tampa Bay beat Anaheim to clinch a playoff berth.

Avalanche 3, Devils 1: Artturi Lehkonen had a goal and an assist, Logan O'Connor and Andre Burakovsky also scored and host Colorado won its eighth straight game.

Maple Leafs 7, Capitals 3: William Nylander, Michael Bunting and Ilya Mikheyev each scored twice, Auston Matthews had two assists to reach 101 points and host Toronto routed Washington.

Blues 6, Sabres 2: Vladimir Tarasenko scored three times as part of a career-best five-point outing and visiting St. Louis rolled to its seventh straight win.

Red Wings 3, Hurricanes 0: Alex Nedeljkovic had 46 saves in a sharp performance against his former team, getting his third shutout of the season and helping visiting Detroit beat Carolina.

Senators 3, Bruins 2: Brady Tkachuk, Josh Norris and Tim Stützle each scored a

goal in the second period and visiting Ottawa sent Boston to its first three-game losing streak this season.

Oilers 4, Predators 0: Leon Draisaitl had three goals and Mike Smith made 30 saves, leading visiting Edmonton past Nashville.

Wild 3, Stars 2 (OT): Frederick Gaudreau scored at 1:40 in overtime after assisting on Kevin Fiala's two regulation goals in visiting Minnesota's victory over Dallas.

Blackhawks 5, Sharks 4 (SO): Alex DeBrincat scored the lone goal in the shootout after having three assists in regulation and host Chicago snapped an eight-game losing streak.

Golden Knights 6, Flames 1: Calgary native Logan Thompson made 35 saves, Jonathan Marchessault and William Karlsson each had a goal and two assists for visiting Vegas.

Canucks 7, Coyotes 1: J.T. Miller had a career-high five assists and host Vancouver extended its winning streak to five games to keep alive its faint playoff hopes.

Olympic champ Lee, Florida star Thomas shine at NCAAs

Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — This is why Sunisa Lee kept her promise and came to Auburn. And why Trinity Thomas endured at Florida.

To compete on the podium with their sport stopping to watch. To celebrate with their teammates under the lights. To earn a chance to have one more chance.

The two gymnastics stars checked every box during the NCAA women's team semifinals on Thursday night.

Lee, the first Olympic champion to compete collegiately, helped send Auburn to the finals for just the second time since 1993 as the Tigers finished second to Florida in the second semifinal to qualify for Saturday's final four.

Thomas claimed the all-around title, capping a show-stopping performance with a perfect 10 on floor exercise as the Gators earned the right to

join Lee and the Tigers as well as Oklahoma and Utah for a shot at a national championship.

"I feel absolutely amazing," said Thomas, who finished with an all-around total of 39.8125, just ahead of Lee at 39.675 and Florida teammate Megan Skaggs at 39.6625. "I've been working through this ever since I got to school and just having a few setbacks, you know, I kept fighting. And to finally do it this time is literally a blessing."

Even if Thomas didn't initially know her 10 on floor — the 11th perfect score she's collected this season, tops in the country — made her the fourth Gator to win the all-around in the last decade. She was so focused on making sure Florida made it to the team final she didn't really pay attention to where she stood in the overall standings until the meet was over.

"(I asked my teammates) 'do you know what the all-around was?' And they were like, 'No,'

and I was like, 'Me neither,'" Thomas said with a laugh. "So, I had no clue, actually."

Thomas eventually turned to fellow senior Savannah Schoenherr, the team's resident calculator. When Schoenherr informed her longtime teammate it was probably her, Thomas let out a semi-surprised "oh."

Consider it a testament to Thomas' ability to stay in the moment.

The same goes for Lee.

Eight months ago she pulled off the meet of her life in Tokyo, becoming the fifth straight American woman to capture gold in the all-around. She didn't let newfound fame distract her from going to Auburn, even if her celebrity created outsized expectations.

"I think (after that) I really took the pressure off of myself and I just went out there and enjoyed it," said Lee, who won the beam title in addition to finishing runner-up to Thomas in the

all-around.

Lee joyfully ran to her teammates after her uneven bars routine served as the exclamation point that pushed Auburn to the finals.

Earlier in the day, Oklahoma reached the finals for the ninth straight time by posting a team score of 198.112, the best of the day.

Oklahoma moved in front during the second rotation, using a stellar set on uneven bars to slip by the Utes into first. The set included a 9.887 from Olivia Trautman, competing in the event for the first time this season after being limited by a knee injury.

Utah reached the finals for the fourth time in five championships by finishing the meet with a rock-solid beam set. The Utes' score of 49.600 was the highest in the event during the first semifinal, ending any hope of Alabama or Minnesota closing the gap.