

Russia renews Kyiv strikes and beyond

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian forces accelerated scattered attacks on Kyiv, western Ukraine and beyond Saturday in an explosive reminder to Ukrainians and their Western supporters that the whole country remains under threat despite Russia's pivot toward mounting a new offensive in the east.

Stung by the loss of its Black Sea flagship and indignant over alleged Ukrainian aggression on Russian territory, Russia's military command had warned of renewed missile strikes on Ukraine's capital. Officials in Moscow said they were targeting military sites, a claim repeated — and refuted by witnesses — throughout 52 days of war.

But the toll reaches much deeper. Each day brings new discoveries of civilian victims of an invasion that has shattered European security. As Russia prepared for the anticipated offensive, a mother wept over her 15-year-old son's body after rockets hit a residential area of Kharkiv, a city in the northeast. An infant and at least eight other people died, officials said.

In the Kyiv region, Ukrainian authorities have reported finding the bodies of more than 900 civilians, most shot dead, since Russian troops retreated two weeks ago. Smoke rose from the capital again early Saturday as Mayor Vitali Klitschko reported a strike that killed one person and wounded several.

The mayor advised residents who fled the

city earlier in the war not to return.

"We're not ruling out further strikes on the capital," Klitschko said. "If you have the opportunity to stay a little bit longer in the cities where it's safer, do it."

It was not immediately clear from the ground what was hit in Saturday's strike on Kyiv's Darnytskyi district. The sprawling district on the southeastern edge of the capital contains a mixture of Soviet-style apartment blocks, newer shopping centers and big-box retail outlets, industrial areas and rail yards.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said an armored vehicle plant was targeted. He didn't specify where the plant is located, but there is one in the Darnytskyi district.

He said the plant was among multiple Ukrainian military sites hit with "air-launched high-precision long-range weapons." As the U.S. and Europe send new arms to Ukraine, the strategy could be aimed at hobbling Ukraine's defenses ahead of what's expected to be a full-scale Russian assault in the east.

It was the second strike in the Kyiv area since the Russian military vowed to step up missile strikes on the capital. Another hit a missile plant on Friday as residents emerged for walks, foreign embassies planned to reopen and other tentative signs of the city's prewar life began to resurface following the failure of Russian troops to capture Kyiv and their withdrawal to con-

centrate on the east.

Kyiv was one of many targets Saturday. The Ukrainian president's office reported missile strikes and shelling over the past 24 hours in eight regions stretching across the country.

The governor of the Lviv region in western Ukraine — far from the volatile east and an area long seen as a safe zone — reported airstrikes on the region by Russian Su-35 aircraft that took off from neighboring Belarus.

In apparent preparations for its assault on the east, the Russian military intensified shelling of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, in recent days. Along with killing civilians, Friday's assault wounded more than 50 people, the Ukrainian president's office reported.

On Saturday, an explosion believed to be caused by a missile sent emergency workers scrambling near an outdoor market in Kharkiv, according to AP journalists at the scene. One person was killed, and at least 18 people were wounded, according to rescue workers.

In southeastern Ukraine, the pummeled southern port city of Mariupol is holding out, but the situation is critical, the Ukrainian president's office said. Russian forces have maintained a blockade there since the early days of the invasion, and dwindling numbers of Ukrainian defenders have held out against the siege.

Rebels in Yemen criticize US-led Red Sea task force

Associated Press

CAIRO — Yemen's Houthis criticized a new U.S.-led task force that will patrol the Red Sea following a series of attacks by the Iran-backed rebels in a waterway that's essential to global trade.

Mohammed Abdul-Salam, the Houthis' chief negotiator and spokesman, said late Friday that the U.S. move in the Red Sea, which comes amid a cease-fire in the country's civil war, contradicts Washington's claim of supporting the U.N.-brokered truce.

The task force "enshrines the aggression

and blockade on Yemen," he claimed on his Telegram social media account.

Abdul-Salam apparently referred to a Saudi-led coalition the rebels have been fighting for years. The coalition, which until recently was backed by the U.S., imposes an air and sea blockade on Houthi-held areas.

Iran is the main supporter of the Houthis who seized Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in September 2014. The Saudi-led coalition entered the war on the side of Yemen's exiled government in March 2015. Years of inconclusive fighting has pushed the Arab world's poorest nation to the brink of fam-

ine.

The new task force of two to eight ships patrolling at a time was expected to be commissioned Sunday and aims to target those smuggling coal, drugs, weapons and people in the Red Sea, according to Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, who oversees the U.S. Navy's Middle-east-based 5th Fleet.

The USS Mount Whitney, a Blue Ridge class amphibious command ship previously part of the Navy's African and European 6th Fleet, will join the task force, Cooper said.

US COVID-19 cases on the rise again

Associated Press

Yet again, the U.S. is trudging into what could be another COVID-19 surge, with cases rising nationally and in most states after a two-month decline.

One big unknown? “We don’t know how high that mountain’s gonna grow,” said Dr. Stuart Campbell Ray, an infectious disease expert at Johns Hopkins University.

No one expects a peak nearly as high as the last one, when the contagious omicron version of the coronavirus ripped through the population.

But experts warn that the coming wave — caused by a mutant called BA.2 that’s thought to be about 30% more contagious — will wash across the nation. They worry that hospitalizations, which are already ticking up in some parts of the Northeast, will rise in a growing number of states in the coming weeks. And the case wave will be bigger than it looks, they say, because reported numbers are vast undercounts as more people test at home without reporting their infections or skip testing altogether.

At the height of the previous omicron surge, reported daily cases reached into the hundreds of thousands. As of Thursday, the seven-day rolling average for daily new cases rose to 39,521, up from 30,724 two weeks earlier, according to data from Johns Hop-

kins collected by The Associated Press.

Dr. Eric Topol, head of Scripps Research Translational Institute, said the numbers will likely keep growing until the surge reaches about a quarter the height of the last “monstrous” one. BA.2 may well have the same effect in the U.S. as it did in Israel, where it created a “bump” in the chart measuring cases, he said.

Keeping the surge somewhat in check, experts said, is a higher level of immunity in the U.S. from vaccination or past infection compared with early winter.

But Ray said the U.S. could wind up looking like Europe, where the BA.2 surge was “substantial” in some places that had comparable levels of immunity. “We could have a substantial surge here,” he said.

Both experts said BA.2 will move through the country gradually. The Northeast has been hit hardest so far — with more than 90% of new infections caused by BA.2 last week compared with 86% nationally. As of Thursday, the highest rates of new COVID cases per capita over the past 14 days were in Vermont, Rhode Island, Alaska, New York and Massachusetts. In Washington, D.C., which also ranks in the top 10 for rates of new cases, Howard University announced it was moving most undergraduate classes online for the rest of the semester because of “a sig-

nificant increase in COVID-19 positivity” in the district and on campus.

On the West Coast, modelers from Oregon Health & Science University are projecting a slight increase in hospitalizations over the next two months in that state, where cases have also risen steeply.

As the wave moves across the country, experts said states with low rates of vaccination may face substantially more infections and severe cases that wind up in the hospital.

Ray said government leaders must be careful to strike the right tone when talking to people about protecting themselves and others after COVID restrictions have largely been lifted. Philadelphia recently became the first major U.S. city to reinstate its indoor mask mandate after a sharp increase in infections. But Vermont’s Levine said there are no plans to bring back any of the restrictions that were imposed earlier during the pandemic.

“It’s going to be hard to institute restrictive, draconian measures,” Ray said. “Fortunately, we have some tools that we can use to mitigate risk. And so I hope that leaders will emphasize the importance for people to watch the numbers,” be aware of risks and consider taking precautions such as wearing masks and getting vaccinated and boosted if they’re not already.

Texas drops truck inspection rules that clogged border

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas Gov. Greg Abbott on Friday repealed his traffic-clogging immigration order that backed up commercial trucks at the U.S.-Mexico border, after a week of intensifying backlash and fears of deepening economic losses.

The Republican governor dropped his new rules that had required all commercial trucks from Mexico to undergo extra inspections to curb the flow of migrants and drugs and ratcheted up a fight with the Biden administration over immigration policy.

Some truckers reported waiting more than 30 hours to cross. Others blocked one of the world’s busiest trade bridges in protest.

Abbott, who is up for reelection in November and has made the border his top issue, fully lifted the inspections after reaching agreements with neighboring Mexican states that he says outline new commitments to border security. The last one was signed with the governor of Tamaulipas, who earlier this week said the inspections were overzealous and created havoc. On Friday, he joined Abbott and said they

were ready to work together.

When Abbott first ordered the inspections, he did not say lifting them was conditional on such arrangements with Mexico.

Pressure was building on Abbott to retreat as gridlock on the border worsened. The American Trucking Association called the inspections “wholly flawed, redundant and adding considerable weight on an already strained supply chain.” One customs agency in Mexico estimated the losses at millions of dollars a day, and produce distributors warned of empty shelves and higher

prices if the order was not rescinded soon.

Abbott acknowledged the trade slowdowns but showed no sign of regret. He said he was prepared to reimpose the inspections if Mexican states don’t hold up their end of the deal.

“I’m not hesitant to do so whatsoever,” Abbott said.

The U.S.-Mexico border is crucial to the U.S. economy and more of it is in Texas — roughly 1,200 miles — than any other state. The United States last year imported \$390.7 billion worth of goods from Mexico, second only to China.

Evacuation orders remain while NM wildfire rages on

Associated Press

Douglas Siddens' mother was among those who made it out with just the clothes on her back when a deadly, wind-fueled wildfire ripped through a mountain community in southern New Mexico.

The RV park where she lived was reduced to "metal frame rails and steel wheels," said Siddens, who managed the site.

"I had like 10 people displaced. They lost their homes and everything, including my mom," he said.

The fire has destroyed more than 200 homes and killed two people since it broke out Tuesday near the village Ruidoso, a vacation spot that draws thousands of tourists and horse racing fans every summer.

Hundreds of homes and summer cabins dot the surrounding mountainsides. The RV park that Siddens managed is near where an elderly couple was found dead outside their charred residence.

Elsewhere in the U.S., crews have been battling large fires in Texas, Oklahoma and Colorado, where a new blaze forced evacuations Friday along the Rocky Mountain's eastern front near Lyons about 18 miles north of Boulder.

That fire was burning in the Blue Mountains near the Larimer-Boulder county line about 20 miles southeast of Estes Park, the east entrance to Rocky Mountain National

Park.

In New Mexico, power was restored to all but a few hundred customers, but evacuation orders for close to 5,000 people remained in place.

Donations poured in from surrounding communities all too familiar with just how devastating wildfires can be.

On Friday, Mayor Lynn Crawford was rallying heartbroken residents once again as firefighters tried to keep wind-whipped flames from making another run at the village. She said the response from their neighbors has been amazing.

Authorities have not yet released the names of the couple who died.

Their bodies were found after worried family members contacted police, saying the couple had planned to evacuate Tuesday when the fire exploded but were unaccounted for later that day.

Authorities reiterated that it was still too early to start letting people in to see the damage. They asked for patience as fire crews put out hot spots and tried to build a stronger perimeter around the blaze.

"It's still an active fire area in there and it's not a safe place," DeFries said.

New Mexico authorities said they suspect the fire, which has torched over 9.5 square miles of forest and grass, was sparked by a downed power line and the investigation continued Friday.

Twitter adopts 'poison pill' defense to bid

Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Twitter said Friday that its board of directors has unanimously adopted a "poison pill" defense in response to Tesla CEO Elon Musk's proposal to buy the company for more than \$43 billion and take it private.

The move would allow existing Twitter shareholders — except for Musk — to buy additional shares at a discount, thereby diluting Musk's stake in the company and making it harder for him to corral a majority of shareholder votes in favor of the acquisition.

Twitter's plan would take effect if Musk's roughly 9% stake grows to 15% or more.

The poison pill injects another twist into a melodrama surrounding the possibility of the world's richest person taking over a social media platform he described Thursday as the world's "de facto town square."

Twitter said its plan would reduce the likelihood that any one person can gain control of the company without either paying shareholders a premium or giving the board more time to evaluate an offer. Such defenses, formally called shareholder rights plans, are used to prevent the hostile takeover of a corporation by making any acquisition prohibitively expensive for the bidder.

Even if it discourages his takeover attempt, Musk could still take over the company by waging a "proxy fight" in which shareholders vote to retain or dismiss the company's current directors. Twitter said its plan doesn't prevent the board from negotiating or accepting an acquisition proposal if it's in the company's best interests.

"They're gearing up for a battle here with Musk," said Daniel Ives, an analyst for Wedbush Securities. "They also have to give themselves time to try to find another potential buyer."

Musk has offered to buy the company outright for more than \$43 billion, saying it "needs to be transformed as a private company" in order to build trust with its users and do better at serving what he calls the "societal imperative" of free speech.

"Having a public platform that is maximally trusted and broadly inclusive is extremely important to the future of civilization," he said during an onstage interview at a TED event Thursday, just hours after his bid was announced.

South Carolina inmate picks firing squad execution over electric chair

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — A South Carolina prisoner scheduled to be the first man executed in the state in more than a decade has decided to die by firing squad rather than in the electric chair later this month, according to court documents filed Friday.

Richard Bernard Moore, 57, is the also first state prisoner to face the choice of execution methods after a law went into effect last year making electrocution the default and giving inmates the option to face three prison workers with rifles instead.

Moore has spent more than two decades on death row after being convicted of the

1999 killing of convenience store clerk James Mahoney in Spartanburg. If executed as scheduled on April 29, he would be the first person put to death in the state since 2011 and the fourth in the country to die by firing squad in nearly half a century.

Only three executions in the United States have been carried out by firing squad since 1976, according to the Washington-based nonprofit Death Penalty Information Center. Moore's would mark the first since Ronnie Lee Gardner's 2010 execution by a five-person firing squad in Utah.

South Carolina is one of four states to allow a firing squad, according to the center.

Mandel, a Jew, campaigning in churches

Associated Press

NORTH OLMSTED, Ohio — Before digging into his six-egg omelet at a bustling northeast Ohio diner, Republican Senate candidate Josh Mandel stopped to bow his head.

“Bless our food, our time, our conversation, in Jesus’ name,” said Pastor J.C. Church, who joined Mandel after a campaign event at a local church. “Amen.”

The scene encapsulated Mandel’s campaign strategy as he competes in a crowded field of Republican contenders ahead of Ohio’s May 3 primary. He is a Jewish candidate who makes no secret of his faith, but who is cen-

tering his campaign around evangelical churches as he tries to win over religious, conservative voters.

“Usually, when someone’s running for U.S. Senate or governor or Congress, they’d go to all the Republican rubber chicken dinners and clam bakes and hog roasts, stuff like that,” Mandel said in a recent interview. “We’re blowing up the playbook. I’m sidestepping all of the Republican Party groups and, instead, I’m running a campaign through churches.”

Indeed, Mandel’s campaign is steeped in Christianity. His website features a picture of a cross

and an American flag. He pledges to make decisions in Washington with “the Bible in one hand and the Constitution in the other.” And he holds most of his campaign events at evangelical churches.

Raised in the Cleveland suburb of Beachwood, Mandel is the grandson of Holocaust survivors, attended B’nai B’rith Perlman summer camp and was married in Israel. His children are enrolled at a modern orthodox Jewish day school where they study Torah half the day.

Mandel describes himself as a “proud Jew” and dismisses those, including some GOP pri-

mary rivals, who have portrayed him as insincere in his emphasis of conservative Christian values. Mandel sees no contradiction between his faith and his campaign approach.

“From my perspective, you know for me, I’m a proud American, I’m a proud Marine Corps vet and I’m a proud Jew,” he explained. “And when I look at the U.S.-Israel relationship, I think liberal Jews in America should be ashamed of themselves for supporting anti-Israel groups like J Street. And I think the best friends of the U.S.-Israel relationship in America are evangelical Christians.”

Court: Finkenauer qualified for Senate ballot

Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — The Iowa Supreme Court ruled Friday that Democratic Senate candidate Abby Finkenauer qualifies for the primary ballot, rejecting a lower court decision and allowing her to continue her campaign for the nomination and the chance to face longtime Republican Sen. Charles Grassley.

The court’s unanimous decision leaves Finkenauer as the likely front-runner in a race with two lesser-known candidates ahead of Iowa’s June 7 primary. The winner will run against Grassley, who is seeking an eighth term in the Senate.

“This is a moment for all advocates for democracy — Democrats, Republicans and Independents — to celebrate the enduring strength of our democratic process and a reminder to never take it for granted,” Finkenauer said in a statement.

She said it’s more than a victory for her campaign but about justice for Iowans and democracy prevailing over “meritless partisan attacks orchestrated by Washington Republicans and allies of Senator Grassley seeking to silence Iowans and undermine the democratic process.”

The court rejected a lower court’s ruling that found that Finkenauer failed to meet a

state law that requires candidates to submit at least 100 signatures from at least 19 counties to qualify for the ballot. The justices agreed that a Polk County judge was wrong when he ruled that three signatures from two counties were invalid, leaving Finkenauer without enough signatures.

The court said the Legislature last year passed new sections of the law that identified specific circumstances when objections to petitions should be sustained.

“The legislature did not include missing or incorrect dates as one of the grounds for sustaining an objection to a petition,” the court said.

Trump endorses GOP’s Vance for Ohio primary

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Former President Donald Trump on Friday endorsed “Hillbilly Elegy” author JD Vance in Ohio’s bitterly competitive Republican Senate primary, ending months of jockeying in a race where his backing could be pivotal.

In a statement, Trump described Vance as “the candidate most qualified and ready to win in November.”

The decision marks a major blow for Vance’s top rivals — former state treasurer Josh Mandel, investment banker Mike Gibbons and former Ohio Republican Party chair Jane Timken — who have been locked in a heated and contentious race for both the

nomination and Trump’s backing in a primary that is now less than three weeks away.

In addition to making frequent trips to Mar-a-Lago, echoing his election lies and hiring a coterie of former Trump aides, the candidates and their affiliated super PACs have also spent millions trying to present themselves to voters as Trump’s favored option and paint one another as insufficiently loyal to the former president.

Vance, in particular, has come under fire for old audio and since-deleted tweets in which he called himself a “never-Trump guy,” called Trump an idiot and said he might have to hold his nose and vote for

Democrat Hillary Clinton in 2016.

But the author, venture capitalist and Marine veteran has since changed his tune, saying he regretted his past comments. In the race, he has closely aligned himself with the former president, making frequent appearances on Fox News and former Trump strategist Steve Bannon’s podcast, where he has echoed Trump’s rhetoric on issues including trade and immigration.

Trump, in his statement, acknowledged that Vance “may have said some not so great things about me in the past.” But he said that Vance, with whom he has been in frequent touch, “gets it now, and I have seen that in spades.”

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman who faked kidnapping accepts deal

CA SACRAMENTO — **C**hristi Papini, the Northern California woman charged last month with faking her kidnapping in 2016, accepted a plea bargain with prosecutors and acknowledged she made up the story that prompted a frantic search and international headlines.

Defense attorney William Portanova said his client will plead guilty to charges of lying to a federal officer and mail fraud.

The search for Papini, 39, of Redding, set off a three-week search across California and several nearby states until she resurfaced on Thanksgiving Day in 2016.

Federal prosecutors alleged in early March that she actually was staying with a former boyfriend nearly 600 miles away in Southern California's Orange County and injured herself to back up her false statements.

She was a stay-at-home mom at the time and her husband worked at Best Buy.

Activists seek change after 4 kids handcuffed

MN MAPLEWOOD, Minn. — Activists in Minnesota are demanding an apology and calling for changes in the way officers deal with children after police in the St. Paul suburb of Maplewood handcuffed four juveniles, including a 10-year-old, as they investigated an incident for which the kids were later cleared.

Maplewood Police Lt. Joe Steiner said that two 12-year-olds, a 16-year-old and the 10-

year-old were handcuffed for about 20 minutes and released.

Toshira Garraway, founder of Families Supporting Families Against Police Violence, said the 16-year-old is her son, and she went to the scene after he called for help. A video posted to Facebook shows Garraway demanding that officers let the children go.

Garraway said she wants the Maplewood Police Department to change its policy on detaining and handcuffing children.

Man who repeatedly attacked lady sentenced

KS WICHITA — A Wichita man has been sentenced to 19 years and four months in prison for repeatedly attacking a woman in his home, Sedgwick County authorities said.

Will Johnson, 35, was sentenced after pleading guilty in February to 22 counts involving four cases alleging abuse of the woman in 2019, The Wichita Eagle reported.

In the most serious assault, Johnson beat, strangled and stabbed the 29-year-old woman on Aug. 29, 2019, Sedgwick County District Attorney Marc Bennett said in a news release.

She suffered several cuts and a broken jaw, skull and nose, court records show.

Johnson was also ordered to pay \$537 to help with the woman's medical expenses.

Missing wallaby found behind zoo exhibit

TN MEMPHIS — Honey Bunch, the wallaby who went missing at the Memphis Zoo after storms passed,

has been found hiding — nearly in plain sight.

"It was an area right behind the exhibit ... that had been searched multiple times, but he was camouflaged really well and hidden very well under a bush," said Jessica Faulk, the zoo's spokesperson.

A curator happened to see some tracks and followed them to Honey Bunch, Faulk said.

"We suspect he was there the whole time," she said.

A creek in the KangaZoo exhibit overflowed during storms, and the exhibit was evacuated, with the animals moved to the zoo's hospital. Memphis police had assisted in the search for the missing animal, a smaller relative of the kangaroo.

Field of Dreams owners plan huge complex

IA DYERSVILLE — The new owners of the "Field of Dreams" site in Iowa plan to use \$80 million in private investment to make the popular tourist attraction a destination for youth baseball and softball tournaments.

Per The Des Moines Register, Go the Distance said in a news release the money will be used to build baseball and softball fields, team dormitories and a hotel, among other improvements. Go the Distance's CEO is Chicago White Sox star and hall-of-famer Frank Thomas. The site in Dyersville has been a popular destination, since the 1989 Kevin Costner movie.

Book illustrator scours city after art theft

NM SANTA FE — An accomplished il-

lustrator of books for children including a work authored by Chelsea Clinton said she is searching for a packet of penguin illustrations that were taken from her unlocked car.

Gianna Marino said that she filed a police report after the pack of 20 illustrations disappeared overnight from the backseat of her car in Santa Fe, during an extended stay in the Southwestern hub for artists and authors.

The theft won't halt publication of the images in a new book about penguins and the loving bonds of family, but Marino said she wanted to save the original illustrations or give them away to friends.

41 charged in takedown of gang leadership

FL WINTER HAVEN — A Florida sheriff said that 41 people were charged with dozens of crimes in an effort to take down the leadership of a notoriously violent group called the Sex Money Murder gang.

The yearlong investigation involved law enforcement agencies across Florida, the Department of Corrections and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd said at a news conference.

It involved wiretaps and monitoring social media and gang members directing operations from prison.

Judd said there are 121 felony charges so far. More than \$1.5 million in illicit drugs was also seized. Eighteen guns and more than \$17,000 in currency were also confiscated.

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Pelicans top Clippers for No. 8 seed in West

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A franchise player out for the season. A first-year head coach. A 1-12 start. The New Orleans Pelicans overcame it all and stormed back to make the playoffs.

Brandon Ingram scored 30 points and the Pelicans rallied from a 13-point deficit in the fourth quarter to beat the depleted Los Angeles Clippers 105-101 in a play-in Friday night and earn the West's No. 8 seed.

"That win was big-time," Pelicans coach Willie Green said.

New Orleans blew a 16-point lead in the first half and didn't grab the lead for good until the game's final 4½ minutes.

"It was an emotional game, a ton of highs and lows," Green said. "But for us, our mentality is we're going to continue to fight. We're not going to fade out."

The Pelicans made the playoffs for the first time since 2017-18, guided by Green, a former Clipper. They've been without Zion Williamson all season because of a foot injury.

"Starting off 1-12 and 3-16, you're thinking when is it going to pick up?" rookie Trey

Murphy said. "Being my first year, I don't know what winning is like. Look at us now."

CJ McCollum added 19 points and Larry Nance Jr. had 14 points and 16 rebounds for New Orleans, which will play No. 1 seed Phoenix in the first round. Game 1 is Sunday in the desert.

"This team is resilient," said Nance, who was traded, along with McCollum, from Portland in February and recently returned from knee surgery. "They started 1-12. That's so hard to pick yourself up from. I've been in seasons like that. It's hard to keep going and keep striving for it."

The Clippers were dealt a huge blow earlier in the day when Paul George entered the league's health and safety protocols. They'd already been without Kawhi Leonard all season while he rehabbed an ACL injury. He watched from the bench early in the game.

Marcus Morris and Reggie Jackson each had 27 points for the Clippers.

"I am disappointed in us not being able to make the playoffs, no matter who was playing," said Clippers coach Tyrone Lue, who is missing the postseason for the first time

as a head coach.

The Pelicans shot 57% in the first half and were better on the boards, in the paint and off the bench. They led by 16 in the second quarter before the Clippers cut their deficit to 56-46 at halftime.

The Clippers roared back in the third, outscoring the Pelicans 38-18. They opened with a 20-2 run that had the crowd on its feet. Jackson scored 10 points and Morris added six in the spurt.

Robert Covington started the third in place of 7-footer Ivica Zubac and his three-point play gave the Clippers a 75-62 lead, their largest of the game.

Ingram scored five of the Pelicans' final 12 points to send them into the fourth trailing 84-74.

The Clippers, who made the Western Conference finals for the first time in franchise history last year, also were missing Luke Kennard. The league's three-point percentage leader didn't play because of a sore right hamstring that kept him out of the loss at Minnesota on Tuesday in the team's first play-in game.

Young leads Hawks over Cavaliers, into playoffs

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — When the final horn sounded and Trae Young's work was done, he slammed the ball off the floor, sending it spinning skyward. He then turned and waved goodbye to the Cleveland fans re-treating to the exits.

So cold.

Ice Trae stings again.

Young scored 32 of his 38 points in the second half and the Atlanta Hawks overcame losing center Clint Capela to a knee injury to beat the Cavaliers 107-101 in the play-in on Friday night and earn the Eastern Conference's No. 8 playoff seed.

Young started slowly for the second straight game, but the All-Star with the chilly nickname for his ability to take over games with one of the NBA's deadliest shooting strokes heated up when it mattered most.

"He made shots from the jump circle," marveled Cavs coach J.B. Bickerstaff.

Young scored 16 points in the third quarter to rally the Hawks from a 10-point halftime deficit, and added another 16 in the fourth to finish off the Cavs, whose inexperience showed throughout the second half.

Bogdan Bogdanovic added 19 points for

Atlanta, which will play No. 1 seed Miami in the first round. Game 1 is Sunday in South Florida.

"We took care of business," Young said. "It's a testament to our team that we kept fighting and finished the job."

The Hawks, who made it to the conference finals a year ago, may have to go forward without Capela. The 6-foot-10 center hyperextended his right knee late in the first half, had to be helped from the floor and couldn't return. He will have an MRI exam in Miami.

Capela's loss forced all of the Hawks to step up, especially on the boards. But it was Young, making 10 of his last 14 shots, who kept their season alive.

"Trae has a great deal of confidence in his game, his ability and he continued to believe," Hawks coach Nate McMillan said. "I didn't see any panic in his play. He came out in the second half, remained aggressive. Those shots started to fall, the same shots that he was taking the first half, they started to fall in the second half."

Lauri Markkanen scored 26 and Darius Garland 21 for the young Cavaliers, whose unexpected season fell just shy of a playoff berth.

Cleveland hasn't been to the playoffs since 2018, and the Cavs haven't been to the postseason without LeBron James on their roster since 1998.

As if to add insult to injury, James tweeted an emoji of an ice cube in the closing seconds — a nod to Young — as the Hawks were ending Cleveland's turnaround season.

Lifted by a rowdy, towel-waving crowd in Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse, the Cavs were in position to advance and played well in long stretches. However, Cleveland's offense bogged down in the third quarter, and the Cavs had no answer defensively for Young.

"The ball wasn't popping and there was a lot of isolation and standing still," Bickerstaff said of his team's troubles after halftime.

The Cleveland fans who stayed until the end saluted the Cavs, who weren't expected to get this far after winning just 22 games last season. While they've been relegated to lottery picks and losing since James left after a four-year run to the NBA Finals four years ago, the future in Cleveland is bright.

"We're headed in the right direction, for sure," Bickerstaff said. "We accomplished a lot this year."

Ohtani goes deep twice in Angels' win

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Angels manager Joe Maddon ordered the second bases-loaded intentional walk of his career and only the third in the majors since at least 1950, and Shohei Ohtani homered twice to lead Los Angeles past the Texas Rangers 9-6 on Friday night.

Corey Seager joins Barry Bonds in 1998 and Josh Hamilton in 2008 in being given first base with the bases full. Hamilton's free pass was also called by Maddon, who was then managing the Tampa Bay Rays against the Rangers.

The intentional pass of Seager gave the Rangers a 4-2 lead in the fourth inning with Austin Warren (1-0) on the mound. Texas scored twice more in the inning, but the Angels got five runs in the fifth, including Ohtani's two-run homer. Last year's MVP also led off the game with a long ball, his first homer and RBI of the season.

Mets 10, Diamondbacks 3: Francisco Lindor homered from both sides of the plate to back another stingy start from newcomer Chris Bassitt, and New York routed visiting Arizona.

Acquired from Oakland in a trade last month, Bassitt (2-0) allowed one run and two hits in six innings. New York (6-2) has the most wins in the majors.

Orioles 2, Yankees 1 (11): New York's Aroldis Chapman walked home a run in the 11th inning to give host Baltimore the victory.

The Orioles went 1-for-15 with runners in scoring position. They didn't need a hit in the 11th.

Giants 4, Guardians 1: Cleveland lost its first home game using its new name as Carlos Rodón allowed one run in seven innings and Joey Bart hit a two-run homer in the eighth to lead San Francisco.

Rodón (1-0) struck out nine, giving up two hits and a pair of walks as the Giants won their third straight.

Blue Jays 4, Athletics 1: Vladimir Guerrero Jr. hit his major league-leading fifth home run, Zack Collins had two hits and an RBI and host Toronto beat Oakland.

Lourdes Gurriel Jr. reached base three times, scored a run and drove in a run to help Toronto win its sixth straight against Oakland.

Twins 8, Red Sox 4: Miguel

Sanó hit a two-run homer, rookie Joe Ryan allowed one run over six innings, and visiting Minnesota beat Boston.

Ryan (1-1) kept the Red Sox off balance with his pinpoint slider, striking out seven and walking none. He threw 60 of his 82 pitches for strikes.

Braves 5, Padres 2: Adam Duvall hit a tiebreaking two-run double in the eighth inning and Ozzie Albies homered for the second straight game as Atlanta beat host San Diego.

Kenley Jansen pitched a perfect ninth to earn his first save with the Braves.

Dodgers 3, Reds 1: Trea Turner extended his hitting streak to 26 games with an RBI triple and Gavin Lux scored two runs while reaching base three times as Los Angeles beat visiting Cincinnati.

Chris Taylor had an early run-scoring triple as the Dodgers punctuated Jackie Robinson Day with their fourth consecutive win.

Mariners 11, Astros 1: Marco Gonzales threw seven solid innings, Adam Frazier had four hits including a two-run triple and two-run double, and Seattle opened its home campaign by beating Houston.

White Sox 3, Rays 2: Rookie slugger Jake Burger had a solo homer and an RBI single, Dylan Cease dominated into the sixth inning and host Chicago beat Tampa Bay.

Gavin Sheets and Leury Garcia each doubled and scored for the White Sox (5-2), whose start is their best since 2016.

Cardinals 10, Brewers 1: Miles Mikolas carried a one-hitter into the seventh inning, Tommy Edman homered for the second straight night and St. Louis rolled past host Milwaukee.

Rockies 6, Cubs 5: Alan Trejo hit a three-run homer in his second at-bat this season, and Colorado overcame a tough start by Germán Márquez to beat visiting Chicago.

Tigers 2, Royals 1: Rookie Spencer Torkelson hit a long two-run homer and had two of Detroit's three hits as host Kansas City lost its fifth straight.

Nationals 7, Pirates 2: Nelson Cruz and Josh Bell drove in three runs each and visiting Washington beat Pittsburgh.

Marlins 7, Phillies 1: Jesús Sánchez tripled for the second straight game, doubled and drove in two runs, and host Miami beat Philadelphia.

NASCAR working to make visibility better at Bristol

Associated Press

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Kyle Busch took a long pause to carefully choose how to describe visibility Friday in the first practice on the dirt at Bristol Motor Speedway.

"So far better, I guess?" Busch said. "But second half of that practice, you couldn't see. You put one car in front of you and you can't see. Two cars? You definitely can't see."

NASCAR brought the Cup Series back to the Tennessee dirt for a second consecutive year as Speedway Motorsports transformed its Bristol bullring for a

Sunday night race. It will be the first time NASCAR races on Easter Sunday in more than 30 years in a scheduling choice by Fox Sports to attract more eyeballs.

The race will run at night after the first dirt Cup race since 1970 last year had mixed results. The 30,000 tons of red Tennessee clay used to cover the concrete made Bristol a dustbowl that had dangerously poor visibility when combined with the glare of the sun.

"We have to race at night," said Joey Logano, who won the Bristol dirt race last year. "That

was important. Because you just couldn't even see the cars, and it was unsafe inside the car."

Speedway Motorsports made changes to the track, as well, knocking 3 degrees of banking off to make it 16 degrees at the apron; the track gets progressively steeper closer to the wall. It was done to create multiple racing lines and prevent too much rubber grinding into one slick lane.

Reigning Cup champion Kyle Larson believes more could have been done, specifically the removal of windshields. He

feels NASCAR is wasting its time running a pseudo-dirt race and not adopting all of the elements that make the formula a fan favorite.

"If we're not going to take the windshields out, then why are we racing on dirt?" Larson said. "We just shouldn't race on dirt if we're not going to take the windshields out and actually have a dirt race with moisture in the track and being able to produce a real dirt race. I feel like we're just wasting everybody's time a little bit and not giving the fans and competitors what we all deserve."

NHL making progress with diversity

Associated Press

CALGARY, Alberta — Brigitte Lacquette recalls trying out for her first summer hockey team with her sister and the unwelcoming vibe in the dressing room.

The First Nations siblings from Mallard, Manitoba, had already navigated the barrier of extensive, expensive travel just to be there.

“They all just kind of stared at us. No one said, ‘Hi.’ No one said anything. We sat on one side of the dressing room and they just stared at us. I remember how uncomfortable of a feeling that was,” Lacquette told The Canadian Press.

“I got cut and then I went to another team and I’m still friends with at least five or six girls on that team from when I played hockey at 11 or 12 years old,” she said. “They were so open and accepting. They didn’t care about the color of our skin. They just cared if we could play hockey or not. Then they made it a point to talk to us and made us feel comfortable.”

The defender on Canada’s

Olympic women’s hockey team in 2018 is now a Chicago Blackhawks regional scout and the first Indigenous woman to scout in the NHL. The 29-year-old Lacquette also serves on the NHL’s player inclusion and female hockey advisory committees.

“Right now, I’m so passionate about diversity, equity and inclusion, especially in hockey,” Lacquette said.

She’s a spokeswoman for a program designed to foster those elements in the sport, and one that is accelerating the work of a female hockey association on Canada’s east coast. About 30% of the Cape Breton Blizzard Female Hockey Association is Indigenous, Black or people of color.

Not only was the Blizzard one of 15 associations to receive a \$10,000 grant from Kruger’s Big Assist program, it was awarded an additional \$50,000 via The Second Assist for its work with two First Nations communities as well as with newcomers to Canada.

“They’re promoting inclusion

by creating teams in First Nations communities and developing all-female referee crews and training female coaches and things like that, so I feel like they’ve done a lot for their community,” Lacquette said. “Traditionally hockey is a white man’s sport, so kind of changing that narrative of it just being strictly a white-man’s sport.

“Hockey is for everyone,” she added. “It is important to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in the sport and making sure kids are comfortable signing up for associations and having teammates that understand everyone has a different background and a different story.”

Lacquette and two siblings playing hockey stretched her family’s finances. The Cote First Nation helped cover some costs, but the same challenges face Eskasoni First Nation girls in eastern Cape Breton wanting to play hockey.

A barrier to playing games there included a lack of certified referees, which Blizzard association president Christina Lamey said was a problem

quickly fixed. The Cape Breton Blizzard Female Hockey Association has doubled in membership in two years to 300 playing on 18 teams.

Roughly 90 hail from the Eskasoni and Membertou First Nations and another handful from Whitney Pier, which is historically an area of Black and newcomer communities.

“In reaching communities who have historically been excluded from the game, I never use the term under-represented because they always wanted to play,” Lamey said. “The want was there.”

Since parents drive hockey associations, getting those without a hockey background into the game was key, she said. Covering the cost of goaltending equipment — because a league can’t survive without goalies — and developing First Nations coaches were other ways the association grew its membership.

“I am specifically working next year on having our first Indigenous female referees,” Lamey said.

Islanders shut out Canadiens in goalie Price’s return

Associated Press

MONTREAL — Ilya Sorokin made a career-high 44 saves to tie the New York franchise record for shutouts in a season with seven, helping the Islanders spoil Carey Price’s season debut in a 3-0 victory over the Montreal Canadiens on Friday night.

Before the game, the Canadiens recognized Islanders great and Montreal native Mike Bossy with a tribute and moment of silence. Bossy died late Thursday at 65.

“It was a fitting place to be,” Islanders forward Josh Bailey said. “We were certainly motivated to play well and try to get a win for him.”

Price stopped 17 shots, giving up goals to Zach Parise and Noah Dobson in a 1:44 span in the third period. Brock Nelson added an empty-net goal.

“It was a lot of fun. It made me feel really, I guess, wanted,” Price said. “It was definitely emotional but I was able to stifle that and stay focused because I wanted to play well tonight.”

Canadiens part-owner Michael Andlauer gave his season tickets to Price’s family in order for them to be able to watch the goaltender up close.

“It didn’t feel quite normal, but pretty close,” Price said. “Definitely having my family here and being able to see them in warmups. They were able to

sit by the Zamboni gate in the second period so that was a lot of fun for me.”

Price played for the first time since Game 5 of the 2021 Stanley Cup Final in July. He spent months recovering from off-season knee surgery, but paused his rehabilitation after voluntarily entering the NHL’s player assistance program last fall. He has said he entered the program for substance abuse and in January noted his career could be in jeopardy.

Panthers 6, Jets 1: Sergei Bobrovsky made 30 saves, Jonathan Huberdeau and Gustav Forsling each scored twice and host Florida beat Winnipeg for its ninth straight victory.

Huberdeau, who added an assist, had two goals in the first five minutes. He has 30 goals this season, and extended his career-best points streak to 13 games.

Mason Marchment and Maxim Mamin also scored, and Claude Giroux had three assists for the Eastern Conference-leading Panthers. Florida has 112 points, two behind Colorado in the race for the most in the NHL. Both teams have eight games remaining.

Nikolaj Ehlers scored for the Jets. Connor Hellebuyck allowed four goals on 26 shots before being replaced by Eric Comrie at the start of the third period. Comrie had 15 stops.