

Ukrainians refuse to surrender Mariupol

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The shattered port city of Mariupol appeared on the brink of falling to the Russians on Sunday after seven weeks under siege, in what would give Moscow a crucial success following its failure to storm the Ukrainian capital and the sinking of its Black Sea flagship.

The Russian military estimated that 2,500 Ukrainian fighters were holding out at a hulking steel plant with a warren of underground passageways in the last pocket of resistance in Mariupol.

Moscow set a midday deadline for their surrender, saying those who laid down their arms were “guaranteed to keep their lives.” But the defenders did not submit, just as they rejected previous ultimatums.

“We will fight absolutely to the end, to the win, in this war,” Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal vowed on ABC’s “This Week.” He said Ukraine is prepared to end the war through diplomacy if possible, “but we do not have intention to surrender.”

The capture of Mariupol would free up Russian forces to join an expected all-out offensive for

control of the Donbas, the industrial region in the country’s east where the Kremlin has focused its war aims after abandoning, for now at least, any attempt to take Kyiv, the capital.

The relentless bombardment and street fighting in Mariupol have left much of the city pulverized and killed at least 21,000 people, by the Ukrainians’ estimate. A maternity hospital was hit by a lethal Russian airstrike in the opening weeks of the war, and about 300 people were reported killed in the bombing of a theater where civilians were taking shelter.

An estimated 100,000 remained in the city out of a prewar population of 450,000, trapped without food, water, heat or electricity in a siege that has made Mariupol the scene of the some of the worst suffering of the war.

“All those who will continue resistance will be destroyed,” Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, the Russian Defense Ministry’s spokesman, said in announcing the latest ultimatum.

Konashenkov said intercepted communications indicated there were about 400 foreign mercena-

ries along with the Ukrainian troops at the Azovstal steel mill, a claim that could not be independently verified.

Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar described Mariupol as a “shield defending Ukraine” as Russian troops prepare for the battle in the Donbas, where Moscow-backed separatists already control some territory.

In a reminder that no part of Ukraine is safe, Russian forces carried out missile strikes Sunday near Kyiv and elsewhere in an apparent effort to weaken Ukraine’s military capacity before the anticipated assault.

After the humiliating loss of the flagship of its Black Sea Fleet to what the Ukrainians boasted was a missile attack, Russia’s military vowed Friday to step up strikes on the capital. The Kremlin said Sunday that it had attacked an ammunition plant near Kyiv overnight with precision-guided missiles, the third such strike in as many days.

Russia also claimed to have destroyed Ukrainian air defense radar equipment in the east, near Sievierodonetsk, as well as sever-

al ammunition depots elsewhere in the country.

Explosions were reported overnight in Kramatorsk, the eastern city where rockets earlier this month killed at least 57 people at a train station crowded with civilians trying to evacuate ahead of the Russian offensive.

A regional official in eastern Ukraine said at least two people were killed when Russian forces fired at residential buildings in the town of Zolote, near the front line in the Donbas.

Malyar, the deputy defense minister, said the Russians continued to hit Mariupol with airstrikes and could be getting ready for an amphibious landing to beef up their ground forces.

Capturing the city would be Russia’s biggest victory after two months of costly fighting and could help reassure the Russian public amid the worsening economic situation from Western sanctions.

It would allow Russia to secure a land corridor to the Crimean Peninsula, which it annexed from Ukraine in 2014, and deprive Ukraine of a major port and its prized industrial assets.

Europe ops tempo puts crimp in military blood donations

By JENNIFER H. SVAN

Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — A ramped up operations tempo in Europe amid the war in Ukraine has meant that fewer service members are lining up to donate blood, exacerbating a preexisting shortage of U.S. stockpiles.

Temporary duty assignments and training obligations have forced more service members to miss planned donations, officials with the Armed Services Blood Program-Europe said Friday.

“We’ve definitely seen that current events in the world have been keeping some folks

from keeping their appointments to donate blood,” said Stacy Sanning, a program spokeswoman.

Slots are still available for a blood drive scheduled next week at the Army’s installation in Baumholder, Germany, Sanning said Friday. Usually, appointments would be full or nearly full this close to the event, she said.

The program aims to collect at least 400 units of blood per month from an average of one to three weekly blood drives in Europe. Every donor gives one unit. After a drop at the beginning of the pandemic, the program mostly has been hitting that goal, Sanning said.

A civilian blood shortage in the U.S., caused

by blood drive cancellations and surging hospital demand during the pandemic, underscores the need for blood in Europe, officials said. Blood collected stateside augments the supply for the U.S. military community in Europe and service members deployed to Africa.

“Right now, there is an urgent need for blood in the United States and that includes the Department of Defense’s overall supply,” said Lt. Col. Veronica Ortiz, director of joint blood operations at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany.

To sign up to donate, go to <https://www.militarydonor.com> or email usarmy.donateblood-europe@mail.mil.

N. Korea tests ‘tactical guided’ weapons

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea reportedly tested two more missiles on Saturday, a day after the 110th birthday of the regime’s founder, and on Sunday denounced upcoming military drills by the U.S. and South Korea.

North Korea fired two projectiles towards the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan, around 6 p.m. Saturday, according to a text message to reporters the next day from South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff.

South Korean and U.S. intelligence agencies are still analyzing the launches, whose projectiles flew 68 miles at an estimated altitude of 15.5 miles, according to the Joint

Chiefs. The projectiles are estimated to have reached a maximum speed of Mach 4, or four times the speed of sound.

The initial estimates peg the projectiles as more limited in range than a launch March 24 of an intercontinental ballistic missile that was theoretically capable of reaching the U.S. mainland. North Korea has conducted at least 11 other rounds of missile tests so far this year.

North Korea provided scant details of the launch Saturday. The regime typically publishes its missile specifications through its state-run media, such as the Korean Central News Agency, the day following the firing.

Rodong Sinmun, a North Korean newspaper, reported Sunday that leader Kim

Jong Un oversaw the test-firing of a “new tactical guided weapon system” for long-range artillery units and the country’s “tactical nuclear operation.”

The newspaper stated the test was “carried out successfully.”

The same day, North Korea’s state-run website Uriminzokkiri published a column criticizing the upcoming joint military drill between the South and U.S.

The nine-day drill is scheduled to start Monday and will consist of computer simulations, South Korea’s military said in a text message Sunday. The training is considered defensive in nature and “will be an opportunity to improve the performance” of troops between the two countries, the release added.

Lessons from Ukraine being used in US Army training

Associated Press

FORT IRWIN, Calif. — In the dusty California desert, U.S. Army trainers are already using lessons learned from Russia’s war against Ukraine as they prepare soldiers for future fights against a major adversary such as Russia or China.

The role-players in this month’s exercise at the National Training Center speak Russian. The enemy force that controls the fictional town of Ujen is using a steady stream of social media posts to make false accusations against the American brigade preparing to attack.

In the coming weeks, the planned training scenario for the next brigade coming in will focus on how to battle an enemy willing to destroy a city with rocket and missile fire in order to conquer it.

If the images seem familiar, they are, playing out on televisions and websites worldwide right now as Russian forces pound Ukrainian cities with airstrikes, killing scores of civilians. The information war on social media has showcased im-

passioned nightly speeches by Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as well as Russian efforts to accuse Ukraine’s forces of faking mass killings in towns such as Bucha — massacres that the West blames on Moscow’s troops.

“I think right now the whole Army is really looking at what’s happening in Ukraine and trying to learn lessons,” said Army Secretary Christine Wormuth. Those lessons, she said, range from Russia’s equipment and logistics troubles to communications and use of the internet.

“The Russia-Ukraine experience is a very powerful illustration for our Army of how important the information domain is going to be,” said Wormuth, who spent two days at the training center in the Mojave Desert watching an Army brigade wage war against the fictional “Denovian” forces.

“We’ve been talking about that for about five years. But really seeing it and seeing the way Zelenskyy has been incredibly powerful. ... This is a world war that the actual world can see

and watch in real time.”

At the center, the commander, Brig. Gen. Curt Taylor, and his staff have ripped pages out of the Russian playbook to ensure that U.S. soldiers are ready to fight and win against a sophisticated near-peer enemy.

It’s a common tool. For example, his base and the Joint Readiness Training Center in Louisiana both shifted to counterinsurgency training during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. And the military services have focused other training on how to fight in cold weather — mimicking conditions in Russia or North Korea. But these latest changes have happened quickly in the early months after Russia invaded Ukraine.

About 4,500 soldiers from 2nd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, based at Fort Hood, Texas, are out in the vast desert training area at Fort Irwin, where they will spend two weeks fighting the NTC’s resident 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, which acts as the enemy military. Soldiers from the regiment — known as Blackhorse — are

arrayed in and around Ujen, which also includes role-players acting as the locals.

Again, they can look to Ukraine to see how Russia failed to do that in the early weeks of the war. U.S. leaders repeatedly noted that in Russia’s initial multipronged assault in Ukraine, commanders consistently failed to provide the airstrikes and support their ground troops needed to move into key cities such as Kyiv.

That failure led to Russian troops bombing the cities from the outskirts, hitting hospitals, apartment buildings and other structures, and killing civilians.

So when the next brigade arrives as the training center, Taylor said it will face an enemy on board with doing just that.

“We will be very focused on how to fight against an adversary that is willing to destroy infrastructure because that’s how we think our adversaries will fight,” Taylor said. “We’ve got to be prepared for urban combat where we have an adversary that is indiscriminately firing artillery.”

Suit seeks to void new Philadelphia mask rule

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Several businesses and residents have filed suit in state court in Pennsylvania, seeking to overturn Philadelphia’s renewed indoor mask mandate scheduled to be enforced beginning Monday in an effort to halt a surge in COVID-19 infections.

The lawsuit, filed in Commonwealth Court on Saturday, said Philadelphia lacks the authority to impose such a mandate.

Philadelphia last week became the first major U.S. city to reinstate its indoor mask mandate after reporting a sharp in-

crease in coronavirus infections, with the city’s top health official saying she wanted to forestall a potential new wave driven by an omicron subvariant.

Attorney Thomas W. King III, who was among those involved in last year’s successful challenge to the statewide mask mandate in schools, said the city’s emergency order went against recommendations of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and “imposed a renegade standard unfound anywhere else in the world.”

The suit accuses city health

officials of having “usurped the power and authority” of state lawmakers, the state department of health and the state advisory health board.

Kevin Lessard, communications director of the Philadelphia mayor’s office, said officials were “unable to comment on this particular case” but cited a court’s denial of an emergency motion by another plaintiff for a preliminary injunction against the mandate. Lessard said “the courts once again confirmed that city has both the legal authority and requisite flexibility to enact the precautionary measures necessary to con-

trol the spread of COVID-19.”

Most states and cities dropped their masking requirements in February and early March following new guidelines from the CDC that put less focus on case counts and more on hospital capacity, and said most Americans could safely take off their masks.

Philadelphia had ended its indoor mask mandate March 2. But on Monday, Dr. Cheryl Bettigole, the health commissioner, cited a more than 50% rise in confirmed COVID-19 cases in 10 days, the threshold at which the city’s guidelines call for people to wear masks indoors.

Police arrest suspect in SC mall shooting that injured 14

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — Police have arrested a suspect in connection with a shooting at a busy shopping mall in South Carolina’s capital on Saturday that left 14 people injured.

Columbia Police Chief W.H. “Skip” Holbrook said Jewayne M. Price, 22, who was one of three people initially detained by law enforcement as a person of interest, remains in police custody and is expected to be charged with unlawful carrying of a pistol.

Fourteen people were injured during the shooting at Columbiana Centre, Holbrook said in a news release Saturday.

The victims ranged in age from 15 to 73.

Holbrook said no fatalities have been reported, but that nine people were shot and five people suffered injuries while attempting to flee the mall for safety.

Police said the 73-year-old victim continues to receive medical treatment, but the other victims have been released from local hospitals or will be released shortly.

“We don’t believe this was random,” Holbrook said. “We believe they knew each other and something led to the gunfire.”

Investigators believe that at least three suspects displayed firearms inside the mall but are working to determine how many suspects fired weapons. Police said at least one firearm was seized.

Heavy police presence continued in the area hours after the shooting, though officers began letting more traffic through the streets surrounding the shopping centers and strip malls that are usually packed on weekends.

Officers were also stationed outside a nearby hotel designated as a reunification area for people at the scene of the shooting and their families.

“Today’s isolated, senseless act of violence is extremely upsetting and our thoughts are with everyone impacted,” Columbiana Centre said in a statement. “We are grateful for the quick response and continued support of our security team and our partners in law enforcement.”

Easter Sunday marks return to in-person worship for many

Associated Press

BOSTON — For many U.S. Christians, this weekend marks the first time since 2019 that they will gather in person on Easter Sunday, a welcome chance to celebrate one of the year’s holiest days side by side with fellow congregants.

The pandemic erupted in the country in March 2020, just ahead of Easter, forcing many churches to resort to online or televised worship. Many continued to hold virtual services last spring after a deadly winter wave of the coronavirus and as vaccination campaigns were still ramping up. But this year, more churches are opening their doors for Easter services with few COVID-19 restrictions, in line with broader societal trends.

Among them are Catholic parishes in the Archdiocese of Boston, which since last June has once again required most churchgoers to attend Mass in person — though those with health risks may still watch remotely, and pastors have been asked to make space for social distancing in churches.

MC Sullivan, chief health care ethicist for the archdiocese, said

celebrating Mass communally is important to how Catholics profess their faith.

“It has been quite wonderful to see how well-attended Mass is right now. ... It seems to have brought a lot of people back to the idea of what’s important to them,” Sullivan said.

While most pandemic restrictions have been lifted, some area parishes are holding Easter Sunday services outside, including a 6 a.m. sunrise Mass near the waterfront in South Boston.

Hundreds of people lit candles in the vast Cathedral of St. Paul, Minn., after Archbishop Bernard Hebda blessed the fire and lit the Paschal Candle to open the Easter Vigil service late Saturday.

The century-old cathedral echoed with the singing of the congregation as candles flickered in the darkness. Well past 8 p.m., wide-eyed children fascinated by the little flames and the cantors far outnumbered people wearing masks — the archdiocese rescinded all COVID protocols on April 1, while allowing the faithful and individual parishes to retain precautions if they wish.

VMI alumni challenging diversification reforms

The Washington Post

Conservative Virginia Military Institute alumni are using a petition drive and a lawsuit to challenge diversity, equity and inclusion efforts at the nation's oldest state-supported military college, ignoring the priorities of VMI's first Black superintendent.

Though VMI's leader, retired Army Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins, has been increasingly vocal about the need for diversity initiatives, a network of older, white alumni upset with the school's reforms is ratcheting up their attacks on the college's new agenda. The group — irate over a state-ordered investigation last year that concluded the college suffered from a “racist and sexist culture” — appears emboldened by the election of Gov. Glenn Youngkin who banned teaching “critical race theory” in K-12 schools and purged the word “equity” from Virginia's education system.

The disgruntled alumni are homing in on a specific target: NewPoint Strategies, a Northern Virginia consulting firm whose clients have included the Defense Department, Fortune 500 companies, federal government agencies, universities and non-profits.

The first attack on the contract came in

March from Carmen D. Villani Jr., a white member of the Class of 1976 and frequent public critic of the college's direction. Villani circulated a petition online calling for Virginia's new attorney general Jason Miyares to halt the NewPoint Strategies contract or any similar contracts at the school. The petition also asks Miyares to stop the college's implementation of diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives until the “appropriate” state agency conducts a “full investigation” to determine whether critical race theory — an academic framework that examines systemic racism in America — or other “divisive training” are occurring at VMI.

On April 1, a company run by another aggrieved white alumnus filed a lawsuit in state court against VMI and NewPoint Strategies asking a judge to halt the contract. The Yorktown, Va.-based firm, Center for Applied Innovation, is run by Bob Morris, a retired Army colonel and member of the Class of 1979.

This is Morris' second lawsuit in the ongoing war over VMI's future.

In his new lawsuit, Morris' company wants a judge to issue an injunction ordering VMI and NewPoint Strategies to cease any work under the college's pending contract.

3 of 6 killed in Sacramento shooting were in gang fight

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Newly filed court documents in the downtown Sacramento shooting that killed six people and wounded a dozen others reveal that three of the dead had been involved in the gang dispute that led to the massive shootout, with at least one of them firing a weapon.

Documents filed Friday by Sacramento County District Attorney Anne Marie Schubert's office show that the three deceased men affiliated with gangs were Joshua Hoye-Lucchese, 32, Devazia Turner, 29, and Sergio Harris, 38, The Sacramento Bee reported Saturday.

Turner fired a weapon, but it was unclear if all three fired weapons. Police have said there were at least five suspects in the April 3 shooting.

Two of the suspects — brothers Smiley and Dandrae Martin — were wounded and are hospitalized or in jail. A third suspect, Mtula Payton, 27, remains at large.

In a social media clip posted hours before the shooting, the Martin brothers are seen posing with Hoye-Lucchese and two handguns and a rifle. In the video, Hoye-Lucchese and Smiley Martin, 27, talk about going downtown while armed to loiter outside nightclubs and “boast about shooting rival gang members,” according to a 13-page document.

In the video, both Hoye-Lucchese and Smiley Martin state allegiance to the Garden Blocc Crips.

Later, surveillance footage from downtown Sacramento April 3 at 1:57 a.m. shows a person next to Smiley Martin pointing in the direction of Payton and Turner, according to the documents. Authorities said both are members of a rival gang, G-Mobb.

Seconds later, Payton and Turner start approaching the corner where the Martin brothers and Hoye-Lucchese are standing, court papers said. Payton and Turner are joined by Sergio Harris, identified in documents as a member of ally gang Del Paso Heights Bloods.

Shortly after 2 a.m., Smiley Martin is seen exchanging gunfire with Devazia Turner, the documents said.

Hoye-Lucchese, Turner and Harris were killed, along with Johntaya Alexander, 21; Melinda Davis, 57; and Yamile Martinez-Andrade, 21.

Ga. man is accused of leaving grandmother in freezer to die

Associated Press

ARMUCHEE, Ga. — Police said a northwest Georgia man killed his grandmother by stuffing her in a freezer while she was still alive.

Floyd County Police discovered the body of Doris Cumming, 82, late Thursday in the Armuchee home she shared with her grandson, 29-year-old Robert Keith Tincher III.

Tincher was charged with murder, aggravated battery and concealing the death of another. He remains jailed in Rome. It's unclear if he has a lawyer who could comment on his behalf.

Police said Cumming's family believed she had moved out of state, but grew concerned after not hearing from her and reported she

might be missing.

Police said they believe that Cumming was injured in a fall in December and that instead of getting her medical attention, Tincher dragged her through home. Criminal charges say Tincher “heard and saw numerous bones break.” He then wrapped her in plastic bags and placed her in a large freezer, with the charges saying Tincher “acknowledged her back broke going into the freezer.” Charges say there was “no altercation or provocation” leading up to the acts.

“From what we determined, at the time, he believed she was still breathing and had some movement at the time she was going into the freezer,” said Floyd County Investigator Britany Werner told WAGA-TV.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Oswald life insurance claim sells at auction

MA BOSTON — The life insurance policy on the man who assassinated President John F. Kennedy paid out less than \$900 to his mother. Now, the death claim she filed to get that sum has sold at auction for almost \$80,000.

The original Notice of Insurance Claim for Lee Harvey Oswald sold for \$79,436, Boston-based RR Auction said in a statement.

The one-page, 8.5-inch by 10.25-inch document came inside a frame alongside a photograph of Oswald. The Proof of Death certificate is signed by Marguerite C. Oswald, and is dated Dec. 26, 1963, just 32 days after Oswald was killed by Jack Ruby. Issued by the National Life and Accident Insurance Co. of Nashville, Tenn., the document includes Oswald's name, dates of birth and death, specifies the place of death as Dallas, and the cause of death as "gun-shot wound."

Felon sentenced after Instagram video with gun

FL TAMPA — A convicted felon in Florida has been sentenced to four years and three months in federal prison after appearing in a social media post holding a rifle.

Christian Agosto, 22, of Brandon, was sentenced in Tampa federal court, according to court records. He had pleaded guilty in December to possessing a firearm as a convicted felon.

Agosto had been free from prison for about four months in July 2021, when he held and displayed a rifle during an Insta-

gram Live video, prosecutors said. Agosto had spent about two years in state prison on several gun charges, and he was on community control through the Florida Department of Corrections.

Agosto's probation officer and other law enforcement officers searched his home several days after the video was posted and recovered a loaded Ruger AR-556 rifle, officials said.

Fire destroys church after its Good Friday service

IL CHICAGO — A fire that roared through a prominent church on Chicago's South Side was sparked by a propane torch on the building's roof, the Chicago Fire Department said.

"The CFD Office of Fire Investigation has determined the fire at Antioch Church to be accidental and caused by work being done on the building roof using a propane torch," the department said on Twitter.

The multiple-alarm fire blaze at the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church began an hour after Good Friday services ended.

"If we've got to lose something, losing it on Good Friday is the best time to lose it because, after Good Friday comes Resurrection Sunday," the pastor, Rev. Gerald Dew, told reporters at the scene.

Shoplifter flees from police, hides in sewer

GA CUMMING — A shoplifting call at a Home Depot in Georgia escalated into a manhunt and an arrest in a sewer system, police said.

Workers at the Cumming store confronted a man who tried to steal copper wire, but he ran outside and hid in the park-

ing lot after officers were called, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported.

Officers saw the man when he got into his car, but he sped off when they tried to pull him over. Police Chief David Marsh said the man crashed after losing control of his vehicle and hitting the guardrail.

The man went into a development that was in the early stages of construction. The sewer was the only part that was completed. Authorities stationed someone at each entry and waited for the man to come out.

Officials look to launch prison tattoo program

MN ST. PAUL — State corrections officials are looking to launch a prison tattoo program in hopes of curbing bloodborne diseases as inmates ink themselves with homemade tools.

The St. Paul Pioneer Press reported that the Corrections Department is searching for an experienced tattoo artist to oversee tattoo studios in state prisons. The aim is to slow the spread of diseases like hepatitis C that can spread when inmates try to tattoo themselves or each other with unsterilized tools and share contaminated needles.

The prison system treats about 80 to 100 inmates for the disease each at a cost ranging from \$20,000 to \$75,000 per inmate.

Man charged with running over woman with his car

NJ ELIZABETH — A New Jersey man has been charged with attempted murder after he allegedly ran down a woman in a road rage in-

cident that was caught on video.

The footage filmed by a neighbor and aired on News12 New Jersey showed a car on a residential street in Elizabeth backing up and then chasing the woman onto a front lawn, where she slips and falls in front of the vehicle.

Police and prosecutors allege Vincent Jean, 56, of Elizabeth, was involved in a minor traffic accident with the woman and began pursuing her after she began taking pictures of his car as he tried to flee.

Jean allegedly drove over the victim, then backed up and drove over her again, according to the prosecutor's office.

The 23-year-old woman was taken to the hospital in critical condition.

Store owner extradited after accidental shooting

NV LAS VEGAS — A Southern California shoe store owner accused of shooting and wounding a 9-year-old girl when he opened fire at shoplifters agreed to be returned from Nevada to face charges in the case.

Police have said that Marqel Cockrell, 20, fled from the city of Victorville in his car just after the girl, identified by family members as Ava Chruniak, was mistakenly hit by bullets as she waited to have her picture taken with a mall Easter bunny.

Cockrell co-owns the shoe store Sole Addicts at the Mall of Victor Valley and was chasing two shoplifters when he fired shots that "instead hit the 9-year-old female victim," Victorville police said in a statement.

— From wire reports



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Healthy Warriors top Nuggets

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Coach Steve Kerr suddenly faces a playoff conundrum: start Stephen Curry again for Game 2 of the playoffs for Golden State and move Jordan Poole back to the bench or stick with what worked so well in the opener and be extra cautious with Curry.

“Yeah, we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it,” Kerr said, smiling.

Poole shined in his playoff debut with 30 points, staying in the starting lineup as Curry returned from a foot injury, and the Warriors smothered Nikola Jokic to beat the Denver Nuggets 123-107 on Saturday night in Game 1 of the first-round series.

For now, Curry sure had a blast watching Poole and Splash Brother Klay Thompson do their thing from the opening tip.

“I have no expectations on what’s next because we’re always trying to figure this out because this is kind of a tough situation to deal with in terms of the quick ramp up that I’ve had

and this is a playoff-type intensity and atmosphere,” Curry said.

Healthy at last, Thompson returned to the playoff stage for the first time in nearly three years following two serious injuries and scored 19 points with five three-pointers.

“Jordan Poole, wow, what a playoff debut,” Thompson said. “... He’s just incredible. What a star in the making.”

The perimeter combination of Curry, Poole and Thompson proved too much for the Nuggets — with Poole acknowledging “it’s pretty lethal.”

Jokic had 25 points and 10 rebounds for Denver, facing stifling defense in the paint from Draymond Green and Kevon Looney while shooting 12-for-25.

Jokic credited both of them for making his shots tough.

“They have the tools. I think I missed a couple of easy ones, but I think that they were defending me really well,” Jokic said. “So I need to be better.”

Game 2 in the best-of-seven series is Monday night at Chase

Center — which hosted its first playoff game since opening in fall 2019. Fans received black T-shirts reading “Gold Blooded.”

Curry came off the bench to contribute 16 points in 21 minutes after missing exactly a month with a sprained ligament in his left foot. The two-time MVP tested it in a scrimmage Thursday, came off the bench and had a minutes restriction. He checked in at the 5:58 mark of the first quarter to a rousing ovation.

Curry missed his first five shots before a layup that went in on a goaltending call against Aaron Gordon 1:14 before halftime, then knocked down a three from the top of the arc as Golden State took a 58-47 lead at the break.

“Give them credit. This is a very talented team with tremendous playoff experience. I think the key stretch was the end of the second quarter,” Nuggets coach Michael Malone said. “You don’t want to play from behind in this building against this team.”

Mitchell, Jazz beat Mavs in series opener

Associated Press

DALLAS — Bojan Bogdanovic put Utah ahead to stay just before halftime, Donovan Mitchell got aggressive in the second half and the only made shot by Royce O’Neale was a huge one late for the Utah Jazz.

All that injured guard Luka Doncic could do for the Dallas Mavericks was watch from the bench, where at one point he was munching popcorn.

Mitchell scored 30 of his 32 points after the break, Bogdanovic finished with 26 and the Jazz opened the playoffs with a 99-93 victory Saturday over the Mavericks, who had cut an 11-point deficit to one before O’Neale’s three-pointer.

“The fact he didn’t hesitate and shot that ball, that’s a mindset, and I think it’s a mindset that our team has right now,” Utah coach Quin Snyder said.

Fourth-seeded Dallas, starting the playoffs at home for the first time since their NBA title season 11 years ago, sorely missed their 23-year-old superstar even though Jalen Brunson had 24 points and Spencer Dinwiddie 22. Doncic strained his left calf six days earlier in the regular-season finale. Coach Jason Kidd has said only that he is day-to-day.

Game 2 in the best-of-seven series is Monday night in Dallas.

Bogdanovic had the Jazz’s only two three-pointers before halftime, in a 13-2 run over the final 3½ minutes that put Utah ahead to stay. Mitchell, who always seems to step up in the postseason, was 1-for-9 shooting before coming alive after the break.

“I came out a little too passive (early), and in the same respect, Bojan was rolling,” Mitchell said. “I didn’t feel like I was out of control, Bojan had it going ... The second half, I came out in attack mode.”

Maxey sparks 76ers’ Game 1 victory

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Tyrese Maxey had Sixers fans roaring “Maxey! Maxey! Maxey!” after each electrifying play — and he crammed a season’s worth into the breakout game of his young career. He wowed on whirlwind layups, connected on three-pointers from Curry-range and did whatever he desired at all times as he dismantled the Raptors.

He even chucked the ball he autographed as the Philadelphia’s star of the game into the stands — where a fan made a two-handed grab.

Everything worked out for Maxey.

Maxey scored 21 of his playoff career-high 38 points in the third quarter and he hit five

three-pointers to lead the 76ers to a 131-111 victory over Toronto in Game 1 on Saturday night.

“I think the only thing I’m going to remember is us winning,” Maxey said.

Philly will remember so much more.

James Harden had 22 points and 14 assists in his first Eastern Conference playoff game as a Sixer. Joel Embiid, the NBA scoring champion, had 19 points and 15 rebounds. They combined to only make 11 of 32 shots from the floor.

Tobias Harris scored 26 points for Philadelphia, trying to get past the second round for the first time since 2001.

It hosts Game 2 on Monday.

The opener belonged to Maxey. The 21-year-old Maxey is the

youngest Sixer to score at least 30 points in a playoff game.

“I saw growth, man,” Harden said. “I saw him from being up-and-down and not really having consistent minutes last year in the postseason to starting and having a huge role on a championship-contending team.”

Maxey was cool and confident in the third as he swished a 32-footer late in the period for a 20-point lead that sent his teammates on the bench into a frenzy. The Raptors were stunned and had no answer for him: Maxey made 7 of 8 shots overall, both threes and all five free throws in 12 minutes.

“He just doesn’t play with anxiety,” Philadelphia coach Doc Rivers said. “There’s not a lot that ruffles him.”

Timberwolves stun Grizzlies in Game 1

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Anthony Edwards was glad to get a victory in the first playoff game of his career.

Now he and the rest of the Minnesota Timberwolves want much more.

Edwards scored 36 points in his postseason debut, and seventh-seeded Minnesota stunned the No. 2-seeded Memphis Grizzlies 130-117 on Saturday to grab home-court advantage in the opener of their first-round Western Conference series.

“Putting on another show,” said Edwards, the top overall pick in the 2020 draft. “That’s it. Putting on another show and impact winning.”

All-Star center Karl-Anthony Towns added 29 points and 13 rebounds. Malik Beasley had 23 points, and Jaden McDaniels 15. Patrick Beverley and D’Angelo Russell had 10 apiece.

The Timberwolves, fresh off beating the Los Angeles Clippers in the play-in game, won their first playoff opener since 2004. That’s when they beat Denver in the first round on their way to the Western Conference finals.

Towns said it was a good feeling walking off with a confidence-building win.

“We did a lot of little things that are needed to win,” Towns said. “We should be very proud of our performance.”

Game 2 is Tuesday night in Memphis.

Ja Morant led the Grizzlies with 32 points and eight assists, and Dillon Brooks added 24 points. Brandon Clarke had 13 points and 12 rebounds off the bench. Desmond Bane scored 17 points and Jaren Jackson Jr. had 12.

“I feel like most of the stuff was on us,” Morant said. “That’s why we lost.”

Memphis tied the franchise record by winning 56 games in the regular season and earn-

ing its highest seed ever. The Grizzlies had a packed FedExForum for only their third Game 1 in Memphis. But they struggled early after a week off and led only twice by two, the last midway through the second quarter.

“We tried our best to stay ready, but it’s been a minute since we played,” Memphis coach Taylor Jenkins said. “But we have to come out ready to go. We didn’t in the first quarter, and we paid for it.”

In this matchup of the NBA’s top-scoring offenses and two of the league’s youngest teams this season, Minnesota set franchise records for points in both the first quarter and the game. It also stymied the Grizzlies with its three-point shooting, rebounding and defense.

The Timberwolves opened with a 9-2 run and led by as much as 13 before a 41-33 lead for the franchise’s highest-scoring first quarter in the playoffs.

White Sox hold off Rays as Abreu, Hendriks deliver

Associated Press

CHICAGO — José Abreu homered for the first time this season, closer Liam Hendriks left the bases loaded in the ninth inning and the Chicago White Sox beat the Tampa Bay Rays 3-2 Saturday.

Michael Kopech threw five solid innings, and Yasmani Grandal singled away from the shift to put Chicago ahead in the sixth. Eloy Jiménez and Tim Anderson added two hits apiece for the White Sox, who have won six of seven and are off to a 6-2 start for the first time since 2016 despite several key injuries.

Hendriks struck out Taylor Walls in the ninth for his fourth save after intentionally walking pinch-hitter Ji-Man Choi to load the bases. Hendriks also got the save in a 3-2 win Friday night.

Dodgers 5, Reds 2: Trea Turner launched a two-run homer and host Los Angeles finally caught up to some record-setting heat from Cincinnati rookie Hunter Greene, beating the skidding Reds for its fifth consecutive victory.

In his highly anticipated ho-

mecoming, Greene threw an astounding 39 pitches 100 mph or faster — most in a single game since pitch tracking began in 2008.

Angels 7, Rangers 2: Shohei Ohtani hit his third home run in two games, Noah Syndergaard won a matchup of local pitchers and Los Angeles won at Texas.

The game featured two starters from opposite sides of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex in Syndergaard and Rangers lefty Taylor Hearn. It also became the latest showcase for Ohtani, the two-way superstar who won the AL MVP award last year.

Braves 5, Padres 2: Ian Anderson pitched one-run ball into the sixth inning and Matt Olson hit one of Atlanta’s three homers in a win at San Diego.

Anderson (1-1) allowed two hits and struck out seven over 5½ innings. Kenley Jansen pitched the ninth for his second save.

Red Sox 4, Twins 0: Alex Verdugo and Xander Bogaerts each hit a two-run homer and host Boston’s Tanner Houck held Minnesota scoreless over five-plus innings.

Houck (1-0) was solid, allowing just two hits and three walks while striking out four. Matt Strahm got the next three outs and Garrett Whitlock gave up just two hits while retiring the final seven.

Athletics 7, Blue Jays 5: Cristian Pache hit a go-ahead home run in the ninth inning, Sean Murphy also connected and Oakland broke through at Toronto after six straight losses there.

Facing Julian Merryweather (0-2), Pache hammered a 1-0 pitch into the right field bullpen for his first home run of the season and second of his career.

Cardinals 2, Brewers 1: Steven Matz (1-1) pitched 5½ shutout innings and combined with three relievers on a five-hitter as St. Louis won at Milwaukee.

Yankees 5, Orioles 2: Josh Donaldson hit his first home run since joining New York, a tiebreaking two-run shot in the fifth inning that lifted the team to a win at Baltimore.

Astros 4, Mariners 0: Justin Verlander pitched three-hit ball over eight innings for his first win since July 2020, leading

Houston to a win at Seattle.

Giants 4, Guardians 2: Brandon Belt scored the go-ahead run on a bases-loaded grounder by Wilmer Flores in the eighth inning, sending San Francisco to a win at Cleveland.

Phillies 10, Marlins 3: Bryce Harper doubled in two runs, walked twice and stole home, and visiting Philadelphia routed Miami.

Diamondbacks 3, Mets 2: Sergio Alcantara snapped a scoreless tie with a two-run homer in the seventh inning, Ketel Marte added an RBI double and Arizona won at New York.

Rockies 9, Cubs 6: C.J. Cron homered twice and Antonio Senzatela pitched five solid innings in his 100th career start for Colorado in a win over visiting Chicago.

Royals 3, Tigers 1: Hunter Dozier homered to break a tie in the sixth and lead host Kansas City over Detroit.

Pirates 6, Nationals 4: Michael Chavis capped a three-hit night with a leadoff triple in the eighth inning, and host Pittsburgh beat Washington.

Avs beat Canes, take top seed in West

Associated Press

DENVER — J.T. Compher and Nathan MacKinnon each scored twice, Ben Meyers added a goal in his NHL debut and the Colorado Avalanche took the top seed in the Western Conference, beating the Carolina Hurricanes 7-4 on Saturday night.

Alex Newhook and Mikko Rantanen also scored and Darcy Kuemper stopped 29 shots to help Colorado run its winning streak to nine straight.

The Avalanche have amassed an NHL-best 116 points this season. They're two away from tying the 2000-01 Stanley Cup squad for points during a season in club history.

Blues 6, Wild 5 (OT): Brayden Schenn scored 56 seconds into overtime and host St. Louis wrapped up a playoff spot, beating Minnesota for its season-high eighth straight victory.

Vladimir Tarasenko, Ivan Barbashev, David Perron, Brandon Saad and Pavel Buchnevich scored in regulation and Ville Husso made 31 saves.

Bruins 2, Penguins 1: Jeremy Swayman rebounded from a rough stretch with 23 saves and host Boston beat Pittsburgh to clinch a playoff spot and end a season-high three-game losing streak.

Trent Frederic and Erik Haula scored first-period goals for the Bruins.

Lightning 7, Jets 4: Nikita Kucherov scored twice and added two assists, Victor

Hedman had four assists and host Tampa Bay tied a season high in goals to beat Winnipeg.

The two-time defending champion Lightning won consecutive games for the first time since a four-game winning streak from March 26 to April 1.

Rangers 4, Red Wings 0: Igor Shesterkin made 20 saves for his fifth shutout of the season, Alexis Lafreniere scored twice and host New York beat Detroit.

Mika Zibanejad had a goal and an assist, and Frank Vatrano also scored for the Rangers. Barclay Goodrow had two assists. The Red Wings were shut out for the seventh time this season.

Oilers 4, Golden Knights 0: Mike Smith made 39 saves for his second consecutive shutout and 44th overall and host Edmonton beat Vegas.

The Oilers moved six points ahead of Los Angeles for second place in the Pacific Division — and seven points clear of the Golden Knights. Edmonton is 14-3-2 in its last 19 games.

Capitals 8, Canadiens 4: Anthony Mantha scored twice in a 34-second span midway through the second period and had two assists in Washington's blowout victory at Montreal.

Alex Ovechkin scored his 47th of the season and Nic Dowd, Garnet Hathaway, Justin Schultz, T.J. Oshie and Dmitry Orlov also connected for the Capitals. Vitek Vanaček made 28 saves.

Flames 9, Coyotes 1: Johnny Gaudreau and Matthew Tkachuk each had two goals and two assists and host Calgary routed Arizona after it clinched a playoff spot before the game started. Edmonton locked the Pacific Division-leading Flames into the postseason by beating Vegas 4-0 earlier in the day.

Maple Leafs 5, Senators 4 (OT): Mark Giordano scored 3:26 into overtime to lift Toronto to a win at Ottawa. Mitchell Marner scored twice in regulation, Michael Bunting and Kyle Clifford also had goals for the Maple Leafs.

Stars 2, Sharks 1: Tyler Seguin scored early, Michael Raffl added a short-handed goal and host Dallas kept up its surge toward a Western Conference wild-card spot, beating San Jose.

Kings 2, Blue Jackets 1: Phillip Danault scored his career-high 24th goal, Dustin Brown also scored in the first period and host Los Angeles beat Columbus to take a big step toward a playoff berth.

Predators 4, Blackhawks 3: Mikael Granlund had a goal and an assist in Nashville's victory over visiting Chicago.

Sabres 4, Flyers 3: Tage Thompson's go-ahead goal capped a four-goal, second-period outburst and host Buffalo beat Philadelphia.

Kraken 4, Devils 3 (SO): Ryan Donato scored in the shootout for host Seattle and New Jersey missed all three of its attempts.

Sooners rally, earn 5th women's gymnastics title

Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — Ragan Smith didn't hear a thing. Not her Oklahoma teammates. Not coach K.J. Kindler. Not the roar of the crowd as the perfect score on floor exercise by Florida's Trinity Thomas flashed.

Nothing.

A long career in gymnastics taught Smith to block it all out when you're standing on the balance beam. The noise. The stakes. The standings. All of it.

"I was so locked in," Smith said.

Smith completed the Sooners' rally from last after one rotation to the program's fifth national title on Saturday, her 9.9625 serv-

ing as the exclamation point as the Sooners edged Florida, Utah and Auburn in a taut final.

A year after finishing second to Michigan by less than a tenth, Oklahoma's score of 198.2 was just enough to slip by the Gators (198.075), followed by the Utes (197.750) and the Tigers (197.350), who put together the best season in program history following the arrival of Olympic champion Sunisa Lee.

Finishing the meet with a raucous celebration is not exactly how Kindler thought things would work out for the Sooners after a so-so performance on floor that included Smith and teammate Jordan Bowers step-

ping out of bounds and left the team staring up at the rest of the field after the first rotation.

"What fight, what heart they had to fight back after floor," Kindler said. "They didn't count themselves out (and) pushed, not just on vault, but every single event after that."

Oklahoma ended up posting the top team score on each of the other three events, hardly panicking despite knowing whatever margin for error it had was gone. Katherine Levasseur's brilliant 9.9750 on vault provided a jolt and the Sooners were on their way.

"We caught fire on vault and I felt like we kept momentum in

our favor from that point forward," Kindler said. "But I mean, we had to swing momentum to begin with. So really proud of the way they just kept feeding off each other."

Kindler typically leans over to talk to each athlete before the event, giving last-minute pointers, maybe a little bit of motivation and whatever else she thinks the moment requires. The moment this time around required her to let her leaders do their job.

Senior Carly Woodard had been doing it all season. She came across a popular gymnastics blog early in the year and found a post that predicted it was safe to count the Sooners out.