

## Putin claims victory in Mariupol

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine—Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed victory in the battle for Mariupol on Thursday, even as he ordered his troops not to take the risk of storming the giant steel plant where the last Ukrainian defenders in the city were holed up.

Instead, he directed his forces to seal off the Azovstal plant “so that not even a fly comes through.”

After nearly two lethal months of bombardment that have largely reduced Mariupol to a smoking ruin, Russian forces appear to control the rest of the southeastern city, including its vital but now badly damaged port. But the Ukrainian troops have stubbornly held out.

Putin’s comments came as satellite images showed more than 200 new graves in a town where Ukrainian officials say the Russians have been burying Mariupol residents killed in the fighting. The imagery, from Maxar Technologies, shows long rows of graves stretching away from an existing cemetery in the town of Manhush, some 12 miles from Mariupol.

A few thousand defenders, by Russia’s estimate, have been holed up for weeks along with hundreds of civilians in the sprawling steel plant, as Putin’s forces pounded the site and repeatedly demanded they surrender.

But on Thursday, the Russian leader declared victory without taking the plant, which covers 4 square miles and is threaded with some 15 miles of tunnels and bunkers.

“The completion of combat work to liberate Mariupol is a success,” he said in an appearance with his defense minister. “Congratulations.”

Instead of mounting a frontal attack on the plant, Russia apparently intends to maintain the siege and wait for the defenders to surrender when they run out of food or ammunition.

Ukraine scoffed at the notion of a Russian victory.

“This situation means the following: They cannot physically capture Azovstal. They have understood this. They suffered huge losses there,” said Oleksiy Arestovich, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The capture of Mariupol would represent the Kremlin’s biggest victory yet of the war in Ukraine. It would help Moscow secure more of the coastline, complete a land bridge between Russia and the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized in 2014, and free up more forces to join the larger battle now underway for Ukraine’s eastern industrial heartland, known as the Donbas.

“The Russian agenda now is not to capture

these really difficult places where the Ukrainians can hold out in the urban centers, but to try and capture territory and also to encircle the Ukrainian forces and declare a huge victory,” retired British Rear Adm. Chris Parry said.

As for the drive in the east, the Russians continued heavy air and artillery attacks but did not appear to gain any significant ground over the past few days, according to military analysts, who said Moscow’s forces were still gearing up for a heavier offensive.

A senior U.S. defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the Pentagon’s assessment, said the Ukrainians were hindering the Russian effort to push south from Izyum.

Rockets struck a neighborhood of Kharkiv on Thursday, and at least two civilians were burned to death in their car. A school and a residential building were also hit, and firefighters tried to put out a blaze and search for anyone trapped.

Western nations, meanwhile, rushed to pour heavy weapons into Ukraine to help it counter the offensive in the east.

U.S. President Joe Biden announced an additional \$800 million in military assistance for Kyiv, including heavy artillery, 144,000 rounds of ammunition and drones.

## Navy submits 30-year shipbuilding plan to Congress

**BY WYATT OLSON**

*Stars and Stripes*

The Navy’s long-term shipbuilding plan would increase its battle force fleet to between 327 and 367 vessels by 2052, a range based on differing scenarios of federal budgeting and shipyard capacity, according to a report submitted to Congress this month.

The 30-year plan, which would represent a roughly 10% to 22% increase in fleet size, maintains the Navy’s submarine superiority, grows unmanned vehicle capability and focuses on vessels more likely to survive in a conflict with China, according to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations.

As of April 11, the Navy had a fleet of 298 battle force ships, according to a report

earlier this month by the Congressional Research Service. The fleet has rarely exceeded 300 ships in the past two decades, reaching that number briefly in July 2020, the report stated.

The plan calls for decommissioning certain “legacy” vessels and others that do not fit with the service’s concept of so-called “distributed maritime operations,” during which sailors and Marines would fight in a widely diffused battlespace, as opposed to being concentrated in a single carrier strike group.

The Navy would decommission 53 vessels during fiscal years 2024 through 2027, including the USS Arleigh Burke, the lead ship of that class of guided-missile destroyers.

“The new era of strategic competition requires a larger modernized, capable, globally deployed, forward, and lethal multi-domain Navy,” the plan states. “Difficult choices must be made to ensure that the Navy best meets Joint Force operational requirements.”

“These choices include divesting ships that provide less relevant capability to our pacing threat warfighting requirements. It also requires prioritizing promising technologies that need to be fielded quickly and at scale to be operationally relevant in the coming years.”

The plan met with a quick thumbs-down by some lawmakers in Congress, which ultimately makes final decisions on Navy shipbuilding and funding.

# Disabled people fight for right to enlist

BY KELLY AGEE  
AND ALEX WILSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

Together, Hannah Cvancara and Joshua Martinez fall into at least three of the 30 categories of medical conditions that disqualify potential candidates from service in the U.S. armed forces.

Cvancara, 26, of Spokane, Wash., was born with fibula hemimelia, a condition that prevented the bones in her legs, ankle and foot from growing with her body. She lost her left leg and walks with a prosthetic.

Martinez, 22, of Gainesville, Ga., survived brain cancer as a child but lives with autism. He said that from the start few people expected much from him.

For both, however, military service beckoned. They sought the opportunity to prove themselves capable and to prove the naysayers wrong.

"I have this duty to serve," Cvancara told *Stars and Stripes* by phone Feb. 16, "and I don't want the fact that my leg is going to stop me, because I am already doing what I would be doing in the Navy."

Defense Department regulations rule out military service for a range of medical conditions, from deformed eyelids to malignant tumors to a history of frostbite.

But the way is not completely barred. The DOD will waive any of those conditions, provided the applicant justifies the waiver with medical documentation or mitigating circumstances. Martinez satisfied that requirement and today enjoys a successful career as a Marine on Okinawa.

Cvancara, an orthopedic nurse and the daughter of a former Air Force flight surgeon, played seven sports growing up and still likes to hike, run and swim.

But one goal eludes her. The Navy turned down her application to become a commissioned nurse in 2017. She tried again in March 2021 and a year later was still waiting on a decision.

Since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, more service members, primarily in the Army, have continued serving despite losing limbs. But starting a military career with such a disability appears to be a higher bar.

"A commissioned officer in the medical field is required to be physically capable of working in a demanding hospital environment," Angela Steadman, spokeswoman for the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, told *Stars and Stripes* by email March 30.

That environment requires prolonged standing and heavy lifting aboard a naval vessel, she said. It also involves climbing ladder wells, moving in tight quarters and walking on uneven surfaces.

Cvancara said she doesn't expect special treatment, just an opportunity.

"I don't want there to be accommodation to the mental or physical standards," she said. "But people with disabilities that can meet those standards should be able to have a chance."

On Okinawa, Martinez, a sergeant, is training for a new role in defensive cyber operations. Before arriving at Camp Hansen, he was a network administrator aboard the amphibious assault ship USS America, homeported at Sasebo Naval Base, Japan.

Marine of the Quarter three times and Noncommissioned Officer of the Quarter once, Martinez as a lance corporal was chief of networking for Marines in Thailand, South Korea and the Philippines, according to the Marine Corps.

"There are very few excuses in the world, there are very few reasons in the world why anyone can't be great or can't do great things or represent something great," he told *Stars and Stripes* by phone Jan. 28.

At age 4, Martinez was diagnosed with brain cancer, he said. Chemotherapy failed, but neurosurgery saved him.

Just months after the operation, however, doctors diagnosed him with autism and Asperger's syndrome, developmental disorders that often result in impaired social and communication skills. Today, both autism and Asperger's are diagnosed as autism spectrum disorder.

After that, Martinez said, very few people outside of his family expected much from him. One teacher even told him that he'd never graduate high school.

Despite that, Martinez set out to join the Marine Corps. Among other requirements, he had to undergo a year of psychological evaluation and track down the neurosurgeon who operated on him as a child to confirm that Martinez's childhood cancer would not interfere with his ability to perform as a Marine.

Military life tends to agree with autistic people, who are typically focused and hardworking, said Arzu Forough, the president and CEO of Washington Autism Alliance. Her late son, Darian, was autistic and served in the Army National Guard, she told *Stars and Stripes* by phone Thursday.

"The structure of military life — the predictability and the fact that expectations are very clear — is a really, really good thing for a person on the spectrum," she said. "They thrive in that type of structure. The more predictable things are, the bet-

ter they thrive."

The military also provides an autistic person with camaraderie and social support, Forough said.

Martinez said that becoming a Marine profoundly changed his life, especially his ability to communicate and pick up on social cues.

"I feel like I'm more of a normal person now because of my interactions with Marines," he said.

As March wound down, Cvancara anticipated the Navy's response to her second try at becoming a commissioned nurse. She ran down the list of things she said makes her a good candidate.

"I got my nursing license on my own dime," she said, by earning a bachelor's in nursing at National University, San Diego, in 2019.

Cvancara stayed fit. For a Navy physical readiness test in October 2020, she posted good scores: 30 pushups, a 2:30 plank time and a 1.5-mile run in 13 minutes, 29 seconds.

The Navy denied her application on March 30 without explanation, Cvancara said. She said she would appeal that decision.

Though disappointed, she continues to advocate for herself, and others like her. Cvancara traveled April 5 and 6 to Washington, D.C., with members of the American Orthotic and Prosthetic Association and her employer, the Evergreen Prosthetics and Orthotics clinic in Spokane, she said.

They talked to members of Congress about reforming disability standards in the military.

"My fight is far from over, in one way or another," Cvancara said. "I know I will never stop advocating for myself and for the disabled community for the chance to fulfill their passion."

# Robotic ships show more of Mideast waters

By J.P. LAWRENCE  
*Stars and Stripes*

MANAMA, Bahrain — A robotic, 23-foot-long vessel moored at U.S. 5th Fleet headquarters in Bahrain provides a possible glimpse into the future of the U.S. Navy.

The Saildrone Explorer resembles a torpedo with a 15-foot-tall shark fin. Powered by wind and solar panels, it has cameras and sensors to keep watch and the ability to sift through data to figure out

what's important.

The bird droppings that covered it on its return to Bahrain served as proof of weeks spent at sea.

"We're getting past the PowerPoints and the fairy dust around the technologies, and we're seeing it in the real world," Navy Capt. Michael Brasseur, commodore of Task Force 59, told Stars and Stripes in a recent interview.

The Navy has used unmanned aerial vehicles and

submarines for years. But since its founding last fall, Task Force 59 has worked to integrate the fleet's unmanned systems on the surface, underwater and in the air.

Its sailors have spent almost 10,000 hours working with surface vessels like the Saildrone Explorer, the group's leaders said.

Military officials said these unmanned ships can help the fleet patrol the busy waters of the Middle East, a pathway for

much of the world's shipping as well as for pirates, smugglers and militias armed with drones of their own.

"The most exciting thing about what we're doing is the pace," Brasseur said at the group's headquarters at Naval Support Activity Bahrain.

The task force began exercises in October 2021 and plans to have 100 unmanned surface vessels sailing around the Middle East by the summer of next year, Brasseur said.

## DOJ to appeal order voiding travel mask mandate

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department is filing an appeal seeking to overturn a judge's order that voided the federal mask mandate on planes and trains and in travel hubs, officials said.

The notice came minutes after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention asked the Justice Department to appeal the decision handed down by a federal judge in Florida earlier this week.

A notice of appeal was filed Wednesday in federal court in Tampa.

The CDC said in a statement that it is its "continuing assessment that at this time an order requiring masking in the indoor transportation corridor remains necessary for the public health."

It remained unclear whether the Biden administration would ask the appeals court to grant an emergency stay to immediately reimpose the mask mandate on public transit. An emergency stay of the lower court's ruling

would be a whiplash moment for travelers and transit workers. Most airlines and airports, many public transit systems and even ride-sharing company Uber lifted their mask-wearing requirements in the hours following Monday's ruling.

A federal judge in Florida had struck down the national mask mandate for mass transit on Monday, leading airlines and airports to swiftly repeal their requirements that passengers wear face coverings. The Transportation Security Administration said Monday that it would no longer enforce the mask requirement.

The CDC had recently extended the mask mandate, which was set to expire Monday, until May 3 to allow more time to study the BA.2 omicron subvariant, which is now responsible for the vast majority of U.S. cases. But the court ruling Monday had put that decision on hold.

The CDC said it will continue to monitor public health conditions to determine if a

mandate would remain necessary. It said it believes the mandate is "a lawful order, well within CDC's legal authority to protect public health."

Justice Department spokesman Anthony Coley said Wednesday night that the department was filing the appeal "in light of today's assessment by the CDC that an order requiring masking in the transportation corridor remains necessary to protect the public health."

President Joe Biden's administration has offered mixed messages in the wake of the Monday ruling. While officials said Americans should heed the CDC's guidance even if it was no longer a requirement, Biden himself suggested they had more flexibility on masking-up during transit.

"That's up to them," Biden declared during a Tuesday visit to Portsmouth, N.H. The White House nonetheless continues to require face coverings for those traveling with him on Air Force One, citing guidance from the CDC.

## Navy junior officer, 29, dies during training in Hawaii

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — A 29-year-old Navy officer died Sunday during training at Marine Corps Base Hawaii, the service said Wednesday.

Lt. j.g. Aaron Fowler, who was assigned to Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit One in San Diego, "became unresponsive" while participating in training at

the Kaneohe Bay base, according to a statement from the Navy Expeditionary Combat Command.

Navy officials did not say how the 2018 Naval Academy graduate died, but said Navy Criminal Investigative Service and local authorities are investigating.

"Counseling is available to teammates through chains of command, command chaplains and [the] Fleet and Family Sup-

port Center," the Navy command said in the statement.

Fowler first enlisted in the service in 2012 and commissioned as an officer after attending the Naval Academy, according to the statement.

In January, he joined the EOD unit, "which specializes in clearing explosive hazards to provide access to denied areas," the command said in the statement.

Rear Adm. Joseph Diguardo Jr., who leads the command, described Fowler as a "brave warrior."

"[Fowler's] decision to join this elite special operations community was a testament to the dedicated and selfless character he embodied and his legacy will endure in our ranks through those he inspired by his service," the commander said.

# Jobless claims in US still at historic lows

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Applications for unemployment benefits inched down last week as the total number of Americans collecting aid fell to its lowest level in more than 50 years.

Jobless claims fell by 2,000 to 184,000 last week, the Labor Department said Thursday. The four-week average of claims, which levels out week-to-week

volatility, rose by 4,500 to 177,250.

About 1.42 million Americans were collecting traditional unemployment benefits in the week of April 9, the fewest since Feb. 21, 1970.

Two years after the coronavirus pandemic plunged the economy into a brief but devastating recession, American workers are enjoying extraordinary job security. Weekly applications for un-

employment aid, which broadly track with layoffs, have remained consistently below the pre-pandemic level of 225,000.

Last year, employers added a record 6.7 million jobs, and they've added an average of 560,000 more each month so far in 2022. The unemployment rate, which soared to 14.7% in April 2020 in the depths of the COVID-19 recession, is now just

3.6%, barely above the lowest point in 50 years. And there is a record proportion of 1.7 job openings for every unemployed American.

The U.S. job market and overall economy has shown remarkable resiliency despite ongoing supply chain breakdowns, the economic consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine and the highest consumer inflation in 40 years.

## Fla. Senate OKs a repeal of Disney self-government law

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — The Florida Senate on Wednesday passed a bill to repeal a law allowing Walt Disney World to operate a private government over its properties in the state, escalating a feud with the entertainment giant over its opposition to what critics call the "Don't Say Gay" law.

The proposal could have huge tax implications for Disney, whose series of theme parks have transformed Orlando into one of the world's most popular tourist destinations over the decades. And Democrats have warned that the move could cause local homeowners to get hit with big tax bills if they have to absorb bond debt from Disney — although such details are far from clear.

The measures, pushed by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, comes as the governor battles with Disney after the company's criticism of a new GOP law barring instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade, as well as instruction that is not "age appropriate or developmentally appropriate."

The bill would eliminate the Reedy Creek Improvement District, as the Disney government is known, as well as a handful of other similar districts by June 2023. The measure leaves room for the districts to be reestablished, with a Republican legislative leader

signaling a likely restructuring of a 1967 deal that lawmakers struck with the company that allows it to provide services such as zoning, fire protection, utilities and infrastructure.

"By doing it this early, we have until next June or July to this put together, so we're actually giving ourselves more time to be thoughtful," Republican Senate President Wilton Simpson told reporters after the vote.

Still, the move represents the latest blow in a culture war harnessed by DeSantis as he runs for reelection and bolsters himself as a potential 2024 GOP presidential candidate through staunch opposition to liberal policies on race, gender and abortion.

"If Disney wants to pick a fight, they chose the wrong guy," DeSantis wrote in a campaign fundraising email Wednesday.

Democrats, the minority party in the Legislature, have rallied against the proposal.

"Let's call this what it is, it's the punitive, petulant political payback to a corporation who dared to say the emperor has no clothes, but if they behave this next election cycle, maybe we'll put it back together," said Sen. Gary M. Farmer, a Democrat.

Disney did not return an email seeking comment. The company is one of Florida's biggest private employers and last year said it had more than 60,000 workers in the state.

## Forecast winds may worsen fire situation in Southwest

Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. — Lisa Wells looked out the window of her home office and saw a plume of smoke. Before long, the smoke blackened, the wind intensified and entire trees were consumed by flames.

In what felt like seconds, her family moved Tuesday from a get-ready-to-go status to go now. She managed to gather important medication and move their horses, alpacas and dogs to safety.

The home they bought 15 years ago on the outskirts of Flagstaff didn't survive. Fierce winds picked up embers that hopped across neighborhoods, destroying some homes and leaving others unscathed.

"It was a miracle that people got out because we had so little time," Wells said Wednesday, standing in a parking lot that has become a gathering spot for the evacuated communities.

Neither officials nor residents have been able to fully survey the damage, partly because the forecast has even stronger winds in store that experts have said could lead to more explosive fire growth.

And the risk isn't limited to Arizona. The 32 square-mile blaze outside Flagstaff is one of a half-dozen major wildfires that have raced across Arizona and New Mexico the last few days.

Red flag warnings of critical

fire conditions were issued Thursday for much of northern Arizona, including the Flagstaff area, and large portions of New Mexico as state and federal officials scrambled to get more crews on the front lines.

With expected wind conditions, "it will prove challenging to put in those containment lines to stop fire growth," said Jerolyn Byrne, a spokesperson for the team working the Flagstaff-area fire. "We'll see some growth on the fire."

At a community meeting in Flagstaff on Wednesday evening, Brian Klimowski of the National Weather Service declared the start of the fire season and said "it's going to be a long one this year."

Hundreds of people have been evacuated because of wildfires burning in New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado. Popular lakes and national monuments have been closed — some because fire has moved directly over them.

U.S. 89, the main route between Flagstaff and far northern Arizona, and communities on the Navajo Nation, remained closed.

Resources to fight the wildfires are tight. Four of the 16 top-level national fire management teams are dedicated to the Southwest — something fire information officer Dick Fleishman said is rare for April.

In Flagstaff, erratic winds have grounded air resources.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Police: Man robs pizzeria, holds worker hostage

**FL** ALTAMONTE SPRINGS — A 49-year-old man was arrested early Tuesday after robbing a central Florida Hungry Howie's pizza shop and holding an employee hostage for more than seven hours, police said.

The standoff began just before 5:30 p.m. Monday, Altamonte Springs police said in a social media post. The man's wife called police and said her husband was at the pizza shop and had threatened suicide. Police said the man threatened to harm the store's employees, but let all but one leave. Around 1 a.m., the Seminole County Sheriff's SWAT team made their way inside the building and escorted the man out. The hostage was also found safe, police said.

The man is charged with false imprisonment, aggravated assault with a deadly weapon and battery.

### Man inhales drill bit while getting a tooth filled

**WI** KENOSHA — A routine trip to the dentist was anything but normal — after an Illinois man inhaled the dentist's drill bit and had to go to the hospital to get it removed last month.

Tom Jozsi, 60, told WISN-TV that he was at the dentist getting his tooth filled when he was told he swallowed a tool.

"I didn't really even feel it going down. All I felt was a cough. When they did the CT scan they realized, 'You didn't swallow it. You inhaled it,'" he said. Doctors believe that Jozsi inhaled just before he coughed, sending the 1-inch bit deep into Jozsi's

lung.

Dr. Abdul Alraiyes, at Aurora Medical Center-Kenosha, said the bit was so deep that normal scopes couldn't reach it. Jozsi said he was told that if it couldn't be taken out, part of his lung would have to be removed.

Alraiyes and his medical team decided to try a newer device. Video shows the medical team was able to navigate the narrow airways, reach the drill piece and pull it out without harming Jozsi.

### Artwork damaged in '17 storm returns to museum

**GA** ALBANY — Artwork damaged when a violent storm tore the roof from a Georgia museum five years ago is going back on display for a summer exhibit.

Albany Museum of Art staff scrambled to save its collection in January 2017 as rain poured into the building for hours. More than 2,000 pieces were sent to Chicago to be treated for damage, WALB-TV reported; others went into storage in Atlanta.

Katie Dillard, the museum's director of curatorial affairs, said that restoration took several years. An exhibit of the restored art will open in May and run until August.

### Woman recovering after attack by 5 pit bulls

**NM** HOBBS — A Hobbs woman is recovering after police say she was mauled by five dogs.

Hobbs police said in a news release Monday the 46-year-old woman was recuperating at home.

The incident happened Saturday after she was dropped off at a friend's house. Police determined she had been walking

when five pit bulls attacked her. Investigators say she fended the dogs off with a knife.

One pit bull was found dead. A second was euthanized by animal control officers at the scene due to its grave injuries. Police say four of the dogs belonged to 61-year-old Ricardo Garcia. The fifth was a stray. Garcia told officers he had no idea his pit bulls were on the loose. He has since given up his rights to the remaining dogs. They will be quarantined and then euthanized.

### Former finance director at airport guilty of theft

**WV** HUNTINGTON — An Ohio woman who was finance director for a West Virginia airport has pleaded guilty to stealing nearly \$49,500 in federal funds from the facility.

Melissa Sue Hall, 46, of South Point, Ohio, pleaded guilty Tuesday to theft from programs receiving federal funds, U.S. Attorney Will Thompson's office said. Hall admitted that between May 2020 and January 2021 she stopped depositing all of the money she collected from vending machines at the Huntington Tri-State Airport into airport accounts and also took money meant to be deposited into ATMs, Thompson's office said in a news release.

Hall faces up to 10 years in prison. She agreed to pay restitution, the prosecutor's office said.

### Police: Officer dragged by vehicle during traffic stop

**NE** OMAHA — An Omaha officer suffered only minor injuries after being dragged during a vehicle stop

early Monday, police said.

The incident happened around 3 a.m. Monday in north Omaha when a policer pulled a woman who was driving from the vehicle and arrested her, television station KETV reported. A male passenger then moved into the driver's seat and took off, police said.

An officer who tried to stop the man was dragged about a block before being released from the car, police said. The vehicle then kept going west on Dodge Street, leading other officers in a chase, according to police.

Tire-puncturing strips were used to disable the car, which crashed in a parking lot, police said. The officer who was dragged and the suspect were deemed by medics to have no serious injuries. The suspect was arrested.

### Jail reports its 5th in-custody death this year

**WA** SEATTLE — A 63-year-old man who was arrested by Seattle police Tuesday and booked into the King County Jail was found unresponsive in a holding cell and died soon after he was taken to Harborview Medical Center, officials said.

The King County Department of Adult & Juvenile Detention says the man is the fifth person to die this year while in custody at the downtown Seattle jail, The Seattle Times reported.

Officials said the man was booked at 3:12 a.m. Tuesday, found unresponsive minutes later by corrections officers and was treated by jail medical staff before medics took him to Harborview. The release does not say why he was booked.

— From wire reports

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# Villanova's Wright resigns, Neptune takes over

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Jay Wright shocked college basketball Wednesday night with his immediate resignation at Villanova, the Big East program he led to two national championships and four Final Fours in a Hall of Fame career.

The 60-year-old Wright guided the Wildcats to titles in 2016 and 2018 and just led the team to this year's Final Four, where they lost to national champion Kansas. He went 520-197 in 21 seasons at the school and 642-282 overall, also coaching Hofstra from 1994-2001.

"It's time for us to enter a new era of Villanova basketball," Wright said in a statement. "After 35 years in coaching, I am proud and excited to hand over the reins to Villanova's next coach. I am excited to remain a part of Villanova and look forward to working with (Villanova) and the rest of the leadership team."

Kyle Neptune, who served on the Wildcats' coaching staff before accepting the head coaching position at Fordham in 2021, returns to replace Wright.

"When looking for a successor, we wanted a candidate who could navigate the changing landscape of collegiate athletics and keep Villanova in a position of strength — now and in the future," athletic director Mark Jackson said. "After meeting with several exceptional candidates, we found all

those attributes and more in Kyle Neptune. Kyle quickly stood out for his basketball knowledge, recruiting savvy and natural ability to connect with student-athletes and coaches."

Wright's decision was unexpected and there was no immediate word the move was health related or that he was leaving for the NBA. He was inducted into the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame in 2021.

Wright will remain at the school and stay involved in fundraising, advising, education and more.

He joined North Carolina's Roy Williams and Duke's Mike Krzyzewski as the third coach with multiple championship to step down over the last two years.

Before he arrived, the Wildcats were known for upsetting Georgetown in the 1985 national championship game and the occasional trip to the NCAA Tournament.

Wright needed three years to build a foundation before Villanova broke through with a trip to the 2005 Sweet 16. An Elite Eight appearance followed the next year and the Wildcats reached the Final Four in 2009.

Villanova won its first national title under Wright in 2016 on Kris Jenkins' buzzer-beater and decimated the NCAA Tournament field in 2018, winning every game by double digits on its way to the national title.

He was selected AP coach of the decade in 2020.

The 37-year-old Neptune was on Wright's staff for the 2009 Final Four team, then later spent three seasons as an assistant at Niagara before he returned to the Wildcats in 2013. He went 16-16 in his lone season at Fordham.

"I think he's more ready to be a head coach than most young guys X's and O's-wise and I think he's got great character, great leadership skills, I think he's going to be an outstanding head coach," Wright said when Neptune was hired at Fordham.

Wright's decision comes after another successful season:

- He reached 25 or more victories for the 10th time in his 22 seasons.

- Villanova has won a regular-season or postseason conference championship in each of the nine seasons since the Big East reconfigured in 2013.

- The Wildcats earned a No. 1 or No. 2 seed in the NCAA Tournament for the eighth time under Wright.

During Wright's tenure, he coached several future NBA stars, including Kyle Lowry, Jalen Brunson, Mikal Bridges and Saddiq Bey.

Wright was hired as head coach at Hofstra and went 207-122 with two NCAA Tournament appearances in seven seasons. Hired in 2001 to replace Steve Lappas, the Wildcats went to the NIT in Wright's first three seasons.

# DeRozan scores 41, Bulls beat Bucks to even series

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — DeMar DeRozan made sure the Chicago Bulls altered their painful recent history against the Milwaukee Bucks and gave this first-round series a fresh new start.

Now it's the defending champion Bucks who are suddenly hurting as the teams head to Chicago all tied up.

DeRozan scored a career playoff-high 41 points and the Bulls outlasted Milwaukee 114-110 on Wednesday night in Game 2. Nikola Vucevic added 24 points and 13 rebounds, while Zach Lavine had 20 points as sixth-seeded Chicago beat the third-seeded Bucks for just the second time in their last 19 meetings.

"No matter what you did in the

regular season, this is a brand new start and new mindset," DeRozan said. "You could see it in all the guys. It doesn't matter if we'd lost 20 times to those guys. This is an opportunity for us to compete. We've got to take advantage of it."

The big question now is what shape the Bucks will be in when this series resumes Friday.

Bobby Portis left the game with a right eye abrasion after the first quarter and Khris Middleton exited with 6:49 left after his left leg gave out while he tried to plant on a spin move.

Milwaukee coach Mike Budenholzer said after the game that Middleton has a sprained medial collateral ligament and will undergo an MRI on Thursday.

"He's always been positive and

he knows the type of team that we are and how resilient we are," Bucks guard Jrue Holiday said. "We just want him to get back as quickly as possible and be healthy so he can come out here and help us win games."

Budenholzer said that Portis "should be fine with some time."

Giannis Antetokounmpo led Milwaukee with 33 points, 18 rebounds and nine assists, putting him one assist from his second career playoff triple-double. Antetokounmpo increased his career postseason point total to 1,715 to overtake Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (1,692) for the most in Bucks history.

Brook Lopez had 25 points for Milwaukee. Middleton scored 18 and Holiday 15.

DeRozan scored eight points during a 13-0 run that began late in the third quarter and gave the Bulls a 96-80 lead with 9:47 remaining. Chicago still led by 15 before the Bucks rallied in the final 7½ minutes.

Lopez converted a three-point play to cut the Bulls' lead to 112-109 with 56 seconds left.

"We expected those guys to make a run," Vucevic said. "They're a championship team for a reason. They've been there before, so we expected them to make a run."

But after Alex Caruso and Vucevic got offensive rebounds on Chicago's ensuing possession, DeRozan's driving layup made it 114-109 with 18.2 seconds remaining.

# Embiid gives 76ers 3-0 series lead

Associated Press

TORONTO — After pushing the Toronto Raptors to the brink of elimination, Philadelphia's Joel Embiid pledged to finish the job as quickly as possible.

Embiid made a three-pointer with 0.8 seconds left in overtime to give the 76ers a 104-101 victory on Wednesday night and a 3-0 lead in their first-round series.

"I'm coming for the sweep, too," Embiid told rapper Drake as he passed the Raptors' celebrity fan on his way off the floor.

"I'll be there," Drake replied about Game 4, which is set for Saturday afternoon in Toronto.

After Philadelphia coach Doc Rivers called timeout to save the possession as the shot clock was running down, Embiid took an inbound pass from Danny Green and hit a turnaround shot from near the sideline before running back to his bench in celebration.

"Great play call," Embiid said. "Tobias set an amazing screen, Danny threw a great pass. All I had to do was finish, and I'm glad I did."

"It felt great but the job's not done," Embiid added. "We've got to get one more."

Embiid's shot came from near the spot where he missed a three at the end of regulation that could have won the game for

the 76ers.

"For him, that's a high-percentage shot, especially on that wing," Harris said of Embiid's decisive basket. "We got the ball to our best player, somebody who makes plays, makes shots."

Toronto's OG Anunoby couldn't get a shot off before the buzzer.

Embiid wouldn't admit it, but all series he has seemed intent on avenging Philadelphia's second-round defeat to the Raptors in the 2019 playoffs, when Kawhi Leonard hit the game-winning shot in Game 7.

"Me and Joel have talked about that," Harris said. "We understand coming to this arena, what happened to us last time we were here."

While the subject may have come up before the playoffs, Embiid insisted it's not on his mind right now.

"During this whole series I haven't really thought about coming in here and trying to get my revenge," he said. "I think I'm more focused on trying to win the whole thing."

Embiid had 33 points and 13 rebounds, helping the 76ers rally from a 17-point deficit. James Harden had 19 points and 10 assists before fouling out in the closing seconds of regulation.

Embiid heard boos from the sellout crowd of 19,800 every time he touched the

ball and was targeted by profane chants at times, but stepped up when it mattered most.

"We've been watching his skill set all year long and how great he's been," Harden said. "Tonight was no different. He did all the right things, and when it was time for him to finish the game off, he did that."

Tyrese Maxey scored 19 points and Tobias Harris had 11 points and 12 rebounds for the Sixers, who can complete the sweep Saturday.

"We're playing for our pride," Toronto guard Fred VanVleet said. "Pride is on the line."

Anunoby scored 26 points, Gary Trent Jr. had a playoff-high 24, and Precious Achiuwa had 20 for the Raptors.

Pascal Siakam and VanVleet each had 12 points. VanVleet shot 3 for 13, going 2 for 10 from 3-point range.

"There's no room to look around and feel sorry for ourselves," VanVleet said. "We did a lot of good things tonight, we played a lot of minutes of great basketball and we're going to have to do it again."

Philadelphia never held a lead in regulation, finally grabbing a 99-97 edge on Maxey's shot with 3:27 left in overtime.

"It took us all game to take the lead," Maxey said. "When we got it, we didn't keep it, but we won so it's all good."

# Celtics up 2-0 on Nets after fourth quarter rally

Associated Press

BOSTON — Celtics fans got under Kyrie Irving's skin in the opening game of their first-round matchup with the Nets.

It was Boston's defense that kept him — and Kevin Durant — off balance in Game 2.

Jaylen Brown scored 22 points, including 10 in the fourth quarter, and the Celtics rallied from 17 points down to beat Brooklyn 114-107 on Wednesday night and take a 2-0 lead in their first-round series.

Jayson Tatum added 19 points for Boston, which held Durant without a basket in the second half. Al Horford had 16 points, Daniel Theis scored 15 and Payton Pritchard had eight of his 10 in the final period.

"This was like an old-fashioned, old-school playoff game," Tatum said. "You just have to grind it out. That's what we did... we just stuck with it. Proud of the guys and how we kept responding all game."

Durant finished with 27 points but struggled from the field for the second straight

game, shooting 4-for-17. Irving had just 10 points on 4-for-13 shooting a day after being fined \$50,000 for directing obscene gestures and profane language at Celtics fans during Game 1.

The series shifts to Brooklyn for Game 3 on Saturday night.

"They're doing a good job trying to cut off my scoring, limit my shot making," Durant said. "It's on me to figure it out."

Durant and Irving were limited to a combined 1-for-17 in the second half. Bruce Brown finished with 23 points and Seth Curry added 16.

"They took the lead and they never looked back in that fourth quarter," Irving said. "We don't really have time to be disappointed, to hold our heads. This is part of playoff basketball."

Coach Ime Udoka said the approach to Durant has been to get into his air space as much as possible.

"I think we did that," Udoka said. "We

want to make him work defensively and offensively have bodies on him the whole time and try to wear him down."

The TD Garden faithful peppered Irving with boos throughout, beginning with the pregame introductions. The volume ratcheted up after tipoff with the addition of "Kyrie sucks! Kyrie sucks!" chants on each of the Nets' first two possessions. The boos returned whenever he got his hands on the ball.

Irving, who is observing Ramadan, came out of the game with 3:23 left in the first quarter. He went to the locker room and returned with food, the sun having just set in Boston.

Former Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski sat courtside to watch a matchup that featured several of his former players. Irving, Tatum and Curry are all former Blue Devils.

"That's the first game he's seen my play in person since he left Duke," Tatum said. "Obviously, he's got a lot of time on his hands."

# Tigers' Cabrera gets 2,999th career hit

Associated Press

DETROIT — Miguel Cabrera had three hits to move one shy of 3,000 in the Detroit Tigers' 5-3 loss to the New York Yankees on Wednesday night at chilly Comerica Park.

Cabrera beat out an infield hit in the second inning and singled up the middle in the fourth against Luis Severino, then grounded a single through the shortstop hole in the sixth off Chad Green (1-1).

The 39-year-old Cabrera struck out on a 1-2 sinker in the eighth.

Green (1-1) allowed Harold Castro's two-run double in the sixth that tied the score 3-3, but Josh Donaldson walked against Drew Hutchison (0-1) leading off the seventh, and pinch-runner Tim Lincecum reached third when Gleyber Torres sacrificed and Hutchison threw the ball wildly past second for an error. Isiah Kiner-Falefa lined the next pitch to center for a 4-3 lead.

**Guardians 11-2, White Sox 1-1:** José Ramírez hit his sec-

ond grand slam of the season in the opener, then had an RBI double in the nightcap as host Cleveland swept a doubleheader from Chicago.

In the opener, Ramírez hit his grand slam during a nine-run second inning.

**Angels 6, Astros 0:** Two-way star Shohei Ohtani pitched perfect ball into the sixth inning, tied a career-best with 12 strikeouts and also had two hits and two RBIs to lead Los Angeles to a win at Houston.

**Dodgers 5, Braves 1:** Tony Gonsolin tossed six shutout innings, Freddie Freeman hit a two-run homer in the first and host Los Angeles beat Atlanta to take two of three from the defending World Series champions.

**Padres 6, Reds 0:** Left fielder Jurickson Profar threw out Joey Votto at home and then hit a two-run homer as visiting Cincinnati lost its ninth straight for its longest skid in five years.

**Phillies 9, Rockies 6:** Johan Camargo had four hits, includ-

ing a three-run homer in a five-run seventh inning as visiting Philadelphia stopped a three-game losing streak.

**Brewers 4, Pirates 2:** Brandon Woodruff (2-1) allowed one hit in six scoreless innings with nine strikeouts, Rowdy Tellez homered for the second straight day and host Milwaukee completed a three-game sweep and extended its winning streak to four.

**Orioles 1, Athletics 0:** Baltimore's Jordan Lyles struck out six and walked one over five scoreless innings, allowing five hits in a win at Oakland.

**Rays 8, Cubs 2:** Francisco Mejia homered and drove in three runs as Tampa Bay won at Chicago in a game called after 5½ innings due to rain.

**Cardinals 2, Marlins 0:** Nolan Arenado hit a two-run home run in the top of the ninth inning to give visiting St. Louis its ninth straight win over Miami.

**Diamondbacks 11, Nationals 2:** Seth Beer's three hits and three RBIs propelled Arizona

to a win at Washington after a pregame parachuting display caused a scare at the nearby U.S. Capitol.

**Giants 5, Mets 2:** Brandon Belt homered on his birthday, newcomer Carlos Rodón allowed three hits and no runs through five innings and San Francisco won on the road with New York manager Buck Showalter out for a medical procedure.

**Blue Jays 6, Red Sox 1:** Raimel Tapia hit a go-ahead, two-run homer in a five-run second inning for his first RBIs this season, and Toronto won at Boston.

**Royals 2, Twins 0:** Daniel Lynch allowed four hits while pitching into the sixth inning and the stingy Kansas City bullpen shut out visiting Minnesota the rest of the way.

**Mariners 4, Rangers 2:** Logan Gilbert pitched 6⅔ scoreless innings and Adam Frazier doubled twice on a three-hit night to lead COVID-hit Seattle over visiting Texas, which is off to its worst start since 1987.

# Kraken score three goals early, hold off Avalanche

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Kole Lind, Jordan Eberle and Yanni Gourde all scored in the first period, and the Seattle Kraken held on to beat the Colorado Avalanche 3-2 Wednesday night.

Philipp Grubauer had 25 saves as Seattle won its third straight. Matty Beniers had an assist to become the first rookie this season to begin his NHL career with a point in each of his first four games.

Cale Makar and Artturi Lehkonen scored for the Avalanche, and Pavel Francouz finished with 26 saves. Colorado, assured of having the top seed in the Western Conference, has lost two straight after winning nine in a row. The Avalanche remained tied with Florida with

116 points for the Presidents' Trophy for the league's best record.

**Oilers 5, Stars 2:** Connor McDavid had a goal and two assists, and host Edmonton won its third straight.

Evander Kane, Derek Ryan, Zach Hyman and Jesse Puljujarvi also scored for the Oilers, who are 11-0-1 in their past 12 home games. Evan Bouchard had two assists and Mike Smith stopped 34 shots.

Jason Robertson and Roope Hintz each had a goal and an assist for the Stars, who have lost three of their last four. Scott Wedgewood finished with 45 saves.

**Blackhawks 4, Coyotes 3 (OT):** Alex DeBrincat scored his 40th goal of the season with 37

seconds left in overtime, giving visiting Chicago a win over Arizona.

Jake McCabe, Dominik Kubalik and Alex Vlasic also scored for Blackhawks, who won for the second time in 12 games after squandering a 3-1 lead in the final 10:18 of regulation.

Barrett Hayton, Nate Smith and Anton Stralman scored for the Coyotes, who have lost eight in a row and 15 of 17.

Kevin Lankinen had 32 saves for the Blackhawks, who have not won in regulation since March 23.

Coyotes goaltender Karel Vejmelka made 34 saves in his 49th game, a franchise record for rookie goaltenders. He is the first rookie in NHL history with

four games of at least 46 saves.

**Golden Knights 4, Capitals 3:** Shea Theodore scored 2:09 into overtime to lift host Vegas over Washington.

Alec Martinez, Evgenii Dadoonov and Chandler Stephenson scored for the Golden Knights in regulation. Robin Lehner made 12 stops in the first period and didn't return. Logan Thompson stopped 13 shots in the final two periods and didn't face any in overtime.

Vegas has 89 points and is two back of Dallas for the second wild card in the Western Conference, and trails Los Angeles by three in the Pacific Division.

Alex Ovechkin had two goals and Evgeny Kuznetsov also scored for the Capitals, while Samsonov made 26 saves.