

Dozens dead after storms in Midwest, South

Associated Press

WYNNE, Ark. — Residents across a wide swath of the South and Midwest on Sunday raced to assess the destruction wreaked by storms that dropped possibly dozens of tornadoes and killed at least 27 people in small towns and big cities, as severe weather moved into parts of the Northeast.

Earlier storms tore a path through the Arkansas capital, collapsing the roof of a packed concert venue in Illinois and stunning people throughout the region Saturday with the damage's scope.

The White House announced Sunday that it would provide federal resources, including financial assistance, to support recovery efforts after President Joe Biden declared broad swaths of the country a major

disaster.

Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders had already declared a state of emergency and activated the National Guard.

Confirmed or suspected tornadoes in 11 states destroyed homes and businesses, splintered trees and laid waste to neighborhoods. It could take days to make a count of all the tornadoes from recent days.

Teams from the National Weather Service on Sunday were investigating reports of tornadoes touching down in New Jersey and Delaware, the president's home state, where severe weather prompted warnings and damaged numerous homes and shut down roads. One person was found dead inside a house heavily damaged by the storm Saturday night in Bridgeville, Delaware State Po-

lice reported.

The dead also included at least nine in one Tennessee county; four in the small town of Wynne, Ark.; three in Sullivan, Ind.; and four in Illinois.

Other deaths from the storms that hit Friday night into Saturday were reported in Alabama and Mississippi, along with one near Little Rock, Ark., where city officials said more than 2,600 buildings were in a tornado's path.

Residents of Wynne, a community of about 8,000 people 50 miles west of Memphis, Tenn., woke Saturday to find the high school's roof shredded and its windows blown out. Huge trees lay on the ground, their stumps reduced to nubs.

Chainsaws buzzed as bulldozers plowed into debris. Utility crews restored power as some

neighborhoods began recovery.

Nine people died in Tennessee's McNairy County, east of Memphis, according to Patrick Sheehan, director of the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency. Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee drove to the county Saturday to tour the destruction and comfort residents. He said the storm capped the "worst" week of his time as governor, coming days after a school shooting in Nashville that killed six people including a family friend whose funeral he and his wife, Maria, attended earlier in the day.

"It's terrible what has happened in this community, this county, this state," Lee said. "But it looks like your community has done what Tennessean communities do, and that is rally and respond."

Pandemic lockdowns led to weight gain in US soldiers

Associated Press

After gaining 30 pounds during the COVID-19 pandemic, Army Staff Sgt. Daniel Murillo is finally getting back into fighting shape.

Early pandemic lockdowns, endless hours on his laptop and heightened stress led Murillo, 27, to reach for cookies and chips in the barracks at Fort Bragg in North Carolina. Gyms were closed, organized exercise was out and Murillo's motivation to work out on his own was low.

"I could notice it," said Murillo, who is 5 feet, 5 inches tall and weighed as much as 192 pounds. "The uniform was tighter."

Murillo wasn't the only service member dealing with extra weight. New research found obesity in the U.S. military surged during the pandemic. In the Army alone, nearly 10,000 active duty soldiers developed obesity between February 2019 and June 2021, pushing the rate to nearly a quarter of the troops studied. Increases were seen in the Navy and

the Marines, too.

"The Army and the other services need to focus on how to bring the forces back to fitness," said Tracey Perez Koehlmoos, director of the Center for Health Services Research at the Uniformed Services University in Bethesda, Md., who led the research.

Overweight and obese troops are more likely to be injured and less likely to endure the physical demands of their profession. The military loses more than 650,000 workdays each year because of extra weight, and obesity-related health costs exceed \$1.5 billion annually for current and former service members and their families, federal research shows.

More recent data won't be available until later this year, said Koehlmoos. But there's no sign the trend is ending, underscoring longstanding concerns about the readiness of America's fighting forces.

Military leaders have been warning about the impact of obesity in the U.S. military for

more than a decade, but the lingering pandemic effects highlight the need for urgent action, said retired Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Stephen Cheney, who co-authored a recent report on the problem.

Koehlmoos and her team analyzed medical records for all active duty Army soldiers in the Military Health System Data Repository, a comprehensive archive. They looked at two periods: before the pandemic, from February 2019 to January 2020, and during the crisis, from September 2020 to June 2021. They excluded soldiers without complete records in both periods and those who were pregnant in the year before or during the study.

Of the cohort of nearly 200,000 soldiers who remained, the researchers found that nearly 27% who were healthy before the pandemic became overweight. And nearly 16% of those who were previously overweight became obese. Before the pandemic, about 18% of the soldiers were obese; by 2021, it grew to 23%.

Trump facing at least 1 felony charge in NY case

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Former President Donald Trump is facing multiple charges of falsifying business records, including at least one felony offense, in the indictment handed down by a Manhattan grand jury, two people familiar with the matter told The Associated Press on Friday.

He will be formally arrested and arraigned Tuesday in his hush money case, setting the scene for the historic, shocking moment when a former president is forced to stand before a judge to hear the criminal charges against him.

The indictment remained sealed and the specific charges were not immediately known, but details were confirmed by people who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss information that isn't yet public.

The streets outside the courthouse where the arraignment will unfold were calm Friday compared with earlier in the week. There were no large-scale demonstrations for or against Trump, though tourists stopped to take selfies and throngs of re-

porters and police officers remained assembled.

When Trump turns himself in, he'll be booked mostly like anyone else facing charges, mug shot, fingerprinting and all. But he isn't expected to be put in handcuffs; he'll have Secret Service protection and will almost certainly be released that same day.

In the meantime, Trump's legal team prepared his defense while the prosecutor's office defended the grand jury investigation that propelled the matter toward trial. Congressional Republicans, as well as Trump himself, contend the whole matter is politically motivated.

"We urge you to refrain from these inflammatory accusations, withdraw your demand for information, and let the criminal justice process proceed without unlawful political interference," Leslie Dubeck, general counsel in the office of Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, wrote in a letter sent Friday to three Republican House committee chairs that was obtained by The Associated Press.

Senator seeks to fix GI Bill issue for overseas vets

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Congressional legislation introduced last week would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to fix an antiquated payment system, which has resulted in a denial of education benefits for numerous former service members enrolled in schools overseas.

Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., submitted a bill Thursday that would require the VA to update its technology to pay GI Bill benefits for veterans taking approved courses while attending educational institutions abroad.

"The VA's technology shouldn't prevent veterans from receiving these critical benefits, which is why I hope colleagues from both sides of the aisle will join me in passing this common-sense legislation," Menendez said in a statement Friday.

Veterans advocates have put the number of students affected by the problem as high as 3,000.

The GI Bill Foreign Institution Electronic Payments Act would require the VA to update its current payment system so foreign schools do not need to establish a U.S. bank account or possess an American tax identification number to receive electronic payments from the VA.

"The bill responds to reports that VA wasn't honoring benefits to veterans studying abroad over technological issues," Menendez's office said in the statement.

The problem developed in 2021 when the VA stopped sending paper checks to foreign schools and switched to electronic transfers.

It's unclear why the VA has demanded foreign colleges get U.S. bank accounts and tax ID numbers, as there is no legal mandate to do so.

Veterans have told Stars and Stripes that they encountered problems at schools throughout Europe and Asia because institutions of higher learning there have no interest in taking those steps.

In May, the House of Representatives passed a bill sponsored by Rep. Mikie Sherill, D-N.J., to resolve the problem. The vote was 397-15.

But the issue was never taken up by the Senate. Menendez's legislation aims to change that.

Two top lawmakers worry Army's 2024 budget might not be enough

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Top lawmakers on the Senate Armed Services Committee said Thursday that they might raise the Army's budget for fiscal 2024, criticizing the Pentagon's proposed spending plan for the military's largest service as insufficient.

Sens. Jack Reed, D-R.I., the committee chairman, and Roger Wicker, R-Miss., the panel's top Republican, said they were worried the \$185 billion Army budget requested by the Pentagon did not keep pace with inflation or meet the service's needs as it contends with the most dangerous security environment since World War II.

Reed noted the Defense Department's budget for the next fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1, marks the fourth straight year that

the Army's spending plan had remained at roughly the same amount. The Army has seen its funding "essentially plateau," even as every other service has benefitted from significant increases, he said.

"Understandably, the department is focused on the pacing threat in the Indo-Pacific, where the nature of competition relies heavily on our nation's sea and air strength. However, I am concerned that inadequate investment in the United States' primary land component may create vulnerabilities," Reed said.

Wicker described the budget request as a "disservice." He said the spending plan represents a 2% cut compared with last year, when accounting for inflation, and the impact of that cut will be even more severe amid rapidly increasing personnel costs.

Ukrainian official outlines Crimea plan

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — A top Ukrainian official on Sunday outlined a series of steps the government in Kyiv would take after the country reclaims control of Crimea, including dismantling the strategic bridge that links the seized Black Sea peninsula to Russia.

Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, published the plan as Ukraine's military prepares for a spring counteroffensive in hopes of making new, decisive gains after more than 13 months of war to end Russia's full-scale invasion.

Moscow annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, but most of the world does not recognize it as Russian territory.

The peninsula's future status will be a key feature in any negotiations on ending the current fighting.

The Kremlin has demanded that Ukraine recognize Russia's sovereignty over Crimea and acknowledge other land gains made by Moscow as a condition for peace. Kyiv has ruled out any peace talks with Moscow until Russian troops leave all occupied territories, including Crimea.

Danilov suggested prosecuting Ukrainians who worked for the Moscow-appointed administration in Crimea, adding that some would face criminal charges and others would lose government pensions and be banned from public jobs.

All Russian citizens who moved to Crimea after 2014 should be expelled, and all real estate deals made under Russian rule nullified, Danilov wrote on Facebook.

As part of the plan, he also called for dismantling a 12-mile bridge that Russia built to Crimea. In October, a truck bomb severely

damaged the bridge, which is Europe's longest and a symbol of Moscow's conquest of the peninsula.

Russia has repaired the damaged section of the bridge and restored the flow of supplies to Crimea, which has been a key hub for the Russian military during the war. Moscow blamed Ukrainian military intelligence for the attack. Kyiv did not claim responsibility, but Ukrainian officials had repeatedly threatened to strike the bridge in the past.

Danilov also argued for renaming the city of Sevastopol, which has been the main base for the Russian Black Sea Fleet since the 19th century. He said it could be called Object No. 6 before the Ukrainian parliaments chooses another name, suggesting Akhtiar after a village that once stood where the city is now.

DOD: US has trained over 7K Ukrainian troops

BY DOUG G. WARE

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Dozens of Ukrainian soldiers at Fort Sill, Okla., have finished learning how to use the Patriot missile system, part of the more than 7,000 troops the United States has trained to fight off Russian forces invading their country, the Pentagon said Thursday.

Sixty-five Ukrainians were taken to the Army base in January to learn how to field the air-defense system to help defend their country against Russian attacks. Fort Sill, where U.S. troops are trained to use the Pa-

triot, is about 80 miles southwest of Oklahoma City near the town of Lawton.

The base is home to the Army's Air Defense Artillery School and Field Artillery School.

"Once in Ukraine, the Patriot air-defense system will add to Ukraine's layered air defenses to provide protection and shield from Russia's wanton brutal attacks on innocent civilians," said Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, the top Pentagon spokesperson.

The Pentagon has said it takes about 90 troops to operate and maintain the Patriot missile system. Ukraine is receiving three

Patriot batteries — one from the U.S. and one each from Germany and the Netherlands. Ukraine leaders had repeatedly requested the Patriot systems from Western countries before the U.S. agreed to send one in December.

The U.S. has so far committed more than \$32 billion in military weapons, vehicles and equipment since Russia launched its war in Ukraine in February 2022. Various military aid packages have included the Patriot, Stryker armored personnel carriers, Bradley Fighting Vehicles and M1 Abrams tanks.

Bereavement leave for loss of immediate family provided

BY JONATHAN SNYDER

Stars and Stripes

Service members who need it may now take up to two weeks of non-chargeable leave following the death of an immediate family member, the Department of Defense announced Wednesday.

The new bereavement leave benefit applies only to active-duty and active National Guard and reserve members who have served longer than 12 months

but have less than 30 days leave available to them, according to a DOD news release. They are eligible for non-chargeable leave following the death of a spouse or child even if they have less than 30 days of leave available or will go below 30 days while on emergency leave.

This benefit is only available to service members with accrued leave balances below 30 days, the release states. Service members with a leave balance

of 30 or more days may take chargeable emergency leave as they would in the past.

"The loss of a spouse or child has detrimental effects on a service member's ability to perform assigned duties," the release states.

Bereavement leave allows service members time away from their military duties in the event of a family member's death to make arrangements and attend the funeral, burial or

memorial service, according to the new policy.

"I think it's a good policy, I think it's beneficial and it's one less thing to worry about," Marine Corps spouse Christian Perez, 26, of Stratford, Conn., told Stars and Stripes on Friday at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan. "I think [bereavement leave] will help take away stress from some people that don't have the leave days already saved up."

Hutchinson to seek presidency, urges Trump exit

Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Asa Hutchinson, who spent two terms as governor of Arkansas, will seek the Republican presidential nomination, positioning himself as an alternative to Donald Trump just days after the former president was indicted by a grand jury in New York.

In an interview that aired Sunday on ABC's "This Week," Hutchinson said Trump should drop out of the race, arguing "the office is more important than any individual person."

"I'm running because I believe that I am the right time for America, the right candidate for our country and its future," he said. "I'm convinced that people want leaders that appeal to the best of America and not simply appeal to

our worst instincts."

Hutchinson is the first Republican to announce a campaign after Trump became the first former U.S. president to face criminal charges. His candidacy will test the GOP's appetite for those who speak out against Trump. Others who have criticized Trump, including former Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, have opted against a campaign, sensing the difficulty of prevailing in a primary.

And in a sign of Trump's continued grip on the Republican base, most in the party — even those considering challenging him for the nomination — have defended him against the New York indictment. That, at least for now, leaves Hutchinson as a distinct outlier among Republicans.

In addition to Trump, Hutchin-

son joins a Republican field that also includes former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is expected to jump into the race in the summer, while Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and former Vice President Mike Pence are among those considering bids.

Hutchinson, 72, left office in January after eight years as governor. He has ramped up his criticism of the former president in recent months, calling another Trump presidential nomination the "worst scenario" for Republicans and saying it will likely benefit President Joe Biden's chances in 2024.

Although he has supported Trump's policies, Hutchinson

has become increasingly critical of the former president's rhetoric and lies about the 2020 presidential election.

Hutchinson also criticized Trump for meeting with white nationalist leader Nick Fuentes and the rapper Ye, who has praised Adolf Hitler and spewed anti-semitic conspiracy theories.

Hutchinson, who graduated from the evangelical college Bob Jones University in South Carolina, said in the ABC interview that he considers himself part of the evangelical community.

"I believe that the evangelical community understands that we need to have a leader that can distance themselves from some of the bad instincts that drive Mr. Trump," he said. "And I hope that we can do that in the future."

US gun injuries surged during pandemic, CDC study shows

Associated Press

NEW YORK — For every American killed by gunfire, an estimated two or more more survive, often with terrible injuries — a fact that public health experts say is crucial to understanding the full impact of guns on society.

A new government study highlights just how violent America's recent past has been by showing a surge in gunfire injuries during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the number of people fatally shooting each other — and themselves — also increased.

The number of people injured by gunfire was nearly 40% higher in 2020 and 2021, compared with 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a study published Thursday. In 2022, gun injuries tapered off, but were still 20% higher than before the pandemic. Gun injuries rose similarly for men and women over the past three years, while the largest proportional increase occurred among children younger than 15, a subset that remains a small fraction of the problem.

Experts say the CDC gun injury study, which uses data from hospital emergency departments, helps provide a more comprehensive picture of gun violence in America than simply measuring homicides and suicides.

The CDC study results came from more than 2,200 U.S. hospital emergency departments, which represent the bulk of the nation's ERs, said Thomas Simon, one of the authors of the new study. The study suggests that the number of gunshot-related ER visits at hospitals in the study rose from about 50,000 in 2019 to more than 72,000 in 2020. Because more than a quarter of U.S. hospital emergency departments were not involved in the study, the actual number is likely higher.

Experts believe a variety of factors contributed to the pandemic surge in gun violence, including a rise in guns purchased, more time spent inside homes where guns are present and mental health struggles stemming from isolation and economic hardships.

Rebounding Pope Francis leads Palm Sunday Mass

Associated Press

VATICAN CITY — Bundled in a long, white coat and battling a hoarse voice, Pope Francis presided over Mass in St. Peter's Square before tens of thousands of faithful on Palm Sunday, a day after he left a Rome hospital where he was treated for bronchitis.

The sun broke through the clouds during the Mass, one of the longest services on the Church's calendar, as Francis, red vestments placed over his coat, sat in a chair under a canopy erected in the square. He took his place there after standing and clutching a braided palm branch in a popemobile that drove at the tail end of a long, solemn procession.

Francis, 86, received antibiotics administered intravenously during his three-day stay. His last previous appearance in St. Peter's Square saw him conduct his regular Wednesday public audience. He was taken to Rome's Gemelli Polyclinic that

same day after feeling ill.

His voice sounded strong as he opened the Mass, but quickly turned strained. Despite the hoarseness, Francis read a 15-minute-long homily.

The homily focused on moments when people feel "extreme pain, love that fails, or is rejected or betrayed." Francis cited "children who are rejected or aborted," as well as broken marriages, "forms of social exclusion, injustice and oppression, (and) the solitude of sickness."

Francis also spoke about a homeless man who recently died, "alone, abandoned," under the colonnade circling St. Peter's Square, where homeless persons often sleep.

"I, too, need Jesus to caress me and be near to me," Francis said.

Palm Sunday marks Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem in the time leading up to his crucifixion, which Christians observe on Good Friday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Stand against anti-LGBTQ+ laws might be changed

CA SACRAMENTO — When North Carolina in 2016 banned transgender people from using the bathroom of their gender identity in public buildings, California retaliated by banning state-funded travel to that state and any other state with laws it deemed discriminatory against LGBTQ+ people.

But seven years later, California now bans state-funded travel to nearly half of the country following a surge of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in mostly Republican-led states. The prohibition means sports teams at public colleges and universities have had to find other ways to pay for road games in states like Arizona and Utah. And it has complicated some of the state's other policy goals, like using state money to pay for people who live in other states to travel to California for abortions.

State Senate leader Toni Atkins announced legislation that would end the ban and replace it with an advertising campaign in those states that promotes acceptance and inclusion for the LGBTQ+ community. The bill would set up a fund to pay for the campaign, which would accept private donations and state funding — if any is available.

Man who researched tips on body disposal indicted

MA COHASSET — A Massachusetts man has been indicted in the death of his wife, who has not been seen since Jan. 1, a top prosecutor said.

Norfolk District Attorney Michael Morrissey said Brian Walshe, 47, has been charged

with first-degree murder as well as misleading a police investigation/obstruction of justice and improper conveyance of a human body. A first-degree murder conviction in Massachusetts carries a mandatory sentence of life in prison without parole.

Walshe is accused of murdering his wife, dismembering her and disposing of her body.

After Ana Walshe was last seen, Brian Walshe made multiple online searches using an iPad belonging to one of his sons using terms such as “dismemberment and best ways to dispose of a body,” “how long before a body starts to smell” and “hacksaw best tool to dismember,” prosecutors said.

Suit contests transgender woman in college sorority

WY CHEYENNE — Seven sorority members from the University of Wyoming have filed a lawsuit challenging the induction of a transgender woman into their local chapter.

The woman, identified only by the pseudonym “Terry Smith” in the lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Cheyenne, made residents of the Kappa Kappa Gamma house uncomfortable in part by sitting on a common-area couch for hours and staring at them without talking, the lawsuit alleges.

“One sorority member walked down the hall to take a shower, wearing only a towel. She felt an unsettling presence, turned, and saw Mr. Smith watching her silently,” the lawsuit alleges.

The lawsuit against the national Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority, its national council presi-

dent and Smith claims national sorority officials pressured the local chapter to violate sorority rules, including those for voting to induct new members.

The lawsuit asks for a judge to declare Smith's sorority membership void and to award damages. The damages should reflect the local chapter's decline in financial stability and donations because of Smith's induction last fall, the lawsuit alleges.

Voter accused of hitting election worker in face

NH RAYMOND — A woman whose paper ballot jammed in a tabulator machine is accused of hitting an election worker in the face who tried to remove it, giving him a bloody nose, police said.

The woman was voting in Raymond last week at the town's polling center, Holmes Gove Middle School. She was charged with misdemeanor simple assault and disorderly conduct, WMUR-TV reported. She was released on bail.

The machine rejected her ballot several times. The woman then folded the ballot and shoved it into the machine, jamming it. When the worker tried to remove it, the woman allegedly hit him in the face and gave him a bloody nose, the station reported. Police intervened.

Seattle Audubon changes name over slavery ties

WA SEATTLE — Seattle Audubon is changing its name to Birds Connect Seattle to move away from a name with a racist legacy.

The Seattle chapter said the name change is one step toward creating a more inclusive and

anti-racist organization, The Seattle Times reported. The organization said the concept of “connection” came up throughout the renaming process and that birds connect across families, hemispheres and habitats.

Birds Connect Seattle announced last year that it would change its name because of its connection to John James Audubon, a naturalist known for his watercolor paintings of birds and for whom many Audubon societies are named. Audubon also owned, sold and bought enslaved African Americans through his general store in Kentucky and was a staunch opponent of abolition.

Carrying concealed guns without a permit OK'd

FL TALLAHASSEE — Floridians will be able to carry concealed guns without a permit under a bill the Legislature sent to Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis. The governor said at a suburban Atlanta gun store that he will sign the bill.

The Senate passed the bill on a 27-13 vote. It will allow anyone who can legally own a gun in Florida to carry one without a permit. It means training and a background check will not be needed for people to carry concealed guns in public.

The arguments over the legislation were divided on political lines, with Republicans saying law-abiding citizens have a right to carry guns and protect themselves and Democrats saying a state that has seen horrific mass shootings such as the Parkland high school and Pulse nightclub massacres will become even more dangerous.

— From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Last-second shot lifts San Diego State

Associated Press

HOUSTON — San Diego State's vaunted defense staggered well into the second half as free-flowing Florida Atlantic breezed to a 14-point lead.

The Aztecs found their teeth again to get back into the game. Then Lamont Butler delivered at the very end.

Butler hit a buzzer-beating jumper for the ages, sending San Diego State to its first national championship game with a 72-71 win over fellow mid-major Florida Atlantic in the Final Four on Saturday night.

"I didn't really know how big it was," Butler said after his calm reaction to one of the greatest shots in NCAA Tournament history. "We're going to the national championship. That's not things many people do."

A diabolical defense had pushed San Diego State (32-6) all the way to the final stop for the NCAA tourney. The Aztecs bumped and harassed opponents all season to create the first all-mid-major national semifinal since VCU and But-

ler in 2011.

The swaggy Owls (35-4) seemed to have solved San Diego State's vaunted defense, using constant movement and ball reversals to create mismatches they could exploit.

San Diego State found its defensive mojo midway through the second half, clamping down on the Owls while whittling their lead down to one on Jaedon LeDee's short jumper with 36 seconds left.

When FAU's Johnell Davis missed a contested layup, San Diego State coach Brian Dutcher opted to not call timeout, joking that he didn't have any plays left.

All he had to do was get the ball to Butler.

The clock ticking down, Butler dribbled to the baseline, found that cut off and circled back. He stepped back to create a little room and hit a jumper that sent the Aztecs racing out onto the floor and had San Diego Padres fans going wild at Petco Park.

Butler's winning buzzer-beater was the first for the Final

Four since Jalen Suggs for Gonzaga against UCLA in 2021 and No. 5 overall. But it's the only one when the winning team was trailing at the time of the shot.

Next up for the Mountain West's first Final Four team is a chance to win the conference's first national title Monday night against UConn, which advanced with a 72-59 win against Miami.

"We've always been knocked down," said San Diego State's Matt Bradley, who had 21 points after struggling in the previous three games. "But the biggest thing we always do is get back up and keep fighting."

San Diego State had been building toward this since Dutcher took over for his longtime mentor Steve Fisher. Dutcher followed the mold Fisher had created, adding an extra dose of nasty to the defense.

The Aztecs lost an opportunity when they were in position for a No. 1 seed in the 2020 NCAA Tournament, only to have it wiped out by the pan-

demic.

San Diego State followed a pair of NCAA Tournament first-round flameouts with a solid 2023 season, winning 27 games to earn a No. 5 seed in the East Region in this year's bracket.

Once the NCAA Tournament started, the Aztecs ramped up their defense even more, holding their first four opponents to an average of 57 points per game and 17% shooting from the three-point arc.

FAU found an answer through quick ball movement, with the occasional dump into the post to keep the Aztecs honest.

The result: The Owls led 40-33 at halftime after hitting 5 of 11 from three-point range against a defense that held its previous two NCAA Tournament opponents to 5-for-44 shooting from the arc.

FAU kept making shots, stretching the lead to 14 midway through the second half.

Then, with Fisher watching in the stands, the Aztecs got gritty.

Huskies put Final Four beatdown on Hurricanes

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Nobody was guarding UConn's best player. So Adama Sanogo spun the ball to get his fingers just right, set his feet behind the three-point line and splashed in the shot. Then, less than a minute later, he did it again.

It was as much basketball clinic as highlight video — and all of it perfectly fitting for the Huskies, who are methodically steamrolling through a March Madness bracket that has been a free-for-all everywhere else.

UConn doled out another drama-free beatdown Saturday, getting 21 points and 10 rebounds from Sanogo to dispatch Miami 72-59 and move one win

from the school's fifth national title.

"There's a lot of teams that want to play Monday," Sanogo said. "It means a lot to us."

Jordan Hawkins overcame his stomach bug and scored 13 for the Huskies, who came into this most unexpected Final Four as the only team with any experience on college basketball's final weekend and with the best seeding of the four teams in Houston — at No. 4.

Against fifth-seeded Miami, they were the best team on the court from beginning to end. Starting with three straight threes — one jumper from Hawkins and two of those set shots from Sanogo — UConn took a

quick 9-0 lead and never trailed.

"This is something that I worked on all summer, especially shooting," Sanogo said.

On Monday in the title game, the Huskies will face San Diego State, which became the first team to hit a buzzer-beater while trailing in a Final Four game for a 72-71 victory over Florida Atlantic. UConn was an early 7½-point favorite, according to FanDuel Sportsbook.

"They're one of the best teams in the country," UConn coach Dan Hurley said of the Aztecs. "And I think it's fitting that both of us kind of earned our way into this title game."

But while the early game was an all-timer, the nightcap was

simply more of the same from the Huskies (30-8).

The 13-point win was UConn's closest since the brackets came out. The Huskies are the sixth team since the tournament expanded to 64 teams in 1985 to reach the title game with five straight double-digit victories. It's an impressive list of behemoths with a knack for closing: Four of the first five went on to win the championship.

Some thought Miami (29-8), with the nation's fifth-ranked offense and four players who have scored 20 points at least three times this season, might be the team to slow this Huskies juggernaut. Not to be.

International greats, Pop headed to Hall

Associated Press

Tony Parker and Pau Gasol played for him. Becky Hammon coached alongside him. Dirk Nowitzki and Dwyane Wade waged battles against him.

He is Gregg Popovich.

And he, finally, is a Hall of Famer.

The Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame made it official Saturday, with three of the NBA's all-time international greats — Nowitzki, Parker and Gasol — joining Wade, Hammon and Popovich as the headliners of the 2023 class that will be enshrined on Aug. 11 and 12.

"This is basketball heaven," Wade said on the ESPN telecast of the announcement in Houston.

Also getting the Hall's call: the 1976 U.S. Olympic women's basketball team; former Purdue coach Gene Keady, a seven-time Big Ten coach of the year; former Texas A&M women's coach Gary Blair, who took two teams to the Final Four;

longtime coach at Division III Amherst and two-time national champion David Hixon; and Gene Bess — who won 1,300 games as a junior college coach at Three Rivers Community College in Poplar Bluff, Mo.

The late Jim Valvano, who as a coach led N.C. State to the 1983 NCAA title, was selected as a contributor — also taking into account his work as a broadcaster and an outspoken advocate for cancer research.

Hall of Fame chairman Jerry Colangelo told the new members or their families about the happy news earlier in the week. Most of them joined Colangelo and other Hall of Famers on Friday for a welcome dinner of sorts, then on Saturday took their first public bows as basketball royalty.

"This class not only represents all levels of basketball — it represents truly, in every regard, what the game is all about and where it is," Colangelo told The Associated Press. "I mean, think about the candidates. There's the countries that are

represented, Germany and Spain and France. It shows how far the game has come and where it is today. I think maybe it's the most unique class, I'd say, of all time, and that covers a lot of territory. It stands by itself as in its uniqueness."

The four NBA players — Nowitzki, Parker, Gasol and Wade — combined for 95,092 points, 39 All-Star appearances and 10 NBA championships. Hammon was a six-time WNBA All-Star and is coach of the reigning WNBA champion Las Vegas Aces.

And all Popovich has done is win five NBA titles, more games than anyone else in league history and an Olympic gold at the Tokyo Games that were played in 2021.

"He's amazing," said Golden State coach Steve Kerr, who played for Popovich and coached under him with USA Basketball at the Tokyo Olympics. "The Hall of Fame was just a formality. Everybody knew he would be there. It was just a matter of when."

The longstanding belief was that Popovich wanted certain people in the Hall before he would allow himself to be under consideration. Tim Duncan and Manu Ginobili had to go in first. Parker going in with Popovich seems fitting, and Popovich has long raved about Hammon's ability.

"In all honesty, I always felt the Hall of Fame is like for Red Holzman, Red Auerbach and Larry Bird and Magic Johnson. ... I've never felt like I really belonged, to be honest with you," Popovich said. "I'm not trying to be 'Mr. Humble' or anything. I'm a Division III guy. I'm not a Hall of Fame guy."

It's the latest accolade for Gasol, Spain's longtime star whose two NBA championships came with the Los Angeles Lakers. Nowitzki, the German great who changed the game with his combination of big-man size and guard skills, spent all of his 21-year career in Dallas and is sixth on the NBA's scoring list. Parker won four rings with Popovich in San Antonio.

Ingram scores 36 points as Pelicans down Clippers

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — When Clippers star Kawhi Leonard hit big shots in the closing minutes, the Pelicans answered with Brandon Ingram, whose recent form has sent his team surging up the standings.

Ingram scored 36 points, bringing fans to their feet with an array of clutch, mid-range jump shots, and New Orleans beat Los Angeles 122-114 on Saturday night.

"If you want to be the best, you've got to go against the best and you've got to beat them," Ingram said. "That's one of the things that was in my head tonight, just trying to get this win."

Jonas Valanciunas scored 23 points — 15 in the third quarter

— and grabbed 12 rebounds for New Orleans (40-38), which won for the seventh time in eight games and pulled within a half-game of the Clippers (41-38) for sixth place in the Western Conference.

Los Angeles lost its second straight despite getting 40 points from Leonard, who played 41 minutes in New Orleans after being restricted to 18 minutes during a loss at Memphis a night earlier so that he'd be more available against the hotly pursuing Pelicans.

"We just have to give credit to them as they played amazing," Leonard said. "Ingram played great."

CJ McCollum and Trey Murphy III each added 19 points for New Orleans, which trailed for

most of the first three quarters but maintained a slim lead throughout the fourth.

Ingram made 13 of 23 shots, including nine shots away from the rim, ranging from pull-ups to tough turnaround fades.

"Those are I'm-just-better-than-you shots," McCollum said of Ingram's shot selection. "He's relying on his skill set and his comfort level. Regardless of analytics and what's considered a good shot, that's a great shot for him."

Ingram also made 10 of 11 free throws, and has now scored 25 or more points in nine straight games.

Russell Westbrook had 24 points and nine assists for the Clippers. Ivica Zubac added 15 points and Norman Powell 12.

Heat 129, Mavericks 122:

Jimmy Butler had 35 points and 12 assists, Cody Zeller added 20 points and host Miami snapped a three-game losing streak. Max Strus and Kevin Love each scored 18 and Tyler Herro added 15 for the Heat.

Luka Doncic finished with 42 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists, and Tim Hardaway Jr. had 31 points for the Mavericks.

The win moves Miami (41-37) closer to securing no worse than the No. 7 seed and most advantageous spot in the Eastern Conference play-in tournament.

Dallas fell a full game behind Oklahoma City in the race for the last Western Conference play-in spot, and the Thunder own the head-to-head tiebreaker.

Red Sox's Duvall hits walk-off homer

Associated Press

BOSTON — Adam Duvall ended the game with his second two-run homer after left fielder Ryan McKenna dropped a two-out fly in the ninth inning, giving the Boston Red Sox a 9-8 win over the Baltimore Orioles on Saturday.

Duvall had four hits and five RBIs. He was a single shy of the cycle.

Baltimore stole five bases and became the first team to steal 10 in its first two games since at least 1901. Jorge Mateo swiped two.

Cedric Mullins hit a three-run homer, Ryan Mountcastle had a two-run shot and the Orioles tagged Chris Sale for seven runs in three innings in his first Fenway Park start since 2021.

Baltimore led 8-7 when McKenna dropped Masataka Yoshida's routine fly. Duvall lined a shot just over the Green Monster against Félix Bautista (0-1).

Dodgers 10, Diamondbacks 1: Trayce Thompson had three home runs and eight RBIs, powering Clayton Kershaw and host Los Angeles to a blowout of Arizona.

In the 12th matchup between Kershaw and fellow lefty Madison Bumgarner, the Los Angeles star came out on top with six strong innings. Each pitcher's team has won six times.

Padres 8, Rockies 4: Xander Bogaerts hit a two-run homer and Matt Carpenter added a two-run double to back fellow new-

comer Michael Wacha as host San Diego topped Colorado for its first victory this season.

Manny Machado gave the Padres some breathing room with an RBI single in the sixth after the Rockies had pulled within one, and Juan Soto had a two-run single in the eighth — his first hit of the season.

Giants 7, Yankees 5: Camilo Doval retired Giancarlo Stanton on a game-ending double play with the bases loaded, and visiting San Francisco hung on against New York.

Stanton hit a grounder to short-stop Brandon Crawford, who started a double play that withstood a video review.

There were four pitch clock violations, the most of any game in the first three days of the new rule. Two were by Doval in the ninth inning.

Guardians 2, Mariners 0: Aaron Civale pitched seven smooth innings, and Josh Naylor and Andrés Giménez homered as visiting Cleveland blanked Seattle.

Civale (1-0) allowed only two hits and a walk with three strikeouts.

Rangers 16, Phillies 3: Marcus Semien led off with a homer, Mitch Garver hit two and host Texas powered past Philadelphia to become the seventh team since 1900 to start a season by scoring 10 or more runs in consecutive games.

Garver ripped a three-run shot to extend the lead to 7-3 in the

fifth inning. He then sparked a six-run seventh with another three-run shot.

Brewers 3, Cubs 1: William Contreras hit a tiebreaking, two-run single in his team's three-run eighth inning, and visiting Milwaukee beat Chicago for its first win of the season.

Brandon Woodruff pitched six sharp innings for Milwaukee.

Rays 12, Tigers 2: Zach Eflin got off to a nice start after signing the largest free-agent contract in Tampa Bay history, pitching five strong innings in a rout of visiting Detroit.

Yandy Díaz and Wander Franco each had three hits and three RBIs for the Rays.

Braves 7, Nationals 1: Matt Olson hit two of Atlanta's four homers, and Spencer Strider struck out nine across six scoreless innings against host Washington.

Ronald Acuña Jr. and Olson began the game with back-to-back home runs, and Marcell Ozuna connected later off Josiah Gray (0-1), who allowed the most homers in the majors last season.

Twins 2, Royals 0: Sonny Gray and four relievers combined on a four-hitter, and visiting Minnesota blanked Kansas City to open with consecutive shutouts for the first time in franchise history.

Jose Miranda had an RBI single, and pinch-hitter Kyle Farmer added a sacrifice fly. Byron Buxton scored twice.

Angels 13, Athletics 1: Taylor Ward homered and drove in four runs, and visiting Los Angeles scored 11 times in the third inning against Oakland to spoil Shintaro Fujinami's major league debut.

Shohei Ohtani had two hits and two RBIs.

Astros 6, White Sox 4: Kyle Tucker hit a pair of run-scoring singles and Yordan Alvarez had three hits to lead host Houston over Chicago.

With the score 3-all in the seventh, Alvarez and José Abreu hit consecutive two-out singles off Joe Kelly (0-1) before Tucker greeted José Ruiz with a go-ahead single.

Mets 6, Marlins 2: Pete Alonso hit a go-ahead double, Tylor Megill struck out seven in five innings and visiting New York beat Miami.

Megill (1-0) started in place of Justin Verlander, who went on the injured list with a strained upper back muscle on opening day.

Reds 6, Pirates 2: Jake Fraley came off the bench to hit a three-run homer, Kevin Newman had a two-run shot against his former team and host Cincinnati defeated Pittsburgh.

Cardinals 4, Blue Jays 1: Jack Flaherty overcame a career-high seven walks and a hit batter in throwing five no-hit innings, and host St. Louis scored three unearned runs in the third on the way to beating Toronto for its first win this season.

Pastrnak's hat trick gets Bruins within 3 of win record

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The Boston Bruins have been playing hockey for nearly a century.

Never, however, quite like this.

David Pastrnak finished off his 14th career hat trick with a blast by Tristan Jarry with 2:26 remaining to lift the Bruins to a 4-3 win over the Pittsburgh Pen-

guins on Saturday.

Boston improved to 59-12-5 with the win and is now within three games of the NHL's all-time single-season victory mark of 62 set by Detroit in 1996 and tied by Tampa Bay in 2019. Boston has six games remaining.

The Bruins, who entered the NHL in 1924, also set a franchise record for most points in a sea-

son, moving past the 121 points produced by the 1970-71 team.

"It's a great accomplishment, but it's hard when you're right in the moment to embrace it, I guess maybe, enjoy it," first-year Boston coach Jim Montgomery said. "I think after the season is over, we'll be able to sit back. It's historical, what we're doing. It's a pleasure to coach

these guys."

Especially when Pastrnak is on a heater.

The veteran forward has 10 goals in his last eight games and 56 on the season, the fifth-highest single-season total in franchise history. His first goal of the game, a deflection from in front, gave him 100 points for the first time in his nine-year career.