

Afghanistan withdrawal issues detailed

By DOUG G. WARE
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The federal government's review of the chaotic 2021 U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan concludes that the evacuation should have started sooner and faults former President Donald Trump for failing to pass information and intelligence to President Joe Biden before he took office.

"Biden's choices for how to execute a withdrawal from Afghanistan were severely constrained by conditions created by his predecessor," the White House summary of the report states. The summary also notes when Biden entered office, "the Taliban were in the strongest military position that they had been in since 2001, controlling or contesting nearly half of the country."

The evacuation, which ended Aug. 31, 2021, officially ended 20 years of war in Afghanistan for the United States. It also marked the return of Taliban rule in the country, rolling back many human rights in the past 20 months, particularly for women.

Many aspects of the pullout were chaotic, and led to 13 U.S. service members being killed near a gate of the Kabul airport by a pair of suicide attacks. During the evacuation, thousands of Afghan nationals fled the country with the U.S. military.

The full classified federal report on the exit was given to Congress on Thursday, but the White House issued a summary of its findings. The report is the result of many months of investigations by Biden's administration into the decision-making process of leaving Afghanistan.

"What you have got in that document is a pretty fair summary of our perspectives of the work over those many months," John Kirby, the chief spokesman for the National Security Council, told reporters at the White House.

The summary points to various issues and problems with the withdrawal. However, the report lays most of the blame on Trump's administration — mainly for failing to bring Biden's transition team up to speed in late 2020 and early 2021 on what was happening in Af-

ghanistan or disclosing information on U.S. confidence in former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's leadership and the ability of his forces to defend themselves after American forces left.

"When President Trump took office in 2017, there were more than 10,000 troops in Afghanistan. Eighteen months later, after introducing more than 3,000 additional troops just to maintain the stalemate, President Trump ordered direct talks with the Taliban without consulting with our allies and partners or allowing the Afghan government at the negotiating table," the 12-page summary reads.

The report also concludes Trump emboldened the Taliban by publicly considering whether to invite them to Camp David on the anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

"President Trump also pressured the Afghan government to release 5,000 Taliban fighters from prison, including senior war commanders, without securing the release of the only American hostage known to be held by the Taliban," according

to the report summary.

The summary also faults Trump's Doha Agreement, a pact that was negotiated between the U.S. and the Taliban that required all NATO forces to leave Afghanistan, including the withdrawal of several thousand American troops by mid-2020 and the withdrawal of all U.S. troops by May 2021. When Biden took office, he extended the evacuation deadline to August on the advice of experts and military commanders on the ground in Afghanistan.

"Clearly, we did not get things right here ... with how fast the Taliban was moving across the country," Kirby said. "[Biden] came in with a certain set of circumstances he had no ability to change."

He added that Trump's deal with the Taliban turned out to be "very corrosive" to the morale of Ghani's troops and Kabul's confidence in U.S. support.

The hectic withdrawal from Afghanistan caused political fallout for Biden, though he has remained steadfast that the pullout was the right thing to do after two decades of war.

Study says climate change juicing home runs in MLB

Associated Press

Climate change is making major league sluggers into even hotter hitters, sending an extra 50 or so home runs a year over the fences, a new study found.

Hotter, thinner air that allows balls to fly farther contributed a tiny bit to a surge in home runs since 2010, according to a statistical analysis by Dartmouth College scientists published in Friday's Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society. They analyzed 100,000 major league games and more than 200,000 balls put into play in the past few years along with weather conditions, stadi-

ums and other factors.

"Global warming is juicing home runs in Major League Baseball," said study co-author Justin Mankin, a Dartmouth climate scientist.

It's basic physics.

When air heats up, molecules move faster and away from each other, making the air less dense. Baseballs launched off a bat go farther through thinner air because there's less resistance to slow the ball. Just a little bit farther can mean the difference between a homer and a flyout, said Alan Nathan, a University of Illinois physicist who wasn't part of

the Dartmouth study.

Nathan, one of a group of scientists who has consulted with Major League Baseball on the increase in homers, did his own simple calculation, based purely on known physics of ballistics and air density as it changes with temperature, and said he got the same result as the Dartmouth researchers.

Both Nathan and the Dartmouth team found a 1% increase in home run likelihood with every degree the air warms. Total yearly average of warming-aided homers is only 1% of all home runs hit, the Dartmouth researchers calculated.

US would bar full ban on trans athletes but allow exceptions

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Schools and colleges across the U.S. would be forbidden from enacting outright bans on transgender athletes under a proposal released Thursday by the Biden administration, but teams could create some limits in certain cases — for example, to ensure fairness.

The proposed rule sends a political counterpunch toward a wave of Republican-led states that have sought to ban trans athletes from competing in school sports that align with their gender identities. If finalized, the proposal would become enshrined as a provision of Title IX, the landmark gender-equity legislation enacted in 1972.

It must undergo a lengthy approval process, however, and it's almost certain to face challenges. While opponents sharp-

ly criticized the proposal, some advocates for transgender athletes were concerned that it did not go far enough.

All told, at least 16 states now have bans in effect covering at least high school interscholastic sports. Some also extend to intramural, club or college sports. Enforcement of bans in at least three other states has been put on hold by courts, and one more has adopted a ban that doesn't take effect until July.

Under the Education Department's proposed rule, no school or college that receives federal funding would be allowed to impose a "one-size-fits-all" policy that categorically bans trans students from playing on sports teams consistent with their gender identity. Such policies would be considered a violation of Title IX.

Still, the proposal leaves room for schools to develop team eli-

gibility rules that could ultimately result in restrictions around trans athletes' participation.

That would be allowed only if it serves "important educational objectives," such as fairness in competition and reduction of injury risks.

Any limits would have to consider the sport, the level of competition and the age of students. Elementary school students would generally be allowed to participate on any teams consistent with their gender identity, for example. More competitive teams at high schools and colleges could add limits, but those would be discouraged in teams that don't have tryouts or cuts.

Biden's administration used "fairness of competition" as criteria, which has been part of the debate both in the U.S. and globally. But officials offered no specifics on how this could be done.

Kansas OKs bill to end kids' gender treatment

Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. — Republican lawmakers in Kansas approved a plan early Friday to end gender-affirming care for transgender youth, capping a week of intensifying efforts to roll back LGBTQ rights.

The Kansas House voted 70-52 to pass a bill requiring the state's medical board to revoke the licenses of doctors who provide gender-affirming care to minors, even though many professionals who deal with transgender youth see such care as vital for preservation of mental health and to prevent suicides. The Senate then voted 23-12 to approve the measure, sending it to Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly.

The governor is expected to veto it, having promised LGBTQ youth that she would protect their rights and reject any measure "that aims to harm or discriminate against you." Supporters do not have the two-thirds majorities in both chambers needed to override a veto.

The Kansas vote came after its lawmakers on Thursday passed a "parents' rights" bill allowing families to pull their children out of lessons and activities involving LGBTQ-themed materials and another measure restricting rooming arrangements for transgender students on school trips.

Republicans on Tuesday approved a broad bathroom bill that would also prevent transgender people from changing the gender on their driver's licenses. On Wednesday, they overrode Kelly's veto of a bill banning transgender female athletes from girls' and women's sports.

High court: Trans girl can run girls track

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Thursday allowed a 12-year-old transgender girl in West Virginia to continue competing on her middle school's girls sports teams while a lawsuit over a state ban continues.

The justices refused to disturb an appeals court order that made it possible for the girl, Becky Pepper-Jackson, to continue playing on her school's track and cross-country teams, where she regularly finishes near the back of the pack.

Justices Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas would have

allowed West Virginia to enforce its law against Pepper-Jackson.

Pepper-Jackson is in the middle of the outdoor track season. She had filed a lawsuit challenging the law, the Save Women's Sports Act, which West Virginia lawmakers adopted in 2021. A federal appeals court had allowed her to compete while she appealed a lower court ruling that upheld the West Virginia law.

In an emailed statement issued by the ACLU's West Virginia chapter to The Associated Press on Thursday night, Pepper-Jackson said: "I am so happy that the Supreme Court saw

that this stay was not an emergency. I still get to play with my friends and teammates on the track team. That's all I want to do, be with my friends and be the girl that I am."

The high court announcement came the same day the Biden administration proposed a new rule that would prevent schools and colleges from enacting outright bans on transgender athletes, but would allow certain exceptions to promote fairness or reduce injuries.

Two weeks ago, track and field banned transgender athletes from international competitions.

2 of 3 Tenn. Dems expelled over gun protest

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — In an extraordinary act of political retaliation, Tennessee Republicans on Thursday expelled two Democratic lawmakers from the state Legislature for their role in a protest calling for more gun control in the aftermath of a deadly school shooting in Nashville. A third Democrat was narrowly spared by a one-vote margin.

The split votes drew accusations of racism, with lawmakers ousting Reps. Justin Jones and Justin Pearson, who are both Black, while Rep. Gloria Johnson, who is white, survived the vote on her expulsion. Republican leadership denied that race was a factor, however.

The visitors' gallery exploded in screams and boos following

the final vote. After sitting quietly for hours and hushing anyone who cried out during the proceedings, people broke into chants of "Shame!" and "Fascists!"

Banishment is a move the chamber has used only a handful of times since the Civil War. Most state legislatures have the power to expel members, but it is generally reserved as a punishment for lawmakers accused of serious misconduct, not used as a weapon against political opponents.

GOP leaders said Thursday's actions were necessary to avoid setting a precedent that lawmakers' disruptions of House proceedings through protest would be tolerated.

Republican Rep. Gino Bulso said the three Democrats had

"effectively conducted a mutiny."

At an evening rally, Jones and Pearson pledged to be back at the Capitol next week advocating for change.

"Rather than pass laws that will address red flags and banning assault weapons and universal background checks, they passed resolutions to expel their colleagues," Jones said. "And they think that the issue is over. We'll see you on Monday."

Jones, Pearson and Johnson joined in protesting last week as hundreds of demonstrators packed the Capitol to call for passage of gun-control measures. As the protesters filled galleries, the three approached the front of the House chamber with a bullhorn and participated in a chant. The scene unfolded

days after the shooting at the Covenant School, a private Christian school where six people were killed, including three children.

Pearson told reporters Thursday that in carrying out the protest, the three had broken "a House rule because we're fighting for kids who are dying from gun violence and people in our communities who want to see an end to the proliferation of weaponry in our communities."

Johnson, a retired teacher, said her concern about school shootings was personal, recalling a day in 2008 when students came running toward her out of a cafeteria because a student had just been shot and killed.

"The trauma on those faces, you will never, ever forget," she said.

Thomas reportedly took undisclosed luxury trips

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas has for more than two decades accepted luxury trips nearly every year from Republican megadonor Harlan Crow without reporting them on financial disclosure forms, ProPublica reports.

In a lengthy story published Thursday the nonprofit investigative journalism organization catalogs various trips Thomas has taken aboard Crow's yacht and private jet as well as to Crow's private resort in the Adirondacks. A 2019 trip to Indonesia, the story detailed, could have cost more than \$500,000 had Thomas chartered the plane and yacht himself, ProPublica reported.

Supreme Court justices, like other federal judges, are required to file an annual financial disclosure report which asks them to list gifts they have received. It was not clear why

Thomas omitted the trips, but under a judiciary policy guide consulted by The Associated Press, food, lodging or entertainment received as "personal hospitality of any individual" does not need to be reported if it is at the personal residence of that individual or their family. That said, the exception to reporting is not supposed to cover "transportation that substitutes for commercial transportation" and properties owned by an entity.

Last month, the federal judiciary beefed up disclosure requirements for all judges, including the high court justices, although overnight stays at personal vacation homes owned by friends remain exempt from disclosure.

Crow told ProPublica it "is no different from the hospitality we have extended to our many other dear friends" and that the couple "never asked for any of this hospitality."

NPR complains as Twitter calls it 'state-affiliated media'

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Twitter has labeled National Public Radio as "state-affiliated media" on the social media site, a move some worried Wednesday could undermine public confidence in the news organization.

NPR said it was disturbed to see the description added to all of the tweets that it sends out, with John Lansing, its president and CEO, calling it "unacceptable for Twitter to label us this way."

It was unclear why Twitter made the move. Twitter's owner, Elon Musk, quoted a definition of state-affiliated media in the company's guidelines as "outlets where the state exercises control over editorial content through financial resources, direct or indirect political pressures, and/or control over production and distribution."

"Seems accurate," Musk tweeted in a reply to NPR.

NPR does receive U.S. gov-

ernment funding through grants from federal agencies and departments, along with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The company said it accounts for less than 1% of NPR's annual operating budget. But until Wednesday, the same Twitter guidelines said that "state-financed media organizations with editorial independence, like the BBC in the UK or NPR in the United States, are not defined as state-affiliated media for the purposes of this policy."

NPR has now been removed from that sentence on Twitter's website.

Asked for comment, Twitter's press office responded with an automated poop emoji.

"NPR and our member stations are supported by millions of listeners who depend on us for the independent, fact-based journalism we provide," Lansing said. "NPR stands for freedom of speech and holding the powerful accountable."

US adds healthy 236,000 jobs in March

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — America's employers added a solid 236,000 jobs in March, suggesting that the economy remains on solid footing despite the nine interest rate hikes the Federal Reserve has imposed over the past year to tame inflation.

The unemployment rate fell to 3.5%, just above the 53-year low of 3.4% set in January.

At the same time, some of the details of Friday's report from the Labor Department raised the possibility that inflationary

pressures might be easing and that the Fed might soon decide to pause its rate hikes. Average hourly wages were up 4.2% from 12 months earlier, down sharply from a 4.6% year-over-year increase in February.

Measured month to month, wages rose 0.3% from February to March, a tick up from a mild 0.2% gain from January to February. But even that figure signaled a slowdown from average wage increases in the final months of 2022.

Last month's job gain marked

a moderation from the sizzling 326,000 that were added in February.

"Today's report is a Goldilocks report," said Daniel Zhao, lead economist at Glassdoor. "It's hard to find a way it could have been better. We do see that the job market is cooling, but it's still resilient."

In another sign that might reassure the Fed's inflation fighters, a substantial 480,000 Americans began looking for work in March. Typically, the bigger the supply of job seekers, the less

pressure employers feel to raise wages. The result can be an easing of inflation pressures.

The percentage of people who either have a job or are looking for one — the so-called labor force participation rate — reached 62.6% in March, the highest level in three years. And the share of working-age Americans — those ages 25 to 54 — who have jobs rose to 80.7%, the highest point since 2001.

"Americans, by and large, are looking for work and finding it," Zhao said.

China hits Reagan library over Tsai trip

Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan — China retaliated for the United States House speaker's meeting with the Taiwanese president by announcing sanctions Friday against the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and other organizations, adding to strains over the self-governed island democracy Beijing claims as part of its territory.

Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy held talks Wednesday with President Tsai Ing-wen at the Reagan library in Simi Valley, Calif., in defiance of Chinese warnings. McCarthy joined a growing series of foreign legislators who have met Tsai in a show of sup-

port for Taiwan in the face of Chinese intimidation.

U.S.-Chinese relations have sunk to their lowest level in decades due to disputes over the status of Taiwan, which split with China in 1949 after a civil war, as well as security, technology and Beijing's treatment of Hong Kong and Muslim ethnic minorities. The mainland's ruling Communist Party says Taiwan is destined to reunite with China, by force if necessary, and has no right to conduct foreign relations.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the Reagan library and the Hudson Institute, a Washington think tank, were sanctioned for "providing

a platform and convenience to Taiwan separatist activities." Chinese institutions are now banned from having any cooperation or contact with them.

An email seeking comment from the library wasn't immediately answered. Hudson Institute President John P. Walters said in a statement that China's Communist Party "has a long history of attempting to silence voices, domestically and abroad, that oppose its international aggression and its oppression of the Chinese people. It has not worked before and it will not work now. We stand firmly with Taiwan and against the CCP and its ruthless, genocidal policies."

Lawmaker seeks Peeps changes

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — This Easter, Americans will devour more than 1 billion Peeps — those radiant marshmallow chicks whose appearance on store shelves each year is as much a herald of spring as azaleas at the Masters.

What makes the treats so vibrant is erythrosine, a chemical that shows up on ingredient labels as Red No. 3. It's one of several chemicals, along with titanium dioxide, used to color some of the most popular candy in the country.

Both chemicals have been linked to cancer. Now, a state lawmaker wants to ban erythrosine and titanium dioxide in California.

The bill has prompted headlines around the world declaring California wants to ban Skittles and other candy. Assemblymember Jesse Gabriel, a Democrat who authored the bill, said he wants to ban the chemicals, not the candy. He said plenty of alternative ingredients are available, noting the chemicals are already banned in Europe and that companies still find a way to sell candy there.

South African pilot finds cobra under seat

Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa — A pilot in South Africa made a hasty emergency landing after discovering a highly venomous cobra hiding under his seat.

Rudolf Erasmus had four passengers on board the light aircraft during Monday's flight when he felt "something cold" slide across his lower back. He glanced down to see the head of a fairly large Cape Cobra "re-

ceding back under the seat."

After taking a moment to compose himself, he informed his passengers of the slippery stowaway.

"There was a moment of stunned silence," he said. Everyone stayed cool, especially the pilot.

Erasmus called air traffic control for permission to make an emergency landing in the town of Welkom in central

South Africa. He still had to fly for another 10 to 15 minutes and land the plane with the snake curled up by his feet.

"I kept looking down to see where it was. It was happy under the seat," he said. "I don't have a big fear of snakes but I normally don't go near them."

Cape Cobras are one of Africa's most dangerous cobra species because of the potency of their venom.

2 killed in West Bank after Israeli strikes

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israel unleashed rare airstrikes on Lebanon and bombarded the Gaza Strip on Friday, an escalation that sparked fears of a broader conflict after days of violence over Jerusalem's most sensitive holy site.

Later in the day, there were signs that both sides were trying to keep the hostilities in check. Fighting on Israel's northern and southern borders subsided after dawn, and midday prayers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem passed peacefully. But a Palestinian shooting attack in the Israeli-occupied West Bank killed two women near an Israeli

settlement just hours later — a grim reminder of the combustible situation.

The early morning Israeli strikes followed an unusually large rocket barrage fired at Israel from southern Lebanon — what analysts described as the most serious cross-border violence since Israel's 2006 war with Lebanon's Hezbollah militants. The violence erupted after Israeli police raided the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem earlier in the week, sparking unrest in the contested capital and outrage across the Arab world.

The Israeli strikes seemed designed to avoid drawing in Hezbollah, the Iran-

backed Shiite group that Israel considers its most immediate threat. The Israeli military said its warplanes struck infrastructure belonging to Palestinian militants that it accused of firing the nearly three dozen rockets that slammed into open areas and northern Israeli towns on Thursday. Nonetheless, the Israeli military said it believed the Palestinian militants acted with the knowledge of Hezbollah, which holds sway over much of southern Lebanon.

There were no reports of serious casualties, but several residents of the southern Lebanese town of Qalili, including Syrian refugees, said they were lightly wounded.

Russia hits illegally annexed areas of Ukraine with ground, air attacks

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian forces used ground- and air-fired missiles, rocket launchers and weaponized drones to bombard the provinces of Ukraine it has illegally annexed but doesn't fully control, causing casualties, building damage and power outages Friday.

The Ukrainian military said Russian forces launched 18 airstrikes, five missile strikes and 53 attacks from multiple rocket launchers between Thursday and Friday mornings.

According to the General Staff statement, Russia was concentrating the bulk of its offensive operations in Ukraine's industrial east, focusing on the cities and towns of Lyman, Bakhmut, Avdiivka and Marinka in Donetsk province.

Most of Friday's battlefield reports concerned the four Ukrainian provinces Russia annexed in September: Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered his military to gain complete control of the provinces, while Ukraine has indicated it will soon launch a counteroffensive to take back more territory.

In the latest fighting, the Ukrainian military said it downed a Russian Su-25 ground attack jet near Marinka. A video showed a big explosion as the plane slammed into the ground,

with its pilot descending on a parachute.

British military officials said in their latest daily analysis that Russian forces have likely advanced into the center of Bakhmut and captured the western bank of the Bakhmutka River. Russia's eight-month campaign to take Bakhmut and Ukraine's determination to defend the city have produced the longest and potentially bloodiest battle of the war.

The U.K. Defense Ministry said Russia's progress, which had largely stalled since the end of March, had regained momentum. According to British intelligence, Ukraine's key supply route to the west of Bakhmut was under threat, with Russia using artillery more effectively and benefiting from reinforcements by regular forces that likely include airborne troops.

British military officials noted also that regular military commanders and those from the Wagner Group, a private Russian military company that has sent its soldiers to fight in multiple African countries, had probably improved cooperation and put on hold their "feud."

Also in Donetsk province, Russia launched a missile attack on the city of Sloviansk, destroying residential buildings, while one civilian was wounded during fighting in Bakhmut.

Eight Filipinos crucified despite church objection

Associated Press

SAN PEDRO CUTUD, Philippines — Eight Filipinos were nailed to crosses to reenact Jesus Christ's suffering in a gory Good Friday tradition that draws thousands of devotees and tourists to the Philippines despite being rejected by the Catholic Church.

The real-life crucifixions in the farming village of San Pedro Cutud in Pampanga province north of Manila resumed after a three-year pause due to the coronavirus pandemic. About a dozen villagers registered but only eight men participated, including 62-year-old sign painter Ruben Enaje, who was nailed to a wooden cross for the 34th time in San Pedro Cutud.

In a news conference shortly after his brief crucifixion, Enaje said he prayed for the eradication of the COVID-19 virus and the end of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has contributed to gas and food prices soaring worldwide.

The gruesome spectacle reflects the Philippines' unique brand of Catholicism, which merges church traditions with folk superstitions.

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Three tied atop Masters leaderboard

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Brooks Koepka carved out a new identity that sure looked familiar Thursday in the Masters.

This wasn't about his surprising defection last year to LIV Golf, or even his victory four days ago that made him the Saudi-funded circuit's first multiple winner. He just looked like "Big Game Brooks," the player who built a reputation for playing his best in the majors.

Koepka was in full flight in the opening round at Augusta National, and he had company. He birdied his last two holes for a 7-under 65, giving him a share of the lead with Jon Rahm and Viktor Hovland.

Koepka couldn't stoop to read putts two years ago at the Masters when he tried to return from knee surgery in three weeks. He felt so hobbled last year he had reason to believe his run in the majors — four wins over three years — was about to be a memory.

He is getting his swagger back.

"Once you feel good, everything changes," Koepka said.

As for Rahm, he never went away. Never mind that he dropped from a sure-fire No. 1 in

the world to No. 3 in the span of a month. The Spaniard overcame a four-putt double bogey on the opening hole with a sublime display of shotmaking.

Hovland played bogey-free to join them atop a leaderboard filled with red numbers and the ominous "weather warning" signs that figure to play a big role this week.

A bad forecast has been talked about almost as much as how 18 players from Saudi-backed LIV Golf would perform amid the high-stakes pressure of a major over 72 holes with a cut.

Koepka carried the flag, though he was more thrilled with having healthy legs.

Rahm had a cool head. He took four putts from 40 feet, and on his way to the second tee thought of the famous quote from his Spanish idol, Seve Ballesteros, who once four-putted at Augusta and said, "I miss, I miss, I miss, I make."

"If you're going to make a double or four-putt, it might as well be the first hole — 71 holes to make it up," Rahm said.

That he did. The Spaniard followed with seven birdies and an eagle, and his 65 was the lowest score in Masters history by

anyone who started with a double bogey.

Koepka won the 2019 PGA Championship — his fourth major in a span of three years — that gave him a five-year exemption to the Masters. That runs out next year, and with LIV not getting any world ranking points, his path to Augusta is limited.

"If you win, you're fine," he said, bluntly and unbothered.

Hovland was among the early starters. The highlight was a 25-foot eagle putt on the second hole and being 7 under through 13 holes until he cooled at the end. The Norwegian star also stood out for other reasons. The azaleas are starting to lose their color from an early bloom. Hovland made up for it with his shirt.

"It's definitely a little bit out there," Hovland said. "But I think I'd rather take these than the pink pants I had last year. So we're making progress."

The warm, muggy air and relatively soft greens allowed for good scores for just about everyone. Cameron Young and Jason Day were at 67.

Defending champion Scottie Scheffler, trying to become only the fourth player to win back-to-back, was in the group at 68 that

included major champions Shane Lowry, Adam Scott and Gary Woodland, along with Xander Schauffele and U.S. Amateur champion Sam Bennett.

Rory McIlroy, needing a Masters green jacket to complete the career Grand Slam, took a double bogey from the trees on the par-4 seventh and had three more bogeys to offset his good play. He wound up with a 72, already seven shots behind a world-class leaderboard.

Rahm only a month ago was playing so well he looked unstoppable — three wins on the PGA Tour over his first five starts, all against strong fields. And then he dropped from No. 1 to No. 3 in no time as Scheffler and McIlroy surged.

Consider his opening round — even the four-putt double bogey — to be a reminder that his game is sharp and his passion is burning hot to be the next Spaniard to win the Masters.

That he could recall a funny line from Ballesteros so soon after a crushing start was a good sign. He thought his putting stroke was good on all of them. So he moved on. Rahm hit every fairway and missed only one green.

Woods' painful Masters walk results in opening 74

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Tiger Woods split the fairway with his opening shot Thursday, confidently plucking his tee from the ground before his ball had even landed, and set off with grim-faced determination for a steady trek around Augusta National.

The rest of his day at the Masters was mostly just grim.

There were two wicked lip-outs on the front side. A pitch shot dumped in a greenside bunker on the back. Some bad luck off the tee at 18, which left him

with a painfully awkward stance. And on just about every hole, a pronounced limp — the evidence of the crash on a suburban Los Angeles road just over two years ago that crushed bones in his right leg and ankle.

By the time Woods struggled through the finishing hole, failing to get up and down from another bunker, he had shot 74 — good enough to stay in contention to play the weekend but hardly good enough to actually contend. He has never missed the cut at the Masters as a professional.

"Most of the guys are going low today. This was the day to do it," Woods said. "Hopefully tomorrow I'll be a little bit better, a little bit sharper, and kind of inch my way through it."

Or at least hobble through it.

It was the worst opening round for Woods at the Masters since 2005, when he followed a 74 with 65-66-71 to capture the fourth of his five green jackets. Recent history suggests that duplicating that comeback will be tough, though: He shot 78-78 on the weekend last year, and is now a combined 16 over for his last four

rounds at Augusta National.

The four consecutive rounds over par is Woods' longest such streak since first driving down Magnolia Lane in 1995.

"Today was the opportune time to get the round under par," he said, "and I didn't do that."

The five-time champion had the best view for a couple of golfers who did.

Viktor Hovland used an eagle at the second to propel him to an opening 65, and Xander Schauffele shot 68, on a day that red numbers dominated the scoreboards.

Butler, Herro shine as Heat rout 76ers

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Jimmy Butler and Tyler Herro each scored 24 points and the Miami Heat kept alive their hopes of avoiding the NBA's play-in tournament with a 129-99 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers on Thursday night.

Max Strus and Bam Adebayo both added 14 points.

The Heat (43-37) would have to win both of their remaining games (at Washington and home against Orlando) and have Brooklyn lose both home games this weekend (to Orlando and Philadelphia) to move into the No. 6 spot and avoid the play-in round. Miami took the Southeast Division title with the win.

Philadelphia (52-27) has already secured the third spot in the Eastern Conference playoffs. Joel Embiid scored 21

points despite not playing in the fourth quarter. James Harden chipped in 14 in limited minutes.

Suns 119, Nuggets 115: Chris Paul made a career-high seven 3-pointers and host Phoenix won its season-best seventh game in a row, holding off short-handed Denver.

Kevin Durant added six 3s and led the Suns with 29 points, while Paul scored 25. Durant also had seven rebounds.

Devin Booker made just 3 of 12 shots, but still scored 15 as he was 8 for 8 from the free throw line. Booker also had eight assists, while Deandre Ayton scored 16 points and reserve Torrey Craig had 11.

Bruce Brown led Denver (52-28), playing without all five starters, with 31 points on 11-of-18 shooting.

Thunder 114, Jazz 98: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 22

points and visiting Oklahoma City strengthened its hopes of reaching the play-in tournament with a victory over short-handed Utah.

Josh Giddey had 17 points, eight assists and eight rebounds, while Aaron Wiggins scored 15 for the Thunder, who snapped a three-game losing streak.

Kris Dunn had 22 points, eight assists and seven rebounds for the Jazz, who were eliminated from postseason contention.

Cavaliers 118, Magic 94: Danny Green scored 21 points, Cedi Osman added 19 and visiting Cleveland beat Orlando in a game in which both teams rested their starters.

Isaiah Mobley came off the bench with 18 points for the Cavaliers, who had clinched the fourth seed in the Eastern Con-

ference playoffs by beating the Magic on Tuesday night.

Jalen Suggs led the Magic with 22 points in their home finale.

Spurs 129, Trail Blazers 127: Keita Bates-Diop had 25 points, Julian Champagne and Keldon Johnson each added 24 and San Antonio beat Portland in the first NBA game in Texas' capital city.

Tre Jones had 18 points and 10 assists for San Antonio, which is guaranteed to finish with one of the NBA's three-worst records.

Kevin Knox had 24 points to lead Portland and Drew Eubanks added 23 points against his former team. The Trail Blazers have lost seven of eight.

The Spurs are playing their final two home games at the Moody Center in Austin as part of what the franchise has deemed a regional outreach.

Duvall breaks tie with 3-run homer, Red Sox top Tigers

Associated Press

DETROIT — Adam Duvall hit a tiebreaking, three-run homer in the sixth inning and the Boston Red Sox went on to beat the Detroit Tigers 6-3 Thursday.

Miguel Cabrera hit a two-out RBI single in the third inning of his final home opener to put Detroit up 3-1.

Boston, swept at home earlier in the week by Pittsburgh, bounced back with a run in the third and fourth before surging into the lead with a four-run sixth.

Chris Sale (1-0) gave up four hits and three runs and three walks while striking out seven in five innings. John Schreiber, Chris Martin, Ryan Brasier and combined to throw three innings of scoreless relief and Kenley Jansen pitched the ninth for his first save with Boston.

Spencer Turnbull (0-2) allowed five runs and five hits and two walks over 5 2-3 innings.

Jose Cisnero gave up the three-run homer to Duvall, the first batter he faced.

Dodgers 5, Diamondbacks 2: Dustin May threw six dominant innings, Freddie Freeman hit a solo homer and Los Angeles spoiled Arizona's home opener.

May (1-0) gave up one run on just two hits, striking out five and walking two.

It was another tough outing against the Dodgers for D-backs righty Merrill Kelly (0-1), who gave up four runs over 5½ innings, walking four and striking out four.

Giants 16, Whites Sox 6: J.D. Davis hit a grand slam in the ninth off mop-up reliever Hanser Alberto for his third hit, Michael Conforto had a three-run homer among three hits and San Francisco powered past host Chicago.

Mike Yastrzemski and Wilmer Flores each launched a two-run shot in San Francisco's five-homer, 20-hit attack. Rookie

catcher Blake Sabol hit the first home run of his career and added two singles to give him four total hits in his first six games.

Jakob Junis (2-0) threw four innings of scoreless, two-hit relief. Lance Lynn (0-1) was the loser.

Braves 7, Padres 6: Orlando Arcia singled in the winning run in the ninth inning for his third hit and Atlanta beat San Diego in its home opener.

Arcia hit a third-inning homer and also had a double.

With two outs in the ninth, pinch-hitter Eddie Rosario doubled to the right-field corner off right-hander Nabil Crismatt (0-1). Arcia followed with the single to center field that drove in Rosario to set off an on-field celebration.

A.J. Minter (1-0) pitched a scoreless ninth.

Matt Carpenter hit a three-run homer and Jake Cronenworth added a solo shot for the Padres.

Rockies 1, Nationals 0: Kyle Freeland pitched four-hit ball over 6⅓ innings, Jurickson Proffar made several nifty catches in left field and Colorado beat Washington in its home opener.

Kris Bryant drove in the only run with a single in the fifth.

Freeland (2-0), who is from Denver, struck out five and walked two before turning things over to the bullpen. Another Denver product, Pierce Johnson, pitched a perfect ninth for his second save.

Josiah Gray (0-2) took the loss.

Blue Jays 6, Royals 3: Kevin Gausman pitched six scoreless innings, Vlad Guerrero Jr. and Cavan Biggio hit home runs and Toronto beat host Kansas City for its third straight victory.

Gausman (1-1) gave up four hits to the struggling Royals, striking out seven and walking two.

Jordan Lyles (0-2) was the loser.

Kraken playoff bound for the 1st time

Associated Press

SEATTLE — The Seattle Kraken clinched the first playoff berth in franchise history and set an NHL record for victories in an expansion team's second season by beating the Arizona Coyotes 4-2 on Thursday night.

Jared McCann, Jordan Eberle, Matty Beniers and Vince Dunn scored for the Kraken, who earned their 44th win — the most by a second-year NHL team since the Original Six era, which ended in 1968.

Philipp Grubauer had 27 saves for Seattle, which won its third straight game.

Barrett Hayton and Laurent Dauphin scored for Arizona. Karel Vejmelka stopped 29 shots.

Bruins 2, Maple Leafs 1, OT: David Pastrnak scored his 57th goal of the season at 2:30 of overtime to give history-chasing Boston a victory over visiting Toronto.

Pastrnak blasted a shot from inside the left circle as the Bruins notched their 61st victory — one off the NHL season record set by Detroit in 1995-96 and matched by Tampa Bay in 2018-19.

Jeremy Swayman made 31 saves for Boston, winners of four straight, and Charlie Coyle also scored.

Ilya Samsonov made 31 saves for Toronto.

Panthers 7, Senators 2: Alex Lyon set a franchise record for saves in a regulation game with 56 and Aleksander Barkov scored twice and host Florida beat Ottawa for its fifth consecutive victory.

Lyon surpassed the mark of 53 set by Craig Anderson on March 2, 2008.

Brandon Montour, Sam Reinhart, Eetu Luostarinen, Nick Cousins and Gustav Forsling also scored for Florida, which scored five goals in the second period alone.

Devils 8, Blue Jackets 1: Jack Hughes scored two goals and set up two by Timo Meier and host

New Jersey routed Columbus with its biggest offensive output in more than four years.

Tomas Tatar, Erik Haula, Damon Severson and Ryan Graves also scored in the Devils' 50th win of the season, one off tying the franchise record set in 2008-09. Vitek Vanecek made 16 saves.

Finnish rookie Joona Luoto scored his first NHL goal for Columbus.

Stars 4, Flyers 1: Jason Robertson beat the first-period buzzer while scoring twice and Dallas beat visiting Philadelphia to keep pace in the tight Central Division playoff race.

Joe Pavelski had a goal and two assists and Colin Miller scored as the Stars reached 100 points.

Kevin Hayes prevented Jake Oettinger's fifth shutout of the season with his 18th goal in the second period.

Golden Knights 5, Kings 2: Vegas scored four goals on its first six shots and took a major step toward clinching the Pacific Division and the top seed in the Western Conference with a victory over visiting Los Angeles.

The third line shined for the Knights with Phil Kessel, Ivan Barbashev and Chandler Stephenson each finishing with a goal and an assist. Vegas' other two goals came from Nicolas Roy and Jonathan Marchessault.

Laurent Brossoit, competing to be the Knights' starting goalie in the playoffs, made 30 saves. Anze Kopitar and Vladislav Gavrikov scored for the Kings.

Sabres 7, Red Wings 6, SO: Tage Thompson scored his 45th goal of the season, Dylan Cozens had two goals and Buffalo outlasted host Detroit in a shootout.

Henri Jokiharju, Zemgus Girgensons and Jordan Greenway also scored for the Sabres, and Devon Levi made 26 saves. Alex Tuch and Jack Quinn scored in the shootout.

Austin Czarnik, Dylan Larkin,

Alex Chiasson, Simon Edvinsson, Jonatan Berggren and David Perron scored in regulation for the Red Wings. Lucas Raymond scored the only shootout goal for Detroit.

Penguins 4, Wild 1: Tristan Jarry stopped 27 shots and host Pittsburgh beat Minnesota to keep pace in the race for one of the two wild-card spots in the Eastern Conference.

Kris Letang beat Fleury over the glove in the first period for his 11th goal of the season. Rickard Rakell, Jason Zucker and Jeff Carter also scored for the Penguins.

Marcus Johansson scored on the two-man advantage midway through the third period to spoil Jarry's bid for a shutout.

Islanders 6, Lightning 1: Adam Pelech, Brock Nelson, Kyle Palmieri and Ryan Pulock scored second-period goals, Ilya Sorokin made 29 saves and host New York beat Tampa Bay to keep pace in the Eastern Conference wild-card race.

Simon Holmstrom and Bo Horvat also scored for the Islanders.

Nikita Kucherov scored for Tampa Bay.

Blues 3, Rangers 2, OT: Kasperi Kapanen scored 1:16 into overtime to lift St. Louis past visiting New York.

Kapanen took a pass from Brayden Schenn to score his 15th goal of the season for St. Louis. Tyler Pitlick and Alexey Toropchenko also scored, and Jordan Binnington made 21 saves.

Vincent Trocheck tied it for the Rangers with 2:03 remaining in regulation on a power play and Jaroslav Halak pulled for an extra attacker.

Vladimir Tarasenko scored and added an assist in his first game in St. Louis since being traded to New York along with Niko Mikkola on Feb. 9.

Canadiens 6, Capitals 2: Joel Armia had his second career hat trick and host Montreal beat

Washington to snap a four-game skid.

Nick Suzuki, Brendan Gallagher and Mike Hoffman also scored for Montreal, Mike Matheson had two assists and Sam Montembeault made 24 saves.

Dylan Strome and Nicklas Backstrom scored for Washington and Darcy Kuemper made 25 saves.

Predators 3, Hurricanes 0: Mark Jankowski had a goal and an assist in the first period and host Nashville beat Carolina to keep alive its improbable playoff hopes.

Michael McCarron also scored as the Predators won their second straight and third in four games after jumping out to a 2-0 lead in the first. Dante Fabbro added an empty-net goal with 2:44 remaining, and Spencer Stastney had two assists for his first NHL points.

Juuse Saros made 32 saves for the win.

Canucks 3, Blackhawks 0: Thatcher Demko stopped 33 shots for his first shutout of the season and third overall in host Vancouver's victory over Chicago.

Andrei Kuzmenko, Vitali Kravtsov and J.T. Miller — into the empty net — scored and defenseman Akito Hirose had two assists to help the Canucks end a four-game losing streak.

Alex Stalock stopped 26 shots for the Blackhawks.

Avalanche 6, Sharks 2: Mikko Rantanen had a hat trick to lead Colorado past host San Jose.

Rantanen reached 52 goals on the season and finished with four points in the game. Nathan MacKinnon also scored a goal and had four points. Ben Meyers scored the other two goals for Colorado and Alexandar Georgiev made 21 saves.

Erik Karlsson had a goal and assist to up his point total to 98 for the season for San Jose. Steven Lorentz also scored, and Kaapo Kahkonen made 15 saves before he was pulled.