

Troops sucked from planes; parachutes blamed

The Washington Post

A Navy SEAL was killed in 2014, an Air Force commando went missing over the ocean in 2019 and an Army Green Beret will likely lose an arm in 2023. Each experienced a rare but catastrophic accident after their parachutes unexpectedly deployed when hit by wind gusts, violently ripping them out aircraft doors and prompting lawsuits questioning the safety of their gear.

All three were wearing the T-11 reserve parachute, which sits on a jumper's chest and is pulled if their main canopy fails. Critics argue that the parachute's fabric ripcord is more sensitive to strong winds than the 50-year-old rig with a metal ripcord that it replaced a decade ago.

While the number of accidents is small, the consequences can be dire. The military knows of the concerns. Evaluators altered the parachute as recently as 2021 to prevent openings from wind blast. Still, critics say small changes haven't stopped the problems, and the product should be replaced.

Army Staff Sgt. Brycen Erdody, a Green Beret medic, nearly died last year 1,250 feet over Fort Bragg, N.C., when his T-11 reserve opened after a wind gust came through an aircraft door. The parachute inflated and sucked him out, slamming him against the door frame, ripping off his helmet and partially severing his arm. An Army investigation cleared him of negligence in the accident.

Erdody has undergone five surgeries since then.

"Both my first ribs were fractured, my sternum was caved in, my bicep was cut in half, my nerves were pulled from my spine," Erdody told *The Washington Post*. "They'll probably end up having to amputate my arm because there's no nerve activity and never will be again."

Erdody and his wife Cassidy filed a federal lawsuit Monday in the Eastern District of North Carolina against the T-11's manufacturer — Airborne Systems of North America — accusing the company of designing a faulty parachute and failing to warn ser-

vice members about its issues. The danger is greatest for jumpmasters, experienced parachutists who lean out of planes to spot drop zones, a role most victims were performing at the time of their accidents.

Airborne Systems did not return requests for comment made by phone and email Monday.

The complaint filed by Erdody's lawyers argues that the T-11 reserve was originally tested with safety pins installed, which provided more resistance and prevented accidental openings. Those pins aren't used in the rig given to troops, the complaint alleges, leading to deaths and life-changing injuries.

Victims of these accidents can't sue the Defense Department due to the Feres doctrine, which prevents service members injured on duty from collecting damages from the federal government. But Erdody's attorney, Natalie Khawam, is still hopeful the lawsuit against the manufacturer will put the military in the spotlight, too.

It is the second time Airborne Systems has been sued over prob-

lems with its T-11 reserve parachute. Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer Bradley Cavner was killed over El Centro, Calif., when his T-11 reserve was activated by a wind gust and his head struck the aircraft's door frame as he was swept out. A lawsuit filed by Cavner's parents ended in a confidential settlement in 2017, according to court records.

Air Force special operator Staff Sgt. Cole Condiff also died when his T-11 reserve opened from a wind gust, pulling him from an aircraft flying over the Gulf of Mexico. His body was never recovered. An Air Force investigation blamed Condiff and his teammates for not noticing that a protective fabric insert — added to the ripcord flap after Cavner's death to prevent another accident — was extended one inch too far.

A military parachute instructor who is not a plaintiff in Erdody's lawsuit said the fabric inserts were a "Band-Aid." The instructor still works for the military and asked that his name not be used to protect his career.

US troops getting hazard pay on Burkina Faso deployment

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Burkina Faso, a West African country where Islamic militants are expanding their reach, has been added to the places where U.S. troops will receive danger pay given the risks they now face on deployments.

The country has experienced two recent military coups and faces growing insurgencies. There are also indications of meddling by Russia's Wagner Group, a private army that's active in neighboring Mali.

"Burkina Faso presents our

military personnel with threats from violent extremist organizations and mercenary forces that can quickly escalate and spread with little to no warning," Rep. Jimmy Panetta, D-Calif., said in a statement Friday.

Panetta is part of a group of lawmakers who have been calling on the Pentagon to expand benefits for troops sent to the Sahel region, where troops routinely carry out training and advisory missions.

"Given the instability in the region and the terrorist activities of both al-Qaida and the Islamic State within Burkina Faso, it is important to recognize the risks

our men and women in uniform face," Rep. Austin Scott, R-Ga., said in the statement.

Panetta's office said it was informed last month that Imminent Danger Pay for troops sent to Burkina Faso was in effect. It adds up to an additional \$225 per month in a service member's paycheck and will be effective retroactively to February 2022.

The Stuttgart-based U.S. Africa Command had requested the pay change more than a year ago, Panetta's office said.

In addition, the lawmakers are calling on the Defense Department to designate Burkina Faso,

Mali, Niger and Chad as qualified hazardous duty areas with tax exclusion benefits, given the security risks in the broader region, Panetta said. The push comes as conditions deteriorate in Burkina Faso and other Sahel countries, such as Niger and Mali; all are grappling with insurgencies.

AFRICOM's Gen. Michael Langley testified before senators in March that numerous countries in the region need more U.S. support in the form of training and equipment, but the approval process is moving too slow for countries that have terrorist affiliates "at their back door."

Ex-CIA officials make case for US, S. Korea exercises

BY DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The largest-ever joint military exercises between the United States and South Korea last month were a prudent response to the North's continued weapon tests and not mere "war demonstrations," two former U.S. intelligence officials said Thursday.

Former CIA senior analyst Sue Mi Terry and former CIA deputy division chief Bruce Klingner agreed the allied exercises were necessary for regional security. Terry, director of the Wilson Center's Asia Program, and Klingner, a senior research fellow at The Heritage Foundation, appeared in a virtual panel discussion sponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The U.S. and South Korea held several large-scale military exercises throughout the country in March. The allies on Wednesday rehearsed air cover for strategic bombers by sending South Korean F-35A and U.S. F-35B Lightning II stealth fighters, F-16 Fighting Falcons and B-52H Stratofortress bombers over the Korean Peninsula, according to a Ministry of National Defense news release that day.

"This is an important part of us showcasing the U.S.'s commitment, resolve to defend South Korea, [and] to really enhance the credibility of extended deterrence," Terry said.

Extended deterrence is a U.S. foreign pol-

icy doctrine used to counter threats using a network of allies, such as South Korea and Japan.

In addition to deterring North Korea, the exercises "reassure our allies that we're there for them," Klingner said.

"We have treaty obligations," he said. "It's the right thing to do."

Following the 1950-53 Korean War, the U.S. and South Korea signed a mutual defense treaty agreeing to "maintain and develop appropriate means to deter armed attack."

North Korea has condemned the drills, which it views as a rehearsal of an invasion, and likened them to a declaration of war.

The allies' "unprecedented" drills will be met with "offensive action" from Pyongyang, the state-run Korean Central News Agency said Thursday in an online column.

North Korea has conducted 11 ballistic missile tests so far this year. It last launched two short-range ballistic missiles toward the East Sea, or Sea of Japan, on March 27.

Terry described North Korea's description of the joint drills as a "convenient excuse" for its threats and part of "their whole strategic plan all along."

The U.S. and South Korea cannot stop the North's missile tests, she said. "So, it's critical that we have appropriate readiness and capabilities to demonstrate to North Korea that we can swiftly respond to any of [their] future provocations."

Army promotion plan minimizes physical fitness

BY MICHAEL SLAVIN
Stars and Stripes

An Army initiative that alters how points are calculated for promotion to the ranks of sergeant and staff sergeant went into effect this month, giving soldiers a broader array of possibilities to climb the ranks.

Military education and awards now account for a larger share of point tallies while physical fitness scores will carry less weight, according to an Army memorandum issued last year that outlines the changes.

For example, a top fitness score is now worth 120 points, down from the previous 180 points for promotion to sergeant. In the case of staff sergeant, fitness scores saw a 25-point decrease.

The point redistribution also rewards soldiers for having proficiency in basic infantry and medical tasks.

That means badges such as the expert soldier, infantryman and field medical badges have become even more valuable. For those seeking promotion to sergeant, that adds up to a 20-point increase in the awards category.

The changes, which went into effect April 1, have received a wide range of reviews.

A user of the popular Army Reddit forum said it meant soldiers tipping the scales would have to "find another excuse why [they] didn't get promoted."

That prompted this retort: "And the dummies will have to read a few more books."

Tension builds at Jerusalem shrine after strike on Syria

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israeli warplanes and artillery struck targets in Syria following rare rocket fire from the northeastern neighbor, as Jewish-Muslim tensions reached a peak Sunday at a volatile Jerusalem shrine with simultaneous religious rituals.

Thousands of Jewish worshippers gathered at the city's Western Wall, the holiest place where Jews can pray, for a mass priestly benediction prayer service for the Passover holiday. At the Al-Aqsa Mosque

compound, a walled esplanade above the Western Wall, hundreds of Palestinians performed prayers as part of observances during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Hundreds of Jews also visited the Al-Aqsa compound under heavy police guard Sunday, to whistles and religious chants from Palestinians protesting their presence.

Tensions have soared in the past week at the flashpoint shrine after an Israeli police raid on the mosque. On several occasions,

Palestinians have barricaded themselves inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque with stones and firecrackers, demanding the right to pray there overnight, something Israel has in the past only allowed during the last 10 days of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Police removed them by force, detaining hundreds and leaving dozens injured.

The violence at the shrine triggered rocket fire by Palestinian militants from the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon, starting Wednesday, and Israeli airstrikes targeted both areas.

US sends guided-missile sub to Mideast

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Navy released a photo Saturday of a guided-missile submarine operating in the Middle East, a show of force that comes amid growing harassment of U.S. troops in Syria and attacks on U.S. bases by Iran-backed militants.

USS Florida, an Ohio-class submarine that carries 154 Tomahawk cruise missiles, entered the region Thursday and began transiting the Suez Canal the following day, Cmdr. Timothy Hawkins, a spokesman for U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. 5th Fleet, said in a statement.

The vessel “is deployed to U.S. 5th Fleet to help ensure regional maritime security and stability,” Hawkins said.

The fleet’s area of responsibility includes the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean.

The Navy doesn’t typically choose to re-

veal the locations of its submarines while they’re at sea. The photo, taken Friday, was released through the Defense Department’s media website.

The show of force follows the repositioning of the George H.W. Bush Carrier Strike Group in the Mediterranean Sea closer to the Middle East, as well as U.S. airstrikes on facilities in Syria used by groups affiliated with Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Those actions came after a drone attack in Syria last month that killed a U.S. contractor and injured at least five service members and another contractor. Four of those troops have been diagnosed with traumatic brain injuries, CNN reported March 30.

The United States is also concerned about potential threats to merchant vessels in regional waters, according to an official familiar with the matter.

Analysts have said Iran is likely to continue its proxy attacks.

Growing relationships with Russia and China, each reliant on Iranian gas, and restored ties with Saudi Arabia could be bolstering Iran’s belligerence, according to regional analysts.

The attacks are “going to increase until something comes to a head,” said Steph Shample, a nonresident scholar with The Middle East Institute, a Washington D.C.-based think-tank. “The only thing that is going to make Iran calm down and simmer down would be losing its allies and losing its support system.”

In all, Iranian-backed militia forces have attacked U.S. troops in Iraq and Syria 83 times in the last two years, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told the Senate Armed Services Committee last month.

There have been four major U.S. responses, Austin said.

US probing if info on Ukraine war was leaked

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department has launched an investigation into the possible release of Pentagon documents that were posted on several social media sites and appear to detail U.S. and NATO aid to Ukraine, but may have been altered or used as part of a misinformation campaign.

The documents, which were posted on sites such as Twitter, are labeled secret and resemble routine updates that the U.S. military’s Joint Staff would produce daily but not distribute

publicly. They are dated ranging from Feb. 23 to March 1, and provide what appears to be details on the progress of weapons and equipment going into Ukraine with more precise timelines and amounts than the U.S. generally provides publicly.

They are not war plans and they provide no details on any planned Ukraine offensive. And some inaccuracies — including estimates of Russian troops deaths that are significantly lower than numbers publicly stated by U.S. officials — have led some to question the docu-

ments’ authenticity.

In a statement Friday, Sabrina Singh, a Pentagon spokeswoman, said the Defense Department “made a formal referral” of the matter to the Justice Department for investigation. And the Justice Department, in a separate statement Friday, said, “We have been in communication with the Department of Defense related to this matter and have begun an investigation.”

The investigation comes as questions continue about the documents’ origination and validity, and as reports suggest

more have begun to appear on social media sites.

“It is very important to remember that in recent decades, the Russian special services’ most successful operations have been taking place in Photoshop,” Andriy Yusov, a spokesman for Ukraine’s military intelligence directorate, said on Ukrainian TV. “From a preliminary analysis of these materials, we see false, distorted figures on losses on both sides, with part of the information collected from open sources.”

Zelenskyy sees Ukraine on road to NATO membership

dpa

KYIV — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Saturday that he still sees his country on the road to NATO accession, despite Russia’s war of aggression showing no sign of stopping after 13 months of fighting.

Last week saw good “movement towards NATO,” what with new military aid from the West and other expressions of international support, said Zelenskyy in his daily

video message from Kyiv.

Zelenskyy referred to Lithuania proposing to invite Ukraine to become a member of NATO at the military alliance’s summit in the capital Vilnius in July. He thanked Lithuania.

The Baltic country’s parliament decided last week to seek an invitation for Ukraine to join the alliance at the summit scheduled for July 11 and 12.

Ukraine’s aspiration to join NATO is often

cited by the Kremlin as one of the reasons for Russia’s full-scale invasion last February.

Last year, Zelenskyy pushed for an “accelerated” accession into NATO, hoping for Ukraine to receive preferential treatment. The United States and other NATO members, like Germany, have expressed reservations about this, given that one of the prerequisites for joining is not being involved in international conflicts.

Biden sports plan angers trans opponents, allies

Associated Press

A Biden administration proposal to forbid outright bans on transgender athletes sparked outrage from conservative leaders while also angering trans rights activists who noted schools could still prevent some athletes from participating on teams that align with their gender identity.

The proposed rule, which still faces a lengthy approval process, establishes that blanket bans, like those that have been approved in at least 20 states, would violate Title IX, the landmark gender-equity legislation enacted in 1972. But schools that receive federal funding could still adopt policies that limit transgender students' participation, particularly in more competitive

high school and college sports.

Under the proposal, it would be much more difficult for schools to ban, for example, a transgender girl in elementary school from playing on a girls basketball team. But it would also leave room for schools to develop policies that prohibit trans athletes from playing on more competitive teams if those policies are designed to ensure fairness or prevent sports-related injuries.

Imara Jones, a trans woman who created "The Anti-Trans Hate Machine" podcast, blasted the proposal, saying President Joe Biden is attempting to "straddle the fence" on a human rights issue ahead of an election year by giving legal recourse to schools that bar some trans ath-

letes from competition.

"The Biden Administration framed their proposal as a ban on blanket discrimination against trans athletes," Jones said. "But actually, it provides guidelines for how schools and universities can ban trans athletes legally."

U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a New York Democrat, also offered pointed criticism, saying in a tweet that the plan was "indefensible and embarrassing."

The proposal was also assailed by many Republican leaders who said they were ready to fight the plan in court.

"South Dakota will not allow this to stand," Gov. Kristi Noem tweeted. "We will lead. We will defend our laws."

Alabama Attorney General

Steve Marshall issued a statement suggesting the state might also try to challenge the federal rule. Alabama lawmakers in 2021 approved legislation that bans trans women and girls from participating on female sports teams in K-12 schools. It was also one of 20 states that filed a lawsuit in 2021 seeking to halt directives that extend federal sex discrimination protections to LGBTQ+ people.

"I have made myself abundantly clear to the Biden Administration that he will NOT impose his radical policies on Alabama athletes. He will NOT destroy athletic competition for our young women & girls. In Alabama our law protects girls' sports. Stay tuned!" Marshall said in a statement.

How Tenn. GOP's majority used power to expel Dems

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The expulsion of two Tennessee Democrats over a gun control protest is an extraordinary showcase of how the levers of single-party power in America's statehouses can be pulled not only to shut down opponents, but to also punish them.

On any given day in Tennessee, Republicans have the commanding majority to pass just about any law they want. The lopsided dynamic is common in many U.S. statehouses — including where Democrats are in charge — and it has widened under gerrymandered voting maps that redraw legislative district boundaries to dilute the opposition party's votes.

But in ousting Reps. Justin Jones and Justin Pearson altogether from the Tennessee Legislature on Thursday, Republicans went beyond their typical ability to steamroll Democrats. They instead maximized their parliamentary power to exact

retribution.

Not only did Republicans have the votes to oust the lawmakers — one of the few times such drastic action has been taken since the Civil War — they suspended legislative rules of procedure to hasten the process. GOP leaders defended their actions as necessary to send a message that disruptive protests in the Tennessee House would not be tolerated.

A third Democrat, Rep. Gloria Johnson, was narrowly spared expulsion by a one-vote margin.

"The erosion of democracy in the State Legislature is what got us here," Pearson said after his ouster. "It wasn't walking up to the well, it wasn't being disruptive to the status quo, it was the silencing of democracy and it's wrong."

In Tennessee, Republicans hold a supermajority control in both the House and Senate and have wielded full control of the Legislature since 2008.

Pope invokes Easter prayers for Ukrainian, Russian people

Associated Press

VATICAN CITY — In an Easter message highlighting hope, Pope Francis on Sunday invoked prayers for both the Ukrainian and Russian people, praised nations that welcome refugees, and called on Israelis and Palestinians wracked by the latest surge in deadly violence to forge a "climate of trust."

Francis, along with dozens of prelates and tens of thousands of faithful, marked Christianity's most joyful day with Mass in a flower-adorned St. Peter's Square. Easter proclaims the Christian belief that Jesus rose from the dead after crucifixion.

The 86-year-old pontiff topped the celebration with a traditional speech about troubled places in the world. Encouraging "trust among individuals, peoples and nations," Francis said the joyful expression of Easter "illumines the darkness and gloom in which, all too often, our world finds itself enveloped."

Since Russia invaded neighboring Ukraine in February 2022,

Francis has repeatedly called for the fighting to end and sought prayers for the "martyred" Ukrainian people.

Ukrainian diplomats have complained that he hasn't come down hard enough in his statements on Russia and particularly Russian President Vladimir Putin as the Vatican tries to avoid alienating Russia.

"Help the beloved Ukrainian people on their journey toward peace, and shed the light of Easter upon the people of Russia," Francis implored God in his Easter speech, which he delivered while sitting in a chair on the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica facing the square. "Comfort the wounded and all those who have lost loved ones because of the war, and grant that prisoners may return safe and sound to their families."

He urged the international community to work to end the war in Ukraine and "all conflict and bloodshed in the world, beginning with Syria, which still awaits peace."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Electric-vehicle mandate draws GOP pushback

DE DOVER — Republican lawmakers are proposing legislation to block state officials from eliminating the sale of new gasoline-powered vehicles in Delaware.

GOP lawmakers said they are circulating two bills to restrict the ability of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control to adopt new regulations that reduce and eventually eliminate sales of new gasoline and diesel cars, trucks and SUVs over the next 12 years.

The move comes in response to proposed regulations under which Delaware would adopt and implement revisions to California's "Advanced Clean Cars" rules. Those rules require automobile manufacturers to gradually deliver an increasing percentage of zero-emission vehicles to dealerships, starting with the 2026 model year and culminating in a total ban on sales of new gasoline-powered vehicles in 2035.

Ex-lawmaker gets 2 years for cesspool bribes

HI HONOLULU — A former Hawaii lawmaker was sentenced to two years in prison in a federal corruption case that's drawn attention to a perennial problem in the islands: the tens of thousands of cesspools that release 50 million gallons of raw sewage into the state's pristine waters every day.

Cesspools — in-ground pits that collect sewage from houses and buildings not connected to city services for gradual re-

lease into the environment — are at the center of the criminal case against former Democratic state Rep. Ty Cullen. He has admitted to taking bribes of cash and gambling chips in exchange for influencing legislation to reduce Hawaii's widespread use of cesspools.

U.S. District Court Judge Susan Oki Mollway said she gave Cullen a sentence at the shortest end of the term recommended by prosecutors because he had cooperated extensively with investigators.

Cullen told the judge he took full responsibility for and was ashamed of his actions.

Police dig out body found in concrete under condo

CO DENVER — Police have been digging out a body encased in concrete that was found in a condo crawl space. They believe the body is of a man killed by a friend and alleged partner in crime during a fight last year.

The mounded concrete grave, with apparent human remains visible through its cracks, was discovered underneath a condo unit after police got information from the mother of the missing man, 36-year-old Karl Beaman, as well as a neighbor in the condo complex in Aurora, a suburb of Denver, according to court documents.

The woman who lived in the unit, Casie Bock, told police that her former boyfriend and father of her two children, Leroy Crawford, killed Beaman, possibly by suffocating him with a plastic bag.

After being arrested in Beaman's death, Bock told police that Crawford "forced her" to

help him put Beaman's body in the crawl space under her condo and then returned the next day with construction tools and a bag of concrete to cover the body. After cracks emerged later, Crawford returned to add more concrete, according to her arrest affidavit.

Sweetgreen swaps name to appease Chipotle

CA LOS ANGELES — A lawsuit over a salad has been tossed.

Sweetgreen said it will change the name of a salad in response to a lawsuit filed by Chipotle.

Los Angeles-based Sweetgreen added the Chipotle Chicken Burrito Bowl to its menu earlier this month. Days later, Chipotle sued Sweetgreen in federal court in California, saying the rival restaurant chain was infringing on its trademark by using the word "chipotle" — a jalapeno chili pepper that has been smoked and dried — to sell a product that is similar to a salad that Chipotle sells.

Sweetgreen said it will change the name of the salad to Chicken + Chipotle Pepper Bowl as part of an agreement to resolve the lawsuit.

Request to allow bets on Boston Marathon denied

MA BOSTON — Massachusetts gambling regulators denied a request to allow legal betting on this year's Boston Marathon, citing concerns by the race's organizers.

All four members of the Massachusetts Gaming Commission who participated in the online meeting voted against the

request by DraftKings.

"At this moment, there is not sufficient time for the Boston Athletic Association, nor its many partners and agencies, to coordinate and fully ensure proper protocols are in place to support such a proposal for wagering on our event," said Scott Stover, chief marketing officer for the BAA.

The commissioners also discussed the proximity of the marathon, scheduled for April 17, and what they saw as DraftKings' lack of communication with the BAA.

First ocean fish farm proposed for East Coast

NH PORTSMOUTH — A New Hampshire group wants to be the first to bring offshore fish farming to the waters off New England by raising salmon and trout in open-ocean pens, but critics fear the plan could harm the environment.

The vast majority of U.S. aquaculture, the practice of raising and harvesting fish in controlled settings, takes place in coastal waters or on land, in tanks and ponds. But New Hampshire-based Blue Water Fisheries wants to place 40 submersible fish pens in water about 7.5 miles off Newburyport, Mass., on two sites that total nearly a square mile, according to federal documents.

The farm would grow millions of pounds of Atlantic salmon and steelhead trout, two popular seafood species, documents state. The proposal needs a battery of approvals, and would be the first of its kind off the East Coast.

— From wire reports

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Koepka holds two-stroke lead in Masters

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Brooks Koepka held steady in the cold air and was potentially spared a big number by the rain-softened grass at Augusta National, finishing the third round at the Masters on Sunday morning with a 1-over 73 to keep a two-shot lead over Jon Rahm.

Koepka has been atop the leaderboard after all three rounds, yet his work is far from over. Rahm had his chances to catch him until three-putt bogeys on both par 5s on the back nine, settling for a 73 that puts him in the final group.

Viktor Hovland was only three shots behind after a wild 70 that illustrated how quickly it can change at Augusta National, even in conditions that can make birdies difficult to find.

Hovland found them. He was 10 shots behind Koepka when he walked off the 10th green with a bogey, and then ran off

five in a row starting on No. 11 and featuring a chip-in from behind the green on the par-3 12th.

When he was finished, that 10-shot deficit was very manageable.

Patrick Cantlay, who had three straight birdies in the rain early in the round on Saturday, had three birdies in a four-hole stretch late and wound up with a 68. He was five shots behind.

His hopes depended so much on Koepka and Rahm not creating more separation, and they obliged, each with a 38 on the back nine without making a birdie.

Rahm wasted two chances for birdie on the par-5s. Koepka missed par putts of 8 feet on the 12th and a little over 3 feet on the 17th.

Koepka's big break came on the par-5 15th. He laid up after a tee shot to the left, and his pitching wedge spun back down the slope and was headed off the green. Such shots typically gain

speed going down the hill toward the pond. The grass was soft and sticky enough that it allowed the ball to stop. Koepka putted from there to tap-in range for par.

Koepka was at 11-under 205 and had just under three hours before he went off for the final round in this weather-disjointed tournament.

The sky was beginning to clear, the temperatures not so frigid and the course still soft from rain that caused play to be stopped on Saturday in the middle of the afternoon. Sunday afternoon had all the trappings of a typical final round at Augusta, filled with big opportunities and loud roars.

Koepka was going after his fifth major championship, and his first since his wire-to-wire win at Bethpage Black four years ago in the PGA Championship. The last three times he had at least a share of a lead in a major, he wound up win-

ning.

It also would be boost for his new league, the Saudi-funded LIV Golf, where Koepka won just a week ago in Orlando against a 48-man field in a 54-hole tournament in Florida.

Rahm, the U.S. Open champion at Torrey Pines in 2021, has never played in the final pairing of a major championship. He was trying to become the fourth Spaniard in a green jacket. This is the 40-year anniversary of Seve Ballesteros — his idol — winning his second Masters.

Still in the mix but needing help were former Masters champion Hideki Matsuyama, who along with Cantlay is the only player to have broken par all three rounds. He had a 70 and was six shots behind, along with Russell Henley (71).

U.S. Amateur champion Sam Bennett, playing in the final threesome of the third round with Rahm and Koepka, fell back with a 76.

Woods withdraws before completing third round

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Tiger Woods withdrew from the Masters before the resumption of the third round because of an injury Sunday, ending his streak of completing all 72 holes of every tournament he has played at Augusta National as a professional.

The tournament announced about 90 minutes before play began that Woods, who is still hobbled by the effects of the 2021 car accident that nearly cost him his right leg, had withdrawn. He'd limped through practice rounds early in the week and again during the first and second rounds, but the limp had become more pronounced as the weather worsened.

"I am disappointed to have to WD this morning due to re-aggravating my plantar fasciitis," Woods said on Twitter. "Thank

you to the fans and to @TheMasters who have shown me so much love and support. Good luck to the players today!"

The five-time champion finished his second round in cold, driving rain on Saturday to make the cut on the number at 3 over, extending his Masters streak to 23 straight and tying Fred Couples and Gary Player for the longest in history.

The 47-year-old Woods headed back out for the start of the third round as temperatures struggled to reach 50 degrees, and it wound up being a waterlogged slog. Wearing a gray winter hat over a baseball cap, he started on the 10th hole with a bogey, added another at No. 14, and then had back-to-back double bogeys after finding the water on Nos. 15 and 16.

It was the first time Woods has ever had consecutive dou-

ble bogeys at the Masters.

By the time the horn blew ending play with rain still pouring and puddles beginning to stand at Augusta National, Woods was at 9 over and alone in last place among those that made the cut. That was 22 shots behind leader Brooks Koepka.

"I've always loved this golf course, and I love playing this event," Woods said after his second round Saturday. "Obviously I've missed a couple with some injuries, but I've always wanted to play here. I've loved it."

Woods also withdrew before the final round of last year's PGA Championship with what his agent, Mark Steinberg, described as pain and discomfort in his right foot. That came hours after the 15-time major champion limped to a 79 at Southern Hills in Tulsa, Okla.,

in similarly cold and windy weather; he had shot 69 in the second round.

Woods captured his fifth green jacket in 2019 when he finished one shot ahead of Koepka, Dustin Johnson and Xander Schauffele. It was his first major win in 11 years and, at age 43, Woods became the second-oldest player to win the Masters after Jack Nicklaus, who was 46 when he won his sixth green jacket in 1986.

Woods was injured in 2021 when his car careened off a suburban Los Angeles road at over 85 mph, crushing his right leg so badly that he said doctors considered amputation. Asked how much hardware held it together, Woods replied: "A lot."

Woods recovered and made the cut at the Masters last year before shooting back-to-back 78s on the weekend.

Rays blast A's, extend win streak to 8

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — The Tampa Bay Rays extended Major League Baseball's best start in 20 years behind Jeffrey Springs' seven innings of three-hit ball and Randy Arozarena's four RBIs, routing the Oakland Athletics 11-0 Saturday for an 8-0 record.

Tampa Bay is the first big league team to open 8-0 since the 2003 Kansas City Royals won their first nine games. The Rays have outscored opponents 64-18 and are the first team to win its first eight games by four or more runs since the 1884 St. Louis Maroons of the Union Association did it in their first 13.

"When you're winning games like this, a lot of things got to be going well," Tampa Bay manager Kevin Cash said. "So, I think we're all pretty impressed with every facet out there."

No team had won eight straight games by that margin at any point in a season since the 1939 Yankees did it 10 times in a row.

Isaac Paredes and Brandon Lowe had three RBIs each for

the Rays.

Mets 5, Marlins 2: Kodai Senga (2-0) won his Citi Field debut, pitching six innings of one-run, three-hit ball and wearing a New York blue-and-orange glove with an image of a ghost and a pitchfork. He struck out six and walked three, allowing his only run on Jazz Chisholm Jr.'s leadoff homer in the sixth.

Red Sox 14, Tigers 5: Rafael Devers homered twice, including his fifth career grand slam, and drove in five runs for visiting Boston against Detroit.

Phillies 3, Reds 2: Bryon Stott capped a three-run rally in the ninth inning with a winning single as host Philadelphia beat Cincinnati despite striking out 17 times.

Cubs 10, Rangers 3: Justin Steele (1-0) allowed one run and four hits in six innings against Texas as host Chicago won its third straight.

Royals 6, Giants 5: Salvador Pérez hit a tying, three-run homer in the eighth inning and pinch-runner Nate Eaton scored on a wild pitch in the

ninth for visiting Kansas City after Vinnie Pasquantino doubled and advanced on Hunter Dozier's groundout.

Twins 9, Astros 6: Byron Buxton and Kyle Farmer hit three-run homers for host Minnesota, and Christian Vázquez had two RBI singles, one a tie-breaking hit in the sixth.

Mariners 3, Guardians 2: Seattle's Eugenio Suárez hit RBI singles in the first and second innings off Cleveland's Cal Quantrill (0-1), who entered 14-0 in 34 regular-season starts at Progressive Field. Quantrill had not lost a home start since Sept. 9, 2019, with San Diego.

Yankees 4, Orioles 1: Giancarlo Stanton hit a 436-foot, 116.3 mph homer to cap visiting New York's three-run fifth inning, his 26th homer of at least 116 mph since 2015, when Statcast began tracking. Teammate Aaron Judge, with 15, is the only other player with more than six.

Cardinals 6, Brewers 0: Nolan Arenado hit his 300th homer and 20-year-old Jordan Walker hit the second of his young career as visiting St. Louis used a

pair of two-run drives in the third inning to end a four-game skid and stopped Milwaukee's six-game winning streak.

White Sox 11, Pirates 5: Yasmani Grandal, Luis Robert Jr. and Oscar Colás had two hits and drove in two runs each for visiting Chicago.

Padres 4, Braves 1: Michael Wacha (2-0) matched his career high with 10 strikeouts, his first double-digit game since June 2015 for visiting San Diego. He allowed two hits in six innings — both by Atlanta's Matt Olson.

Diamondbacks 12, Dodgers 8: Ketel Marte and Geraldo Perdomo each hit two-run homers in the second off Noah Syndergaard (0-1) and Alek Thomas had four of host Arizona's 17 hits as the Diamondbacks overcame a 4-0 deficit.

Nationals 7, Rockies 6: Stone Garrett had four hits and five RBIs, homering and doubling twice for visiting Washington.

Angels 9, Blue Jays 5: Mike Trout hit a three-run homer in the fifth inning, and host Los Angeles rallied from a 4-0 deficit to defeat Toronto.

Adesanya stops Pereira to reclaim UFC middleweight belt

Associated Press

MIAMI — Israel Adesanya wanted a quick rematch after a November loss to Alex Pereira stripped him of the 185-pound championship belt he'd held since 2019.

Five months later in UFC 287 in Miami early Sunday, Adesanya dropped the middleweight champion Pereira with two right hands, then raised his fists in triumph as he took back his middleweight championship belt and cemented his legacy as one of the greatest fighters in the sport's history.

"I hope every one of you behind the screen or in this arena can feel this level of happiness just one time in your life,"

Adesanya said. "But guess what, you'll never feel this level of happiness if you don't go for something."

Pereira (7-2) landed a knee that pushed Adesanya (24-2) into the cage in the second round. Adesanya came off the cage with two right hooks and a right hammer fist, followed by ground and pound to end the fight at 4:21.

The 35-year-old Pereira had never lost to Adesanya. Before he scored a TKO win for the welterweight belt in UFC 281 in November, Pereira defeated Adesanya twice in kick boxing.

Adesanya, born in Nigeria but raised in New Zealand, entered the UFC in 2018 and won

the middleweight belt a year later when he beat then-champion Robert Whittaker in a stunning knockout.

He successfully defended his title five times as he became one of the sport's main draws. He was in unfamiliar territory Saturday as the challenger.

"They say revenge is sweet," Adesanya said. "And if you know me, I've got a sweet tooth."

Fighting in his hometown as the UFC returned to Miami for the first time in 20 years, Jorge Masvidal (35-17) lost a unanimous decision to fifth-ranked welterweight contender Gilbert Burns (22-5).

Burns hurt Masvidal with a series of head shots, and Masvidal appeared winded as the fight went on. Afterward, Burns paid respect to the veteran Masvidal.

"We're here because of this guy, 52 pro fights," Burns said to the crowd, which chanted "Let's go Jorge" throughout. "Give it up for your guy."

Masvidal, who turns 39 in November, entered the match on a three-fight losing streak having lost back-to-back title challenges to Kamaru Usman and a unanimous decision to longtime rival Colby Covington.

Masvidal appeared to retire from the sport after the loss.

Oilers' McDavid 6th to top 150 points

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Connor McDavid became the first player in 27 years to reach 150 points in a season when he had two goals and an assist in the Edmonton Oilers' 6-1 victory over the San Jose Sharks on Saturday.

McDavid now has 151 points with two games remaining in the regular season. He became just the sixth player ever to record 150 points in a season, joining Wayne Gretzky (nine times), Lemieux (four times), Phil Esposito, Steve Yzerman and Bernie Nichols.

Zach Hyman, Derek Ryan and Philip Broberg also scored to help the Oilers win their seventh straight game. Edmonton closed in on clinching home-ice advantage in the first round of the playoffs.

Penguins 5, Red Wings 1: Sidney Crosby became the 15th player in NHL history to reach 1,500 career points, scoring two goals and adding an assist in visiting Pittsburgh's crucial victory.

Crosby has 550 goals and 950 assists and is the sixth-fastest player to hit the 1,500-point milestone, accomplishing it in his 1,188th game. Crosby became the 12th player in league history to reach 90 points in his age 35 season or older.

Bruins 2, Devils 1: Pavel Zacha scored twice in the first five minutes, and host Boston held on to tie an NHL record with its 62nd win of the season.

The Bruins have three games left to try to top the record for regular-season wins set by the 1995-96 Red Wings and matched by the 2018-19 Lightning. Boston faced Philadelphia on Sunday, then plays Washington on Tuesday and Montreal on Thursday.

Linus Ullmark stopped 29 shots for Boston, which won its fifth straight and its 12th in 13 tries.

Stars 2, Golden Knights 1 (SO): Roope Hintz scored the only goal in the shootout to lift host Dallas into a tie for first place in the Central Division.

Dallas has 102 points with three games left in the regular season. The Stars are tied with defending champion Colorado, which also won Saturday and has three games left.

Pacific Division-leading Vegas did clinch home-ice advantage for the first round of the playoffs by getting the point.

Sabres 4, Hurricanes 3: Tage Thompson scored the go-ahead goal 6:15 into the third period, Rasmus Dahlin had a goal, two assists and a key blocked shot, and host Buffalo preserved its slim playoff hopes.

Buffalo improved to 6-1-1 in its past eight, guaranteeing the Sabres remain in contention through their game at the New York Rangers on Monday.

Avalanche 4, Kings 3: Denis Malgin scored twice and visiting Colorado got its fourth straight win.

The Avalanche kept pace with Dallas for first place in the Central Division.

Coyotes 5, Ducks 4 (OT): Barrett Hayton scored 4 minutes into overtime and host Arizona handed Anaheim its 10th straight loss.

Jets 2, Predators 0: Connor Hellebuyck stopped 28 shots for his fourth shutout of the season.

Jusse Soros made 36 saves for Nashville. The Predators dropped to 40-31-8 — three points behind the Jets in the wild-card standings.

Panthers 4, Capitals 2: Matthew Tkachuk scored the tie-breaking goal with 1 minute left in regulation and had two assists as visiting Florida won its sixth straight.

Florida reclaimed the top wild card in the Eastern Conference.

Rangers 4, Blue Jackets 0: Igor Shesterkin stopped all 20 shots he faced for his third shutout of the season and 11th of his career to lead visiting New York past Columbus.

Islanders 4, Flyers 0: Scott Mayfield, Brock Nelson and rookie defenseman Samuel Bolduc each scored and Ilya Sorokin made 27 saves as host New York kept pace in the Eastern Conference wild-card race.

Wild 5, Blues 3: Ryan Hartman and Sam Steel scored short-handed goals 20 seconds apart in the first period and host Minnesota earned two key late-season points.

Senators 7, Lightning 4: Egor Sokolov scored his first NHL goal and host Ottawa beat Tampa Bay.

The Lightning are locked into a first-round playoff series with Toronto.

Kraken 7, Blackhawks 3: Jordan Eberle, Jared McCann and Daniel Sprong each had a goal and an assist and host Seattle won its fourth straight.

The second-year Kraken clinched their first Stanley Cup playoff spot Thursday.

Maple Leafs 7, Canadiens 1: Mitch Marner had two goals and an assist to reach a career-high 98 points for the season, helping host Toronto rout Montreal.

Canucks 3, Flames 2 (SO): Andrei Kuzmenko scored in the shootout to lift host Vancouver.

Calgary pulled one point behind Winnipeg for the second wild card in the Western Conference.

Clippers top Blazers, bolster hopes of avoiding play-in

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Kawhi Leonard scored 27 points, Norman Powell added 23 and the Los Angeles Clippers solidified their hopes of avoiding the play-in game with a 136-125 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers on Saturday.

Russell Westbrook had 20 points for the Clippers, who have won four of their last six and hold the fifth spot in the Western Conference.

Wins by LA and Minnesota on Saturday ensured the Clippers can finish no lower than seventh. Their best hope of avoiding the play-in game, though, is beating Phoenix on Sunday in what could be a preview of a first-round series.

While the Suns were expected to sit most of their starters, which they also did Friday night against the Los Angeles Lakers, coach Tyrone Lue said he will play everyone that he can.

"I hope they sit all five guys. I'll take it however I can get it," Lue said. "My main focus is doing what we have to do to get into the playoffs. It doesn't matter what seed."

"We have to win. That's the focus," Leonard said.

Jazz 118, Nuggets 114: Ochai Agbaji scored 28 points to lead host Utah over the Western Conference-leading Denver, snapping a four-game losing streak.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope

scored a season-high 21 points for the Nuggets, who lost for the fifth time in six games.

Timberwolves 151, Spurs 131: Anthony Edwards had 33 points in 25 minutes and visiting Minnesota routed San Antonio.

Karl-Anthony Towns added 22 points, Mike Conley had 20 points and Rudy Gobert had 10 points and 13 rebounds for Minnesota, which will finish no lower than ninth in the Western Conference.