

Billing records led to suspected leaker

Associated Press

BOSTON — Billing records of an Internet social media platform and interviews with another user helped the FBI identify a Massachusetts Air National Guardsman as a suspect in the leak of highly classified military documents, according to court records unsealed Friday.

The new details came as Jack Teixeira, 21, appeared in court to face charges under the Espionage Act of unauthorized removal and retention of classified and national defense information.

A federal magistrate judge ordered him held until a detention hearing next week.

Teixeira was arrested by heavily armed tactical agents on Thursday following a week-long criminal investigation into the disclosure of the government records, a breach that exposed to the world unvarnished

secret assessments on the war in Ukraine, the capabilities and geopolitical interests of other nations and other national security issues.

He appeared in court Friday in tan jail clothes for a brief proceeding at which U.S. Magistrate Judge David Hennesy ordered him held pending a hearing next Wednesday.

Investigators believe Teixeira was the leader of an online private chat group on Discord, a social media platform popular with people playing online games. Billing records the FBI obtained from Discord, which has said it was cooperating with the bureau, helped lead investigators to Teixeira, according to an FBI affidavit unsealed Friday.

According to the document, the FBI interviewed someone familiar with Teixeira's online posts on Monday. That person, who is not identified in the affi-

davit, told the FBI that a username linked to Teixeira began posting what appeared to be classified information roughly in December.

The affidavit suggests Teixeira switched from typing out documents in his possession to taking them home and photographing them because he "had become concerned that he may be discovered making the transcriptions of text in the workplace."

That's different from what posters have told The Associated Press and other media outlets, saying the user they would call "the O.G." started posting images of documents because he was annoyed other users weren't taking him seriously.

The affidavit also alleges Teixeira was detected on April 6 — the day The New York Times first published a story about the breach of documents — searching for the word "leak" in a clas-

sified system. The FBI says that was reason to believe Teixeira was trying to find information about the investigation into who was responsible for the leaks.

The classified documents — which have not been individually authenticated in public by U.S. officials — range from briefing slides mapping out Ukrainian military positions to assessments of international support for Ukraine and other sensitive topics, including under what circumstances Russian President Vladimir Putin might use nuclear weapons.

It was not immediately clear how Teixeira would have had access to the records, but a Defense Department official told the AP on Thursday that as an information technology specialist responsible for military communications networks, the young Guardsman would have had a higher level of security clearance.

CENTCOM: US troops weren't injured in drone attack

By J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

U.S. Central Command said Thursday that American troops did not suffer traumatic brain injuries during a drone attack on a convoy last week in Iraq, adding that its earlier statements indicating there had been injuries were due to a misunderstanding.

"We gave you incorrect information," CENTCOM said in a statement late Thursday. "There were no injuries related to the attack on the convoy in Sulaymaniyah."

The attack at the Sulaymaniyah airport in Iraq targeted a convoy that included U.S.

troops and Gen. Mazloun Abdi, the Syrian Kurdish commander of anti-Islamic State forces.

A Stars and Stripes inquiry with the subject line, "Press request: Attack on convoy in Sulaymaniyah" including questions about Abdi and last week's attack was answered with responses about a different attack on U.S. troops last month, a CENTCOM spokeswoman said Thursday.

The drone that attacked the convoy missed by slightly more than 100 yards, CENTCOM spokesman Col. Joseph Buccino said in a phone call Thursday.

"It didn't hit anything in the convoy," Buccino said.

Abdi is the leader of the Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish-led group that the U.S. has allied with in the fight against ISIS.

Responsibility for the strike has been widely attributed to Turkey, although Ankara has denied these claims.

The attack and its aftermath highlight the complicated nature of American relations in the Middle East, where troops tasked with containing ISIS are partnering with Kurdish units seen as threats by NATO ally Turkey, while also defending against attacks from Iran and its proxy militias.

Ankara believes that the U.S.-

backed SDF is a terrorist group affiliated with Kurds waging an insurgency in Turkey that has left 40,000 dead, a January report by the Council on Foreign Relations said.

But the U.S. views the SDF as separate from Kurdish groups that have been blacklisted internationally for terrorism. Washington has worked with the SDF since 2014 to defeat ISIS.

Three U.S. military personnel were in the convoy with Abdi at the time of the attack, with one service member riding in the same vehicle as the general, The Wall Street Journal reported Friday.

Russian forces bear down on Bakhmut

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The battle for Bakhmut is heating up again, analysts and Russian officials said Friday, as Ukrainian defenders of the devastated city resisted a coordinated three-pronged attack by the Kremlin's forces and efforts to stop supplies from reaching them.

"Russia has re-energized its assault" on Bakhmut, the U.K. Ministry of Defense said of recent developments in the eastern Ukraine city, which for eight and a half months has been the stage for the war's longest and bloodiest fight.

"The Ukrainian defense still holds the western districts of the town but has been subjected to particularly intense Russian artillery fire over the previous 48 hours," the ministry's assessment said.

Until recently, the private Russian military contractor

Wagner Group spearheaded the campaign to take Bakhmut, making slow, grinding progress at the cost of thousands of lives on both sides. Now, regular Russian units have joined the thrust.

Military analysts have said that seizing Bakhmut would have public relations and tactical military value for Moscow though was unlikely to prove decisive in the war's outcome. The Russian Defense Ministry also noted the stepped-up fighting in western parts of the city Friday.

"Wagner assault detachments are engaged in high-intensity combat operations to capture areas of western Bakhmut with airborne forces supporting on the flanks," the ministry said in a statement.

It added: "The units of the airborne forces operating on the flanks are providing support to the assault squads and stop the enemy's attempts to deliver am-

munition to the city and bring in reserves."

Bakhmut lies in Donetsk province, one of four provinces Russia illegally annexed last fall. Moscow controls about half of the province. Bakhmut is a stepping stone to seizing the remaining half.

Ukrainian officials have said they're buying time by depleting Russian forces in the battle while Kyiv prepares a counter-offensive.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy argues that if Russia wins the Bakhmut battle, Russian President Vladimir Putin might be able to begin building international support for a deal that would require Ukraine to make unacceptable compromises to end the war.

The Ukrainian president's office said Friday that over the previous 24 hours, two kindergartens and residential build-

ings have been destroyed in Bakhmut. The city already resembles a ghost town.

The British military observed that regular Russian troops have increasingly joined the battle.

"Wagner assault groups continue to conduct the main advance through the center of town, while Russian airborne forces have relieved some Wagner units securing the northern and southern flanks of the operation," the British military said on Twitter.

It noted, however, that though the Ukrainian defenders have "significant resupply issues," their withdrawals from Bakhmut positions have been made in an orderly fashion.

Across Ukraine, at least three civilians were killed and nine wounded from Thursday to Friday, according to the presidential office.

Russian Pacific Fleet put on high alert for snap drills

Associated Press

MOSCOW — The entire Russian Pacific Fleet was put on high alert on Friday for snap drills that will involve practice missile launches in a massive show of force amid tensions with the West over the fighting in Ukraine.

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said the goal of the war games was to test the capability of Russia's armed forces to mount a response to aggression.

Along with the missile launches, the drills will also involve nuclear-capable strategic bombers and other warplanes besides the naval aviation of the Pacific Fleet, Shoigu said.

The Russian military has concentrated the bulk of its forces on the front lines in Ukraine, but

also continued conducting regular drills across Russia to train its forces and demonstrate their readiness.

The Russian Defense Ministry released videos showing warships and submarines sailing off to take part in the maneuvers. As part of the drills, marine units deployed to amphibious landing vessels and coastal defense missile systems moved to firing positions.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov described the war games as part of regular training intended to "maintain the necessary level of the armed forces' readiness."

Shoigu noted that the maneuvers' scenario envisages a response to an adversary's attempt to make a landing on Sak-

halin Island and the southern Kuril Islands.

Japan asserts territorial rights to the Kuril Islands, which it calls the Northern Territories. The Soviet Union took them in the final days of World War II, and the dispute has kept the countries from signing a peace treaty formally ending their hostilities.

Last year, Russia announced it had suspended peace talks with Japan to protest Tokyo's sanctions against Moscow over its action in Ukraine.

Russia has built up its military presence on the islands in recent years, deploying advanced fighter jets, anti-ship missiles and air defense systems there.

The Pacific Fleet drills start-

ed days before a planned trip to Moscow by Chinese Defense Minister Gen. Li Shangfu.

The Russian Defense Ministry said Shoigu and Li would discuss "prospects of bilateral defense cooperation and acute issues of global and regional security."

A three-day visit to Moscow by Chinese President Xi Jinping last month demonstrated the two nations' partnership in the face of Western efforts to isolate Russia over Ukraine and gave a political lift to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Both Moscow and Beijing have accused Washington of trying to isolate them and to hold back their development as they challenge the U.S. for regional and global leadership.

DeSantis signs 6-week abortion ban into law

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law a bill approved by the Republican-dominated Florida Legislature to ban abortions after six weeks of pregnancy.

The governor's office said in a statement late Thursday that he had signed the legislation. The ban gives DeSantis a key political victory among Republican primary voters as he prepares to launch an expected presidential candidacy built on his national brand as a conservative standard bearer.

The six-week ban will take effect only if the state's current 15-week ban is upheld in an ongoing legal challenge that is before the state Supreme Court, which is controlled by conservatives.

The policy would have wider implications for abortion access throughout the South in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision last year overturning *Roe v. Wade* and leaving decisions about abortion access to states. Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi have banned abortion at all stages of pregnancy, while Georgia forbids the procedure after cardiac activity can be detected, which is around six weeks.

"We have the opportunity to lead the national debate about the importance of protecting life and giving every child the opportunity to be born and find his or her purpose," said Republican Rep. Jenna Persons-Mulicka, who carried the bill in the House.

Democrats and abortion-rights groups

have criticized Florida's proposal as extreme.

"This ban would prevent four million Florida women of reproductive age from accessing abortion care after six weeks — before many women even know they're pregnant," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said in a statement issued after Thursday's vote. "This ban would also impact the nearly 15 million women of reproductive age who live in abortion-banning states throughout the South, many of whom have previously relied on travel to Florida as an option to access care."

The law contains some exceptions, including to save the woman's life. Abortions for pregnancies involving rape or incest would be allowed until 15 weeks of pregnancy, provided a woman has documentation such as a restraining order or police report. DeSantis has called the rape and incest provisions sensible.

Drugs used in medication-induced abortions — which make up the majority of those provided nationally — could be dispensed only in person or by a physician under the Florida law. Separately, nationwide access to the abortion pill mifepristone is being challenged in court.

"I can't think of any bill that's going to provide more protections to more people who are more vulnerable than this piece of legislation," said Republican Rep. Mike Beltran, who said the bill's exceptions and six-week time frame represented a compromise.

DOJ seeks to put abortion pill limits on hold

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — The Justice Department said Thursday that it will again go to the Supreme Court over abortion after a lower court ruling allowed the abortion pill mifepristone to remain available in the U.S. but reimposed past restrictions on getting and using the drug.

At stake in the accelerating court battle that began in Texas is widespread access to the most common method of abortion in the U.S., less than a year after the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* prompted more than a dozen states to effectively ban abortion outright.

In a ruling late Wednesday, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans temporarily narrowed a ruling by a lower court judge in Texas that had completely blocked the Food and Drug Administration's approval of mifepristone. But a divided three-judge panel still reduced the period of pregnancy when the drug can be taken and said it could not be dispensed by mail.

The ruling preventing the pill from being sent by mail amounts to another significant constraint of abortion access that could be felt even in states where abortion remains legal, some of which have already begun stockpiling mifepristone over worries that the drug will become unavailable.

The Justice Department said it would ask the U.S. Supreme Court for an emergency order to stop the lower court ruling from taking effect.

"We are going to continue to fight in the courts, we believe the law is on our side, and we will prevail," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Thursday, speaking from Dublin during a visit by President Joe Biden.

Trump answers questions for 7 hours in fraud lawsuit

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Former President Donald Trump answered questions for nearly seven hours Thursday during his second deposition in a legal battle with New York's attorney general over his company's business practices, reversing an earlier decision to invoke his Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination and remain silent.

The Republican met all day with lawyers for Attorney General Letitia James, who sued Trump last year. Her lawsuit claims Trump and his family misled banks and

business associates by giving them false information about his net worth and the value of assets such as hotels and golf courses.

Shortly after Trump entered the Manhattan skyscraper that houses James' offices, his attorney, Alina Habba, said he was "not only willing but also eager to testify."

After the deposition was finished, a lawyer for Trump's businesses, Christopher Kise, said the former president had spent nearly seven hours "describing in detail his extraordinary business success."

"The transactions at the center of this

case were wildly profitable for the banks and for the Trump entities," Kise said. "When the facts of this success, and not politically engineered soundbites, are out in the open, everyone will scoff at the notion any fraud took place."

The lawsuit is unrelated to the felony criminal charges filed against Trump by the Manhattan district attorney, which led last week to his historic arraignment, the first for a former president.

James declined to answer a question about the deposition at a news conference on an unrelated matter Wednesday.

Airport in Fla. reopening as floods recede

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — One of Florida's busiest airports announced plans to reopen Friday morning, two days after an unprecedented deluge left planes and travelers stranded and turned Fort Lauderdale's streets into rivers.

Officials at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport completed final inspections after sunrise Friday and said in a tweet that operations would resume at 9 a.m.

"Travelers are advised to check with their airlines for updated flight times BEFORE coming to the airport. Thanks for your patience as we work to restore normal operations," the tweet said.

The airport shut down Wednesday evening as a storm dumped more than 2 feet of rain.

"Nature has been unkind to us," Broward County Mayor Lamar Fisher said during a news conference Thursday afternoon at the airport.

A flood warning was expiring, but the National Weather Service warned motorists that water-covered roads could still be a hazard.

All across Fort Lauderdale, residents and business owners cleaned up. While it started raining on Monday in South Florida, much of the water fell Wednesday, and the Fort Lauderdale area saw record rainfall amounts on a matter of hours, ranging from 15 inches to 26 inches.

On Thursday, residents in the city's Edgewood neighborhood waded through knee-high water or used canoes and kayaks to navigate the streets. Dennis Vasquez, a window screen installer, towed some of his neighbor's belongings on an inflatable mattress to a car on dry land. He himself lost all of his possessions when water rose chest-high in his house Wednesday night.

"Everything, it's gone," he said in Spanish. "But I will replace it."

Christopher Alfonso and Tony Mandico, neighbors for 50 years in Edgewood, said their homes are likely total losses.

They said the area never severely flooded until a sanitary sewer system replaced septic tanks 10 years ago, making some streets higher than others and channeling rain onto lower roads.

Report says Justice Thomas didn't report real estate deal with donor

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Conservative megadonor Harlan Crow purchased three properties belonging to Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and his family, in a transaction worth more than \$100,000 that Thomas never reported, according to the non-profit investigative journalism organization ProPublica.

The 2014 real estate deal shines a new light on Thomas' decades-old relationship with Crow, a real estate magnate and longtime financier for conservative causes. That relationship and the material benefits received by Thomas have fueled calls for an official ethics investigation.

ProPublica previously revealed that Thomas and his wife Ginni were gifted with hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of annual vacations and trips by Crow for decades — including international cruises on his mega-yacht, private jet flights and stays at Crow's invitation-only resort in the Adirondacks. But the 2014 real estate deal is the first public evidence of a direct financial transaction between the pair.

Citing state tax documents and property deeds, ProPublica reported that one of Crow's companies paid \$133,363 for the home in Savannah, Ga., where Thomas'

mother was living, along with two nearby vacant lots that belonged to Thomas' family members. Thomas' mother remained living in the home, which soon underwent tens of thousands of dollars in renovations.

Federal officials, including Supreme Court justices, are required to disclose the details of most real estate transactions with a value of over \$1,000. Thomas would not be required to report the purchase if the property was his or his spouse's primary personal residence, but this stipulation does not apply to this purchase, which Thomas did not report.

Both Thomas and Crow have released statements downplaying the significance of the gifts, with Thomas maintaining that he was not required to disclose the trips. Crow responded to the latest disclosure with a statement to ProPublica saying that he approached Thomas about the purchase with an eye on honoring his legacy.

"My intention is to one day create a public museum at the Thomas home dedicated to telling the story of our nation's second black Supreme Court Justice," the statement said. "Justice Thomas' story represents the best of America."

Thomas' office did not respond to an Associated Press request for comment.

Mayor says major plastics fire in Indiana is now fully extinguished

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Ind. — A major industrial fire fueled by tons of scrap plastics in an Indiana city has been fully extinguished, although an evacuation order for people living nearby remains in place, the city's mayor said.

Richmond Mayor Dave Snow tweeted Thursday night that the fire chief of the eastern Indiana city had informed him that "the fire has been fully extinguished ahead of schedule."

Officials had said earlier Thursday that the fire, which began Tuesday afternoon, was close to being extinguished at the 14-acre former factory site in Richmond, a city of 35,000 about 70 miles east of Indianapolis, near the Ohio border.

An evacuation order for at least 1,500 people living within a half-mile was still in effect Friday morning, but Snow said in his tweet that "we're now able to turn our atten-

tion to collecting air and water samples to determine when the evacuation order can be lifted."

Fire Chief Tim Brown was not available Friday morning to provide an update, another fire official said. A message seeking an update was left Friday morning for Snow, whose assistant said he was in a meeting.

Clouds of black smoke marred the spring sky after the fire began Tuesday. By Thursday afternoon, the smoke was lighter and less dense after progress in dousing the fires.

Brown said Thursday that the site had six buildings full of plastics "floor to ceiling and wall to wall" but that he expected the fires to be out by late Thursday or Friday morning.

Tests on debris that landed outside the fire zone showed some evidence of asbestos, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which urged residents not to disturb anything they found.

Powerful Cyclone Ilsa lashes Australia

Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia — Australia's most powerful tropical cyclone in eight years lashed its northwest coast with winds gusting to an apparent record of 180 miles per hour Friday but skirted larger population centers and resulted in no immediate reports of injuries.

Cyclone Ilsa crossed the Pilbara coast of Western Australia state as a Category 5 storm, the most severe, but weakened to Category 2 as it moved inland, Australia's Bureau of Meteorology said.

Damage was still being assessed in the path of Ilsa, which made landfall in the early hours 93 miles northeast of the iron ore export town of Port Hedland in the rural area of Pardoo.

Pardoo had a population of 47 in the latest census and the Pardoo Roadhouse and Tavern was destroyed. The two owners stayed throughout the storm and were unharmed, emergency officials said.

"They've had a pretty uncomfortable, challenging night," Department of Fire and Emergency Services Superintendent Peter McCarthy said.

Beyond Pardoo, Acting Emergency Services Minister Sue Ellery described the storm damage as "fairly minimal."

Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner Darren Klemm said he was relieved that Ilsa had shifted toward Pardoo after tracking from the Indian Ocean toward Port Hedland, the world's largest bulk export port

that sends Australian iron ore around the globe. Port Hedland has 16,000 residents and is the largest Pilbara city.

The city's docks had been cleared of ships, including iron ore carriers, before the storm struck.

Port Hedland residents "feel like they've dodged a bullet," Klemm said. "A Category 5 cyclone impact in Port Hedland would have resulted in significant damage."

Ilsa apparently set an Australian record with wind gusts in its path recorded as high as 180 mph at Bedout Island off the Pilbara coast before the island's measuring equipment stopped working, weather bureau manager Todd Smith said. It was not clear whether the equipment malfunctioned or power was cut.

UN: 400K migrants may cross Darien Gap this year

Associated Press

PANAMA CITY — Two U.N. groups said Thursday that the number of migrants crossing the dangerous Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama could soar to as many as 400,000 this year.

That would represent a huge increase from the 250,000 migrants estimated to have crossed the roadless, jungle-clad route in 2022.

The U.N. agencies for refugees and migration said in a report that nearly 100,000 people may have already made the crossing so far this year, six times more than in the similar period of last year.

If that trend keeps up, it could mean many

more migrants seeking to reach the United States through Central America and Mexico.

The groups called it "an unprecedented movement (of people) through the Americas."

The United States pledged its forces will assist their Colombian and Panamanian counterparts with intelligence gathering to dismantle smuggling rings operating in the Darien Gap, which is a key route for migrants heading to the U.S. from South America, a senior Biden administration official said Wednesday.

The area is among the most dangerous portions of the long route to the U.S. bor-

ders. Migrants and international human rights groups have denounced sexual assaults, robberies and killings in the remote jungle. That's in addition to the natural dangers posed by venomous snakes and rushing rivers.

U.S. forces could assist in targeting smugglers for arrest and locating "stash houses" where smugglers hold migrants, the official said, without specifying whether the U.S. forces involved would be military or civilian law enforcement.

The United States, Panama and Colombia had announced Tuesday an ambitious 60-day campaign to shut down the Darien Gap route.

Populist Iraqi cleric says he's suspending movement

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Influential Iraqi Shiite cleric and political leader Muqtada al-Sadr announced on Friday that he would suspend the movement he leads for one year, citing "corruption" among some of his followers.

A group within his Sadrist movement, which has dubbed itself the "Owners of the Cause," believes that al-Sadr is Imam Mah-

di, a Shiite religious leader said to have vanished more than 1,000 years ago and who is expected to return leading an army of the faithful to defeat evil in the world.

On Friday, Iraq's Supreme Judicial Council announced that an investigative court had ordered the arrest of 65 alleged members of the "Owners of the Cause," which it described as a disruptive "gang."

In a statement posted on his Twitter account, al-Sadr said, "I want to be a reformer for Iraq, and I cannot reform the Sadrist movement." He added that he will freeze all activities of the movement — except for religious activities such as Friday prayers.

Al-Sadr resigned from politics last August, following a nearly yearlong deadlock in the formation of a new Cabinet.

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Sources: Deal for Commanders in place

Associated Press

Dan Snyder has a deal in place to sell the NFL's Washington Commanders for the biggest price paid for a North American professional sports team.

A group led by Josh Harris and Mitchell Rales that includes Magic Johnson has an agreement in principle to buy the team for a record \$6.05 billion, two people with knowledge of the situation told The Associated Press on Thursday.

The people confirmed the deal was a fully financed, nonexclusive agreement that was not yet signed. The people spoke on condition of anonymity because the deal hasn't been finalized.

Another person told The AP a deal hasn't been sent to the NFL for approval yet. The league declined to comment.

Once the deal is approved, Harris would own controlling stakes in teams in three of the four major North American pro sports leagues. He and David Blitzer have owned the NBA's Philadelphia 76ers since 2011 and the NHL's New Jersey Devils since 2013.

Harris has owned a piece of the Pittsburgh Steelers, which he needs to sell before getting the Commanders.

The price for the Commanders tops the previous record of

\$4.65 billion set when Walmart heir Rob Walton's group bought the Denver Broncos last year. Johnson, the basketball Hall of Famer who also owns part of Major League Baseball's Los Angeles Dodgers, was also part of Harris' bid for the Broncos.

Rales, co-founder of the Dannaher Corp. and a Maryland resident, and Johnson were relatively late additions to the group. Rales and Harris grew up in Bethesda in the Washington suburbs and give the team local ownership roots.

The sale of the Commanders is pending the execution of a contract and then approval from the rest of the league's owners, which could happen as soon as their next meeting in Minnesota in May but may take longer. It would need 24 of 32 votes to pass, which is not expected to be a problem after the Broncos sale was unanimously approved and given that Snyder was beginning to fall out of favor with the group.

Snyder bought his boyhood favorite team in 1999 for \$750 million and despite mounting criticism repeatedly said he'd never sell. That changed after multiple investigations by the league and Congress into Washington's workplace misconduct and potential improprieties.

The congressional investigation found Snyder played a role in a toxic culture.

Indianapolis Colts owner Jim Irsay in October became the first to suggest there was "merit to remove" Snyder, a nearly unprecedented move that would have also taken a three-quarters majority to happen. Instead, two weeks later, Snyder and wife Tanya hired Bank of America Securities to explore a possible sale of the team.

It quickly became apparent the Snyders, who bought out the previous minority owners in 2021, were not looking to maintain a controlling interest. Canadian investor Steve Apostolopoulos and Houston Rockets owner Tilman Fertitta were among the other bidders after early interest from Washington-area businessman Todd Boehly and mortgage executive Mat Ishbia, who instead paid \$4 billion for the NBA's Phoenix Suns and WNBA's Mercury.

The group led by Apostolopoulos was the only other one to submit a fully financed bid.

Lawyers representing over 40 former team employees hailed the news of an agreement in principle, saying it "marks the end of a long, difficult chapter" for their clients and fans. Lisa Banks and Debra Katz wel-

comed the new owners and said they "hope a new chapter can truly begin" within the organization.

Harris and Rales will soon assume control of a once-storied franchise that has fallen far from its 1980s and early '90s glory days, when Washington won the Super Bowl three times. With Snyder in charge, the team made the playoffs just six times in 24 seasons, only twice won a postseason game and went 166-226-2 overall.

The new owners will inherit coach Ron Rivera, who has run Washington's football operations for three seasons, none with a winning record, including an NFC East title at 7-9 in 2020 followed by a first-round loss.

Their biggest immediate challenge for the long-term future of the organization is a new stadium to replace FedEx Field, the rushed-to-completion home of the team since 1997 in Landover, Md., that has not aged well. Virginia abandoned a stadium bill last spring given the number of off-field controversies swirling around the team.

Getting fans back is also a major priority after Washington ranked last in the league in attendance in 2022 and were second-last in 2021.

Grizzlies' Ja Morant files countersuit against teen

Associated Press

Grizzlies point guard Ja Morant has filed a countersuit against the Memphis teenager suing the two-time All-Star, accusing the teen of slander, battery and assault over a pickup basketball game at Morant's home last July.

The lawsuit filed Wednesday night in Shelby County Circuit Court accuses Joshua Holloway, whose lawsuit was amended March 28 after he turned 18, of damaging Morant's reputation and putting him at risk of

losing millions of dollars both in his contract and in potential endorsement deals.

Morant declined to comment Thursday when asked about his countersuit after practice. The Grizzlies are the No. 2 seed in the Western Conference preparing to host LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers starting Sunday.

The guard signed a five-year, \$193 million contract last July that includes a \$38 million bonus for making the All-NBA team this season. The NBA sus-

pended Morant eight games in March for "conduct detrimental to the league" for displaying a firearm at a suburban Denver club on March 4.

Morant's countersuit notes the lawsuit was reported nationally despite being under seal until the amended version was filed March 28 and that the lawsuit potentially jeopardizes the guard's relationships with sponsors including some "unconsummated deals in progress."

In the countersuit, Morant also accuses the teen of lying to

police, in the original lawsuit and then changing his story in the amended version.

Morant says in the countersuit he punched Holloway once after being hit in the face with a basketball during a July 26 pickup game at his home after the teen approached the Grizzlies guard with "balled up" fists.

Holloway's attorneys did not immediately respond to an email from The Associated Press requesting comment on Morant's countersuit.

Rays defeat Red Sox for 13-0 start

Associated Press

The Tampa Bay Rays tied Major League Baseball's post-1900 record for 13 consecutive wins at a season's start, rallying to beat the Boston Red Sox 9-3 Thursday behind a seven-run fifth inning that Harold Ramirez began and capped with doubles.

Tampa Bay matched the 13-0 start of the 1982 Atlanta Braves and 1987 Milwaukee Brewers. The only longer opening streak was a 20-0 start by the 1884 St. Louis Maroons of the Union Association.

Rays starter Jeffrey Springs left two pitches into the fourth inning with what the team said was ulnar neuritis. Tampa Bay trailed 3-1.

Ramirez started the big rally with a double off Corey Kluber (0-3) and broke open the game with a three-run double against Richard Bleier. Kevin Kelly (1-0) pitched 2½ innings for the win.

Twins 11, Yankees 2: Michael A. Taylor, rookie Edouard Julien and Carlos Correa hit consecutive homers in a nine-run first inning for the Twins. Taylor homered twice and drove in four runs.

Julien became the eighth player since 1974 to have his first two major league hits in the same inning, according to STATS.

Joe Ryan (3-0) struck out 10 and walked none while allowing one run and three hits over seven innings. Jhonny Brito (2-1) gave up seven runs and six hits in two-thirds of an inning. Anthony Rizzo hit a pair of solo homers for the host Yankees.

Tigers 3, Blue Jays 1: Javier Báez was benched after a base-running gaffe as visiting Detroit avoided a three-game sweep.

Tigers manager A.J. Hinch removed Báez in the third, one inning after Báez appeared to lose track of outs and ran into a double play. Báez doubled off the left-field wall with one out in the second but didn't run hard out of the box, apparently thinking he had homered. He then broke for third and rounded the base on Akil Baddo's liner to center and was easily doubled off to end the inning.

Zach McKinstry hit a tiebreaking double in the fifth off Chris Bassitt (1-2) and Jake Rogers had two hits and an RBI as Detroit stopped a six-game skid. Spencer

Turnbull (1-2) allowed one run and six hits in five innings and Alex Lange got three outs for his second big league save and first since 2021.

Pirates 5, Cardinals 0: St. Louis Rookie Jordan Walker's hitting streak ended at 12 games when he went 0 for 4 with two strikeouts. The 20-year-old tied the record for longest hitting streak at the start of a career by a player 20 or younger, set by Eddie Murphy, who hit in 12 straight games with the Philadelphia Athletics from Aug. 26, 1912, to Sept. 5, 1912.

Carlos Santana doubled twice for the Pirates, and Connor Joe and Rodolfo Castro hit consecutive homers in the eighth against Génesis Cabrera. Vince Velasquez (1-2) allowed three hits in six innings, and Jordan Montgomery (2-1) gave up two runs and six hits in 6½ innings.

Reds 6, Phillies 2: Wil Myers hit a pair of run-scoring singles. Spencer Steer, Tyler Stephenson and Jose Barrero drove in runs for the host Reds, who had lost six of seven.

Kyle Schwarber became the first left-handed batter to homer off Nick Lodolo (2-0), who al-

lowed two runs and eight hits in five innings. Bailey Falter (0-2) gave up five runs and eight hits in 4½ innings.

Orioles 8, Athletics 7: Baltimore's Adley Rutschman led off the ninth against Trevor May (2-1) with his first game-ending homer.

Ryan Mountcastle's sixth home run sparked a four-run third. Oakland pulled even behind Brent Rooker, who homered twice and drove in five runs.

Félix Bautista (1-1) worked a perfect ninth.

Brewers 4, Padres 3, 10 innings: Rowdy Tellez hit a two-run homer in the first inning and a go-ahead sacrifice fly in the 10th for visiting Milwaukee.

Tellez's sac fly against Luis Garcia (0-2) brought in automatic runner Christian Yelich, who had advanced to third on a double steal with Willy Adames.

San Diego's Trent Grisham hit a tying, two-run homer with two outs in the eighth off Matt Bush.

Devin Williams (2-0) struck out Juan Soto, Xavier Bogaerts and Nelson Cruz in the ninth. Joel Payamps pitched the 10th for his first career save.

Players find less time for small talk with pitch clock

Associated Press

DENVER — Home plate used to be a place where the sociable Brandon Crawford would touch base with catchers and umpires.

Just a casual conversation to catch up: How's the family? What's up? That sort of thing.

These days, the San Francisco Giants infielder keeps the chatter to a minimum. There's simply no spare time for small talk while on a pitch clock.

Because that 15 seconds between pitches — 20 when someone's on base — goes by fast at the plate. The penalty for idle chatter could be stiff — a called strike on the hitter.

Social hour just has to wait.

"You have to figure out a different time to get your conversations in, whether it's pregame or going to dinner or breakfast," Crawford said.

The pitch clock hasn't just made baseball quicker. It's quieter now, too. There's no real chance to talk shop on the bases with former teammates, good friends or umpires. Batters only get 30 seconds between at-bats to get set.

Dodgers manager Dave Roberts can't even imagine the strikes he might've had called on him if he was playing under these rules. He's well known for his affable personality and

would always greet the home-plate umpire when he batted, along with the catcher. He'd carry it right over to the bases, too, when he got aboard.

"Some guys are having a little harder time with it," Roberts said of cutting back on conversations. "I think the salutations and stuff like that have to be more minimized."

Roberts joked that he could strategize around his gift for gab — maybe engage players he knows before they dig into the box.

"Try to get his attention and get that clock going," Roberts cracked.

The players, though, are

starting to realize that silence is golden. This is no social call when they step up. They can't afford to fall behind 0-1 in the count.

Last week, Padres slugger Manny Machado became the first player ejected in an argument that followed a pitch clock violation, which carries a penalty of an automatic strike for hitters and an automatic ball for pitchers. It wasn't for talking, but rather he thought he had called timeout as the pitch clock wound down to eight seconds — the deadline for batters to be alert to the guy on the mound.

A cautionary tale, though, that every second matters.

Burns helps Hurricanes beat Panthers

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Brent Burns scored twice and the Carolina Hurricanes scored four times in the third period to beat the Florida Panthers 6-4 on Thursday night to win the Metropolitan Division.

Jesper Kotkaniemi, Jesper Fast, Shayne Gostisbehere and Sebastian Aho also scored for the Hurricanes, who began the night one point ahead of New Jersey atop the division. Frederick Andersen finished with 31 saves.

Carolina will open the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs against the New York Islanders.

Aleksander Barkov, Ryan Lomberg, Anthony Duclair and Carter Verhaeghe scored for Florida, which began the night one point behind the Islanders for the top wild card in the Eastern Conference. Alex Lyon had 30 saves.

The Panthers will face league-best Boston in the first round of the playoffs.

Golden Knights 3, Kraken 1: Alec Martinez broke a tie midway through the second period and visiting Vegas won its third Pacific Division title.

The Golden Knights finished 51-22-9 with 111 points, tying the franchise record for victories and holding off the late surge from Edmonton to win the division title and clinch home-ice advantage in the Western Conference.

Vegas will face Winnipeg in the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Bruins 5, Canadiens 4: David Pastrnak's goal midway through the third period helped visiting Boston close out its record-setting season with a comeback win.

Dmitry Orlov had a goal and an assist. Trent Frederic, Jake DeBrusk and Charlie Coyle also scored for Boston. Jeremy Swayman made 30 saves.

The Bruins closed their Presidents Trophy-winning season by

establishing records for wins (65) and points (135) in a season.

Lucas Condotta scored in his NHL debut, and Michael Pezzetta added a goal and an assist for the Canadiens. Nick Suzuki and Justin Barron also scored. Sam Montembeault made 16 saves.

Devils 5, Capitals 4, OT: Dougie Hamilton tied it in the third period, Luke Hughes scored his first NHL goal in overtime and New Jersey rallied to beat host Washington.

New Jersey erased a three-goal deficit, climbing back into it thanks to two from Erik Haula and one on the power play from Miles Wood. But Carolina's victory at Florida locked the Devils into the second seed in the Metropolitan Division and set up a first-round matchup against the rival New York Rangers.

Avalanche 4, Jets 2: Evan Rodrigues scored the go-ahead goal on a wrist shot early in the third period to help Colorado remain in control for the Central Division crown.

The Avalanche have 107 points and need to beat Nashville on Friday to secure the division's top spot over Dallas. The Stars wrapped up their regular season with 108 points after a win over St. Louis.

Denis Malgin and Mikko Rantanen also scored for the defending Stanley Cup champions, with Artturi Lehkonen adding a late empty-net score.

Axel Jonsson-Fjallby and Kevin Stenlund scored for Winnipeg. David Rittich stopped 21 shots.

Maple Leafs 3, Rangers 2: Noel Acciari scored the go-ahead goal late in third period, Joseph Woll made 22 saves and Toronto beat host New York in the season finale for both teams.

Timothy Liljegren and William Nylander also scored for Toronto.

Artemi Panarin and Kaapo Kakko scored for the Rangers, and Jaroslav Halak finished with 18 saves.

Sabres 4, Senators 3, OT: Casey Mittelstadt scored 1:18 into overtime and Craig Anderson stopped 30 shots before announcing he is retiring at the end of the season as Buffalo closed its home schedule with a win.

Tage Thompson scored his team-leading 47th goal, while Henri Jokiharju and Victor Olofsson also scored for Buffalo in a game between Atlantic Division rivals eliminated from playoff contention.

Predators 4, Wild 3, OT: Juuso Parssinen scored at 2:44 of overtime to lift host Nashville.

Mark Jankowski, Kiefer Sherwood and Yakov Trenin also scored for the Predators. Juuse Saros made 21 saves.

Frederick Gaudreau scored twice and Nic Petan also scored for the Wild. Gustav Nyquist had two assists and Filip Gustavsson made 27 saves.

Blue Jackets 3, Penguins 2, OT: Johnny Gaudreau scored a minute into overtime and host Columbus snapped a four-game losing streak.

Gaudreau scored his 14th overtime goal and the Blue Jackets moved ahead of Chicago and Anaheim for the worst record in the NHL. Columbus has one game remaining.

Andrew Peeke and Emil Bemstrom also scored for the Blue Jackets. Michael Hutchinson stopped 34 shots.

Stars 1, Blues 0: Rookie center Wyatt Johnston scored his 24th goal and host Dallas beat St. Louis.

The Stars won their sixth game in a row to finish with 108 points, keeping them one point ahead of Colorado for the division lead. The Avalanche finish the season Friday night at Nashville.

Stars goalie Jake Oettinger had 25 saves for his fifth shutout of the season. He stopped four shots in the final two minutes when St. Louis pulled its goalie for an extra skater.

Oilers 5, Sharks 2: Mattias

Janmark scored twice, Leon Draisaitl had a goal and two assists and host Edmonton closed the regular season with a franchise-record ninth straight victory.

Evan Bouchard and Evander Kane also scored for the Oilers, and Stuart Skinner made 27 saves.

Noah Gregor and Steven Lorentz scored for San Jose.

Canucks 5, Coyotes 4, OT: Conor Garland capped his first career hat trick 1:19 into overtime to lead visiting Vancouver.

Elias Pettersson scored his 39th goal and J.T. Miller got his 32nd for the Canucks.

Kings 5, Ducks 3: Adrian Kempe had three goals and an assist and visiting Los Angeles clinched third place in the Pacific Division.

Captain Anze Kopitar scored a first-period goal that made him Los Angeles' leading scorer for the 15th time in the past 16 seasons, while Kempe and Trevor Moore scored 49 seconds apart in the second period.

Lightning 5, Red Wings 0: Brayden Point scored his 50th and 51st goals, backup Brian Elliott made 32 saves and host Tampa Bay stopped a four-game losing streak.

Alex Killorn, Brandon Hagel and Michael Eyssimont also scored for the Lightning.

Ville Husso stopped 27 shots for Detroit.

Flyers 5, Blackhawks 4, OT: Ivan Provorov scored 3:09 into overtime to lift visiting Philadelphia.

Travis Konecny had two goals and an assist, Owen Tippett had a goal and an assist, and Noah Cates also scored for the Flyers. Felix Sandstrom finished with 34 stops.

Jonathan Toews scored in his final game with Chicago, Andreas Athanasiou had a goal and two assists, and Anders Bjork and Juhar Khaira also scored. Alex Stalock finished with 31 saves.