

Ukrainians to train on tanks in Germany

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — The United States is delivering Abrams tanks next month to the Army's sprawling base in Grafenwoehr, where it will train Ukrainian soldiers to use them in their fight against Russia, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Friday.

The announcement came at a meeting of the Ukraine Contact Defense Group, where NATO leaders also said that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will attend a pivotal heads of state summit in Lithuania this summer, a move that indicates more advanced alliance support may be on the way.

A total of 31 training tanks will arrive at Grafenwoehr Training Area in Bavaria at the end of May, and the troops will start training a couple of weeks later, U.S. officials said. Training will last about 10 weeks.

"Our common efforts have made a huge difference to Ukraine's defenders on the battle-

field," Austin said Friday. "And they underscore just how badly the Kremlin miscalculated."

Ukraine's requests for Western battle tanks were rebuffed at a Ramstein contact group meeting in January, but allies came to an agreement soon afterward that included a package of M1 Abrams and European-made tanks.

"I do think the M1 tank, when it's delivered, will make a difference," Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters Friday.

However, Milley cautioned that "there's no silver bullet in war," which is full of variables and requires the right mix of combined forces on the battlefield.

Also on Friday, Germany and Poland signed an agreement to create a maintenance hub for tanks used in Ukraine.

The delivery of up to 80 Leopard 1A5 battle tanks by midyear is progressing rapidly, German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius said.

Germany will begin training 100 Ukrainian troops on the Leop-

ard this weekend, Pistorius added. The training is a joint project between Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark.

Besides tanks, Zelenskyy has asked repeatedly for Western fighter jets, which until now have been ruled out by President Joe Biden and other leaders concerned about the war's escalation beyond Ukraine's borders.

Milley and other U.S. officials have continued to advocate that Ukraine rely on artillery and more cost-effective air defense tactics against Russian planes.

"Russians are cautious to come into Ukraine because of the effective use of the Ukrainian air defense system," said Milley, who described the system as effective at multiple altitudes and ranges.

"That was the theme of this entire day — air defense, air defense, air defense," Milley said.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov, meanwhile, said he remains optimistic that fighter jets such as U.S. F-16s will be part of "the next stage" of aid to Ukraine. It's last on his wish list,

he added, but "I think it will be done."

Esa Pulkkinen, permanent secretary for the defense ministry of Finland, NATO's newest member, said Friday that he expected Western fighter jets to be a part of Ukraine's forces eventually.

"Whether that time is now or later, that's kind of the speculative question," Pulkkinen said.

The subject is likely to come up at this summer's NATO summit in Vilnius. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg met with Zelenskyy on Thursday during what was the alliance leader's first visit to Kyiv, he told reporters Friday at Ramstein.

Zelenskyy accepted the invitation to the summit, though Stoltenberg didn't say whether Zelenskyy would attend virtually or in person, given the unknowns about the war.

"No one can tell today when this war ends," Stoltenberg said. "We need to be prepared for the long haul. That's why NATO allies have said we will stand by Ukraine as long as it takes."

Pentagon prepares to evacuate Americans in Sudan

Associated Press

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — The Pentagon has deployed forces and is developing options to assist in the possible evacuation of U.S. Embassy personnel from Sudan, but the White House said Friday there are no plans for now for a broader pullout of the potentially thousands of other Americans from the African country where warring factions are in a violent conflict.

The troop moves by the U.S. military are intended "to ensure that we provide as many options as possible, if we are called on to

See related story on Page 5

do something. We haven't been called on to do anything yet," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said at a news conference in Germany. Austin and U.S. Army Gen. Mark Milley, the Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, held meeting meetings with defense leaders from other countries to discuss support for Ukraine.

An estimated 16,000 private U.S. citizens are registered with the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum as being in Sudan. The State Department has cautioned that that figure probably is inaccurate

because there is no requirement for Americans to register nor is there a requirement to notify the embassy when they leave.

"It's absolutely imperative that U.S. citizens in Sudan make their own arrangements to stay safe in these difficult circumstances," White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said in Washington.

He added that "Americans should have no expectation of a U.S. government coordinated evacuation at this time. And we expect that that's going to remain the case."

For embassy staff, according to an American official, a small number of U.S. troops have begun arriving in the Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti, where the U.S. is pre-positioning forces and equipment to assist in any potential evacuation. The official said Army soldiers are being tapped for the task.

The U.S. troops are being moved to Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti. Evacuation planning for Sudan got underway in earnest on Monday after a U.S. Embassy convoy was attacked in Khartoum, the Sudanese capital.

Russian military bombs its own city accidentally

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russia's military acknowledged that a bomb accidentally dropped by one of its warplanes caused a powerful blast in a Russian city not far from Ukraine's border, injuring two and scaring local residents.

Belgorod, a city of 340,000 located about 25 miles east of the Russia-Ukraine border, has faced regular drone attacks during Russia's current military operation in Ukraine. Russian authorities blamed the earlier strikes on the Ukrainian military, which refrained from directly claiming responsibility for the attacks.

The explosion late Thursday was far more powerful than anything Belgorod residents had experienced before. Witnesses reported a low hissing sound followed by a blast that made nearby apartment buildings tremble and shattered their windows.

It left a 66-foot-wide crater in the middle of a tree-lined avenue flanked by apartment blocks, damaged several cars and threw one vehicle onto a store roof. Two people were injured, and a third person was later hospitalized with hypertension, authorities said.

Immediately after the explosion, Russian commentators and military bloggers were abuzz with theories about what weapon Ukraine had used for the attack. Many of them

called for strong retribution.

But about an hour later, the Russian Defense Ministry acknowledged that a weapon accidentally released by one of its own Su-34 bombers caused the blast. The ministry did not provide any further details, but military experts said the weapon likely was a powerful 1,100-pound bomb.

Military experts charged that the weapon appeared to have been set to explode with a small delay after impact that would allow it to hit underground facilities.

Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said local authorities decided to temporarily resettle residents of a nine-story apartment building while it was inspected to make sure it hadn't suffered structural damage that rendered it unsafe to live in.

In an editorial gaffe, an anchor on Russian state television followed the news about the local authorities dealing with the explosion's aftermath by declaring that "modern weapons allow Russian units to eliminate extremists in the area of the special military operation from a minimal distance." The anchor looked visibly puzzled by the text that he had just read.

Russian commentators questioned why the warplane flew over Belgorod and urged the military to avoid such risky overflights in the future.

Poll: Biden 2024 bid splits Dems

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Only about half of Democrats think President Joe Biden should run again in 2024, a poll shows, but a large majority say they'd be likely to support him if he became the nominee.

The poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that 26% of Americans overall want to see Biden run again — a slight recovery from the 22% who said that in January. Forty-seven percent of Democrats say they want him to run, also up slightly from only 37% who said that in January.

The ambivalence among Democratic voters comes as Biden is preparing to formally announce his 2024 reelection campaign as soon as next week, according to people briefed on the discussions.

Despite the reluctance of many Democrats to see Biden run for another term, 78% of them say they approve of the job he's doing as president. And a total of 81% of Democrats say they would at least probably support Biden in a general election if he is the nominee — 41% say they definitely would and 40% say they probably would.

Interviews with poll respondents suggest that the gap reflects concerns about Biden's age, as well as a clamoring from a younger generation of Democrats who say they want leadership that reflects their demographic and their values. Biden, now 80, would be 82 on Election Day 2024.

DEA boss asked to explain no-bid contracts, hires

Associated Press

A senior Republican on the Senate Judiciary committee is demanding that U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration chief Anne Milgram address allegations of improper hiring and contracting of her past associates.

The request Thursday by Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa follows an Associated Press investigation finding that a federal watchdog is investigating whether strict federal rules on no-bid contracting and hiring may have been violated to channel DEA work to Milgram's associates.

"These are serious allegations, and DEA must respond to them and clear the air,"

Grassley wrote in a letter sent to Milgram's office, a copy of which was obtained by the AP.

The scrutiny by the Justice Department's Office of Inspector General comes as the DEA is struggling with repeated revelations of agent misconduct and a fentanyl crisis claiming more than 100,000 overdose deaths a year that Milgram has called the "deadliest drug threat our country has ever faced."

The DEA didn't immediately respond to a request for comment on the letter. But Milgram's boosters inside and outside the agency have defended her actions as part of an ongoing effort to clean house, recruit tal-

ented individuals and pursue innovative ways to protect national security and the health of the American people.

Much of Grassley's five-page letter focuses on a \$1.4 million no-bid contract to a Washington law firm for a recent review of the DEA's scandal-plagued foreign operations that he criticized for giving short shrift to agent misconduct and how to prevent it. That review was co-authored by Boyd Johnson, former right-hand man to one of Milgram's closest friends, Preet Bharara, when he was U.S. Attorney in Manhattan. Bharara himself landed at the firm, WilmerHale, even as the review was being conducted.

Calif. to meet 100% of water requests

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California will provide 100% of the water requested by cities and farms for the first time in years thanks to winter storms that filled reservoirs and runoff from a record snowpack, regulators announced Thursday.

The State Water Project will provide full allocations to 29 water agencies supplying about 27 million customers and 750,000 acres of farmland, the Department of Water Resources said.

As late as March, the agency was only expecting to provide 75% of requested water supplies.

The last time the state agency fully met water requests was in 2006.

Meanwhile, the federal Bureau of Reclamation announced it was increasing water allocations for the Central Valley Project to 100% for the first time since 2017.

The move was cheered by contractors who supply the federal water to the state's agricultural heartland. It will provide much-needed water to communities, farms and families in the San Joaquin Valley, said a statement from Jose Gutierrez, interim general manager of Westlands Water District.

"Following two years of 0% allocations, this water supply will assist growers in Westlands with putting the land to work to grow the food that feeds the world," he said.

Both the state and federal governments control networks of reservoirs and canals that supply water across California.

Three years of drought had pinched off supplies drastically in the nation's most populous state. Late last year, nearly all of California was in drought, including at extreme and exceptional levels. Wells ran dry, farmers fallowed fields and cities restricted

watering grass.

The water picture changed dramatically starting in December, when the first of a dozen "atmospheric rivers" hit, causing widespread flooding and damaging homes and infrastructure, and dumping as many as 700 inches of snow in the Sierra Nevada mountains.

The statewide reservoir storage on Thursday was at 105% of the average for the date, the Department of Water Resources said.

The runoff from the melting snow will supply additional water that the state agency said it is working to capture.

As of this week, more than 65% of California no longer had drought conditions, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

However, the Department of Water Resources urged people to continue using water cautiously.

Police make 6th arrest in Ala. party shooting

Associated Press

DADEVILLE, Ala. — Investigators on Thursday charged a sixth person with reckless murder in connection with a deadly shooting at a Sweet 16 birthday party, saying in court documents they believe gunmen shot into the crowd during the celebration.

Investigators said in court documents filed Thursday that they believe five of those charged were present at the party on April 15 and "discharged firearms into the crowd," resulting in the deaths of four people.

The Alabama Law Enforcement Agency on Thursday night announced the arrest of a 15-year-old juvenile from Tuskegee, Ala., the sixth person charged in the case, but court records were not released because of the person's age.

All six face reckless murder charges in connection with the fatal shooting, the state agency said.

The Sweet 16 birthday, at a dance studio just off the town square, was in full swing when gunfire erupted. Investigators have not discussed a motive or what they believe led to the shooting.

The shooting killed four young people, ranging in age from 17 to 23, and shocked the small east Alabama city of Dadeville.

Man accused of shooting girl and her parents is arrested in Florida

Associated Press

GASTONIA, N.C. — A North Carolina man accused of shooting and wounding a 6-year-old girl and her parents after children went to retrieve a basketball that had rolled into his yard was arrested in Florida on Thursday afternoon, authorities said.

The violence was the latest in a string of recent shootings sparked by seemingly trivial circumstances.

Robert Louis Singletary, 24, was arrested in the Tampa area by Hillsborough County deputies, according to online jail records. He was being held without bail on a fugitive warrant. He was scheduled to appear in court Friday.

Gaston County Police Chief Stephen Zill said at a news conference Wednesday that his department and the U.S. Marshals Service's Regional Fugitive Task Force had been conducting a broad search for Singletary, who fled after the Tuesday night shootings near Gastonia, a city of roughly 80,000 people west of Charlotte.

Singletary had been out on bond in a December attack in which authorities say he assaulted a woman with a hammer. He was wanted in Tuesday's shootings on four counts of attempted first-degree murder, two counts of assault with a deadly weapon with the intent to kill inflicting serious injury and one count of being a felon in possession of a fire-

arm.

Zill declined to say what sparked the attack, explaining that the investigation was ongoing.

However, neighbor Jonathan Robertson said the attack happened after some neighborhood children went to retrieve a basketball that had rolled into Singletary's yard. He said Singletary, who had yelled at the children on several occasions since moving to the neighborhood, went inside his home, came back out with a gun and began shooting as parents frantically tried to get their kids to safety.

"As soon as I saw him coming out shooting, I was hollering at everybody to get down and get inside," Robertson said.

A 6-year-old girl, Kinsley White, was grazed by a bullet in the left cheek and was treated at a hospital and released, she and her family said. Her father, Jamie White, who had run to her aid, was shot in the back. He remained hospitalized Thursday with serious wounds, including liver damage, according to Kinsley's grandfather and neighbor, Carl Hilderbrand. The girl's mother, Ashley Hilderbrand, was grazed in the elbow. Authorities say Singletary also shot at another man but missed.

"It was very scary," Ashley Hilderbrand said Wednesday. "My daughter actually got to come home last night. She just had a bullet fragment in her cheek."

Court to decide on abortion pill access

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court was facing a self-imposed Friday night deadline to decide whether women's access to a widely used abortion pill will stay unchanged or be restricted while a legal challenge to its Food and Drug Administration approval goes on.

The justices were weighing arguments that allowing restrictions contained in lower-court rulings to take effect would severely disrupt the availability of the drug, mifepristone, which is the most common abortion method used in the United States.

It has repeatedly been found to be safe and effective, and has been used by more than 5 million women in the U.S. since the FDA approved it in 2000.

The Supreme Court had initially said it

would decide by Wednesday whether the restrictions could take effect while the case continues. A one-sentence order signed by Justice Samuel Alito on Wednesday gave the justices two additional days, without explanation.

The justices were scheduled to meet for a private conference Friday, where they could talk about the issue. The additional time could be part of an effort to craft an order that has broad support among the justices. Or one or more justices might be writing a separate opinion, and asked for a couple of extra days.

The challenge to mifepristone, brought by abortion foes, is the first abortion controversy to reach the nation's highest court since its conservative majority overturned *Roe v. Wade* 10 months ago and allowed more than a dozen states to effectively ban abortion out-

right.

In his majority opinion, Alito said one reason for overturning *Roe* was to remove federal courts from the abortion fight. "It is time to heed the Constitution and return the issue of abortion to the people's elected representatives," he wrote.

But even with their court victory, abortion opponents returned to federal court with a new target: medication abortions, which make up more than half of all abortions in the United States.

Women seeking to end their pregnancies in the first 10 weeks without more invasive surgical abortion can take mifepristone, along with misoprostol. The FDA has eased the terms of mifepristone's use over the years, including allowing it to be sent through the mail in states that allow access.

Anti-abortion group blasts Trump over ban comments

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — A major anti-abortion group blasted former President Donald Trump on the issue Thursday, saying his contention that abortion restrictions should be left up to individual states, not the federal government, is a "morally indefensible position for a self-proclaimed pro-life presidential candidate."

The Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America group was responding to a statement by Trump campaign spokesperson Steven Cheung for a Washington Post story about division among the 2024 GOP presidential field on abortion-related issues. The group has said

it would not support any White House candidate who did not at a minimum support a 15-week federal abortion ban.

"The Supreme Court made clear in its decision that it was returning the issue to the people to decide through their elected representatives in the states and in Congress," the group's president, Marjorie Dannenfelser, said in a news release. "Holding to the position that it is exclusively up to the states is an abdication of responsibility by anyone elected to federal office."

The condemnation by one of the nation's largest anti-abortion groups amounted to a stunning rebuke of the former president, the

leading contender for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination. His three nominations of conservative judges to the Supreme Court paved the way for the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, which had legalized abortion nationwide for nearly 50 years.

Cheung had told the Post that "President Donald J. Trump believes that the Supreme Court, led by the three Justices which he supported, got it right when they ruled this is an issue that should be decided at the State level."

Last month in Iowa, Trump repeatedly refused to say whether he would support a federal law restricting abortion in every state.

Mont. House speaker silences transgender lawmaker

Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. — Montana's House speaker on Thursday refused to allow a transgender lawmaker to speak about bills on the House floor until she apologizes for saying lawmakers would have "blood on their hands" if they supported a bill to ban gender-affirming medical care for transgender youth, the lawmaker said.

Rep. Zoëy Zephyr, who was deliberately misgendered by a conservative group of lawmakers demanding her censure after Tuesday's comments, said she will not apologize, creating a standoff between the first-term state lawmaker and Republican legislative leaders.

Speaker Matt Regier refused to acknowledge Zephyr on Thursday when she wanted to comment on a bill seeking to put a binary definition of male and female into state code.

"It is up to me to maintain decorum here on the House floor, to protect the dignity and integrity," Regier said Thursday. "And any representative that I don't feel can do that will not be recognized."

Regier said the decision came after "multiple discussions" with other lawmakers and that previously there have been similar problems.

Democrats objected to Regier's decision, but the House Rules committee and the

House upheld his decision on party-line votes.

"Hate-filled testimony has no place on the House floor," Republican Rep. Caleb Hinkle, a member of the Montana Freedom Caucus that demanded the censure, said in a statement.

Zephyr said she stands by what she said about the consequences of banning essential medical care for transgender youth.

"When there are bills targeting the LGBTQ community, I stand up to defend my community," Zephyr said. "And I choose my words with clarity and precision and I spoke to the real harms that these bills bring."

Sudan general says military committed to civilian rule

Associated Press

KHARTOUM, Sudan — Sudan's top general on Friday declared the military's commitment to a civilian-led government, an apparent bid for international support days after brutal fighting between his forces and a powerful paramilitary group derailed hopes for the country's democratic transition.

In his first speech since the conflict engulfed Sudan nearly a week ago, army chief Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan pledged the military would prevail and secure the vast African nation's "safe transition to civilian rule." But for many Sudanese, Burhan's claim rang hollow 18 months after he joined forces with his current rival to seize power in a coup that cast aside Sudan's pro-democracy forces.

Burhan's announcement came on the Muslim Eid al-Fitr holiday, which marks the end of Ramadan and its month of fasting. "We are confident that we will overcome this ordeal with our training, wisdom and strength," Burhan said, vowing to preserve "the security and unity of the state."

The holiday — typically filled with

prayer, celebration and feasting — was a somber one in Sudan, as gunshots rang out across the capital of Khartoum and heavy smoke billowed over the skyline.

"Instead of waking up to the call to prayer, people in Khartoum again woke up to heavy fighting," said Norway's ambassador to Sudan, Endre Stiansen. "Can any hell be more horrible than this?"

Mosques held mass morning prayers inside to protect worshippers from the intensified fighting. The violence so far has killed 413 people and wounded 3,551 others, according to the latest toll from the World Health Organization. That includes at least nine children killed and 50 wounded in the fighting, said the United Nations Children's Fund.

The explosions rocking Khartoum followed frenzied international calls for a holiday cease-fire. After the United Nations and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged a respite from the spiraling violence, the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, promised to stop fighting for the three days of Eid al-Fitr to allow for evacuations and safe corridors. But there was no response from Burhan's military.

N. Korea official criticizes G-7

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea's foreign minister on Friday called the Group of Seven wealthy democracies a "tool for ensuring the U.S. hegemony" as she lambasted the group's recent call for the North's denuclearization.

The top diplomats from G-7 nations, who met recently in Japan, had jointly condemned the North's recent ballistic missile tests and reiterated their commitment to the goal of North Korea's complete abandonment of its nuclear weapons. Their communique was prepared as a template for leaders at the G-7 summit next month in Hiroshima, where North Korea's nuclear program will likely be discussed again.

North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui said her country will take unspecified "strong counteraction" if G-7 countries — the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada, Italy and the European Union — show "any behavioral attempt" to infringe upon the fundamental interests of North Korea.

"G7, a closed group of a handful of egoistic countries, does not represent the just international community but serves as a political tool for ensuring the U.S. hegemony," Choe said in a statement carried by North Korean state media.

French producers can't swallow beer's Champagne slogan

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — The guardians of Champagne will let no one take the name of the bubbly beverage in vain, not even a U.S. beer behemoth.

For years, Miller High Life used the "Champagne of beers" slogan. This week, that appropriation became impossible to swallow.

At the request of the trade body defending the interests of houses and growers of the northeastern French sparkling wine, Belgian customs crushed more than 2,000 cans of Miller High Life advertised as such.

The Comité Champagne asked for the destruction of a shipment of 2,352 cans on the grounds that the century-old motto used by the

American brewery infringes the protected designation of origin "Champagne."

The consignment was intercepted in the Belgian port of Antwerp in early February, a spokesperson at the Belgian Customs Administration said on Friday, and was destined for Germany. Belgian customs declined to say who had ordered the beers.

The buyer in Germany "was informed and did not contest the decision," the trade organization said in a statement.

Frederick Miller, a German immigrant to the US, founded the Miller Brewing Company in the 1850s. Miller High Life, its oldest brand, was launched as its flagship in 1903.

According to the Milwaukee-based brand's website, the company started to use the "Champagne of beers" nickname three years later. At one point, the beer was also available in champagne-style bottles.

No matter how popular the slogan is in the United States, it is incompatible with European Union rules making clear that goods infringing a protected designation of origin can be treated as counterfeit.

The 27-nation bloc has a system of protected geographical designations created to guarantee the true origin and quality of artisanal food, wine and spirits, and protect them from imitation.

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A's break fans' hearts again with move

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Ryan Thibodaux arrived in the Bay Area in 1995 from Texas and instantly became a fan of the Oakland Athletics.

The onetime Astros fan cheered slugger Mark McGwire, who hit 52 home runs the following year. He saw the glory days of Dave Stewart and Dennis Eckersley, and cheered on Eric Chavez, Jason Giambi and Miguel Tejada. There were \$2 BART rides and bargain bleacher seats in the third deck.

The A's "converted me over pretty quickly," he said.

All these years later, Thibodaux and many Oakland fans already were heartbroken about the state of their struggling team — small crowds, bad baseball and dismal winters watching top players being traded away or lost in free agency.

Now, the greatest disappointment yet: Yes, the A's are leaving for Las Vegas.

"This has seemed to be inevitable for a year or so, at least," Thibodaux said Thursday. "I'm still more saddened than I thought I would be."

The news came Wednesday night from team president

Dave Kaval, who said Oakland signed a binding agreement to buy land on a 49-acre site near the Las Vegas Strip to build the intimate ballpark that team leaders always coveted but say couldn't be pulled off in the Bay Area.

"This really is one of the saddest days," said lifelong fan Jason Bressler, 40, who grew up in suburban Alamo and now lives in Los Angeles. "Some of my best childhood memories were in Section 216 of the Coliseum with my friends and family, and when they were on the road, Bill King was the soundtrack of my youth. "Attending Game 4 of the 1989 World Series with my dad is an experience I'll cherish forever."

Even after moving out of the Bay Area and starting his own family, Bressler kept his allegiance, making it a "point to take in multiple games a year whether in Oakland or on the road.

"Now that they are leaving I can't help but feel like a big piece of my childhood is going with them," he said. "It pains me that I won't be able to share those same experiences with my kids moving forward."

Oakland's last professional

team lost its luster long ago for many supporters who were increasingly frustrated and furious about a rise in season ticket prices and \$30 parking fees — not to mention the carousel of players.

The A's drew an announced crowd of just 3,035 fans on Monday, April 3, for the first game of a series with the Cleveland Guardians. It rose to 3,407 the next night — but 11 of 13 Triple-A games that day attracted larger crowds and four of them more than doubled the A's total.

Naomi Arnst fondly remembers A's games with her father rooting for the old greats.

"I'm still crying inside about the Oakland A's. I have been a fan for 51 years," she wrote in a text message Thursday. "I used to go to games with my dad and watch Vida Blue pitch. I still have my Dagoberto Campaneris bat from bat day in 1974. Oh and many years later we lived each day for the 20-game win streak. And what about Catfish Hunter Day before he died of ALS."

This week, a billboard along a busy East Bay freeway advertises tickets starting at \$10.

One Twitter account, with the handle @OaklandPast,

tried to organize fans to make a statement. An April 11 post mused about about a sellout at the Coliseum to show their love for the A's, and said team owner John Fisher is "bad for the game of baseball, Oakland and bad for a storied franchise like the A's."

"Bring signs, let the world know the problem is NOT THE FANS!" the post said.

The team declined to comment on its attendance situation.

Manager Mark Kotsay, his coaches and the players are trying to survive, too. They lost 102 games in 2022 and are 3-16 heading into a weekend series starting Friday at Texas.

After being swept by the Cubs this week at home, the team had already lost five games by 10 or more runs. The only seasons since moving to Oakland in 1968 when the A's had more than five double-digit losses for an entire season were 1996 (eight), 2008 (eight), 1984 (seven) and 1979 (six).

The loyal fans, Thibodaux included, and the the men in the green-and-gold uniforms have known this day was coming.

"It hasn't been the same for a long time," he said.

Gooch leads after 1st round of LIV Golf in Australia

Associated Press

ADELAIDE, Australia — Taylor Gooch upstaged the more-fancied names on the LIV Golf tour by shooting a 10-under 62 Friday to take a four-stroke lead after the first round of the inaugural Australian tournament at The Grange.

The 31-year-old American started with a par on his opening hole in the shotgun-start format — the par-3 12th — but then had 10 birdies, including five in a row.

Two more players in the unfancied category — Richard Bland and Dean Burmester — shot 66s and were tied for second.

Five players were tied for fourth, including Danny Lee, who won the second LIV event in Arizona in mid-March.

"If anyone says they're not surprised at 10-under, they're lying," Gooch said. "It's the day that you work hard for ... it was one of those rounds where I was hitting it close and making a lot of putts, so it was fun."

The higher-profile names in the 48-player field were further behind on the leaderboard.

Sergio Garcia shot 68 and British Open champion Cameron Smith and Brooks Koepka had 69s. Phil Mickelson and Bubba

Watson had 70s and Patrick Reed and Dustin Johnson shot 71. Bryson DeChambeau had a 73.

LIV Golf and local organizers said there was a sellout crowd of 35,000 for the first day. Local media reported that there were long lines of fans waiting to enter the course when the golfers teed off shortly after midday in Adelaide.

"The energy was really high out there," said Smith, who is Australian. "It's nice to have a lot of people that are riding with you but it's also pretty stressful — you want to hit a good shot all the

time, it's not as free-flowing as what it typically is."

Johnson's team, Aces GC, led the team leaderboard entering the fourth tournament of the year. Charles Howell III, who won the season-opening event in Mexico and shot 69 on Friday, leads the overall individual standings ahead of Koepka, who won the last LIV tournament in Orlando.

The individual winner at The Grange will collect \$4 million of the total \$20 million purse.

The 14-event season continues next weekend at Sentosa Golf Club in Singapore.

Duran leads Red Sox to win over Twins

Associated Press

BOSTON — Jarren Duran lined one ball off Kenta Maeda's ankle to knock Minnesota's starter from the game and in the next inning sent another ball off the Green Monster to lead the Boston Red Sox to a 11-5 victory over Minnesota on Thursday.

Maeda (0-3) allowed a home run to Alex Verdugo to lead off the bottom of the first and left trailing 1-0 after taking Duran's 111 mph line drive off his ankle in the second inning. The Twins right-hander made the play to get the out at first and end the frame.

Emilio Pagan relieved Maeda and gave up five straight hits, including Duran's double, as Boston opened a 7-0 lead.

Tanner Houck (3-0) scattered four hits over his first six innings but gave up Willi Castro's two-run homer in the seventh. He also took Jose Miranda's line drive off his left foot in the seventh but remained in the game. Houck allowed three runs on six hits and a walk, striking out seven in seven innings.

Yankees 9, Angels 3: Nestor Cortes kept Shohei Ohtani and Mike Trout off the bases, Jose Trevino hit a three-run double in

a five-run first inning and New York beat visiting Los Angeles.

Ohtani and Trout each went 0 for 3 against Cortes, a fellow All-Star.

Isiah Kiner-Falefa made a pair of diving catches in center and hit a two-run single in a three-run seventh, and Anthony Rizzo went 3 for 3 with a pair of walks, raising his average to .344. New York (12-7) took two of three and has won five of its first six series.

Cortes (3-0) gave up three runs and four hits in six innings.

Patrick Sandoval (1-1) allowed five runs and four hits, tying his career high with six walks, in four innings.

Padres 7, Diamondbacks 5: Trent Grisham had two doubles and four RBIs, Xander Bogaerts added a two-run homer and visiting San Diego beat Arizona in Fernando Tatis Jr.'s return from an 80-game suspension.

Tatis was 0 for 5 with two strikeouts in his first regular-season game since 2021, batting leadoff and playing right field. He missed all of last season, first because of a broken left wrist and then because he tested positive for a performance-enhancing drug.

Brent Honeywell (2-0) tossed

two scoreless innings of relief. Josh Hader worked the ninth for his sixth save in as many chances. Arizona's Kyle Nelson (3-1) gave up two unearned runs in relief.

Mets 9, Giants 4: Pete Alonso hit his major league-leading ninth homer and drove in four runs as New York beat host San Francisco.

Eduardo Escobar and Jeff McNeil also homered for the Mets, who are 6-1 on their 10-game trip.

Rookie Kodai Senga allowed four runs and five hits, struck out four and walked four in five innings to become the second pitcher in franchise history to begin his career 3-0.

Alonso opened the scoring with a two-run shot in the fourth inning off Sean Manaea (0-1).

Dodgers 6, Cubs 2: James Outman hit a tiebreaking grand slam in the ninth inning for his second homer of the game, and visiting Los Angeles beat Chicago.

Max Muncy also homered for the banged-up Dodgers, who had dropped three of four.

Chicago had won a season-high four straight. Cody Bellinger homered against his former team

for the second time this season, but Michael Fulmer (0-2) struggled with his location in the ninth.

Caleb Ferguson (1-0) pitched a scoreless inning.

Pirates 4, Reds 3: Connor Joe and Jack Suwinski hit back-to-back home runs in the first inning, Roansy Contreras took a shutout into the seventh and Pittsburgh beat visiting Cincinnati.

Joe hit a three-run blast to center off Luke Weaver (0-1). Suwinski followed with a shot into the right-field stands to put the Pirates ahead 4-0.

Contreras (2-1) gave up one run and five hits in 6½ innings with eight strikeouts and two walks.

Rockies 5, Phillies 0: Ryan Feltner tossed 5½ scoreless innings, C.J. Cron homered and Colorado beat host Philadelphia to snap an eight-game skid.

Feltner (1-2) allowed just three hits. Justin Lawrence struck out four in 2½ relief innings and Pierce Johnson worked a scoreless ninth to complete the shutout.

Cron gave Feltner a cushion with a two-run shot to left in the first off Matt Strahm (1-2), who fanned a career-high 11 batters in 5½ innings.

Scherzer suspended 10 games after substance ejection

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Mets pitcher Max Scherzer was suspended for 10 games by Major League Baseball on Thursday following his ejection for having a foreign substance on his hand during a game.

Scherzer initially appealed the suspension but dropped his appeal hours later. In exchange, his fine was reduced from \$10,000 to \$5,000, according to a person familiar with negotiations between MLB and the players' union. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the agreement hadn't been announced.

Scherzer said shortly before New York's game at San Francisco that the Mets urged him to accept the suspension, adding that it was the best move for the team.

"I went through the appeal process. Looked at what that appeal process was going to look like. I thought I was going to get in front of a neutral arbitrator, but I wasn't. It was going to be through MLB. Given that process, I wasn't going to come out on top," Scherzer said. "I'm going to follow what the Mets wanted me to do and that was to accept the suspension and come to a settlement."

The appeal and suspension

were imposed by Michael Hill, MLB's senior vice president for on-field operations. Scherzer became the third pitcher suspended since the crackdown on sticky substances started in June 2021. Seattle's Héctor Santiago was penalized that June 28 and Arizona's Caleb Smith that Aug. 24, also 10-game penalties.

All three inspections that led to suspensions involved umpire Phil Cuzzi.

Scherzer, a three-time Cy Young Award winner, was ejected on Wednesday during the fourth inning of a game at Dodger Stadium. He claimed the stickiness was caused by

rosin and sweat and not by a foreign substance.

Cuzzi determined after the second inning that Scherzer's hand was stickier and darker than normal and ordered Scherzer to wash his hand, which Scherzer said he did with alcohol while a Major League Baseball official watched.

After the third inning, Cuzzi then determined the pocket of Scherzer's glove was "sticky," likely with too much rosin, and he ordered Scherzer to change gloves. The umpires then checked the 38-year-old right-hander again before the fourth, and his hands were even worse than before.

Warriors defeat Kings, now trail 2-1

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Stephen Curry scored 36 points, Kevon Looney matched his career high with 20 rebounds and the Golden State Warriors beat the Sacramento Kings 114-97 on Thursday night to cut their series deficit to 2-1.

As suspended star Draymond Green watched from home, the defending champions dominated without him as they have done so many times before. The fiery forward was suspended without pay for stepping on the chest of Domantas Sabonis in the fourth quarter Monday night in Game 2.

The Warriors also were without key defensive stopper Gary Payton II after the guard became ill Wednesday.

Curry shot 12 for 25 with six

3s while Andrew Wiggins added 20 points and seven rebounds for the Warriors, who never trailed and will now try to even the best-of-seven series in Game 4 on Sunday back on their home court at Chase Center.

Looney also had nine assists.

De'Aaron Fox had 26 points for the Kings.

76ers 102, Nets 97: Joel Embiid, limping throughout and perhaps lucky not to have been ejected for kicking a player in the groin area, blocked a potential tying basket with 8.8 seconds left and visiting Philadelphia beat Brooklyn for a 3-0 series lead.

Tyrese Maxey made the tie-breaking 3-pointer with 44 seconds left. The 76ers can sweep their way into the second round

with a victory Saturday in Brooklyn.

With James Harden having been ejected in the third quarter for another groin shot and Embiid not looking like his usual dominant self, Maxey took over the offense.

He scored 25 points, Harden had 21 and Embiid added 14 points and 10 rebounds.

Nets fans loudly booed the decision not to eject Embiid for kicking his leg up toward Nic Claxton's groin in the first quarter, after the Nets center stepped over him after he dunked and Embiid fouled him and fell to the court.

Mikal Bridges scored 26 points for the Nets.

Suns 129, Clippers 124: Devin Booker scored 45 points, Kevin Durant added 26 and vis-

iting Phoenix beat Kawhi Leonard-less Los Angeles to take a 2-1 lead in the Western Conference playoff series.

Leonard sat out because of a sprained right knee, the same injury that has sidelined fellow star Paul George since March 21. Leonard was hurt in Game 1, and played through it in Game 2, but afterward his condition didn't improve.

Booker shot 18 for 29 and had seven rebounds, three steals and two blocks while playing a game-high 44 minutes. He scored 38 points in Game 2. Norman Powell led the Clippers, scoring a career playoff-high 40 points on 14-of-22 shooting. Russell Westbrook added 30 points and 11 assists.

Game 4 is Saturday in Los Angeles.

Maple Leafs bounce back, even series with Lightning

Associated Press

TORONTO — John Tavares had his first playoff hat trick and the Toronto Maple Leafs rebounded from a poor playoff start with a lopsided 7-2 victory over the Tampa Bay Lightning on Thursday night to even the teams' first-round playoff series at a game apiece.

Mitch Marner had two goals and an assist, William Nylander added a goal and an assist and Zach Aston-Reese also scored for Toronto.

Morgan Rielly tied a franchise record with four assists. Auston Matthews also had two assists for the Maple Leafs, whose stars stepped up. Ilya Samsonov made 20 saves for Toronto after being pulled in Tuesday's 7-3 loss.

Ian Cole and Corey Perry scored for the Lightning, who were without injured defensemen Victor Hedman and Erik Cernak. Andrei Vasilevskiy, who has played every minute

of Lightning postseason action since 2020, allowed seven goals on 37 shots.

The series shifts to Florida, where Games 3 and 4 of the best-of-seven set are scheduled for Saturday and Monday.

Avalanche 3, Kraken 2: Devon Toews scored with 7:01 remaining to complete Colorado's rally from two goals down as the Avalanche beat visiting Seattle to even the first-round series at a game apiece.

Trailing 2-0 in the second period, Artturi Lehkonen and Valeri Nichushkin scored 48 seconds apart to tie the game. It set the stage for Toews, who knocked in a rebound for the defending Stanley Cup champions. Alexandar Georgiev finished with 27 saves.

Justin Schultz and Brandon Tanev scored for the Kraken, who won 3-1 in Game 1. Philipp Grubauer stopped 38 shots against his former team. He spent three seasons in Colorado before signing with Seat-

tle prior to the 2021-22 season.

Game 3 of the best-of-seven series is Saturday in Seattle.

Rangers 5, Devils 1: Chris Kreider scored two power-play goals in a three-goal second period and New York stunned New Jersey to take a 2-0 lead on the road in their first-round playoff series.

Patrick Kane added a goal and two assists and fellow trade deadline acquisition Vladimir Tarasenko scored for the second straight game as the Rangers again had their way with the young Devils.

Kaapo Kakko also scored and Adam Fox added two more assists to give him six in two games. Igor Shesterkin had a relatively easy night, making 21 saves.

Erik Haula scored for New Jersey.

Vitek Vanecsek finished with 26 saves in a game that got one-sided and chippy late.

The best-of-seven series shifts across the Hudson River

to Madison Square Garden for Games 3 and 4 on Saturday and Monday, respectively.

Golden Knights 5, Jets 2: Mark Stone scored two third-period goals and assisted on another in just his second game since returning from back surgery to give the Golden Knights a victory over the visiting Jets in Game 2 to even the first-round series.

Chandler Stephenson and William Karlsson each had a goal and an assist, Jack Eichel scored his first career playoff goal and Phil Kessel and Alex Pietrangolo each had two assists. Laurent Brossoit made 31 saves.

Stone's goals were his first since January. He underwent back surgery Jan. 31 and returned in time for this game.

Adam Lowry and Kevin Stenlund each scored for the Jets, and Connor Hellebuyck made 34 stops.

Game 3 is Saturday afternoon at Winnipeg.