

US to dock nuclear submarines in S. Korea

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Presidents Joe Biden and Yoon Suk Yeol on Wednesday were to sign an agreement that includes plans to have U.S. nuclear-armed submarines dock in South Korea for the first time in more than 40 years, a conspicuous show of support to Seoul amid growing concern about nuclear threats by North Korea, according to senior Biden administration officials.

The planned dock visits are a key element of what's being dubbed the "Washington Declaration," aimed at deterring North Korea from carrying out an attack on its neighbor. It is being unveiled as Biden is hosting Yoon for a state visit during a moment of heightened anxiety for both leaders over an increased pace of ballistic missile tests by North Korea over the last several months.

The three senior Biden administration officials, who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity ahead of the official announcement, said Biden and Yoon aides have been working on details of the plan for months and agreed that "occasional" and "very clear demonstrations of the strength"

of U.S. extended deterrence capabilities needed to be an essential aspect of the agreement.

The agreement seeks to allay South Korean fears over the North's aggressive nuclear weapons program and to ward off the country from restarting its own nuclear program, which it gave up nearly 50 years ago when it signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The United States and South Korea would also coordinate more deeply on nuclear response strategy in the event of the North attacking the South — but operational control of such weapons would remain in U.S. control, and no nuclear weapons are being deployed onto South Korean shores.

Biden and Yoon did not directly address the agreement during their remarks at a pomp-filled arrival ceremony before nearly 7,000 guests on the White House lawn on Wednesday morning before their private talks. Biden stressed both nations' commitment to work together to ensure a secure Indo-Pacific.

"We're taking on the challenges of the world, and we're taking them on together,"

Biden said.

The state visit comes as the U.S. and South Korea mark the 70th year of the countries' alliance that began at the end of the Korean War and committed the U.S. to help South Korea defend itself, particularly from North Korea. Approximately 28,500 U.S. troops are currently based in South Korea.

"Why did they sacrifice their lives for this faraway country and for the people that you've never met?" Yoon said of the U.S. troops who served during the war. "That was for one noble cause: to defend freedom."

Additionally, the agreement calls for the U.S. and South Korean militaries to strengthen joint training and better integrate South Korean military assets into the joint strategic deterrence effort. As part of the declaration, South Korea will reaffirm its commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, an agreement signed by several major nuclear and non-nuclear powers that pledged their cooperation to stem the spread of nuclear technology, the officials said.

Taliban kill militant behind bombing at Kabul airport

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A ground assault by the Taliban killed the Islamic State militant who spearheaded the August 2021 suicide bombing at the Kabul airport that left 13 U.S. troops and about 170 Afghans dead during the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, U.S. officials said Tuesday.

Initially, neither the United States — nor apparently the Taliban — were aware the mastermind was dead. He was killed during a series of battles early this month in southern Afghanistan between the Taliban and the ISIS affiliate, according to several officials.

But in the past few days, U.S. intelligence confirmed "with high confidence" that the ISIS leader had been killed, a senior administration official said. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters.

Late Tuesday night, Pentagon press secretary Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder issued a

statement confirming the plotter had been killed by the Taliban. "The United States was not involved in this operation," Ryder said.

Over the weekend, the U.S. military began to inform the parents of the 11 Marines, the sailor and the soldier who were killed in the blast at Abbey Gate, and they shared the information in a private group messaging chat. The father of one of the Marines said the death of his son's killer brings little comfort.

"Whatever happens, it's not going to bring Taylor back and I understand that," Darin Hoover, the father of Staff Sgt. Darin Taylor Hoover, said in a phone call with The Associated Press. "About the only thing his mom and I can do now is be an advocate for him. All we want is the truth. And we're not getting it. That's the frustrating part."

Hoover said he and his son's mother, Kelly Henson, have spent the past year and a half grieving his death and praying for ac-

countability from the Biden administration for the handling of the withdrawal.

He added that the Marines provided only limited information to him and did not identify the ISIS leader or give the circumstances of his death. U.S. officials declined to provide many details because of sensitivities in the intelligence gathering.

The administration official said it was their "moral responsibility" to let the victims' families know that the "mastermind" and "person most at fault for the airport attack" had been taken off the battlefield. The official added that intelligence officials determined the leader had "remained a key plotter and overseer" for the group.

The Afghanistan-based offshoot of ISIS — called Islamic State-Khorasan — has up to 4,000 members and is the Taliban's top military threat. The group has continued to carry out attacks in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover, especially against the country's minority groups.

Russian warplanes intercepted over Baltic Sea

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Three Russian military planes were intercepted by allied aircraft over the Baltic Sea, Germany's air force said Wednesday.

Two Sukhoi Su-27 fighter jets and an Ilyushin Il-2 on Tuesday were flying without their transponders on, the German military said.

NATO allies have long taken issue with Moscow over its military's failure to file flight plans or use transponders. Not following those procedures can pose a safety hazard because they make jets operating in international airspace invisible to civilian radar.

The German air force said Eurofighter jets from both Germa-

ny and the United Kingdom were involved in the intercept, which was carried out without incident.

Such encounters are not uncommon over the Baltic and Black seas, where NATO aircraft routinely police the skies for potential intrusions by the Russians.

Still, encounters on occasion

can become tense.

In March, a Russian fighter jet collided with a U.S. drone over the Black Sea, causing the unmanned aircraft to crash into international waters.

At the time, U.S. European Command said the incident followed a pattern of dangerous actions by Russian pilots in international airspace.

Korea Medal of Honor recipient's remains ID'd

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The remains of a U.S. Army corporal killed during the Korean War have been identified 73 years after he was declared missing and was awarded the Medal of Honor for bravery, U.S. and South Korean officials said Wednesday.

Cpl. Luther H. Story of Buena Vista, Ga., was posthumously awarded the nation's highest military award for his actions during an intense attack by the North Korean army on Sept. 1, 1950.

U.S. officials said Story "fearlessly stood in the middle of the road, throwing grenades into the truck. Out of grenades, he crawled to his squad, gathered up additional grenades, and again attacked the vehicle."

He was wounded in action and stayed behind so his company could get to safety.

"When last seen, he was firing every weapon available and fighting off another hostile assault," U.S. officials said.

Story's remains could not be identified, and Gen. Omar Bradley presented Story's father the Medal of Honor at a Pentagon ceremony in 1951. The corporal was declared un-

recoverable — his remains still missing — on Jan. 16, 1954.

In June 2021, 652 people killed in the Korean War were disinterred and, using DNA, dental and anthropological analysis on the human remains, Story's remains were discovered.

"The supreme sacrifice and heroism of Corporal Luther Story is illustrative of the freedom, security and prosperity the South Korean people have today," the White House and South Korea said in a joint statement.

The announcement comes as President Joe Biden welcomed South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol for a state visit.

On Tuesday evening, Yoon and his wife, Kim Keon Hee, made an evening stop to the Korean War Memorial with Biden and first lady Jill Biden. They participated in a wreath-laying ceremony next to the memorial's Pool of Remembrance.

While they were there, the leaders met with Story's living relative, his niece Judy Wade and her spouse, Joseph Wade.

Both nations continue to work to identify all missing soldiers.

China, Ukraine leaders talk for 1st time since war began

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he and Chinese leader Xi Jinping had a "long and meaningful" phone conversation Wednesday, their first known contact since Russia invaded Ukraine more than a year ago.

The phone call lasted nearly an hour and was a significant development that came two months after Beijing, which has long been aligned with Russia, said it wanted to act as a mediator in the war against Ukraine and after Xi visited Moscow last month.

It also comes as Ukraine is readying its forces for an expected spring counteroffensive.

Zelenskyy was upbeat about the call, which gave him a chance to try to drive a wedge between Moscow and its key ally Beijing. Russian President Vladimir Putin is eager to keep Xi close as a counter to the United States, which has sided with Ukraine.

"I believe that this call, as well as the appointment of Ukraine's ambassador to China, will give a powerful impetus to the development of our bilateral relations," Zelenskyy said in a Facebook post without elaborating. His office said more details would be published later in the day.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry

statement said Beijing's "core stance is to facilitate talks for peace," announcing that an envoy — a former ambassador to Russia — would visit Ukraine in pursuit of a "political settlement." The Chinese government has denied any plans to provide Russia with weaponry to help it fight the war, which Putin launched in February 2022.

The statement struck a positive tone, giving a nod to Kyiv's insistence that its territory cannot be broken up by Russia's annexations of land while making clear that Beijing values its long-standing ties with Ukraine.

"Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity is the political foundation of China-Ukraine relations," the statement said. "China's readiness to develop relations with Ukraine is consistent and clear-cut. No matter how the international situation evolves, China will work with Ukraine to advance mutually beneficial cooperation."

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova commended China's approach, praising Beijing's "readiness to strive to establish a (peace) negotiations process," while slamming what she called Kyiv's "rejection of any sound initiatives aimed at a settlement."

McCarthy alters debt bill as he seeks votes

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republicans made post-midnight changes to their sweeping debt ceiling package to win over holdouts, as Speaker Kevin McCarthy pushed ahead Wednesday with plans to launch debate and round up support from his slim majority for a vote this week.

Facing a revolt from Midwestern Republicans over doing away with biofuel tax credits that were just passed into law last year by President Joe Biden, GOP House members relented and allowed the tax credits to stay on the books.

Republicans also agreed to quickly launch the bolstered work requirements for recipients of government aid, starting in 2024 as proposed by another holdout, Freedom Caucus' Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla.,

who has led previous challenges to McCarthy.

The changes were approved at a 2 a.m. session of the House Rules Committee despite earlier repeated insistence by McCarthy and his leadership team that there would be no changes.

House Republicans were to meet privately early Wednesday to discuss next steps. The floor debate was expected to launch at noon Wednesday, a final vote on the sprawling package likely pushes to Thursday.

Republicans hold a five-seat majority and face several absences this week, leaving McCarthy with almost no votes to spare.

"This week, we will pass the bill on this floor," McCarthy told reporters late Tuesday.

The top Democrat on the panel, Rep. Jim McGovern, of

Massachusetts, derided the "midnight seance" that produced the final package, particularly "cruelly" imposing stricter work requirements on recipients of food stamps and other government aid.

"Taking food away from people is a rotten thing to do," said McGovern in the early hours of Wednesday morning.

While the 320-page package has almost no chance of becoming law, McCarthy is using it as a strategy to shake up the debate. Biden has so far refused to engage with House Republicans on what the White House calls "hostage taking" over the debt ceiling, and threatened to veto the package, which couples a debt ceiling increase with restrictions on federal spending. McCarthy hopes passage will kickstart talks with Democrats.

But McCarthy acknowledged after closed-door meetings late Tuesday that not all House Republicans were fully on board with the proposal. He insisted that passing this bill would be merely a starting point for negotiations with Biden and Democrats, and not the final product.

"There's a number of members that will vote for it going forward and say there are some concerns they have," he said. But he said they will also say they are ready to vote anyway: "They want to make sure the negotiation goes forward."

It's a first big test for the president and the Republican speaker, coming at a time of increased political anxiety about the need to raise the federal debt limit, now at \$31 trillion, to keep paying the country's already accrued debts.

'High probability' Japanese lander crashed on the moon

Associated Press

A Japanese company's spacecraft apparently crashed while attempting to land on the moon Wednesday, losing contact moments before touchdown and sending flight controllers scrambling to figure out what happened.

More than six hours after communication ceased, the Tokyo company space finally confirmed what everyone had suspected, saying there was "a high probability" that the lander had slammed into the moon.

It was a disappointing setback for ispace, which after a 4½-month mission had been on the verge of doing what only three countries have done: successfully land a spacecraft on the moon.

Takeshi Hakamada, founder and CEO of ispace, held out hope even after contact was lost as the lander descended the final 33 feet. Flight controllers peered at

their screens in Tokyo as minutes went by with only silence from the moon.

A grim-faced team surrounded Hakamada as he announced that the landing likely failed. Official word finally came in a statement: "It has been determined that there is a high probability that the lander eventually made a hard landing on the moon's surface."

If all had gone well, ispace would have been the first private business to pull off a lunar landing. Hakamada vowed to try again.

Only three governments have successfully touched down on the moon: Russia, the U.S. and China. An Israeli nonprofit tried to land on the moon in 2019, but its spacecraft was destroyed on impact.

Named Hakuto, Japanese for white rabbit, the spacecraft had targeted Atlas crater in the northeastern section of the moon's near side.

War-weary Sudanese crowd at borders amid shaky truce

Associated Press

CAIRO — Crowds of families have been growing at Sudan's border crossing with Egypt and at a main port, desperately trying to escape their country's violence and sometimes waiting for days with little food or shelter, witnesses said Wednesday. In the capital Khartoum, the intensity of fighting eased on the second day of a three-day truce.

Taking advantage of relative calm, many residents in Khartoum and the neighboring city of Omdurman emerged from their homes to seek food and water, lining up at bakeries or grocery stores, after days of being trapped inside by the fighting between the army and a rival paramilitary group. Some inspected shops or homes that had been destroyed or looted.

"There is a sense of calm in my area and neighborhoods," said Mahasen Ali, a tea vendor who

lives in Khartoum's southern neighborhood of May. "But all are afraid of what's next."

Still, gunfire and explosions could be heard in the city, though residents said clashes were in more limited pockets, mainly around the military's headquarters and the Republican Palace in central Khartoum and around bases in Omdurman across the Nile River.

With the future of any truce uncertain, many took the opportunity to join the tens of thousands who have streamed out of the region of the capital in recent days, trying to get out of the crossfire between the forces of Sudan's two top generals. The generals' war for power since April 15 has pushed the population to a near breaking point. Food has grown more difficult to obtain, electricity is cut off across much of the capital and other cities, and many hospitals have shut down.

Russian spy plot fizzles as stolen ID trial nears

Associated Press

U.S. prosecutors who introduced Russian spy intrigue into the case of a couple accused of living for decades in Hawaii under identities stolen from dead babies are now saying they don't want jurors to hear about photographs showing them wearing foreign uniforms.

A U.S. judge granted the request last week, ruling that the uniforms are not relevant to the upcoming trial for charges involving identity theft and passport fraud. Defense attorneys have said from the start those uniforms were worn once for fun.

When the former U.S. defense contractor and his wife were arrested last year, prosecutors suggested the case was about more than just identity theft.

According to prosecutors, Walter Glenn Primrose and Gwynn Darle Morrison are the real names of the couple who have been fraudulently living for decades under stolen identities Bobby Fort and Julie Montague. Prosecutors say Primrose spent more than 20 years in the Coast Guard as Bobby Fort, where he obtained secret-level security clearance. After retiring in 2016, he used the secret clearance for his defense job, prosecutors said.

There is no indication in court papers why the couple in 1987 assumed the identities of deceased children, who would have been

over a decade younger than them.

A search of the couple's home in Kapolei, a Honolulu suburb, turned up Polaroids of them wearing jackets that appear to be authentic KGB uniforms, an invisible ink kit, documents with coded language and maps showing military bases, prosecutors said.

They have pleaded not guilty to conspiracy, false statement in a passport application and aggravated identity theft. Trial is scheduled for next month but it will likely be delayed because a new lawyer was appointed for Primrose last week.

At a video hearing Tuesday, his new attorney, Marc Victor, said he thinks the earliest he can be ready for trial is next year.

Prosecutors last month filed a motion "to preclude examination or testimony concerning Defendants wearing or being photographed in foreign military uniforms." Prosecutors said they were irrelevant to the charges, and U.S. District Judge Leslie Kobayashi agreed.

Defense attorneys for the couple have said they took a photo as a joke.

In an email from prosecutors to defense attorneys, Assistant U.S. Attorney Tom Muehleck wrote that a witness said the photos were taken sometime in the 1990s and U.S. agents were given the "alleged uniform."

Defense attorneys said that debunks the spy theory.

Call of Duty to make tabletop debut in 2024

BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL

Stars and Stripes

One of the most widely played video games among U.S. service members is headed to the tabletop.

Call of Duty: The Board Game is in development and expected to be ready sometime next year, Activision said Monday.

The video game franchise has been among the most commercially successful since its debut as a World War II-themed first-person shooter in 2003. It has been praised for its realistic gameplay and storylines that often mirror real-life military operations and technology.

U.S. and U.K. military esports teams regularly play the game and have competed against professional gamers during the Call of Duty Endowment Bowl competitions.

The board game will include two to four players, figurines of familiar game characters and an "intuitive combat system designed to replicate the feel of Call of Duty," Activision said in a statement.

Gameplay also will mirror some of the maps of towns, buildings and combat environments from the video series.

A short trailer video posted on the Activision website starts with typical dramatic music and cartoon renderings of familiar player avatars in combat gear moving across the screen.

The video shows no images of the actual game and ends with "coming soon."

The board game will be "a series of products within the same game system, starting with the initial core sets," Bryan Pope, one of the game's designers, told entertainment website Polygon. "From there additional products will add new features to the game, such as new operators, weapons, maps and even new modes of play over time."

Activision said it will release more game details in the next couple of weeks.

The board game is being designed by Arcane Wonders, which has worked on popular games such as Mage Wars, Sheriff of Nottingham and Spoils of War.

Arcane Wonders has launched a Kickstarter campaign for the board game, which has met with criticism from some who perceived crowdfunding as unnecessary given the franchise's success.

Arcane Wonders defended the campaign, saying that board game companies are much smaller than video game makers.

Barbie with Down syndrome unveiled

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Toy company Mattel revealed its first Barbie doll representing a person with Down syndrome on Tuesday.

Mattel collaborated with the National Down Syndrome Society to create the Barbie and "ensure the doll accurately represents a person with Down syndrome," the company said.

Design features of the new Barbie were made under guidance from NDSS, Mattel said. In addition to portraying some physical characteristics of a person with Down syndrome, the Barbie's clothing and accessories carry special meaning.

The blue and yellow on the doll's dress, accompanied by butterflies, represent symbols and colors associated with Down syn-

drome awareness. And the three chevrons on the Barbie's necklace represent how people with Down syndrome have three copies of their 21st chromosome, Mattel said.

In addition, the Barbie wears ankle foot orthotics, which some children with Down syndrome use.

"This means so much for our community, who for the first time, can play with a Barbie doll that looks like them," NDSS President and CEO Kandi Pickard said in a statement. "This Barbie serves as a reminder that we should never underestimate the power of representation."

Barbie's new doll representing a person with Down syndrome is part of Mattel's 2023 Fashionistas line, which is aimed at increasing diversity and inclusivity.

NFL Draft back to putting QBs on top

Associated Press

Quarterbacks are back on top in the NFL Draft.

A year after the first 19 picks were non-QBs and Kenny Pickett was the only signal-caller selected in the first round, this draft class is loaded with potential franchise players.

Bryce Young and C.J. Stroud have been the center of attention since before last year's draft even took place. On Thursday night, they could become the ninth pair of QBs selected 1-2 in the Super Bowl era.

Anthony Richardson and Will Levis should make it four QBs in the top 15, which has happened only five times previously. If they all go in the top 10, it'll be the second time ever.

Then there's Hendon Hooker, who may end up being a late first-round pick despite his age and knee injury.

There's no consensus at No. 1 this year like there was in 2021 when everyone knew Trevor Lawrence was going to Jacksonville, but momentum has been building toward Young going first to Carolina. The 2021 Heis-

man Trophy winner at Alabama is an overwhelming favorite to go No. 1, according to FanDuel Sportsbook.

The Panthers have been on the clock since they made a blockbuster trade with Chicago in March, leaping from No. 9 to have their choice of QBs.

"You go get the guy that you want," Panthers general manager Scott Fitterer said at the combine. "If you have conviction on a guy, you go get him. It's pretty simple that way. If you don't know and you're going to give all these resources to go up and get it, you're hurting your team in the long run. You better be right. You better have conviction if you do move up. But when you do that, you're all-in."

Young has all the tools. He excelled in a pro-style offense, can make the necessary throws, has strong pocket awareness and the ability to create off-schedule plays. The biggest concern surrounding Young is his size. He measured at 5-foot-9, 204 pounds at the combine.

No quarterback who weighed under 207 pounds at the com-

bine has been drafted in the first round. But Young is too talented to slip beyond the Panthers or Houston Texans at No. 2.

"If you just looked at it analytically, how many guys at that size have (become) superstars as undersized quarterbacks?" Panthers coach Frank Reich said. "And there are some, like Drew Brees ... and it all goes back to that recipe. How much are we going to weigh that? How important is that to us as an organization? And that's the process that we go through. But, everything is a consideration. ... It's also a consideration (with) his playmaking ability, his accuracy, his leadership, his instincts. It's the same thing with C.J., Levis, Richardson, all of those guys. You look at every single one of those things, and it's a sliding scale on how you evaluate them."

Stroud was a finalist for the Heisman the past two seasons at Ohio State. He has the prototypical size at 6-foot-3, 214 pounds and is a precision passer who makes smart decisions. He didn't do too much outside the pocket but showed superior

playmaking ability in a College Football Playoff semifinal loss to Georgia.

"The old scouting adage is if you can do it once, you can do it. So you know he does have that ability." NFL Network draft analyst Daniel Jeremiah said. "He is the purest thrower of the bunch. Just accurate. If you value decision-making, accuracy, as pretty much everybody does, C.J. Stroud is really, really solid in that."

Levis has the size, 6-foot-4, 229 pounds, that teams desire and experience playing in a pro-style offense at Kentucky. He has a strong arm and he's athletic, but also showed a propensity for making poor decisions.

"He has the traits to do so many things that Young and Stroud can't, but evaluators are wondering if he will be able to figure out the mechanics," ESPN draft analyst Todd McShay said.

Levis certainly doesn't lack confidence.

"I want to be the greatest of all time. I think you're crazy if you don't think that way," he said.

Young? Stroud? Panthers reach consensus on No. 1 pick

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Carolina Panthers coach Frank Reich said he and general manager Scott Fitterer have agreed on which quarterback the team will select with the No. 1 pick in the NFL Draft.

But Reich said the team won't announce who that is until Thursday night, when the draft begins.

The Panthers are choosing between Alabama's Bryce Young, Ohio State's C.J. Stroud, Kentucky's Will Levis and Flor-

ida's Anthony Richardson in an effort to upgrade a quarterback position that has been in transition for the last five seasons.

Fitterer said last week that he had waited to ask Reich who he preferred at No. 1 so that nothing would cloud either decision-maker's judgment.

Fitterer finally walked into Reich's office Monday and popped the question on who he prefers — and both agreed on the same QB.

"It was kind of like a proposal — and I said yes," Reich joked Tuesday. "But there is consensus and we are excited."

Young remains the overwhelming favorite to be the first Panthers QB selected No. 1 overall since Cam Newton in 2011, according to FanDuel Sportsbook, although Levis has moved ahead of Stroud.

This is a hugely important pick for the Panthers, who have not been to the playoffs since 2017 largely because of inconsistency at the quarterback position.

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Booker scores 47, Suns win series over Clippers

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Devin Booker unleashed a torrent of offense in the third quarter rarely seen in NBA playoff history, hitting shots from every corner of the gym.

The Phoenix Suns needed just about every one of them.

Booker scored 47 points, including 25 in a spectacular third quarter, to lead the Suns past the Los Angeles Clippers 136-130 on Tuesday night and win the Western Conference first-round playoff series in five games.

"It was spiritual," Suns forward Kevin Durant said of watching Booker's third quarter. "I don't scream too much in games as I get older, but when he hit that three at the top of the key, I felt that energy and I know everyone in the crowd felt it. We

feed off his aggression."

The Clippers didn't go quietly, nearly coming back from a 20-point deficit early in the fourth, hitting four straight threes at one point to quickly close the gap.

Los Angeles had multiple chances to tie in the final three minutes, but could never convert. Durant made a layup to push Phoenix's lead to 134-130 and then made two free throws to put the Suns up six with 31.3 seconds left.

"I think it's a good lesson for us moving forward," Booker said. "Don't play with your food. Finish out as strong as you can. Keep playing all the way until the whistle blows."

Durant finished with 31 points while Deandre Ayton had 21 points and 11 rebounds. Booker shot 19 of 27 from the field, in-

cluding 4 of 7 from three-point range.

Durant's final free throws capped a wild back-and-forth second half that saw the Clippers take a 71-61 lead early in the third.

But the Suns — led by Booker's stellar shot making — unleashed a powerful wave of offense, pouring in 50 points in the third quarter to take a 111-94 lead into the fourth. Booker made 10 of 11 shots in the rally, including three three-pointers and a tomahawk fastbreak dunk.

"When he's going like that, we're not calling any plays," Suns coach Monty Williams said.

The flustered Clippers had no answer until it was too late. Norman Powell led Los Angeles with 27 points while Mason

Plumlee scored 20 off the bench.

It was a tough night for Russell Westbrook, who scored 14 points on 3 of 18 shooting and had a costly turnover in the final minute, dishing a pass to Terance Mann, who wasn't expecting the ball. Westbrook also missed a contested layup with 2:19 left that could have tied the game.

Westbrook said he was proud of the team's effort. He added eight rebounds and eight assists.

"We stayed with our principles and kept fighting," said the nine-time All-Star. "Kept competing. Didn't give up on the next play and gave ourselves a chance."

The Suns will play the top-seeded Denver Nuggets in the next round. Game 1 is Saturday in Denver.

Jokic, Nuggets advance, eliminate Timberwolves

Associated Press

DENVER — Michael Malone surveyed the scene Tuesday night and wondered where everyone was — not just Denver's fans, but the Nuggets themselves.

"Our team was kind of like the crowd tonight — we were late arriving," Malone said after Nikola Jokic and Jamal Murray helped the top-seeded Nuggets overcome a slow start to eliminate the Minnesota Timberwolves 112-109 in Game 5 of their Western Conference first-round playoff series.

Anthony Edwards, who led Minnesota with 29 points, hit the back iron on a 27-foot three-point attempt at the buzzer that would have sent the game into overtime.

The top-seeded Nuggets will face the fourth-seeded Phoenix Suns, who eliminated in the Los Angeles Clippers in five games, in the second round, which begins Saturday night in Denver.

Despite Denver being the better seed, Jokic called the Suns "the favorite to win the championship. They have an amazing, amazing group of guys, well-coached." He went up and down their roster, saving special praise for Chris Paul, Kevin Durant and Deandre Ayton. "So it's going to be a big challenge for us."

Jokic also applauded the Wolves, who

were without top perimeter defender Jaden McDaniels (broken hand) and center Naz Reid (broken wrist) for the series and lost Kyle Anderson to an eye injury in Game 4.

"And they still managed to be in every game except Game 1. That was the only game that was an easy win for us," Jokic said. "They did a good job. We were just a little bit better this time."

Jokic had a triple-double and scored 28 points despite missing 21 of 29 shots, and Murray scored 35 points to help the Nuggets overcome an early 13-point deficit and hand Malone his record 25th career playoff victory for Denver, one more than Doug Moe had.

A rainstorm slowed traffic into downtown Denver and an earlier start than normal had fans streaming into Ball Arena a little late.

"I looked up, there's a lot of empty seats and coaches said, well, the weather's really bad. But the way we played that first quarter was like a regular-season game," Malone said. "And then slowly but surely, I felt Jamal made a couple of shots. And Jamal plays with so much emotion. And I think he got our team going. ... Jamal just wouldn't quit, you know? And he made big shot after big shot."

Good thing for Denver, too, because Jokic

and Michael Porter Jr. were a combined 11 for 39 from the floor and the Nuggets fell behind by 13 in the first quarter, a sluggish start that stumped Malone.

"I couldn't put my finger on it as it was going on," he said. "Was it nerves? Was it the moment? Was it too big for us trying to close out a team? I don't think it was. We just showed up like we weren't playing hard. But it was not the necessary physicality and aggression and intensity that is needed to close the team out."

Hawks 119, Celtics 117: Trae Young had 38 points and drained a long go-ahead three-pointer from beyond the top of the key with 2.8 seconds left to help visiting Atlanta cap a late comeback and beat Boston.

The victory trims Boston's lead in the first-round playoff series to 3-2 and sends the teams back to Atlanta for Game 6 on Thursday.

John Collins added 22 points for Atlanta, who played without Dejeune Murray, who was suspended for one game for bumping official Gediminas Petraitis with his chest while walking off the court after the end of Game 4.

Jaylen Brown scored 35 points and Jayson Tatum added 19 for the Celtics, who were outscored 37-25 in the fourth quarter.

Islanders get bounces, top Hurricanes

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — The New York Islanders were ready to capitalize, both on a bizarre bounce of the puck and mistakes by the Carolina Hurricanes. That was enough to keep them alive in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Brock Nelson scored by knocking in an airborne puck that had bounced off the face of Carolina's Sebastian Aho, and the Islanders added two goals following turnovers to beat the Hurricanes 3-2 on Tuesday night and extend their first-round playoff series.

The Islanders trailed 3-1 in the best-of-seven series, but staved off elimination by scoring the game's first two goals and never trailing while playing in front of a rowdy crowd eager to see the Hurricanes become the first team to advance to this year's second round.

"We believe in one another,

we believe in this group and what we can do and how we can play," Islanders captain Anders Lee said. "That was no different coming into this evening. ... We came in tonight and played a very solid hockey game and put everything on the line."

Mathew Barzal had the winner, taking a turnover by Martin Necas the other way to beat Anti Raanta late in the second period for a 3-1 lead. Carolina closed to within one midway through the third, but Ilya Sorokin and the Islanders tenaciously held that lead as the Hurricanes ran extended zone time with an empty-net attacker.

Instead, New York sent the series back to UBS Arena for Friday's Game 6.

Pierre Engvall got the Islanders a lead midway through the first period after getting a 1-on-1 shot at Raanta off Carolina's failed clear, while Sorokin finished with 34 saves to lead the

Islanders.

Aho — who exited briefly after Nelson's goal — and Paul Stastny scored for the Hurricanes, who were coming off a 5-2 win that ended an eight-game postseason road losing streak dating to 2021.

Aho's score off a behind-the-net feed from Seth Jarvis cut the deficit to 3-2 midway through the third period. But the Hurricanes came up short on a night that included the Islanders successfully challenging a first-period put-away on Stefan Noesen's one-timer for coming on an uncalled offside as Carolina pushed into the zone with the man advantage.

Raanta finished with 19 saves, while Aho and defenseman Brent Burns both rang the post on a frustrating night for the Hurricanes. And now, they'll have to win on the road again to avoid a Game 7 at home Sunday.

"I like the way we played,

played hard," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We had a couple of mistakes that cost us, but there wasn't a ton of those. It's just the bounces didn't go our way. It's very simple."

Nelson's goal stood out. He swung at the puck after it had struck Aho near the mouth and was falling to the ice, batting it past Raanta on the right side early in the second for a wild score.

"(Engvall) with his speed and size kind of found himself in the slot with a little lane," Nelson said. "Unfortunately it hits a guy in the face. For me it was nice, it was right there and I was able to get a stick on it in the air and go in."

Aho eventually skated back to the bench while doubled over, then straight to the locker room. He returned midway through the period after getting stitches.

Seguin, Stars take 3-2 series lead with win over Wild

Associated Press

DALLAS — Tyler Seguin and the Dallas Stars are making the Minnesota Wild pay for all of those penalties, and now have the series lead for the first time.

The Stars took advantage early in Game 5, and went on to a 4-0 victory Tuesday night.

Seguin scored his fourth power-play of the series only 2:22 into the game, and just eight seconds after Wild forward Marcus Foligno's five-minute major penalty and game misconduct for a knee-on-knee hit on Radek Faksa.

"Minnesota is one of the most penalized teams in the league, we knew we were going to get power plays," Stars coach Pete DeBoer said. "So the goal was to make them pay for it. And we're doing that, and we've got to keep doing that."

Jason Robertson also had a

power-play goal in the first period, and like Seguin also had an assist. Roope Hintz had three assists and now has the highest-scoring playoff series ever for a Dallas player, while Jake Oettinger stopped 27 shots for his second career postseason shutout — and the first by any goalie this postseason.

Faksa remained face down on the ice after the collision with Foligno near the blue line, which came right after the Stars center had knocked the puck out of the air with his hand. Faksa had to be helped off the ice once he got up, but returned to the game midway through the first period.

"I'm keeping my lane, it's unfortunate we both hit in that leg area. I wouldn't say it's a knee-on-knee, I hit him in the upper area," Foligno said. "He's rotat-

ing out of the way, I don't move my leg at all. I stay my course. That's what I see. If you want to give me a penalty, for sure. But a five-minute and a game misconduct ... I just don't agree with that part."

Wild coach Dean Evason said his group had watched the replay several times, and that "if anything, we felt their guy moved and our guy did not."

Officials also reviewed the play, upholding the major penalty and issuing the game misconduct after a lengthy look at replays.

"It took some life out of us for sure," Evason said.

Mason Marchment scored early in the second period and Ty Dellandrea added an empty-netter with 3:57 left for the Stars, who will try to close out the first-round playoff series Friday night in Game 6 at Min-

nesota. The seventh game would be Sunday in Dallas.

Oilers 6, Kings 3: Nick Bjugstad scored twice as host Edmonton beat Los Angeles to take a 3-2 lead in the first-round playoff series.

The Oilers are a win away from advancing to the second round. Game 6 is Saturday in Los Angeles.

Leon Draisaitl, Evander Kane, Zach Hyman and Brett Kulak also scored for Edmonton. Connor McDavid and defensemen Mattias Ekholm and Darnell Nurse had two assists apiece. Stuart Skinner made 25 saves.

Hyman's goal came when he was hit in the face on a shot by Evan Bouchard and the puck deflected past the Kings' Phoenix Copley for the Oilers' fifth goal of the game. Hyman stayed in the game.

Astros hand Rays 1st 2023 home loss

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Luis Garcia scattered three hits over six innings and the Houston Astros ended the Tampa Bay Rays' 14-game season-opening home winning streak, 5-0 on Tuesday night.

Only three teams had a longer run than the Rays, who are 20-4 overall.

"It was a little weird," Tampa Bay manager Kevin Cash said of the first home loss. "Walking in there (the clubhouse) with no music or anything like that, but I'm guessing they'll get the music back on soon."

The 1880 Chicago White Stockings, who became the Cubs, hold the MLB record for the longest season-opening home streak with 21. The 1886 Detroit Wolverines had an 18-game stretch, while the 1884 St. Louis Maroons of the Union Association won 16 in a row, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

The announced crowd for the game between the MLB-best Rays and the defending World Series champion Astros at Tropicana Field was just 9,916.

Garcia (2-2) struck out seven, walked two and allowed just one runner to reach scoring position. The right-hander was coming off a start last Wednesday in which he gave up two hits over seven shutout innings in an 8-1 victory over the Toronto Blue Jays.

"Garcia, he was great, especially against a hot team and a very good offensive team," Houston manager Dusty Baker said. "He had command of every pitch."

Reds 7, Rangers 6: Jonathan India hit a go-ahead, two-run single to cap a six-run eighth inning, and host Cincinnati rallied from a 6-0 deficit to beat Texas.

Nick Senzel had two RBI singles, one in the seventh for the Reds' first run and another with two outs in the eighth that made it 6-3. Pinch-hitter Jake Fraley

followed with a two-run double against Ian Kennedy (0-1), and India's single off Kennedy completed the rally.

Reiver Sanmartin (1-0) worked a scoreless eighth, and Alexis Díaz pitched the ninth for his second save in two nights.

Giants 5, Cardinals 4: Blake Sabol hit a game-ending two-run homer in the ninth inning and host San Francisco rallied past St. Louis.

With two outs and a runner on second, Sabol sent Ryan Helsley's 1-2 offering over the wall in center field for his first career walk-off homer. Helsley (0-2) blew his third save of the year.

Mike Yastrzemski had an RBI double earlier in the ninth and homered in the fourth for the Giants, who have won four straight.

Dodgers 8, Pirates 7: Chris Taylor hit a go-ahead, three-run homer in the eighth inning against Colin Holderman (0-1) as visiting Los Angeles rallied from a five-run deficit to beat Pittsburgh.

The Pirates' seven-game winning streak ended. It was their longest since an 11-game run in 2018.

Yency Almonte (2-0) struck out two in a scoreless seventh and Shelby Miller sent the side down in order in the ninth for his first save in the majors.

Red Sox 8, Orioles 6: Jarren Duran hit a grand slam in the third and visiting Boston withstood a five-run ninth inning by Baltimore as the Orioles' seven-game winning streak ended.

The Red Sox led 8-1 heading into the bottom of the ninth before the Orioles rallied with a leadoff homer by Gunnar Henderson and a one-out grand slam by Cedric Mullins. Kenley Jansen came on and retired the final two hitters for his sixth save.

Corey Kluber (1-4) pitched six innings and won for the first time in 10 starts, a drought that dated to last season when the

two-time Cy Young winner was with the Rays.

Twins 6, Yankees 2: Joe Ryan became the first five-game winner in the major leagues this season, Byron Buxton and Trevor Larnach hit two-run homers in the sixth inning and host Minnesota clinched its first season series win against New York since 2001.

Ryan (5-0) joined Jerry Koosman in 1979 as the only Twins pitchers to win their first five starts since the franchise moved to Minnesota for the 1961 season. Ryan allowed two runs — one earned — and seven hits in seven innings with seven strikeouts and no walks.

Blue Jays 7, White Sox 0: José Berríos struck out a season-high nine over seven innings, Danny Jansen homered twice and host Toronto extended Chicago's losing streak to six.

Berríos (2-3) allowed four hits — all singles — and walked one in his second straight seven-inning outing. Nate Pearson and Anthony Bass finished with hitless relief as the Blue Jays won for the 14th time in 20 games.

Nationals 5, Mets 0: Josiah Gray pitched six overpowering innings and batterymate Keibert Ruiz homered as visiting Washington beat New York.

Cubs 6, Padres 0: Justin Steele pitched three-hit ball into the sixth inning in his fourth straight win, and host Chicago beat San Diego. Yan Gomes had four of Chicago's seven hits, including a two-run homer off Blake Snell (0-4) in the second.

Steele (4-0) struck out five and walked two in 5½ innings, improving to 5-1 with a 1.07 ERA in his last 12 starts dating to July 22.

Braves 7, Marlins 4: Charlie Morton pitched seven strong innings, Ozzie Albies homered twice and host Atlanta beat Miami. Morton (3-2) allowed three hits and one run with two walks and nine strikeouts on a season-high 108 pitches.

Yuli Gurriel hit an inside-the-park homer in the ninth for Miami. Bryan Hoeing (0-1) gave up four runs in 3⅓ innings in his second career start.

Rockies 5, Guardians 1: Colorado's Charlie Blackmon hit his 40th leadoff homer and hit an RBI double off Cleveland's Peyton Battenfield (0-2) in a three-run second that built a 4-0 lead for the visiting Rockies.

Brenton Doyle had his first three major league hits and stole two bases as Colorado clinched its first series win this season.

Mariners 5, Phillies 3: Jarred Kelenic homered among his three hits, Teoscar Hernández also went deep and Seattle opened a nine-game road trip by beating Philadelphia. Edmundo Sosa homered for the defending NL champion Phillies, who had won three in a row.

Marco Gonzales (2-0) gave up one run on four hits in five innings.

Tigers 4, Brewers 3: Kerry Carpenter hit a three-run homer as visiting Detroit beat Milwaukee to snap a four-game skid. Detroit scored all its runs in the second inning against Eric Lauer (3-2). The Brewers have lost three straight for the first time this season.

Royals 5, Diamondbacks 4: Scott Barlow got Christian Walker to hit into a game-ending groundout with runners on second and third, and visiting Kansas City beat Arizona for its second win in 11 games. Brady Singer (2-1) rebounded from three poor starts, allowing one run in six innings, and Barlow got the last five outs for his third save. The Royals tied their season high with 14 hits.

Angels 5, Athletics 3: Brandon Drury had a two-run triple as host Los Angeles scored four runs in the first and held on to beat Oakland. Mike Trout went 2-for-4 with a double and Shohei Ohtani had two stolen bases for the Angels.