

Israel hails ‘success’ in blocking Iran strike

Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — Israel on Sunday hailed its air defenses in the face of an unprecedented attack by Iran, saying the systems thwarted 99% of the more than 300 drones and missiles launched toward its territory. Regional tensions were high amid fears of an Israeli counter-strike that could fuel further escalation.

President Joe Biden convened a meeting of the Group of Seven advanced democracies “to coordinate a united diplomatic response.” The participants unanimously condemned the attack and said they “stand ready to take further measures now and in response to further destabilizing initiatives.”

The United States made clear it would not participate in any offensive action against Iran. “We don’t seek a war with Iran. We’re not looking for escalation here,” White House national security spokesman John Kirby

told NBC.

Iran launched the attack in response to a strike widely blamed on Israel that hit an Iranian consular building in Syria earlier this month and killed two Iranian generals. Israel said Iran launched 170 drones, more than 30 cruise missiles and more than 120 ballistic missiles.

By Sunday morning, Iran said the attack was over, and Israel reopened its airspace. Israel’s War Cabinet held a meeting.

“We will build a regional coalition and collect the price from Iran, in the way and at the time that suits us,” said a key War Cabinet member, Benny Gantz.

Both Hamas and Hezbollah are backed by Iran.

Israeli and U.S. officials praised the response to the aerial assault.

“Iran launched more than 300 threats and 99% were intercepted,” said Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the Israeli military spokesman. “That is a success.” Asked

if Israel would respond, Hagari said the country would do what was needed to protect its citizens.

Hagari said none of the drones and cruise missiles reached Israel and that only a few ballistic missiles got through. Of the cruise missiles, 25 were shot down by the Israeli air force, he said.

Hagari said minor damage was caused to an Israeli airbase, but he said it was still functioning. Rescuers said a 7-year-old girl was seriously wounded in southern Israel, apparently in a missile strike, though police were still investigating the circumstances.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu posted a message on X: “We intercepted. We blocked. Together, we will win.” Defense Minister Yoav Gallant thanked the U.S. and other countries for their assistance.

Gen. Mohammad Hossein Bagheri, the chief of staff of the

Iranian armed forces, said the operation was over, the state-run IRNA news agency reported. “We have no intention of continuing the operation against Israel,” he was quoted as saying.

Iran said it targeted Israeli facilities involved in the Damascus strike, and that it told the White House on Sunday that the operation would be “minimalistic.” Turkey said it acted as intermediary for the messages.

Iran’s president, Ebrahim Raisi, claimed Iran had taught Israel a lesson and warned that “any new adventures against the interests of the Iranian nation would be met with a heavier and regretful response from the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

Iran’s paramilitary Revolutionary Guard issued a new threat against the U.S., saying “any support or participation in harming Iran’s interests” will be followed by a decisive response by Iran’s armed forces.

Navy strike group in Japan changes commanders

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Command of the Navy’s only aircraft carrier strike group permanently stationed in a foreign country changed hands Friday during a ceremony at the homeport of the U.S. 7th Fleet.

Rear Adm. Pat Hannifin passed command of Task Force 70 and Carrier Strike Group 5 to Rear Adm. Greg Newkirk aboard the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan, Task Force 70 said in a Friday news release.

The dual-hatted command is responsible for 7th Fleet’s carri-

er strike group, now led by the Ronald Reagan, and authority over any independently deployed cruisers or destroyers active in its operations area, which spans more than 47.8 million square miles.

“Command at any level is one of life’s most distinct honors and most sacred privileges,” Newkirk said at the ceremony, according to the news release. “To command at any time and place of such great global consequence alongside great teams that include our friends here in Japan — the honor becomes even higher.”

The command encompasses

subordinate units, including Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 51, Electronic Attack Squadron 138, Carrier Air Wing 5 and Destroyer Squadron 15, the Navy’s largest destroyer squadron.

Hannifin, of San Diego, took command of the task force in June. His next assignment is director of operations for U.S. Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii.

He said he was “incredibly proud” of his team and that Task Force 70’s 11,000 sailors are the “nation’s front line,” according to the release.

“I am incredibly honored to have stood among them, and

know Admiral Newkirk is exactly the man needed to lead them in the coming year,” he said.

During Newkirk’s tenure as commander of Carrier Strike Group 5, the USS George Washington is scheduled replace the Ronald Reagan. The George Washington, which the Ronald Reagan replaced as the lead ship of the strike group in 2015, is due to relocate from Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Wash., the Navy announced in April 2023.

The Ronald Reagan will move to Puget Sound Naval Shipyard for maintenance.

Congress might change how ships are named

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

Congress is taking aim at the Navy tradition of selecting untraditional names for its new ships and submarines.

A report by the Congressional Research Service, a public policy research institute for Congress, found inconsistencies and exceptions to traditional ship-naming protocols stoke public perception that the process is rife with politics.

"Observers have perceived a breakdown in, or corruption of, the rules," according to the report released in February.

The shifting politics of presidential administrations, congressional majorities, and public lobbying have warped the system in deciding who is honored with their name on a ship.

The report comes as the Navy prepares to name the fifth Ford-class aircraft carrier, the next block of Virginia-class attack submarines, missile frigates, and troop ships.

It focuses on the attack submarines. Of the first 30 commissioned since 2003, all but two were named for states.

"But the most recent seven have been named for four earlier U.S. Navy attack submarines, a former secretary of the Navy, an island, and a city, suggesting that there is no longer a clear naming rule for the class."

The issue is timely, the report said, because the Navy is on ship-buying overdrive, with nearly 90 vessels on order and maximizing the capacity of American shipyards.

The names chosen will likely remain in the fleet for a half-century or more. The largest and most prestigious vessels — aircraft carriers and submarines — have service lives of up to 50 years.

Since the Navy was founded in 1775, attempts have been made

to formalize rules for naming the more than 7,000 ships that have served in the fleet.

The first rule held up until the sixth ship.

The 1794 Naval Act called for building six frigates with names reflecting the new nation's principles: United States, Constitution, President, Congress, and Constellation.

However, then-Navy Secretary Thomas Pickering opted for geography over ideology for the sixth ship, naming it the USS Chesapeake, after the shipyard location where it was built.

"The very first naming decision by the very first secretary of the Navy resulted in a 'corruption' of the established naming convention," according to a 2012 report to Congress by four historians tasked with documenting Navy ship names.

With a relatively small Navy, U.S. ships in the first half of the 19th century mostly stuck to a traditional set of names — battles (Yorktown), states (Delaware), Founding Fathers (Franklin), Native American tribes (Chippewa), aggressive animals (Rattlesnake) and patriotic names (Independence).

More unusual names would show up when the Navy purchased an existing ship and kept the name such as the USS *Ganges*. Captured enemy ships either kept their original names such as the HMS *Little Belt*, a British ship that became the USS *Little Belt*, or the American captain was permitted to name the prize to be added to the Navy such as the Canadian schooner *Lord Nelson* seized during the War of 1812 became the USS *Scourge*.

The onset of the Civil War in 1861 saw shipyards in the northern states go into overdrive, turning out wooden and ironclad ships of every shape and purpose as well as buying merchant vessels. Ships were given names and

sent into service rapidly.

A New York City ferry drafted into Union service was named the USS *Hunchback*. The Union fleet included the USS *Snowdrop*, USS *Hibiscus*, USS *Switzerland*, and other unique warship names.

After World War I, attempts to categorize warships by how they were named became more consistent. The massive buildup of the Navy for World War II made keeping within the naming protocols a way to avoid confusion.

The report lists more 50 resolutions and bills since 1987 calling on the Navy to name a ship after a state, city, battle, famous former vessel, or, most often — a specific person, ranging from House committee chairpersons to a Navy cryptographer killed in a terrorist attack.

In 1969, the Navy officially decreed ships should not be named for living people or members of Congress.

The rules were soon scuttled by former President Richard Nixon, who was a Navy officer during World War II.

Four attack submarines were named after deceased lawmakers, and in a 160-year first, a living congressman was honored with his name on the third *Nimitz*-class supercarrier: the USS *Carl Vinson*.

Political liberals have criticized the naming of ships as late as the 1980s for Confederates who rebelled against the United States, including Civil War Gens. Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson.

Carriers named after Vinson and former Sen. John Stennis honor lawmakers who were fierce supporters of the Navy, but just as fierce opponents of racial desegregation.

The loudest conservative complaints came with the naming of a littoral combat ship the USS *Gabrielle Giffords*, honoring the

Democratic congresswoman from Arizona who was severely wounded in a 2011 assassination attempt that killed six others.

Giffords had not served in the military, and this set off demands for an investigation of naming "exceptions" by the Obama administration. A review found then-Navy Secretary Roy Mabus had followed traditional protocols in naming ships, with the exception of the USS *Gabrielle Giffords*.

Adm. Hyman Rickover, the politically savvy "father" of the nuclear-powered Navy and its ever-expanding fleet of attack and ballistic missile submarines, was sanguine about the changes to tradition.

The names of battleships for states and cruisers for cities meant members of Congress with key votes on Navy budget bills could take a trophy back home to show constituents: the name of their city or state on a major warship that traveled the world and fought wars. With no battleships and few cruisers being built after World War II, there were few trophies to be had. Rickover wanted more submarines for the Navy.

If the name changes meant the Navy received the funding it requested, he was willing to live with what won over congressional budgeters — and their voters.

Rep. Joe Courtney, D-Conn., represents a district that is home to the General Dynamics Electric Boat factory, where half of the new attack submarines are built, and the Naval Submarine Base New London. He can recite the famous Rickover response to a subordinate Navy officer who lamented the loss of the traditional sea creature names to what he felt were more prosaic city and states.

"I'm a fan of Rickover," Courtney said. "He said, 'Fish don't vote. People do.'"

Steel from Baltimore bridge cut up for recycling

The Baltimore Sun

BALTIMORE — As one worker cut into a piece of steel with a torch, another operated an excavator — missing at first, but then picking up another portion of what used to be the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

The pieces they each wrangled Friday couldn't have weighed more than one short ton, less than 0.02% of the 50,000 short tons of bridge wreckage that fell into the nearby Patapsco River. Yet they represented a tiny step in a painstaking, arduous process.

When the Key Bridge collapsed into the midnight-black water in the early hours of

March 26, it created a seemingly insurmountable task: clearing the channel of debris and the massive cargo ship that created the mess. The scale of the salvage job is difficult to comprehend, and although crews have begun to remove the wreckage from the channel, piece by piece, one can't simply throw thousands of tons into a trash bin.

Instead, a nearby facility was swiftly tasked with processing the crumpled steel and concrete.

Disasters demand such improvisation. The Cruise Maryland Terminal is now a center of salvage and recovery operations. A community center

was converted to assist small businesses. And Tradepoint Atlantic in Sparrows Point, a logistics hub where freight trains, ships and trucks meet, has turned 5 of its 3,300 acres into a scrap steel processing center for the remains of the bridge.

Those acres had sat unused for years and were overgrown with shrubs. But shortly after the bridge collapse, it became clear that they and Tradepoint Atlantic were a unique asset. With plenty of land and a location within sight of the accident, Tradepoint readied those acres for the job of dividing the Key Bridge into small bits that can be taken away by trucks.

Because of its location east of the bridge, Tradepoint's access to the shipping channel has not been blocked by the wreckage. It's accepted roughly double its usual amount of cargo. On Friday, longshoremen rolled Mitsubishi's off a 656-foot ship while — amid salt piles and aluminum ingots — crews cut up the steel debris.

Contractors employed by the state and federal government now have an agreement with Tradepoint Atlantic, a decade-old, privately owned hub on the site of a former Bethlehem Steel plant, to use it to carve the bridge into pieces that will ultimately be taken to a recycling center.

Unmanned barges break loose on Pittsburgh river

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — More than two dozen river barges broke loose from their moorings and floated down the Ohio River in Pittsburgh, striking one bridge that had already been preemptively closed and damaging a marina, officials said. The boats were eventually pinned to the riverbank or went over a dam downstream, officials said.

Pittsburgh police, fire and emergency medical services responded around 11:25 p.m. Friday to reports of the barges "floating uncontrolled" down the river, Pittsburgh Public Safety said in a statement. The area had been hit by flooding after heavy rains Thursday.

The Sewickley Bridge was struck by a barge a few minutes before 2 p.m. Saturday, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation said. It "was closed in advance of the strike and will remain closed until our crews complete an inspection," spokesperson Steve Cowan said.

Officials in Moon Township,

which is connected by the bridge to the community of Sewickley, earlier said the span would be temporarily closed "due to unmanned barge passing through."

Eleven of the 26 barges that broke free were quickly contained to one side by another towing vessel just downstream, said Cmdr. Justin Jolley of the Coast Guard marine safety unit in Pittsburgh. Nine others were collected at the Emsworth lock and dam downstream.

Five or six barges went through the dam. Four ended up just downstream at a lock and dam, while another ended up on the bank of the river and was stabilized. Marine safety units were searching for one barge unaccounted for, Jolley said.

Pittsburgh public safety officials reported damage to Peggy's Harbor, a marina on the river. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported that the McKees Rocks Bridge was also closed as a precaution, but later reopened.

Birth control may be humane way to control rat population

Associated Press

New York lawmakers are proposing rules to humanely drive down the population of rats and other rodents, eyeing contraception and a ban on glue traps as alternatives to poison or a slow, brutal death.

Politicians have long come up with creative ways to battle the rodents, but some lawmakers are now proposing city and statewide measures to do more.

In New York City, the idea to distribute rat contraceptives got fresh attention in city government Thursday following the death of an escaped zoo owl, known as Flaco, who was found dead with rat poison in his system.

City Council Member Shaun Abreu proposed a city ordinance Thursday that would establish a pilot program for controlling the millions of rats in subway stations and empty lots by using birth control instead of lethal chemicals. Abreu, chair of the Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management, said the contraceptives are also more ethical and humane than other methods.

The contraceptive, called ContraPest, is contained in salty, fatty pellets that are scattered in rat-infested areas as bait. It works by targeting ovarian function in female rats and disrupting sperm cell production in males, The New York Times reported.

New York exterminators currently kill rats using snap and glue traps, poisons that make them bleed internally, and carbon monoxide gas that can suffocate them in burrows. Some hobbyists have even trained their dogs to hunt them.

Some lawmakers in Albany are considering a statewide ban on glue boards under a bill moving through the Legislature. The traps, usually made from a slab of cardboard or plastic coated in a sticky material, can also ensnare small animals that land on its surface.

"This is not a problem we can kill our way out of," said Jakob Shaw, a special project manager for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. "It's time to embrace these more common sense and humane methods."

Cavoli: Russia 'a chronic threat' as troops push east

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The top general for U.S. forces in Europe said Thursday that the military will continue to push troops into Eastern Europe as host countries build up the infrastructure to accommodate them amid a renewed threat from Russia.

Army Gen. Christopher Cavoli, who leads U.S. European Command and is NATO supreme allied commander, said the focus of American combat forces on the Continent has shifted "significantly" eastward in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and will remain there for the foreseeable future.

"Russia shows no signs of stopping, nor does Russia intend to stop with Ukraine," he said during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing. "Russia presents to us a chronic threat."

American troops surged toward NATO's eastern flank in 2022 and now have a presence in Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia.

Poland, in particular, has "a ton" of service members — nearly 10,000 — and could host more as the country develops the necessary military infrastructure, Cavoli said.

The U.S. Army's first permanent base in Poland, located in Poznan, welcomed its first permanently assigned active-duty soldier a year ago.

"They'll build us infrastructure and as it comes online, we'll push forces in [Poland] up to a brigade combat team," Cavoli said.

There are no immediate plans to grow the U.S. military's force in Europe beyond the 100,000 troops now stationed there or add more perma-

nent bases in Eastern Europe.

Cavoli told House lawmakers Wednesday that the military will continue deploying service members to the region on a rotational basis.

A NATO force of 40,000 troops is also bolstering the alliance's border with Russia.

The danger from Russia has not lessened even with its massive losses in Ukraine, Cavoli said. As many as 75,000 Russian troops have been killed in the war, and thousands of tanks and other equipment have been destroyed.

The attrition has barely made a dent as the Kremlin's war machine pumps out weapons and Russia's military successfully replenishes its ranks.

Russia still has as many tanks functioning in Ukraine as it had at the beginning of the war and is "on track" to build a larger army, with an estimated 30,000 soldiers volunteering for service every month, according to Cavoli.

"They've grown back to what they were before," he said. "They've got some gaps that have been produced by this war, but their overall capacity is very significant still and they intend to make it go higher."

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell said earlier this month that Russia has "almost completely reconstituted militarily" over the past few months. Cavoli said the training partnership between the U.S. and Ukraine has provided valuable insight into the capabilities of the Russian military and the U.S. is closely following how Ukrainians adjust to Russia's battlefield adaptations.

"Warfare as it goes on is a series of moves and counter moves and Russia's military has evolved significantly during this conflict," he said.

Police kill man who killed 6 at Sydney mall

Associated Press

SYDNEY — A police officer and several bystanders are being hailed for running "towards danger" to confront the attacker who stabbed and killed six people at a suburban Sydney shopping center. The shopping mall, one of the country's busiest and near the world-famous Bondi Beach, was a hub of activity on Saturday afternoon when 40-year-old Joel Cauchi used a knife to kill five women and one man. He also injured at least a dozen others, including a 9-month-old baby whose mother died during the attack, before a police officer shot him dead.

New South Wales Police confirmed Sunday that Cauchi had a history of mental illness and investigators weren't treating the attack as terrorism-related.

The number would have been far higher, according to NSW Premier Chris Minns who on Sunday praised "the ordinary members of the public that cornered and confronted a murderer in the Westfield Shopping Centre, showing what I would call instinctive bravery under terrible circumstances."

Talking to reporters while standing outside the shopping mall, Minns underscored the role played by Inspector Amy Scott — the first emergency responder on the scene — who shot and killed Cauchi.

"(Scott) ... ran towards danger and showed professionalism and bravery and without a shadow of a doubt, saved many, many lives in the last 24 hours," he said.

Hundreds of floral tributes and messages for the victims had been laid outside the closed shopping mall on Sunday, which police said would remain an active crime scene for days if not weeks.

Boat with 20 corpses seen off Brazil

Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia — A small boat full of decomposing corpses was spotted by fishermen off Brazil's northeastern coast on Saturday, according to local news reports.

Brazil's Attorney General's office said in a statement that it has dispatched a forensics team to the area to determine where the bodies and the boat came from.

"Some reports say there

could be up to 20 corpses" in the boat, the Attorney General's office said in a statement.

The office announced it is opening a criminal and a civil investigation into the incident.

The boat was floating off the coast of the state of Para in a remote location about 185 miles from the state capital Belém.

It wasn't the first time that vessels carrying dead bodies were spotted by fishermen in

the western side of the Atlantic Ocean. In 2021, at least seven boats full of corpses washed up in Brazil and the Eastern Caribbean.

Investigations by The Associated Press and local authorities determined that some of these boats carried the corpses of African migrants who were trying to make it to the Canary Islands, but had missed their target and had drifted for weeks in the Atlantic Ocean.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

State may repeal law that lets towns ban booze

NY ALBANY — New York towns that have post-Prohibition bans on alcohol sales would be forced to lift such restrictions under a bill moving through the Legislature.

The bill would strike down a 1934 law passed right after Prohibition that allowed towns and cities to opt to stay dry. Many U.S. communities fully or partially ban alcohol sales. Pennsylvania, for example, has about 675 that have some sort of restriction.

In the Empire State, only seven communities have complete booze bans, according to the New York State Liquor Authority. The largest, the western New York town of Caneadea, is home to about 2,000 people.

The bill's sponsor argues that lifting restrictions will spur business growth and save those who live in such places from having to buy their booze elsewhere, allowing them to enjoy a glass of wine with dinner at local restaurants.

Debate over bakery's mural leads to legislation

NH CONCORD — A New Hampshire town's new ordinance that was pitched as "a path forward" for public artwork hasn't resolved a bakery owner's First Amendment dispute over a large pastry painting, and his lawyer predicts it will only lead to more litigation as town officials become "speech police."

Conway residents passed the ordinance by a vote of 1,277 to 423 during town elections Tuesday, part of a lengthy ballot for

budget and spending items and picking government positions, such as selectboard, treasurer and police commissioner.

The vote came more than a year after the owner of Leavitt's Country Bakery sued the town over a painting by high school students that's displayed across his storefront, showing the sun shining over a mountain range made of sprinkle-covered chocolate and other pastries.

The new ordinance requires applicants to meet criteria for art on public and commercial property. It says that while the zoning and planning boards must approve the appropriateness of theme, location and design before the selectboard considers each proposal, the process should make "no intrusion into the artistic expression or the content of work."

Governor vetoes plan to limit 'three strikes' law

ME AUGUSTA — The governor has vetoed a proposal to end the state's "three strikes" law for people convicted of petty thefts.

The proposal, from Democratic Rep. David Sinclair, sought to set a threshold for theft by a repeat offender. Sinclair's proposal stated that a person with two or more prior convictions would not be charged with a felony if they committed theft of property valued at \$500 or less.

Gov. Janet Mills vetoed the proposal Tuesday. Mills wrote in her veto message that the proposal would "make Maine an outlier among New England states."

Mills also wrote that retail theft is "a serious problem in

Maine" and that the proposal to alter the three strikes rule could possibly make it worse.

Coast Guard cadets cited in cheating case

CT NEW LONDON — Fifty-five Coast Guard Academy cadets have been disciplined for sharing homework answers in violation of academy policy, Coast Guard officials announced.

After a series of disciplinary hearings, six of the cadets failed the course and 48 got lowered grades, officials said Wednesday.

The cadets were accused of cheating by sharing answers for two separate homework assignments electronically.

The cadets will be provided the opportunity to appeal the disciplinary actions, officials said.

Menendez, wife will have separate bribery trials

NJ TRENTON — U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez and his wife will be tried separately on allegations that they participated in a bribery scheme, a federal judge ruled Thursday, agreeing to sever and delay Nadine Menendez's trial after her lawyers argued that she requires treatment for a serious medical condition.

The New Jersey Democrat's trial will remain scheduled for May 6 in Manhattan federal court, while Nadine Menendez's trial was tentatively pushed back to July.

Nadine Menendez's lawyers argued for the move in a letter to Stein this week, saying she was recently diagnosed with an unspecified condition that will require surgery in the next four to

six weeks. In court on Thursday, they said she needs more time for testing to understand the nature of the condition.

Prosecutors, meanwhile, contended that the entire trial should just be delayed, arguing that severing Nadine Menendez's trial from her husband's would result in "serious inefficiencies and unfairness" that would require dozens of witnesses to be recalled.

'Slender Man' assailant won't be released

WI WINNEBAGO — A Wisconsin woman who at age 12 stabbed a sixth-grade classmate nearly to death to please the online horror character Slender Man remains a risk to the public and won't be released yet from a psychiatric hospital, a judge said.

Judge Michael Bohren ruled last week against Morgan Geyser, now 21, despite the testimony of two psychiatrists, including the medical director of Winnebago Mental Health Institute, who said she was ready to depart that hospital and return to the community under certain conditions.

Geyser and Anissa Weier were 12 in 2014 when they lured Payton Leutner to a Waukesha park after a sleepover. Geyser stabbed Leutner repeatedly while Weier egged her on. Leutner suffered 19 stab wounds and barely survived.

The girls quickly confessed, saying they carried out the attack to appease Slender Man, a fictional online horror character. They said they feared he would otherwise harm their families.

— From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

New chapter awaits Clark in WNBA

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — John Meinen has been an avid Iowa basketball fan for decades.

The 61-year-old former hoops player never lost touch with the sport, his home state or his beloved Hawkeyes' men's or women's teams, even after moving to Indianapolis.

So with the Indiana Fever expected to draft Caitlin Clark with the No. 1 overall pick Monday night, Meinen can't hide his excitement over seeing the potential of a game-changing player suddenly making the Fever relevant again after a seven-year playoff drought.

"She's Bob Cousy meets Steph Curry. I mean there just hasn't been anyone, certainly in the women's game, who plays the way she does," Meinen said. "I don't know her, I've never met her, but she seems like a very nice person. The other piece of it is she's got a little Taylor Swift in her because girls just look up to her."

He's not alone.

Fever guard Erica Wheeler told social media fans Clark was the real deal after attending one Iowa game in February 2023. Another Fever guard, Grace Berger already knows Clark's scouting report after chasing her around Big Ten courts for three seasons.

Neither had any idea back then, though, that the Fever would win a second straight draft lottery that would allow them to team up with the 2023 unanimous rookie of the year Aliyah Boston and the greatest scorer in Division I history.

This young, star-studded combination suddenly makes last season's 13-win team a must-watch team, a title Indiana last held during Tamika Catchings' final season in 2016.

So fans in Indianapolis and around the Hoosier State are focused on how quickly Indiana can rise in the standings and become a legitimate contender.

"I think she's in the right sit-

uation here," Meinen said. "Indiana is all about basketball. They're going to embrace her. They have a good young core. I think the future's very, very bright for this team."

Clark's transformation from generational college superstar to becoming the face of a WNBA franchise has been eagerly anticipated since Clark and the Hawkeyes started selling out arenas while getting record TV ratings over the past two seasons.

That is expected to continue at the pro level.

While the Fever have declined to release ticket sales or merchandising information — or discuss expectations for Clark on the court — because she is not yet officially on the team's roster, that has not stopped other teams from promoting their matchups against Clark.

Two-time defending WNBA champion Las Vegas already has announced the Indiana game on July 2 will be played

at T-Mobile Arena, which seats about 6,000 more fans than its traditional home venue.

The Phoenix Mercury also have dubbed the June 30 date against the Fever as "The GOAT vs. The Rook," capitalizing on a seemingly thinly veiled rivalry between Diana Taurasi and Clark.

"Reality is coming," Taurasi recently said on ESPN. "You look superhuman playing against some 18-year-olds, but you're going to come play with some grown women that have been playing professional basketball for a long time."

How quickly and smoothly Clark adapts to bigger, stronger, more experienced opponents is a serious concern.

While most evaluators believe Clark's shooting and passing skills will travel to the WNBA, there are questions about her defense and how the 6-foot, 155-pound point guard will deal with established stars unlikely to give the newcomer the red carpet treatment.

Scheffler holds 1-shot lead after 3 rounds of Masters

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Scottie Scheffler was in the lead and seemingly in control of his game Saturday in the Masters until realizing there was no such thing at Augusta National.

He posed over another beautiful shot at the flag on the 10th hole and was stunned to see it take a hard hop over the green and roll down into the bushes. He made double bogey and suddenly was one shot behind.

"Make another bogey at 11 and all of a sudden I'm probably going from in the lead to a few out of the lead and then," Scheffler said, "you know, things happen pretty fast out there."

It was so fast and furious that it was hard to keep up.

Six players had at least a

share of the lead at one point. There was a five-way tie for the lead early on the back nine. No one was safe. It was like that to the very end.

Scheffler made an 8-foot birdie putt on the final hole for a 1-under 71 that gave him a one-shot lead over Collin Morikawa, the two-time major champion who has largely disappeared from the elite in golf and now is one round away from the third leg of the Grand Slam.

Bryson DeChambeau looked to be on the verge of a meltdown when he drove into the trees right of the 18th fairway, punched out to the short grass and then hit wedge from 77 yards that spun back into the cup for a birdie to sum up a wild Saturday.

"Easier than putting," said DeChambeau, adding that he was joking although there was some truth to that. He three-putted three times on the back nine.

Max Homa has gone 32 holes without a birdie and he was only two behind after a round of 17 pars and one bogey for a 73. Xander Schauffele has gone 25 holes without a bogey, and that goes a long way. He was five back after a 70.

Augusta National didn't need a ferocious wind to be wildly entertaining. The course was tough as ever, with a wind that would have felt scary if not for the day before. The greens made players feel as though they were putting on linoleum floors.

Scheffler was at 7-under 209 as he goes for a second Masters green jacket and tries to extend a dominant stretch that includes two wins on tough courses (Bay Hill and TPC Sawgrass) and a runner-up finish in his last three tournaments.

"It's nice to have that experience, but going into tomorrow, that's really all that it is," he said.

Morikawa made two tough pars to finish off a 69 — of those was a long birdie putt that hit the lip and spun 12 feet away. He is the only player to break par all three days at this Masters. Not bad for a someone who only found a swing key on Monday, switched putters after the first round and hasn't had a top 10 since the first week of the year.

Holloway, Pereira earn KOs at UFC 300

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Alex Pereira left no doubt he was the true light heavyweight champion in the main event, knocking out Jamaal Hill at 3:14 of the first round Saturday night.

But the lasting image of UFC 300, one that likely will resonate for years to come, was Max Holloway's last-second knockout of Justin Gaethje for the ceremonial BMF title belt.

Holloway-Gaethje was arguably the most anticipated fight on the loaded card, and it not only lived up to expectations, but surpassed them before a sellout crowd of 20,067 that roared over the final seconds and its stunning conclusion.

"That fight sucked the life out of everybody tonight," UFC President Dana White said. "People ask me what I do. I sell holy (stuff) moments. That was the ultimate holy (stuff) mo-

ment. Let's just talk about his fight for the rest of the press conference."

The UFC — which had its third-highest gate at \$16.5 million — awarded Holloway a \$600,000 bonus for his performance.

Even though Holloway (26-7) was well on his way to a victory by decision — two judges had him ahead 39-37 — the former featherweight champion could have run out the clock.

He instead pointed to the floor in the final seconds and then traded blows with Gaethje (25-5). It was a tremendous combination of punches from both fighters before the one that sent the now ex-BMF champ to the mat with just one second remaining in the five-round fight.

"This is the moment," Holloway said about going for the KO. "This is what the BMF is known for. If that's not a BMF moment, I don't know what is. If Justin

was up, he would've given me those 10 seconds."

"That's why Max Holloway is beloved," White said. "He's got the fight won and in there with one of the most dangerous fighters in the business. That's like movie (stuff). It's the fight of the year. If something beats that as fight of the year, holy (stuff)."

In the evening's final fight, Pereira dropped Hill to the canvas with a straight left hand and then pounded him. Referee Herb Dean stepped in to stop the fight.

"I see myself as the champion. I didn't want to let the belt go to my head," Pereira said through an interpreter. "I had to step in and win the championship."

Hill, 32, was the previous title holder, but a torn Achilles tendon forced him to vacate the championship last July. That put the belt in Pereira's hands, eventually setting up this

matchup and his fourth pay-per-view event in 16 months.

As would be expected from a milestone card number, this was a strong lineup that included 12 current or former champions, and 11 who have headlined UFC pay-per-view events.

Zhang Weili (25-3) retained her women's strawweight championship in the co-main event, beating No. 1 challenger Yan Xiaonan (18-4) by unanimous decision. Each judge scored the fight 49-45.

One of the more notable matchups on the undercard was between two-time U.S. Olympic judo gold medalist Kayla Harrison and International Boxing Hall of Fame inductee Holly Holm.

Harrison (17-1), who made her UFC debut, dominated Holm (15-7). She won the bantamweight bout by submission with a rear-naked choke at 1:47 of the second round.

Rangers rally past Islanders for team-best 54th win

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Artemi Panarin scored late in the third period to tie game and tallied the shootout winner as the New York Rangers rallied to defeat the New York Islanders 3-2 for a franchise-record 54th win on Saturday.

Igor Shesterkin made 34 saves, Braden Schneider scored a short-handed goal and Vincent Trocheck ended the shootout with another goal as the Rangers inched closer to winning the Presidents' Trophy for the NHL's best regular-season record.

Panarin scored to open the shootout against Ilya Sorokin. After Kyle Palmieri hit the post and Brock Nelson was stopped by Shesterkin, Trocheck ended the exciting game between the longtime rivals with a shot into the lower corner of the net that ended the Islanders' six game

winning streak.

Stars 3, Kraken 1: Defense-man Miro Heiskanen had a goal and two assists, and Jason Robertson had a goal and an assist as host Dallas beat Seattle to clinch the Central Division title for the first time in eight years.

Flyers 1, Devils 0: Travis Konecny scored a short-handed breakaway goal and Samuel Ersson stopped 20 shots to keep host Philadelphia's miniscule postseason hopes alive with one game left to play in a win over New Jersey.

Bruins 6, Penguins 4: Brad Marchand scored short-handed to cap visiting Boston's four-goal second period as it beat Pittsburgh.

Jets 7, Avalanche 0: Josh Morrissey and Adam Lowry scored 10 seconds apart in a four-goal first period that chased goaltender Alexandar Georgiev from the net, and vis-

iting Winnipeg moved into the driver's seat for the Central Division's second seed with a win against Colorado.

Panthers 3, Sabres 2 (OT): Sam Reinhart got his 55th goal of the season with 1:02 left in overtime, and host Florida clinched home ice for at least Round 1 of the Stanley Cup playoffs by beating Buffalo.

Capitals 4, Lightning 2: John Carlson scored the go-ahead goal on a power play with 11:31 left, Charlie Lindgren made 32 saves in another strong performance when his team needed him and host Washington kept its playoff hopes alive by beating Tampa Bay.

Canucks 3, Oilers 1: Casey DeSmith made 32 saves and visiting Vancouver strengthened its lead atop the Pacific Division with a win over Edmonton.

Kings 3, Ducks 1: Pierre-Luc Dubois and Matt Roy ended

long goal droughts and host Los Angeles remained in third place in the Pacific Division.

Senators 5, Canadiens 4 (SO): Brady Tkachuk had two goals and an assist, Drake Batherson scored the only goal in the shootout and host Ottawa beat Montreal.

Red Wings 5, Maple Leafs 4 (OT): Dylan Larkin scored on a power play 41 seconds into OT and visiting Detroit overcame Auston Matthews' 69th goal of the season to beat Toronto.

Predators 6, Blue Jackets 4: Roman Josi scored two goals and assisted on two others, Tommy Novak had two goals and an assist, and host Nashville defeated Columbus.

Wild 6, Sharks 2: Liam Obergren scored his first career goal and visiting Minnesota beat San Jose to assure the Sharks of having the best odds to win the NHL Draft lottery.

Castellanos, Phillies walk off Pirates

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Nick Castellanos hit a walk-off, bases-loaded single in the ninth inning, Kyle Schwarber homered and the Philadelphia Phillies rallied to beat the Pittsburgh Pirates 4-3 on Saturday.

Alec Bohm added an RBI for the Phillies, who moved over .500.

Oneil Cruz homered for Pittsburgh.

Schwarber led off the ninth with a single to right off Jose Hernandez (1-1), and Trea Turner walked to put runners on first and second with no outs. Both advanced on a wild pitch.

Hernandez struck out Bryce Harper for the first out, and Pirates manager Derek Shelton lifted Hernandez for Roansy Contreras. Pittsburgh intentionally walked Bohm to load the bases before Castellanos laced a first-pitch, 95-mph fastball over center fielder Jack Suwinski.

Jeff Hoffman (2-0) pitched a 1-2-3 ninth to cap an impressive outing by Philadelphia's relievers, who struck out seven, walked one and allowed one hit in five scoreless innings in relief of

starter Spencer Turnbull.

Yankees 3-8, Guardians 2-2: Oswaldo Cabrera hit a two-run homer and visiting New York beat Cleveland in the first game of a split doubleheader to match the best start in its famed history.

Juan Soto hit a three-run homer and Cody Poteet pitched six solid innings in his debut for New York (12-3) as it won the second game to sweep a doubleheader over Cleveland and continue one of the strongest starts in its storied history.

Poteet (1-0) allowed one run and six hits while picking up his first win since 2021 — 1,056 days ago — with Miami.

Twins 11-4, Tigers 5-1: Visiting Minnesota took advantage of a bases-loaded walk, a three-run error by Detroit third baseman Zach McKinstry and three-run homer by Matt Waller in the 12th inning to beat Detroit in the first game of a doubleheader.

Edouard Julien and Willi Castro homered in the second game, giving the Twins the doubleheader sweep.

Reds 5, White Sox 0: Nick Lodolo struck out 10 in 5½ solid innings in his first big league start

in almost a year, and visiting Cincinnati beat Chicago.

Royals 11, Mets 7: Salvador Perez had four RBIs on two hits and Bobby Witt Jr. scored four times to lead visiting Kansas City to a win over New York.

Blue Jays 5, Rockies 3: Daulton Varsho hit his second career grand slam, Yariel Rodríguez struck out six over 3⅓ innings in his major league debut and host Toronto beat Colorado.

Marlins 5, Braves 1: Josh Bell homered, Max Meyer allowed one run over six innings, and Miami beat Atlanta for its first home win of the season.

Giants 11, Rays 2: Logan Webb allowed one run over seven innings, Thairo Estrada homered twice and visiting San Francisco cruised past Tampa Bay.

Red Sox 7, Angels 2: Triston Casas hit a long two-run homer in a four-run first inning and host Boston cleaned up its season-long defensive problems in a victory over Los Angeles for its first home victory of the season.

Nationals 3, Athletics 1: MacKenzie Gore tied a career high with 11 strikeouts, CJ

Abrams hit an RBI triple and visiting Washington beat Oakland.

Astros 9, Rangers 2: Kyle Tucker doubled twice and had three RBIs and Jose Altuve added three hits and drove in two runs as host Houston used a seven-run seventh inning to break a tie and coast to a victory over Texas.

Brewers 11, Orioles 5: Jake Bauers hit a tiebreaking three-run homer in the fourth inning and visiting Milwaukee slugged its way to a victory over Baltimore.

Diamondbacks 4, Cardinals 2: Lourdes Gurriel Jr. hit a three-run homer, Ryne Nelson threw six solid innings and host Arizona beat St. Louis.

Cubs 4, Mariners 1: Shota Imanaga allowed one unearned run over 5⅓ innings, Michael Busch homered in his third straight game and visiting Chicago beat Seattle.

Dodgers 5, Padres 2: Mookie Betts had three hits and two RBIs, rookie Gavin Stone retired his first 15 batters and host Los Angeles defeated San Diego in a game delayed more than two hours by rain.

Braves ace Strider will miss season after UCL surgery

Associated Press

MIAMI — Atlanta Braves ace Spencer Strider will miss the rest of the season after having surgery to repair the ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow, the team said Saturday.

Dr. Keith Meister in Arlington, Texas, performed the procedure on Friday, using an internal brace to repair the UCL. Strider avoided Tommy John surgery, which he had in 2019 while at Clemson.

Recovery from the internal brace surgery, which uses an artificial material to make the repair, has allowed pitchers to return to the majors in as little as nine months. Tommy John

surgery, which uses a tendon from elsewhere in the body to replace the torn ligament, has a typical rehab period of 12 to 18 months.

Strider complained about discomfort in his elbow after pitching four innings in Atlanta's 6-5 win over Arizona on April 5. An MRI the next day revealed damage to his UCL, and the Braves prepared for the worst.

"You never expect these things to be good or just a blip on the screen," manager Brian Snitker said last week.

Strider was 20-5 in 2023, leading the majors in wins and strikeouts (281). The right-han-

der had a 3.86 ERA last season.

He had a 7.00 ERA with 12 strikeouts in two starts this year.

The club's first attempt at finding someone to fill Strider's spot in the rotation went poorly. Right-hander Allan Winans was recalled from Triple-A Gwinnett last Sunday after Strider went on the 15-day injured list. Winans allowed seven runs, six earned, over five innings of a disastrous start against the Mets on Thursday and was optioned after the game.

Snitker said the team has been looking at replacement options since Strider initially

went down, but doesn't have anyone specific in mind yet.

"We're monitoring all those guys that are down there," he said before Saturday's game against the Miami Marlins. "All the starters. We have some good options, and we'll just see where we are after different things. It'll be kind of a day-to-day thing."

The Braves began Saturday in first place in the NL East with an 8-4 record as they attempt to win their seventh straight division title.

The 25-year-old Strider joins a list of big-name pitchers who have suffered significant injuries this season.