

US, allies study Ukraine's Black Sea wins

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Ukraine's successful drone and missile attacks on Russia's Black Sea Fleet are being studied by the U.S. Navy and NATO as the West develops strategies to confront potential Russian aggression, the service's top admiral in Europe said.

Ukraine is locked in a bitter stalemate on land, with dwindling munition supplies and Russian forces entrenched in much of the country's east. But it has found success at sea worth learning from and applying globally, analysts say.

Without a traditional navy, Ukraine has managed to sink or disable nearly one-third of the fleet, said Adm. Stuart Munsch, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa and Allied Joint Forces Command Naples. They've done it by starting with low-cost technology and adding

sophisticated weaponry to their operations as the war has developed. The attacks have pushed the Russians further east in the Black Sea and opened a maritime corridor to allow grain shipments, which Munsch said was a significant achievement.

"They've also demonstrated how to put the Russians in such a box so that they no longer operate freely," said Munsch, speaking with reporters at a celebration of NATO's 75th anniversary aboard the amphibious command ship USS Mount Whitney on Tuesday.

The Ukrainian maritime strategy was a particular focus of the recent Black Sea Maritime Forum in Bucharest, Romania, Munsch said.

The annual talks were attended by naval personnel and other representatives from all Black Sea littoral countries except for Russia. U.S. allies like the U.K., Japan and Sweden also were there.

Ukrainian use of drones and missiles reveals problems Western navies could experience in defending against such attacks, said Sebastian Bruns, a German maritime security expert and senior researcher for the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University.

Those challenges include identifying, tracking and neutralizing surface drones that barely rise above surface level. Most Western navies don't have sufficient close-in weapons systems that can shoot at the angle needed when a surface drone is approaching, he said.

"I am not sure that Western navies would have similar problems as the Russians, but we too would likely lose ships. If not unit kills, then at least mission kills," said Bruns, who recently published an analysis on Black Sea naval lessons.

Ukrainian use of anti-ship mis-

siles against static targets, such as ships in port and other shore facilities, also is wreaking havoc on the Black Sea Fleet, to include installations, people and their morale, Bruns pointed out.

The Ukrainian Defense Ministry on March 24 said it had disabled or destroyed 26 Russian surface vessels and one submarine.

The lessons being learned also extend to a Taiwan defense scenario. Deploying large numbers of cheap drones into a relatively confined battle space such as the Taiwan Strait or the seas near China could make those spaces no-go territory or escalate the costs of operating there to prohibitive levels, said James Holmes, chair of the maritime strategy program at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I.

The Pentagon's Replicator program, announced last year, envisions such a capability, he noted.

CENTCOM Abbey Gate review: Blast wasn't preventable

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The suicide bombing at the Kabul airport that killed 13 American troops and more than 150 Afghans in August 2021 was not preventable and U.S. service members did not see the suspected bomber on the morning of the attack, according to a new review by U.S. Central Command released Monday.

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, which ended Aug. 31, 2021, concluded 20 years of war in Afghanistan for the United States. It also marked the return of Taliban rule in the country, rolling back many human rights in the past 20 months.

The American pullout included the evacuation of thousands of

Afghan nationals who fled the country with the U.S. military. The chaotic withdrawal also led to the deaths of 13 service members and 170 Afghans outside Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport on Aug. 26, 2021. This triggered widespread debate and congressional criticism.

Former Marine Sgt. Tyler Vargas-Andrews told the House Foreign Affairs Committee in March 2023 that his unit warned commanders they saw two suspects in the crowd outside the Abbey Gate of the Kabul airport who fit a description flagged by U.S. intelligence. But the Marines said they were denied permission to shoot.

Vargas-Andrews, who was injured during the blast but not interviewed in the initial investiga-

tion, said an intelligence bulletin went out at about 2 a.m. on the day of the suicide attack describing a potential bomber and his male companion. Vargas-Andrews said he and others saw the individuals, "nervously looking up at our position," between noon and 1 p.m. When Marines relayed their findings to a commander and asked for permission to shoot, the commander said he did not have the authority to approve such an action, Vargas-Andrews told lawmakers.

In August, Army Gen. Michael Erik Kurilla, commander of U.S. Central Command, directed U.S. Army Central to conduct a supplemental review following public testimony and other public statements regarding the events.

"The suicide bomber was not previously identified in the crowd, nor was there an opportunity for service members to engage him prior to the attack on August 26, 2021," CENTCOM said in its statement.

The review also found the Abbey Gate bombing was not preventable at the tactical level without degrading the mission. It also found military leaders were present and made "sound tactical decisions."

For the first time, the U.S. military is confirming the bomber was Abdul Rahman al-Logari, an Islamic State militant who had been in an Afghan prison but was released by the Taliban that summer, The Associated Press reported.

US details Pentagon's role in defending Israel from attack

By J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

U.S. forces in the Middle East shot down dozens of missiles and drones over the weekend as Iran launched its first ever attack from its own territory on Israel, senior White House officials said.

The Iranian attack involved more than 300 aerial munitions, including 100 ballistic missiles, more than 30 cruise missiles and 150 one-way attack drones, senior administration officials said in a telephone press conference Sunday.

The White House believes that 99% of the aerial threats were intercepted and that the attack caused no significant damage, said a senior administration official who was unauthorized to be identified on the record.

U.S. Air Force, Navy and Army assets participated in the operation to shoot down Iranian missiles and drones, which one official called a "spectacular success," with no American casualties.

sualties.

Some 70 Iranian drones were shot down by fighter pilots from the 494th Fighter Squadron based out of RAF Lakenheath in England and the 335th Fighter Squadron from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, N.C., a senior official said.

The destroyers USS Arleigh Burke and USS Carney in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea took down between four and six ballistic missiles, officials said. Meanwhile, an Army Patriot missile battery deployed to Irbil, Iraq, shot down a ballistic missile headed from Iran toward Israel.

Israeli air defense systems were responsible for most of the shootdowns, the administration officials said.

Some of the U.S. units involved were part of a move by Washington over the last week to bring additional aircraft and ships to the region, in anticipation of the attack.

"Thanks to these deployments and the extraordinary

skill of our service members, we helped Israel take down nearly all of the incoming drones and missiles," President Joe Biden said late Saturday in Washington.

The U.S., U.K., France and other countries prepared for two weeks to defend against the weapons strikes, which Iran said would be retribution for Israel killing two of its generals in a strike in Syria at the beginning of April.

Iran and Israel have engaged in a shadow war for many years, but the Hamas-Israel war that began Oct. 7 has brought that conflict into the open. Munitions also were launched from Iraq, Syria and Yemen, where Iranian proxy militias operate.

The White House said that Iran's intent was to inflict significant damage in Israel. Tehran didn't give prior warning of the attack, and the scope of the operation is seen as being on the high end of how the administration expected Iran would respond.

USS Boxer makes a U-turn for repairs

By ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

Maintenance problems forced an amphibious assault ship to return to California last week, just days into its first deployment in five years.

The USS Boxer left San Diego, its homeport, on April 1 for the Indo-Pacific, but turned back toward home Thursday for "additional maintenance in support of its deployment," according to a statement 3rd Fleet made to several news outlets.

"USS Boxer will resume its deployment in the near future," the statement said.

Third Fleet didn't elaborate on the maintenance problem, but USNI News reported Thursday it was related to the ship's rudder. Repairs could take up to three weeks, according to the report, which cited an unnamed defense official.

A spokesperson for 3rd Fleet did not respond to an email and phone call requesting comment.

The 843-foot Boxer is the flagship of an amphibious ready group that includes the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit from Camp Pendleton, Calif., and two other ships, the amphibious transport dock USS Somerset and landing ship dock USS Harpers Ferry.

The group also includes new amphibious combat vehicles designed to replace the amphibious assault vehicles in which eight Marines and a sailor drowned off Southern California in July 2020.

The Boxer was already under scrutiny following significant mechanical issues that delayed its deployment multiple times.

Sex crimes charges dropped against California Marine after plea deal

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — A Southern California Marine accused of having sex with a missing 14-year-old girl found in his Camp Pendleton barracks room last summer no longer faces sex crimes charges, military officials said.

Under an agreement offered by his defense attorney, Pfc. Avery Rosario pleaded guilty Tuesday to breach of restriction, for leaving the base with-

out permission, The San Diego Union-Tribune reported.

He was sentenced to time served and agreed to be administratively separated, essentially fired from the Marine Corps without a dishonorable discharge.

Before the plea deal, Rosario faced charges alleging sexual assault after he was arrested June 28 when the missing girl was discovered in his room.

His attorney maintained Ro-

sario thought the girl was an adult. She was returned to her family.

The decision to dismiss allegations that Rosario sexually assaulted a minor came after consultation with the girl and her family through the girl's attorney, a military spokesperson told the Union-Tribune.

A relative of the teen told NBC San Diego after Tuesday's hearing that the family did not wish to comment.

FBI opens probe into bridge collapse

Associated Press

The FBI is conducting a criminal investigation into the deadly collapse of Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge that is focused on the circumstances leading up to it and whether all federal laws were followed, according to someone familiar with the matter.

The person was not authorized to discuss details of the investigation publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity to The Associated Press.

FBI agents were aboard the cargo ship Dali on Monday conducting court-authorized law enforcement activity, the agency said in a statement. It didn't elaborate and said it wouldn't comment further on the investigation, which was first reported by The Washington Post.

Meanwhile, Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott on Monday announced a partnership with two law firms to "launch legal action to hold the wrongdoers responsible" and mitigate harm to city

residents.

The massive Dali left Baltimore's port in the early hours of March 26, laden with cargo and headed for Sri Lanka, when it struck one of the bridge's supporting columns, causing the span to collapse into the Patapsco River and sending six members of a roadwork crew plunging to their deaths.

Divers have recovered three of the six bodies from the wreckage.

The Dali experienced appar-

ent electrical issues before leaving port, according to a different source with knowledge of the situation. The person, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to comment, said alarms went off on the ship's refrigerated containers while it was still docked in Baltimore, likely indicating an inconsistent power supply.

The ship's crew was aware of the issues and indicated they would be addressed, according to the source.

Trump's hush-money trial gets underway in NYC

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Donald Trump arrived Monday at a New York court for the start of jury selection in his hush money trial, marking a historic moment as the former president and current White House hopeful answers to criminal charges.

It's the first criminal trial of any former U.S. commander in chief and the first of Trump's four indictments to reach trial. Because he is also the presumptive nominee for this year's Republican ticket, the trial will produce the head-spinning split-screen of a presidential candidate spending his days in court and, he has said, "campaigning during the night."

At the outset of Monday's court proceedings, Judge Juan M. Merchan denied a defense request to recuse himself from the case. Also before jury selection, prosecutors asked a judge to fine Trump \$3,000 over social media posts about key witnesses.

Prosecutors from the Manhattan District Attorney's office are seeking a \$1,000 fine for each of three posts that they say violate gag order that bars him from commenting on witnesses.

Scores of people are expected to be called into the courtroom to begin the process of finding 12 jurors, plus six alternates. Trump's notoriety would make the process of picking a jury a

near-herculean task in any year, but it's likely to be especially challenging now, unfolding in a closely contested presidential election in the city where Trump grew up and catapulted to celebrity status before winning the White House.

Merchan has written that the key is "whether the prospective juror can assure us that they will set aside any personal feelings or biases and render a decision that is based on the evidence and the law."

The trial amounts to a historic courtroom reckoning for Trump, whose norm-shattering presidency was shadowed from start to finish by investigations and who now faces four sepa-

rate indictments.

Trump has pleaded not guilty to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records.

Prosecutors say he was trying to conceal an alleged effort to keep salacious — and, he says, bogus — stories about his sex life from emerging during his 2016 campaign.

The charges center on \$130,000 in payments that Trump's company made to his then-lawyer, Michael Cohen. He had paid that sum on Trump's behalf to keep porn actor Stormy Daniels from going public, a month before the election, with her claims of a sexual encounter with the married mogul a decade earlier.

Johnson says he will push for Israel and Ukraine aid

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Mike Johnson said Sunday he will try to advance war-time aid for Israel this week as he attempts the difficult task of winning House approval for a national security package that also includes funding for Ukraine and allies in Asia.

Johnson, R-La., is already under immense political pressure from his fellow GOP lawmakers as he tries to stretch between the

Republican Party's divided support for helping Kyiv defend itself from Moscow's invasion. The Republican speaker has sat for two months on a \$95 billion supplemental package that would send support to the U.S. allies, as well as provide humanitarian aid for civilians in Ukraine and Gaza and funding to replenish U.S. weapons provided to Taiwan.

The attack by Iran on Israel early Sunday further ratcheted

up the pressure on Johnson, but also gave him an opportunity to underscore the urgency of approving the funding.

Johnson told Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures" that he and Republicans "understand the necessity of standing with Israel" and he would try this week to advance the aid.

"The details of that package are being put together right now," he said. "We're looking at the options and all these supple-

mental issues."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer at a news conference also said that President Joe Biden held a phone call Sunday with the top Republicans and Democrats in the House and Senate, including Johnson. The New York Democrat said there was consensus "among all the leaders that we had to help Israel and help Ukraine, and now hopefully we can work that out and get this done next week."

Philippines: No plans to give US access to more military bases

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippine president said Monday his administration has no plan to give the U.S. access to more Philippine military bases and stressed that the American military's presence in several camps and sites so far was sparked by China's actions in the disputed South China Sea.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who took office in 2022, allowed American forces and weapons access to four additional Philippine military bases, bringing to nine the number of sites where U.S. troops can rotate indefinitely under a 2014 agreement.

The Biden administration has been strengthening an arc of security alliances in the region to better counter China, a move that dovetails with Philippine efforts to shore up its external defense, especially in the South China Sea.

Marcos' decision last year alarmed China because two of the new sites were located just across from Taiwan and southern China. Beijing accused the

Philippines of providing American forces with staging grounds, which could be used to undermine its security.

"The Philippines has no plans to create any more bases or give access to any more bases," Marcos said, without elaborating in response to a question during a forum with Manila-based foreign correspondents.

Asked if he was concerned that allowing the U.S. military access to Philippine bases had provoked Chinese actions in the South China Sea, Marcos said the presence of U.S. troops was in response to China's moves.

"These are reactions to what has happened in the South China Sea, to the aggressive actions that we have had to deal with," he said, mentioning Chinese coast guard vessels using water cannons and lasers to deter Philippine ships from the area Beijing claims as its own.

Last week, President Joe Biden renewed Washington's commitment to defend Pacific allies in a White House summit with Marcos and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

Biden hosts Iraqi leader as Mideast tensions soar

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Monday hailed the "unprecedented military effort to defend Israel" on Monday as he hosted Iraq's leader at the White House and his administration aims to prevent an escalation in Mideast hostilities following Iran's weekend attack.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani was visiting the White House for talks intended to focus primarily on U.S.-Iraq relations, which had been scheduled well before the Iranian strikes. But Saturday's drone and missile launches, including some that overflowed Iraqi airspace and others that were launched from Iraq by Iran-backed groups, have underscored the delicate relationship between Washington and Baghdad.

The sharp increase in regional tensions over Israel's war in Gaza and the weekend developments have raised further questions about the viability of the two-decade American military presence in Iraq. However, a U.S. Patriot battery in Irbil, Iraq, did shoot down at least one Iranian ballistic missile, according to American officials, one of dozens of missiles and drones destroyed by U.S. forces alongside Israeli efforts to defeat the attack.

Speaking at the start of the meeting in the Oval Office, Biden reinforced that the U.S. remains "committed to Israel's security."

"Our partnership is pivotal for our nations, the Middle East and the world," Biden told al-Sudani, as the Iraqi leader noted the discussion comes at a "sensitive time."

Meeting with Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Muhammad Ali Tamim before Biden's session with al-Sudani, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the U.S. was urging all parties to avoid escalation.

"In the 36 hours since, we have been coordinating a diplomatic response to seek to prevent escalation," he said. "Strength and wisdom need to be different sides of the same coin."

Tamim said the Iraqi government was equally concerned.

"The Middle East today is living in exceptional circumstances that have repercussions on our nations, and we hope escalations and tensions in the area will end," he said.

Monday's talks would also focus on economic, trade and energy issues that have become a major priority for Iraq's government. Biden praised al-Sudani for strengthening Iraq's economy.

Japanese Red Cross collects blood at US Marine base

BY JONATHAN SNYDER
AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — The Japanese Red Cross recently parked its blood-collection bus on this base south of Hiroshima for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Marine spouse Catherine Matchem-Watkins was among the Americans donating their vital fluid Thursday during the

blood drive by the organization's Yamaguchi Prefecture Blood Center.

She has an American Red Cross blood donor card and was excited to receive Japan's version.

"I've always wanted to donate blood to Japan because I've donated blood in the States," the Marine Corps Community Services employee told Stars and Stripes at the drive. "It's always been a thing for me to just make

sure I'm giving back because you never know when blood can save a life and it actually helped save my son's life."

The Japanese Red Cross began collecting blood at MCAS Iwakuni in 2004; however, only Japanese employees could donate until 2017, when the American Red Cross began providing translators, said Takuya Nakagawa, Japanese Red Cross spokesman.

The entire donation process

was simple and easy with the translator's help, Matchem-Watkins said.

Nine Americans donated blood on Thursday, Nakagawa said.

"We are thankful that they cooperated in donating blood, which is also a contribution to the community," he said.

The last blood drive at MCAS Iwakuni was held on Aug. 21, 2019, 4½ years ago, Nakagawa said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Vote OKs Oakland airport name adjustment

CA SAN FRANCISCO — Oakland officials have voted in favor of changing the name of the city's airport to San Francisco Bay Oakland International Airport, despite San Francisco threatening a lawsuit over what it said is a trademark violation.

The Board of Commissioners for the Port of Oakland voted unanimously to move forward with the name-change and scheduled a second vote for final approval on May 9. The airport is currently called Oakland International Airport.

Oakland airport officials have said travelers unfamiliar with the region fly into San Francisco's airport even if their destination is closer to the Oakland airport across the Bay. Modifying the name to San Francisco Bay Oakland International Airport will change that, they said. The airport's three-letter code OAK would not change.

Firms to halt sales as part of 'ghost guns' suit

PA PHILADELPHIA — Two of America's leading gun parts manufacturers have agreed to temporarily halt sales of their products in Philadelphia and elsewhere in Pennsylvania, city officials said, announcing a settlement of their lawsuit against the companies.

Philadelphia filed suit against Polymer80 and JSD Supply in July, accusing the manufacturers of perpetuating gun violence in the city by manufacturing and selling untraceable, self-manufactured weapons commonly known as "ghost guns."

Under the settlement, JSD Supply, based in Butler, Pa., agreed it would no longer sell its products in the state for four years, city officials said. JSD-owned Eagle Shows, which bills itself as Pennsylvania's largest gun show, will be required to prohibit vendors from selling such gun parts for two years.

Dayton, Nev.-based Polymer80 agreed to a four-year ban on sales to customers in Philadelphia and nearby counties. Additionally, Polymer80 agreed to pay \$1.3 million, which Philadelphia officials said will fund efforts to address gun violence.

Man arrested for allegedly taking inactive fireboat

NY NEW YORK — A man was arrested for allegedly taking a decommissioned New York City fireboat for an overnight cruise on the Hudson River, before becoming stuck, jumping ship and stealing another vessel, police said.

He was charged with two counts of grand larceny, officials said.

The man commandeered the fireboat, known as the John J. Harvey, by untying it from its mooring at Pier 66 off the west side of Manhattan, according to authorities. The 130-foot-long vessel, which now serves as a museum, earned local acclaim after it was used to evacuate survivors of 9/11.

Once aboard the fireboat, the man was able to drift a short distance into the Hudson River, police said, but quickly got stuck. He leapt overboard, plunging into the frigid waters and later emerging on a second stolen vessel, according to police. The department's Harbor Unit ar-

rested the man on the sailboat's deck.

Teen sentenced in bonfire blast that burned others

WI MAPLE GROVE — An 18-year-old who triggered a bonfire explosion that injured more than a dozen people at a backyard gathering in eastern Wisconsin has been sentenced to a year in jail and five years probation.

Sam Armstrong appeared in Shawano County Court, WLUK-TV reported.

Armstrong pleaded no contest in February to 13 counts of injury by negligent use of an explosive. A no-contest plea is not an admission of guilt but is used as such at sentencing.

Armstrong was attending a bonfire on Oct. 14, 2022, with other teenagers in Maple Grove, about 25 miles northwest of Green Bay, when he threw a barrel containing a mix of gasoline and diesel into the fire, sparking an explosion that burned at least 17 of the roughly 60 youths who were there, authorities have said.

He told police he didn't know his actions would cause an explosion and injure anyone, according to a criminal complaint. Armstrong told investigators he had been drinking beer.

Prison official charged for taking \$219K in bribes

SC COLUMBIA — A supervisor who managed security at a South Carolina prison accepted more than \$219,000 in bribes over three years and got 173 contraband cellphones for inmates, according to federal prosecutors.

Christine Mary Livingston, 46, was indicted on 15 charges

including bribery, conspiracy, wire fraud and money laundering.

Livingston worked for the South Carolina Department of Corrections for 16 years. She was promoted to captain at Broad River Correctional Institution in 2016, which put her in charge of security at the medium-security Columbia prison, investigators said.

Livingston worked with an inmate, Jerrell Reaves, 33, to accept bribes for cellphones and other contraband accessories. They would take \$1,000 to \$7,000 over the smart phone Cash App money transfer program for a phone, according to the federal indictment unsealed.

Lawmakers send bill to ban first-cousin marriages

TN NASHVILLE — The Republican-led Tennessee Legislature has overwhelmingly voted to send GOP Gov. Bill Lee a proposal that would ban marriage between first cousins.

The House cast a 75-2 vote on the bill after the Senate previously approved it without any opposition.

But a particularly vocal opponent, Republican Rep. Gino Bulso, took up most of the debate time, as he argued for an amendment to allow first-cousin marriages if the couple first seeks counseling from a genetic counselor.

The socially conservative attorney argued that the risk of married cousins having a child with birth defects does not exist for gay couples. He contended there is no compelling government interest to ban same-sex cousins from getting married.

— From wire reports

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Scheffler pulls away for 2nd Masters win

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Scottie Scheffler spent more time looking at his feet than any of the white leaderboards at Augusta National, all of them showing what everyone was watching — a Masters champion again, the undisputed best player in golf.

He prefers to stay in his own little world, population one.

Nobody is close to him in the game at the moment.

Scheffler is No. 1 in the world by a margin not seen since Tiger Woods in his prime. In nine tournaments this year, he doesn't have a round over par and has earned over \$15 million. And on Sunday, he delivered the greatest piece of evidence when he slipped into that green jacket.

Scheffler pulled ahead with magnificent shots around the turn, poured it on along the back

nine as his challengers melted away with mistakes and closed with a 4-under 68 to claim his second Masters in three years with a four-shot victory.

"I had a lot of really talented players trying to chase me down, and I knew pars weren't going to get it done," Scheffler said.

Unlike two years ago when he won his first major, there were no doubts Sunday morning, no tears, and no wife to reassure him he was built for a moment like this. His wife, Meredith, was home in Dallas expecting their first child at the end of the month.

Scheffler made sure there was no drama, either.

Much like Woods he made the outcome look inevitable with sublime control, the difference being a peach shirt instead of Sunday red, and no fist pumps

until it was over.

After sharing hugs with cadie Ted Scott and Collin Morikawa, Scheffler turned to face the crowd with both arms raised. "WOOOOOO!" he yelled, slamming his fist.

Masters newcomer Ludvig Aberg, among four players who had a share of the lead at one point, lost ground when his approach went into the pond left of the 11th hole and he made double bogey. Against a player like Scheffler, those mistakes are not easy to overcome.

Aberg closed with a 69 and was the runner-up, not a bad debut for someone playing in his first major championship.

Morikawa, who had two double bogeys to fall out of the hunt, shot 74 and tied for third with Tommy Fleetwood (69) and Max Homa (73), whose hopes ended on the par-3 12th with a

double bogey from the bushes, not Rae's Creek.

"He is pretty amazing at letting things roll off his back and stepping up to very difficult golf shots and treating them like their own," Homa said about Scheffler. "He's obviously a tremendous talent, but I think that is his superpower."

Woods, meanwhile, closed with a 77 and finished in last place at 16-over 304, the highest 72-hole score of his career. This came two days after he set the Masters record for making his 24th consecutive cut.

The 27-year-old Scheffler is the fourth-youngest player to have two green jackets. He now has three victories against the strongest fields — Bay Hill, The Players Championship and the Masters — in his last four starts. The other was a runner-up finish in Houston.

Familiar faces, foes kick off NBA's postseason

Associated Press

LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers are back in the play-in tournament. So is Stephen Curry, as he and Golden State will be fighting for their season. And Jimmy Butler returns as well, after this round last year was the first step on Miami's way to the NBA Finals.

The postseason — not technically the playoffs, yet — gets underway Tuesday with a pair of Western Conference matchups. The Lakers visit New Orleans with the winner securing the No. 7 seed and a series with defending champion Denver in Round 1. And then the Warriors go to Sacramento, an elimination game for both teams.

Golden State won a Game 7 at Sacramento to last season to advance. The Warriors know Tuesday's game has Game 7-type consequences.

"It'll be a great atmosphere," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "We were there last year, obviously. They'll have their crowd behind them. It's nice to not get on a plane. So, we'll take the bus up there tomorrow, have a day to prepare and be ready to go."

The Eastern Conference takes the stage Wednesday: Philadelphia plays host to Miami in a game to decide the No. 7 seed,

and Atlanta visits Chicago with the season on the line for those clubs.

"Look, this is the best time of year," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "These kind of environments, the games, the context ... you can't expect it to be easy."

Of the 20 postseason seeds, 15 were decided on Sunday, as were three of the four play-in matchups and three of the four first-round series that don't include play-in teams.

"Good momentum going into the playoffs," Thunder star Shai Gilgeous-Alexander said after his team finished No. 1 in the West. "Nothing to complain about. ... We won a lot of basketball games. That's what it's all about. That's what everybody laces their shoes up for, to win basketball games and have a chance to win a championship."

Phoenix won at Minnesota on Sunday, and now will head back there for a Game 1 next weekend.

"It's time now," Suns guard Bradley Beal said. "It starts now."

The Lakers forced a rematch of Sunday's regular-season finale with a 128-104 victory in New Orleans that knocked the Pelicans out of the sixth seed. Now the

Lakers expect the Pelicans to respond as if this were Game 2 of a playoff series.

"You win that first game and a team has multiple days to kind of sit on that feeling, sit with that taste in their mouth of defeat, so they're going to be extremely ready for us and we have to come in with the same sense of urgency," said the 39-year-old James, who is playing in his 21st NBA season.

The Lakers and Heat showed that the play-in can be a springboard to bigger and better things last year; the Lakers reached the Western Conference finals, the Heat reached the NBA Finals.

"We're not the same group as last year," Butler said. "We — I — are very confident in the guys that we do have, and we know what we're capable of. We'll see what we got whenever the time gets here."

Golden State gets a short bus ride north for an elimination game against the Kings, on the same floor where the Warriors won a road Game 7 in Round 1 last season.

"We're happy to have a shot," Kerr said.

So are the Kings, who had an up-and-down season — but have a chance to vanquish the memory of falling in the playoffs to the Warriors a year ago.

Elliott snaps 42-race skid with OT win

Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — Chase Elliott had to get through a few extra laps after 18 months since last winning a race.

Elliott pulled ahead and cleared Ross Chastain on the first lap after the second restart in overtime Sunday at Texas Motor Speedway, ending a 42-race winless streak for NASCAR's most popular driver.

"A lot of things went on our way today. I'm not naive to that," Elliott said. "You have to be in the mix and you've got to be up front to even have things go your way. And we were close enough to do that."

The race ended on the 16th

caution after Elliott had taken the white flag for the 276th lap in a race scheduled for 267 laps. Chastain got bumped from behind by defending race winner William Byron, who finished third and was just behind Brad Keselowski when the final yellow flag came out.

It was the fifth win this season for Hendrick Motorsports, the 306th for NASCAR's winningest team, but the first for Elliott in the No. 9 Chevrolet since Talladega in October 2022.

"The longer it goes and the more ways you find to either not run good or lose races, you know it can make it tougher," Elliott said. "It's been an extremely im-

portant thing to me ... to try to climb this mountain again together and try to get back to where we need to be as a group."

Elliott and Denny Hamlin were at the front of the field after a restart with two laps left in regulation, and they were racing all-out when Hamlin got loose on the outside going into Turn 4 and went hard into the wall, bringing out the 14th caution and sending the race to overtime.

"Trying go for the win ... got loose and spun out," said Hamlin, the only driver to lead laps in all nine races this season.

That was the second restart in the last 10 laps of regulation, with Hamlin leading on the pre-

vious one before Elliott edged ahead about the same time that another caution came out when polesitter Kyle Larson wrecked after a crowded four-wide jumble back in the field.

On the first restart in overtime, Elliott was on the inside and took a hard shove from Keselowski, but Harrison Burton was wrecked within a half lap.

In NASCAR's only stop this season at the 1½-mile Texas Motor Speedway, which for the first time in 20 years won't host a fall playoff race, there were 13 different leaders.

Keselowski has now gone 107 races since his last win at Talladega in April 2021.

Guardians rally to stun Yankees in 10 for series win

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — The Guardians began their first homestand staring at the sky in awe. They ended it with a stunning show on the field.

First a total solar eclipse, then a remarkable comeback against the New York Yankees.

Cleveland capped a memorable opening week at Progressive Field on Sunday by scoring three runs in the 10th inning for an 8-7 win to salvage the finale of a three-game series against baseball's top team.

It's early, way too early to make any broad declarations about the Guardians. But at 10-5, and having won four of their first five series, they've already surpassed expectations while showing grit, togetherness and resilience.

"This whole homestand, we fought back," first-year manager Stephen Vogt said. "We're not going to quit. That's one of the things I heard the boys yelling on the way back up to the clubhouse, 'We don't quit! We don't quit!' And that's what this group is about."

After falling behind 7-5 in the top of the 10th and on the verge

of being swept, the Guardians scratched and scrapped their way back, scoring three runs on a forceout, fielder's choice and sacrifice fly.

Orioles 6, Brewers 4: Jackson Holliday delivered his first big league hit in the seventh inning, then scored the tiebreaking run to help host Baltimore avoid a sweep with a victory over Milwaukee.

Holliday came up with the Orioles down 4-3 in the seventh. With a man on first and no outs, Holliday singled into right field. Then the rookie infielder flashed his speed, barely making it from first to third on Gunnar Henderson's RBI single.

Pirates 9, Phillies 2: Andrew McCutchen hit his 300th home run, Jack Suwinski had a grand slam and visiting Pittsburgh beat Philadelphia to gain a split of the four-game series.

Padres 6, Dodgers 3: Jurickson Profar broke a seventh-inning tie with a three-run double, Jackson Merrill had three hits and visiting San Diego defeated Los Angeles to take two of three in their weekend series.

Profar's bases-loaded drive off the center-field fence gave

the Padres two straight series wins at Dodger Stadium for the first time since 2013.

Athletics 7, Nationals 6: Abraham Toro hit a go-ahead, two-run single in a six-run sixth inning, and host Oakland rallied from five runs down to beat Washington to win three straight series for the first time since 2021.

Blue Jays 5, Rockies 0: José Berríos and two relievers combined on a two-hitter, Justin Turner had three hits and three RBIs and host Toronto beat Colorado for its second shutout victory of the season.

Rays 9, Giants 4: Amed Rosario and René Pinto homered off Blake Snell in his return to Tropicana Field, and host Tampa Bay beat San Francisco.

Snell (0-2) gave up seven hits, walked two and struck out four in four innings.

Red Sox 5, Angels 4: Masataka Yoshida hit his first homer of the season, one of three home runs by his team, and host Boston beat Los Angeles.

Astros 8, Rangers 5: Jose Altuve homered off Nathan Eovaldi in his first two at-bats and Cristian Javier pitched seven

strong innings to lead host Houston to a win over Texas.

Reds 11, White Sox 4: Christian Encarnacion-Strand tied a career high with four RBIs, and visiting Cincinnati routed Chicago for a three-game sweep.

Cubs 3, Mariners 2: Michael Busch homered for the fourth straight game, Javier Assad struck out six and visiting Chicago beat Seattle.

Diamondbacks 5, Cardinals 0: Zac Gallen pitched six sharp innings and Corbin Carroll hit a two-run single in a five-run fifth to lead host Arizona.

Tigers 4, Twins 3: Mark Canha's two-run double highlighted a four-run eighth inning for host Detroit as it rallied to beat Minnesota.

Braves 9, Marlins 7: Marcell Ozuna hit a three-run homer off Tanner Scott with two outs in the ninth inning, and visiting Atlanta beat Miami to take two of three in the series.

Mets 2, Royals 1: Harrison Bader broke a scoreless tie with an infield single in the eighth inning and Edwin Díaz earned his first save at Citi Field since October 2022 as host New York edged Kansas City.

Knights score 4 late, top Avalanche in OT

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Tomas Hertl, who earlier had a goal wiped out because of goaltender interference, scored on a power play 1:23 into overtime as the Vegas Golden Knights rallied from three goals down to defeat the Colorado Avalanche 4-3 on Sunday.

"Maybe it was karma," Hertl said.

The Knights trailed 3-0 after two periods, but forced overtime when William Karlsson scored twice and Ivan Barbashev once. Karlsson's second goal, his 30th of the season and fifth in six games, came with 3:37 left in regulation. Adin Hill made 21 saves.

The Knights outshot Colorado 13-2 in the third period and overtime.

"It would've been easy tonight to say, 'Let's build our

game and do some things in the third that are good and then worry about our next one,'" Knights coach Bruce Cassidy said. "It's good that they pushed back. I think that will help the group collectively as we go into the playoffs. If we're in this position, this is the one we'll look back and say, 'Hey, you're never out of it.'"

Vegas took advantage of an Avalanche team playing the second of a back-to-back. They lost 7-0 to Winnipeg on Saturday in Denver, and have been defeated in five of their past seven games.

"When you get into a game with a team that makes a push, you've got to continue to push back," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said. "We didn't push back hard enough, but at the end of the day, you can't take dumb penalties in a tight game. You

just can't. That's the difference in the hockey game for me."

Blues 4, Kraken 1: Jordan Kyrou, Brayden Schenn and Nathan Walker scored in the third period, leading host St. Louis to a victory over Seattle.

Kasperii Kapanen also scored for St. Louis. Joel Hofer made 19 saves and hiked his record to 15-12-1.

Jared McCann scored a goal for the Kraken and Joey Daccord made 25 saves as his record slipped to 18-18-11.

Hurricanes 4, Blackhawks 2: Seth Jarvis scored two power-play goals in the third period, and visiting Carolina beat Chicago for its fifth consecutive victory.

Jordan Staal also scored for Carolina (52-22-7), which stayed alive in the race for the Metropolitan Division title. Sebastian Aho added an empty-

netter, and Andrei Svechnikov had two assists.

The Hurricanes moved within one point of the idle New York Rangers for the top spot in the division. Each team has one game left on its schedule.

Flames 6, Coyotes 5: Nazem Kadri scored twice in the third period, and also had an assist, as host Calgary rallied to beat Arizona.

Andrei Kuzmenko, Matt Coronato, Connor Zary, and Yegor Sharangovich also scored for Calgary, which has won three of its last four games. Dustin Wolf finished with 30 saves to win his third straight start.

Dylan Guenther had two goals, and Alex Kerfoot, Matias Maccelli, and Josh Doan also scored for Arizona, which was swept in the three-game season series with the Flames. Clayton Keller had two assists.

Canada defeats US in women's world hockey final

Associated Press

UTICA, N.Y. — Slowed by an injury entering the women's world hockey championships, it seemed only a matter of time for Marie-Philip Poulin — aka, Canada's Captain Clutch — to make her presence felt.

That moment came Sunday, with Poulin scoring twice in a breathtaking 6-5 overtime win over the United States that has the gold medal returning to Canada for a tournament-record 13th time.

"I hate to say you're not trying to rely on it, expect it, but I know I've grown to expect it," Canada coach Troy Ryan said. "Tonight was just a whole other level. I could see in her eyes every time we called her name that she was ready to go. It's just special."

In an outing sealed by Danielle Serdachny converting a rebound 5:16 into the extra period for a power-play goal, Poulin was the difference-maker in settling Canada in an outing filled with momentum shifts, three lead changes and neither team building more than a one-goal lead.

With the U.S. surging in the second period by scoring twice less than six minutes apart to build a 3-2 lead, Poulin tied the game by roofing a shot off the crossbar with 1:02 left in the period.

"Happy it happened today," said Poulin, who missed the final three games with her PWHL Montreal team leading up to the world championship break. "You want to win and I'm competitive and that's part of it."

The 33-year-old Poulin earned her nickname with gold medal-clinching goals in two Winter Games and the 2021 world championships — each time against the U.S.

Canada got payback by beating the Americans on home soil in central New York a year after a 6-3 loss to the U.S., which won its 10th tournament outside of Toronto.

What also stood out was the relentless pace and back-and-forth intensity that was once again on display in the 36th tournament meeting between the world's top powers.

Poulin went so far as to search out U.S. captain Hilary Knight and give her a hug on the ice.

"We just said, 'That was unbelievable,'" Poulin said.

And heart-breaking, from a U.S. perspective.

Though American defenseman Caroline

Harvey had a goal and assist, she also had two pucks go in off her.

"No emotion. I mean, it's not the result we wanted," Harvey said. "Not what we came here for. Definitely very motivational. Pretty speechless at this point."

Aside from losing on home soil, the game ended with Serdachny's power-play goal coming with 2 seconds left on a too-many-players penalty. Erin Ambrose's shot from the left circle was stopped by Aerin Frankel, before Serdachny swept the loose puck into the net.

"Let me regroup after that one," U.S. coach John Wroblewski said, following a three-second pause. "Instead of talking about the isolated events of tonight's game, I think that normally that's an interesting storyline. But I think the entity of an amazing 6-5 game is an amazing hockey game that took place."

There's much a young and somewhat untested American team, featuring four players making their tournament debuts, can learn from building toward the future.

"We were served a lesson tonight on that. And we'll see if we can bank it and make our players appreciate what they (thought) that lesson was," Wroblewski said.