

‘Moving at breathtaking speed in space’ US general issues warning over China’s rapidly advancing capabilities

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — U.S. Space Command’s new leader warned of China’s rapidly advancing space capabilities this week following meetings with his South Korean and Japanese counterparts.

“We’re seriously focused at U.S. Space Command on our pacing challenge, which is the People’s Republic of China,” Space Force Gen. Stephen Whiting told reporters during an online press conference from Japan’s capital Wednesday.

The Tokyo stop was part of a tour that has included visits to South Korea and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii.

Beijing is “moving at breathtaking speed in space,” Whiting said, noting that China is rapidly developing a range of counter-space weapons that threaten American space capabilities.

“They’re also using space to

make their terrestrial forces — their army, their navy, their marine corps, their air force — more precise, more lethal and more far-ranging,” he said.

The general, who took charge of Space Command in January, also met Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara and top military leaders.

Whiting held up Japan’s new Space Operations Group, which he also visited this week, as an example during his talks in Japan and South Korea.

“Their focus on space domain awareness along with ours to keep track of those threats in space that we see — and many of those are emanating from China — has put an impetus on us developing improved space domain awareness capability,” he told reporters.

Japan is preparing to field a deep-space radar that will provide better understanding of what China is doing in space,

Whiting said.

The U.S. is partnering with Japan to launch new satellites that will monitor space from orbit, he said, adding that he visited a Mitsubishi satellite factory during his trip.

Chinese activities on the Moon are also on Space Command’s radar.

“Those appear to be exploratory and scientific on the surface, but the Chinese aren’t very transparent with what they do in space,” he said. “So, we hope there’s not a military component to that, but we would certainly welcome more transparency.”

Whiting said he’s interested in having space domain awareness reach lunar orbit.

“We want to make sure that any activities that happen on the Moon are indeed for science purposes and exploration and that no one is going to the Moon for military purposes,” he said.

Space Command operated from 1985 to 2002 and was reestablished in August 2019. It differs from the Space Force, an independent service branch established in December 2019.

Space Command guards America’s space assets and protects U.S. and allied forces from potential space-enabled attacks, Whiting said.

The U.S. military has been collaborating and training in the space domain with Japan and South Korea, the general added.

“We find that when we operate in a unified fashion with our allies and partners, that builds deterrence and ensures that there will never be a day without space for our militaries and for our national populations,” he said.

Whiting was next headed to Kwajalein Atoll, where the Air Force recently conducted its first hypersonic missile test in the Western Pacific.

Navy opens up combat awards for actions in Mideast

By MATTHEW ADAMS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy is now authorizing combat awards for sailors serving in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, the service has announced.

Sailors in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden can now receive the Combat Action Ribbon, as well as personal military decorations that include “C” and “V” devices for combat and valor, Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro wrote in a memo released Wednesday.

The Air Medal is authorized

on a strike/flight basis, which is given for sustained flight operations. Sailors can also receive personal military decorations with “R” for direct hands-on efforts during combat operations.

Awards can be issued for incidents dating back to Oct. 19, 2023, when Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen began firing anti-ship missiles and drones over the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, according to the Navy.

On Oct. 19, the USS Carney shot down cruise missiles and several drones that were launched by Houthis.

Since 2014, Houthi rebels have been involved in a civil war with the government in Yemen, which is located on the southwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula and shares borders with Saudi Arabia and Oman. Its coastline runs along the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

The Carney’s actions at the time came amid spiking violence and attacks in the Middle East in the two weeks after Hamas militants launched a surprise assault against Israel on Oct. 7, killing more than 1,000 Israelis.

Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, the commander of the 5th Fleet at the time, visited the Carney in January to award medals to several sailors who helped shoot down 14 Houthi drones on Dec. 16. The 5th Fleet’s area of responsibility includes the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Arabian Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean.

For the latest combat awards, imminent danger pay is not authorized for the region. The awards are limited to times when the sailor received hostile-fire pay.

IG finds gap in Army harassment claims, reports

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

More than 4,500 soldiers said in a survey that they have experienced sexual harassment in the Army but less than 100 filed a formal complaint, according to a review released Wednesday by the Pentagon's top internal investigator.

The review conducted by the Defense Department inspector general said an anonymous Army survey of more than 27,000 soldiers found 4,674 had experienced or witnessed sexual harassment in the ranks. But the service reported only 73 formal complaints of sexual harassment

were received between January 2021 and January 2023, according to the review.

Defense Department Inspector General Robert Storch said in a statement that the large difference in perceived incidents and reported incidents was due to the Army's failure to use and understand surveys and reports on the problem.

"Sexual harassment, bullying and hazing should not be tolerated under any circumstances," he said.

The review focused on eight brigades at two garrisons — Fort Cavazos, Texas, and Fort Liberty, N.C. The recommendations, how-

ever, are for all Army installations and units.

The review concluded the Army was missing the significance of the gap and whether the sexual harassment reporting system was too confusing or cumbersome.

"[The Army] may miss opportunities to identify possible barriers to reporting," according to the IG report.

The Pentagon review focused on how Army brigade commanders use two tools: The Defense Organizational Climate Survey, which asks soldiers anonymously for their opinions on a wide range of topics on Army life, including

sexual harassment, and Command Climate Assessments, which are reports by commanders that take surveys and filed complaints into account in determining the level of perceived problems within their ranks.

The review found commanders failed to compare year-over-year results on the climate survey to establish trends. Questions on hazing and bullying were often omitted.

The climate assessments were drawn up without a proper understanding of what the results of the surveys meant and what the trends identified as issues within each command.

No decision made on US leaving Niger, Chad

Associated Press

There has been no final decision on whether all U.S. troops will leave Niger and Chad, two African countries that are integral to the military's efforts to counter violent extremist organizations across the Sahel region, a top U.S. military official told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Niger's ruling junta ended an agreement last month that allows U.S. troops to operate in the West African country. The State Department said Wednesday night that U.S. and Nigerien officials would meet Thursday in the capital, Niamey, "to initiate discussions on an orderly and responsible withdrawal of U.S. forces."

That meeting comes as the two countries have been "unable to reach an understanding" to continue cooperation "in a manner that addresses the needs and concerns of each side," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said.

The government of neighboring Chad in recent days has also questioned its agreement with the United States, Joint Chiefs Vice Chairman Adm. Christopher Grady, the nation's second-highest-ranking military officer, said in an interview.

The agreements have allowed the U.S. to conduct critical counterterrorism operations within the countries' borders and have supported military partner training in both nations. The reversals have prompted concern that U.S. influence in Africa is losing ground to overtures from Russia and China.

"We are all trying to establish ourselves as the partner of choice," Grady said. "It's up to us to establish why we think our partnership with them is important. We certainly want to be there. We want to help them, we want to empower them, we want to do things by, with and through (them)."

Army fires air defense commander in Germany

By PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — The commander of an Army air defense unit in Germany has been fired after just six months in charge, the service confirmed Thursday.

Lt. Col. Eric Ackles took command of 1st Battalion, 57th Air Defense Artillery Regiment in October, when it reactivated in Ansbach, amid growing concerns of Russian aggression on the Continent.

"A thorough investigation" led to his termination Monday, according to the 10th Army Air and Missile Defense Command, of which 1st Battalion is a subordinate.

"Lt. Col. Ackles was relieved due to a loss of trust and confidence in his ability to command," 10AAMDC spokesman Capt. Alec Watkins said in an email. "We take all allegations and investigations seriously."

Ackles' removal hasn't affect-

ed the battalion's mission, Watkins said, adding that its soldiers "maintain a high level of readiness."

The unit specializes in the short-range Avenger system, which uses surface-to-air missiles to shoot down aerial threats.

Two of its three battalions are based in the Bavarian town of Ansbach, while the third is in Vicenza, Italy.

U.S. air defense teams were rushed into countries on NATO's eastern flank following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 amid fears of the fighting spilling over into alliance nations.

Ackles served in various positions prior to his most recent post, including as a platoon leader and battery trainer.

The Florida native enlisted in the Air Force in 2002, where he was certified as an air traffic control specialist. He transferred to the Army in 2005, according to a biography provided at his assumption of command ceremony.

High court unsure of Trump immunity claim

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court seems highly skeptical of former President Donald Trump's claim of absolute immunity from prosecution, but it's less clear that the justices are headed for a quick resolution.

Chief Justice John Roberts was among at least five members of the court Thursday who appeared likely to reject the claim of absolute immunity that would stop special counsel Jack Smith's prosecution of Trump on charges he conspired to overturn his 2020 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

But in arguments lasting more than 2½ hours in the court's first consideration of criminal charges against a former president, Roberts also was among several justices who suggested that the case might have to be sent back to lower courts before any trial could begin. Roberts indicated he was unhappy with the reasoning adopted by the federal appeals court that ruled against Trump.

The timing of the Supreme Court's decision could be as im-

portant as the outcome. Trump, the presumptive 2024 Republican presidential nominee, has been pushing to delay the trial until after the November election, and the later the justices issue their decision, the more likely he is to succeed.

Justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, two of Trump's three high court appointees, suggested that former presidents might have some immunity and that in this case, lower courts might have to sort out whether that applied to Trump. That could further delay a trial.

Justice Amy Coney Barrett, the other Trump appointee, seemed less open to arguments advanced by Trump lawyer D. John Sauer.

Trump's lawyers argue that former presidents are entitled to absolute immunity for their official acts. Otherwise, they say, politically motivated prosecutions of former occupants of the Oval Office would become routine and presidents couldn't function as the commander in chief if they had to worry about criminal charges.

Fellow reservists say they warned of killer's decline

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Maine — Fellow U.S. Army reservists who witnessed the mental and physical decline of a colleague who would commit Maine's deadliest mass shooting told a commission investigating the killings Thursday that they tried to intervene before the tragedy.

Six weeks before Robert Card killed 18 people at a bar and bowling alley in Lewiston, his best friend and fellow reservist Sean Hodgson texted their supervisors, telling them to change the passcode to the gate at their Army Reserve training facility and arm themselves if Card showed up. The Lewiston killings happened Oct. 25 — exactly six months prior to Thursday's hearing.

"I grieve every day for the many lives that are lost for no reason and those that are still affected today," Hodgson said prior to testifying Thursday.

Hodgson told superiors on Sept. 15: "I believe he's going to snap and do a mass shooting." That message came months after relatives had warned police that Card had grown paranoid and said they were concerned about his access to guns.

The failure of authorities to

remove guns from Card's possession in the weeks before the shooting has become the subject of a monthslong investigation in the state, which also has passed new gun safety laws since the tragedy.

Card also was hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital for two weeks in July, and the Army barred him from having weapons while on duty. But aside from briefly staking out the reserve center and visiting Card's home, authorities declined to confront him. He was found dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound two days after the shootings.

In an interim report released last month, the independent commission launched by Gov. Jane Mills concluded that the Sagadahoc County sheriff's office had probable cause under Maine's "yellow flag" law to take Card into custody and seize his guns. It also criticized police for not following up with Hodgson about his warning text.

On Thursday, another fellow reservist, Daryl Reed, told the commission he witnessed firsthand the mental and physical decline of a colleague who went from a "normal guy" to becoming paranoid.

Arizona indicts 18 people in election interference case

Associated Press

PHOENIX — An Arizona grand jury has indicted former President Donald Trump's chief of staff Mark Meadows, lawyer Rudy Giuliani and 16 others for their roles in an attempt to overturn Trump's loss to Joe Biden in the 2020 election.

The indictment released Wednesday names 11 Republicans who submitted a document to Congress falsely declaring that Trump won Arizona in 2020. They include the former state party chair, a 2022 U.S. Senate candidate and two sitting

state lawmakers, who are charged with nine counts each of conspiracy, fraud and forgery.

The identities of seven other defendants, including Giuliani and Meadows, were not immediately released because they had not yet been served with the documents. They were readily identifiable based on descriptions of the defendants.

Trump himself was not charged but was referred to as an unindicted co-conspirator.

With the indictments, Arizona becomes the fourth state where

allies of the former president have been charged with using false or unproven claims about voter fraud related to the election. Heading into a likely November rematch with Biden, Trump continues to spread lies about the last election that are echoed by many of his supporters.

"I will not allow American democracy to be undermined," Democratic state Attorney General Kris Mayes said in a video released by her office. "It's too important."

The indictment alludes to Gi-

uliani as an attorney "who was often identified as the Mayor" and spread false allegations of election fraud. Another defendant is referred to as Trump's "chief of staff in 2020," which describes Meadows.

Descriptions of other unnamed defendants point to Mike Roman, who was Trump's director of Election Day operations; John Eastman, a lawyer who devised a strategy to try to persuade Congress not to certify the election; and Christina Bobb, a lawyer who worked with Giuliani.

Hamas official: Truce, Palestinian state linked

Associated Press

ISTANBUL — A top Hamas political official told The Associated Press the Islamic militant group is willing to agree to a truce of five years or more with Israel and that it would lay down its weapons and convert into a political party if an independent Palestinian state is established along pre-1967 borders.

The comments by Khalil al-Hayya in an interview Wednesday came amid a stalemate in months of talks for a cease-fire in Gaza. The suggestion that Hamas would disarm appeared to be a significant concession by the militant group officially committed to Israel's destruction.

But it's unlikely Israel would consider such a scenario. It has vowed to crush Hamas following the deadly Oct. 7 attacks that triggered the war, and its current leadership is adamantly opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state on lands Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war.

Al-Hayya, a high-ranking Hamas official who has represented the Palestinian militants in negotiations for a cease-fire and hostage exchange, struck a sometimes defiant and other times conciliatory tone.

Speaking to the AP in Istanbul, Al-Hayya said Hamas wants to join the Palestine Liberation Organization, headed by the rival Fatah faction, to form a unified government for Gaza and the West Bank. He said Hamas would accept "a fully sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the return of Palestinian refugees in accordance with the international resolutions," along Israel's pre-1967 borders. If that happens, he said, the group's military wing would dissolve.

"All the experiences of people who fought against occupiers, when they became independent and obtained their rights and their state, what have these forces done? They have turned into polit-

ical parties and their defending fighting forces have turned into the national army," he said.

Over the years, Hamas has sometimes moderated its public position with respect to the possibility of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. But its political program still officially "rejects any alternative to the full liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea" — referring to the area reaching from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, which includes lands that now make up Israel.

Al-Hayya did not say whether his apparent embrace of a two-state solution would amount to an end to the Palestinian conflict with Israel or an interim step toward the group's stated goal of destroying Israel.

There was no immediate reaction from Israel or the Palestinian Authority, the internationally recognized self-ruled government that Hamas drove out when it seized Gaza in 2007, a year after

winning Palestinian parliamentary elections. After the Hamas takeover of Gaza, the Palestinian Authority was left with administering semi-autonomous pockets of the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

The Palestinian Authority hopes to establish an independent state in the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza — areas captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war. While the international community overwhelmingly supports such a two-state solution, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-line government rejects it.

The war in Gaza has dragged on for nearly seven months and cease-fire negotiations have stalled. The war began with the Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel in which Hamas-led militants killed about 1,200 people. The ensuing Israeli bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians, according to local health authorities.

Ukrainians using long-range missiles secretly given by US

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Ukraine for the first time has begun using long-range ballistic missiles provided secretly by the United States, bombing a Russian military airfield in Crimea last week and Russian forces in another occupied area overnight, U.S. officials said Wednesday.

Long sought by Ukrainian leaders, the new missiles give Ukraine nearly double the striking distance — up to 190 miles — that it had with the midrange version of the weapon that it received from the U.S. last October.

"We've already sent some, we will send more now that we have additional authority and money," White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said. The additional ATACMS were included in a new military aid package signed by President Joe Bi-

den on Wednesday.

Biden approved delivery of the long-range Army Tactical Missile System, known as ATACMS, in February, and then in March the U.S. included a "significant" number of them in a \$300 million aid package announced, officials said.

Ukraine has been forced to ration its weapons and is facing increasing Russian attacks. Ukraine had been begging for the long-range system because the missiles provide a critical ability to strike Russian targets that are farther away, allowing Ukrainian forces to stay safely out of range.

Information about the delivery was kept so quiet that lawmakers and others in recent days have been demanding that the U.S. send the weapons — not knowing they were already in Ukraine.

Report: Burkina Faso's military killed hundreds

Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal — Military forces in Burkina Faso killed 223 civilians, including babies and many children, in attacks on two villages accused of cooperating with militants, Human Rights Watch said in a report published Thursday.

The mass killings took place Feb. 25 in the country's northern villages of Nondin and Soro, and some 56 children were among the dead, according to the report. The human rights organization called on the United Nations and African Union to provide investigators and to support local efforts to bring those responsible to justice.

"The massacres in Nondin and Soro villages are just the latest mass killings of civilians by the Burkina Faso military in their counterinsurgency operations,"

Human Rights Watch Executive Director Tirana Hassan said in a statement. "International assistance is critical to support a credible investigation into possible crimes against humanity."

The nation has been ravaged by violence that has pitted jihadists linked to al-Qaida and Islamic State against state-backed forces. Both sides have targeted civilians. Most attacks go unpunished and unreported in a nation run by a repressive leadership.

Witnesses and survivors told HRW that the Feb. 25 killings were believed to have been carried out in retaliation for an attack by Islamist fighters on a military camp near the provincial capital Ouahigouya, about 15 miles away.

A Burkina Faso government spokesperson didn't respond to requests for comment.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

State senator arrested on suspicion of burglary

MN MINNEAPOLIS — A state senator who also serves as an Air National Guard lieutenant colonel was arrested on suspicion of burglary early Monday in the northwestern Minnesota city of Detroit Lakes, police said.

Democratic Sen. Nicole Mitchell, 49, of Woodbury, was being held in the Becker County Jail on suspicion of first-degree burglary.

Senate Democrats hold just a one-seat majority with four weeks left in the legislative session.

Mitchell worked as a meteorologist with the U.S. military and for KSTP-TV and Minnesota Public Radio before she was elected to the Senate in 2022 from a suburban St. Paul district. She commands an Air National Guard weather unit, her official profile says.

Dispatchers received a 911 call at 4:45 a.m. from a homeowner about “an active burglary in process at her residence,” Detroit Lakes Police Chief Steve Todd said. Officers searched the home and arrested Mitchell, Todd said.

Public records and an obituary posted by a Detroit Lakes funeral home show that Mitchell’s father, who died last month, and stepmother lived on the same block of the same road as where the senator was arrested.

Charges filed after crash into building kills 2 kids

MI BERLIN TOWNSHIP — A Michigan woman was charged Tuesday with second-degree murder and other crimes after prosecutors

say she drunkenly smashed her SUV into a boat club that was hosting a birthday party, killing two young siblings and injuring several other people.

Marshella Chidester, 66, faces eight counts in Saturday’s crash at the Swan Boat Club in Monroe County, about 30 miles south of Detroit, court records show.

The Detroit News reported that Chidester is a former commodore at the boat club.

The crash killed 8-year-old Alanah Phillips and her 4-year-old brother, Zayn Phillips, the sheriff’s office said. Their mother and another sibling were among the injured.

Migrants indicted over alleged border breach

TX EL PASO — A Texas grand jury indicted more than 140 migrants on misdemeanor rioting charges Tuesday over an alleged mass attempt to breach the U.S.-Mexico border, a day after a judge threw out the cases.

No injuries were reported during the alleged breach on April 12 in El Paso, which authorities say began when someone in the group cut through a razor wire barrier. Mass arrests also followed an episode in the Texas border city in March.

On Monday, a county judge had thrown out the charges against those who were arrested this month, ruling there was insufficient probable cause.

USPS to reroute mail despite ballot concerns

NV LAS VEGAS — The USPS announced on Tuesday it will follow through with its plan to reroute Reno-area mail processing to Sacra-

mento, Calif., a move that drew bipartisan ire from Nevada lawmakers while raising questions about the rate at which mail ballots can be processed in a populous part of a crucial swing state.

Postmaster General Louis DeJoy has cast the permanent measure as a cost saving move, but federal, state and local lawmakers have complained about a lack of transparency in the process that could slow mail throughout the region.

Under the plan, all mail from the Reno area will pass through Sacramento before reaching its destination — even from one side of the city to the other.

Democratic Secretary of State Cisco Aguilar, the state’s top election official, previously said moving operations could slow the processing of mail ballots, and “has the potential to disenfranchise thousands of Nevada voters and would unquestionably impact the results of Nevada’s elections.”

Woman convicted of dismembering landlord

IL CHICAGO — A Chicago woman has been convicted of killing and dismembering her landlord and putting some of the victim’s remains inside a freezer in the boarding house where she lived.

A Cook County jury convicted Sandra Kolalou, 37, late Monday of all the charges she faced, including first-degree murder, dismembering a body, concealing a homicidal death, and aggravated identity theft, news outlets reported. Her sentencing is scheduled for June 20.

Prosecutors said Frances Walker, 69, had served Kolalou with an eviction notice from a

boarding house she owned before Kolalou killed and dismembered her in October 2022.

Kolalou, whose attorneys plan to appeal the verdict, was arrested and charged after Walker’s severed head, arms and legs were discovered inside a kitchen freezer at the home on Chicago’s northwest side.

Family: Woman charged in robbery was scammed

OH FAIRFIELD TOWNSHIP — A 74-year-old woman charged in the armed robbery of an Ohio credit union last week is a victim of an online scam who may have been trying to solve her financial problems, according to her relatives.

Ann Mayers, who had no previous run-ins with the law, faces counts of aggravated robbery with a firearm and tampering with evidence in Friday’s robbery in Fairfield Township, north of Cincinnati.

Officers arrested Mayers at her Hamilton home shortly after the robbery, Fairfield police said in a Facebook post. A handgun was found in her car, which police said she used in the robbery.

Authorities have since learned Mayers may have been a scam victim. Her relatives told detectives that she had been sending money to an unidentified individual, The Columbus Dispatch reported Wednesday.

Sgt. Brandon McCroskey told the newspaper that Mayers reportedly spoke with family members about robbing banks in the days leading up to the holdup, but they didn’t take her comments seriously.

— From wire reports

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Herro leads Heat to tie series with Celtics

Associated Press

BOSTON — The Miami Heat beat the Boston Celtics with an unprecedented barrage of 3-pointers Wednesday night to erase the home-court advantage the Celtics worked all season to establish.

Tyler Herro had 24 points and 14 assists, hitting six of Miami's 23 3-pointers — the most in a playoff game in franchise history — to lead the Heat to a 111-101 victory over top-seeded Boston and tie the first-round playoff series at one game apiece.

"It was a very good response," Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said. "And then we also made some shots. It always looks better when you make shots."

Bam Adebayo had 21 points and 10 rebounds, and new Celtics nemesis Caleb Martin also had 21 points for the Heat, who shot 53.5% (23 of 43) from beyond the arc to bounce back after a Game 1 blowout. That broke Miami's playoff record of 20 3-pointers, set against the

Bucks in the 2021 first round.

"They obviously made a conscious effort to have free reign to shoot more," Boston coach Joe Mazzulla said.

And shoot and shoot and shoot.

Playing their third straight game without playoff stalwart Jimmy Butler, who was injured in the opening play-in game, the Heat shot better than 50% from 3-point range in each of the first three quarters (and a still productive 4 of 10 in the fourth).

After the Celtics cut an 11-point lead to six, 102-96, with 3:16 to play, Martin hit a 3 and Boston never got as close as two possessions again.

"You have to take 'em, based on how they were playing us the first two games," said Spoelstra, who saw the Celtics hit 22 3-pointers to Miami's 12 in the opener. "I did not want to get annihilated in that department like we did the game before."

Jaylen Brown scored 33 points for Boston. Jayson Ta-

tum scored 28, showing no ill-effects of Martin's hard foul that sent him crashing to the floor with under a minute to play in the Celtics' 114-94 victory on Sunday.

Tatum got up off the parquet floor.

But so did the Heat.

"It seemed we couldn't get them to miss," Brown said. "They had a record-breaking night. ... They made a lot of shots that usually we're comfortable with."

The series moves to Miami for Games 3 and 4 on Saturday and Monday.

"It's always a good thing if you can get one on the road," Martin said. "You always look to try to steal one. We were able to do that."

Miami led by five, 55-50, with two minutes left in the first half before Brown hit three straight 3-pointers to open a four-point lead. Brown missed a 3 the next time down, but his layup in the final seconds made it 61-58 at the half.

Miami went on a 10-0 run to

take an 82-70 lead with under four minutes to play in the third before the Celtics cut it to six.

"We knew it wasn't going to be easy," Tatum said. "There's a lot of history between these two franchises, especially recently. ... It's never going to go exactly as people expect it to go and that's the beauty of it."

Thunder 124, Pelicans 92: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 33 points and host Oklahoma City beat New Orleans to take a 2-0 lead in its first-round Western Conference playoff series.

Chet Holmgren had 26 points and seven rebounds and Jalen Williams added 21 points for the top-seeded Thunder, who shot 59% from the field and made 14 of 29 3-pointers.

Jonas Valanciunas scored 19 points and Herb Jones and Brandon Ingram added 18 each for the Pelicans.

New Orleans continued to struggle on offense without top scorer Zion Williamson, who remained out with a strained left hamstring.

Minnesota's Reid wins Sixth Man of the Year award

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Naz Reid was having a productive season as a reserve when the Minnesota Timberwolves needed him in the starting lineup while playing without All-Star Karl-Anthony Towns.

Reid was excellent in that role, too, helping the Timberwolves to the second-best season in franchise history.

Reid was rewarded with the NBA's Sixth Man of the Year on Wednesday, edging Sacramento's Malik Monk in a close vote to become the third undrafted player to win the award for the league's best reserve.

Reid averaged career highs of 13.5 points and 5.2 rebounds in 81 games. The forward-center came off the bench 67 times, getting a feel for the game in the early minutes before getting his chance to impact it.

"I kind of joke around with my teammates a little bit, but it's kind of a saying where I feel like we have to keep the momentum going, anyway," Reid said in an

interview on TNT after the award was announced. "Either we got to have the mentality to come back in the game, or to push the lead forward."

The 6-foot-9 Reid helped Minnesota do that plenty of times en route to a 56-26 record to earn the No. 3 seed in the Western Conference. They have a 2-0 lead over the Phoenix Suns in their first-round series going into Friday.

Towns was hurt in March and missed the next 18 games. Yet the Wolves hardly slowed down, going 10-3 from March 16 to April 10 while Reid started 12 of the 13 games. He averaged 17.1 points on 45.4% shooting during that span.

Reid got 45 first-place votes to 43 for Monk from a panel of 99 reporters and broadcasters who cover the league. Both players had 39 second-place votes and 10 third-place votes, giving Reid a total of 352 points to Monk's 342.

Milwaukee's Bobby Portis Jr. finished

third. Norman Powell of the Clippers was fourth and Atlanta's Bogdan Bogdanovic rounded out the top five.

Reid was undrafted out of LSU in 2019, originally joining Minnesota with a two-way contract that summer. The fan favorite played his way into a multiyear contract extension last summer, then rewarded the Wolves this season with 843 points off the bench, second-most in franchise history.

He twice reached 30 points and had 20 or more 14 times, both career bests, and said the award was special for the fans who have supported him since the beginning of his career.

"They've seen me work from Day 1. Since the moment I got here I changed my body, I changed my mentality, I changed the direction I wanted to go in life," Reid said. "I think they kind of deserve that and I think just being with me, that's super special."

Bruins top Leafs to take series lead

Associated Press

TORONTO — Brad Marchand broke a tie midway through the third period and the Boston Bruins beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 4-2 on Wednesday night to take a 2-1 lead in the first-round playoff series.

After Todd Bertuzzi tied it for Toronto with 8:35 left, Marchand put the Bruins back in front 28 seconds later. He took a pass from Danton Heinen and ripped a shot past goalie Ilya Samsonov's ear. Marchand capped the scoring with an empty-netter and also had an assist.

"We stuck with it all game," Marchand said. "We elevated to another level."

The Maple Leafs were livid at Marchand's agitating antics.

"The gamesmanship and everything, it's world class," Toronto coach Sheldon Keefe said about Marchand. "He's been in the league long enough ... he gets calls. It's unbelievable, ac-

tually, how it goes. We've got to play through that."

Marchand got tangled up with Bertuzzi in the second period with Toronto up 1-0. A frothing Scotiabank Arena crowd clamoring for a penalty, the referees took no issues before Trent Frederic scored the tying goal seconds later.

"I don't think there's another player in this series that gets away with taking out Bertuzzi's legs the way that he does," Keefe said. "It's an art and he's elite at it. We have to manage our way through that."

Jake DeBrusk also scored for Boston, and Jeremy Swayman made 28 saves. Swayman made 35 saves in Boston's 5-1 victory in Game 1, then gave way to Linus Ullmark in Toronto's 3-2 victory in Game 2.

Matthew Knies also scored for Toronto, and Samsonov made 30 saves. Toronto was 0-for-5 on the power play, leaving

it 1-for-11 in the series.

The Maple Leafs opened the scoring with 6:50 left in the second. Mitch Marner deftly moved past a defender and slid a pass for Knies to redirect upstairs on Swayman.

Boston tied it with 2:23 left in the period when Frederic's shot went off the lost and in. DeBrusk gave Boston a 2-1 lead at 1:07 of third. Game 4 of the best-of-seven series is Saturday night at Scotiabank Arena.

Golden Knights 3, Stars 1: Noah Hanifin broke a tie with an unassisted goal late in the second period and Stanley Cup champion Vegas beat top-seeded Dallas to take a 2-0 lead in the first-round series.

Hanifin was one of the three trade-deadline acquisitions for the visiting Knights, the No. 8 seed in the Western Conference.

Jonathan Marchessault scored his second goal of the se-

ries, and his franchise-record 36th in the postseason while appearing in all 90 of visiting Vegas' playoff games.

Jack Eichel assisted on Marchessault's goal and added an empty-netter. Logan Thompson had 20 saves in his second career playoff start. Game 3 is Saturday night in Las Vegas.

Kings 5, Oilers 4 (OT): Anze Kopitar fired a wrist shot past Stuart Skinner's glove and into the top corner on a breakaway to give visiting Los Angeles a win over Edmonton in Game 2 of their series.

Kopitar picked up the puck near the Edmonton blue line, moved in on Talbot and shot from the slot as Oilers defenseman Darnell Nurse dove to try to block the shot.

The Kings rebounded from a 7-4 loss Monday night in the opener to send the series to Los Angeles tied 1-1. Game 3 is Friday night.

Power denies being part of in Penske cheating scandal

Associated Press

Will Power said Thursday he was unaware of any manipulations to Team Penske's push-to-power system until after last weekend's IndyCar race at Long Beach and never illegally used the mechanism.

Team Penske is under heavy scrutiny following the March 10 season-opening race at St. Petersburg, Fla., in which Josef Newgarden was stripped of the victory and Scott McLaughlin, who finished third, was also disqualified.

Power finished fourth and while his result was not thrown out, he was docked 10 points and all three Penske drivers were fined \$25,000. Power has not been accused of any wrongdoing by IndyCar but was punished because the manipulated systems were found on all three Penske cars following Sunday

morning's warmup in California.

"I was disappointed to learn about the penalty that we received this week from IndyCar," Power wrote on social media. "There was an oversight by our team and I was unaware of the situation until it was brought to our attention following Long Beach."

"As per the rules, I did not utilize the P2P capabilities during any start or restart during the St. Petersburg race," he continued. "While I accept the penalty, I want it to be known that I did nothing wrong and followed the rules."

Team Penske has maintained that the push-to-pass system on its three Chevrolets was utilized in a test session for upcoming hybrid engines and then mistakenly not replaced before the start of the season. It re-

mained on the cars for three races and Newgarden onboard videos clearly show the reigning Indianapolis 500 winner illegally using push-to-pass to gain position on at least one restart.

McLaughlin in a Wednesday night statement said he used the system for less than 2 seconds and gained no positions on the track. He said he pushed the button out of habit.

IndyCar prohibits the use of the push-to-pass system on starts and restarts and the button isn't even supposed to work on those occasions. The issue was discovered Sunday in California when a glitch in the system knocked push-to-pass out on all cars except the three Penske entries.

IndyCar then examined the units, found them to be illegal, and forced the team to correct

the systems before the race.

Roger Penske, who owns the race team, IndyCar and Indianapolis Motor Speedway, told The Associated Press "I am embarrassed" by the scandal. Newgarden has yet to address the issue but a Friday morning news conference has been scheduled at Barber Motorsports Park in Alabama.

IndyCar has yet to present the data that proves Newgarden manipulated his way to the victory. The disqualification dropped him from first to 11th in points and the scandal hit right before Friday night's Season 2 debut episode of "100 Days to Indy" in which Newgarden is the star.

Newgarden, in addition to being the reigning Indy 500 winner, is a two-time IndyCar champion and in a contract year with Penske.

Prospects transferring not a red flag

Associated Press

DENVER — Playing for multiple schools no longer raises a red flag for NFL talent evaluators in this day and age of the ever busier transfer portal and financial windfalls available to college football players before they're even old enough to buy a round of drinks.

That's a good thing for the nearly one-third of the 398 prospects invited to the NFL scouting combine in February who switched schools on their way to catching the attention of pro scouts ahead of Thursday's NFL Draft.

The list of players who capitalized on relaxed transfer rules includes USC quarterback Caleb Williams, who was the odds-on favorite to go first overall to the Chicago Bears on Thursday night. Williams spent his freshman year at Oklahoma before following coach Lincoln Riley to Los Angeles, where he threw for 72 touchdowns in two seasons with the Trojans.

Another is Heisman Trophy winner Jayden Daniels, who spent two seasons at LSU after playing three years at Arizona State.

"Transfers, in terms of im-

pacting guys and grades, no, that's not really an issue anymore," said NFL Network draft analyst Daniel Jeremiah, a former pro scout. "I know once upon a time it would come up in draft meetings. But I'm old enough to remember when I first started in '03 we had discussions in the draft about a player having tattoos!"

"Think how silly that is when we fast-forward 20 years. Some things become less important. And nobody really cares about the transfer thing anymore."

Players can also make money long before declaring for the draft now, and there's still an influx of athletes who took advantage of the NCAA's decision to give them an extra year of eligibility due to the pandemic.

One player who capitalized on that extra season was Denver Broncos wide receiver Brandon Johnson, who caught just one touchdown pass in five seasons at Tennessee, including one year that he ended up redshirting after four games.

Johnson transferred to Central Florida, where he caught 11 touchdown passes in 13 games in 2021, catching the attention of the Broncos, who signed him as

an undrafted free agent.

"I think a lot of guys transfer for circumstances that everybody may not know about. There's a lot that goes into it," Johnson said. "So I'm glad the negative stigma is gone."

"Before, they were looked at as though, 'Oh, this guy's afraid of competition or he can't stick it out if it gets tough.' So, yeah, I can definitely appreciate this new era."

Johnson said he never would have reached the NFL were it not for the chance to play an extra season close to home.

Of the 398 players invited to this year's combine, 121 of them attended more than one college or university.

Four of them transferred multiple times, including quarterbacks Kedon Slovis (USC, Pitt, BYU) and Jack Plummer (Purdue, Cal, Louisville). Outside linebacker Ovie Oghoufo played at Notre Dame, Texas and LSU and defensive end Eyabi Okie-Anoma played for Alabama, UT Martin and Michigan before finishing up at Charlotte.

In future drafts, there's likely to be even more players who bounce around to several

schools on their way to the pros. College athletes are now eligible to play immediately no matter how many times they transfer — as long as they meet academic requirements — after the NCAA fast-tracked legislation to fall in line with a recent court order.

While transferring is no longer the taboo it once was, the nascent NIL frontier provides the pro talent evaluators with another inflection point, giving them a chance to see how prospective picks might handle fame and fortune.

Jeremiah said that when talent evaluators go back to "self-scout" and see why a certain player didn't work out, two things usually come up: "They don't know how to handle adversity and then the other thing is sometimes they don't know how to handle money, fame, all that kind of stuff that goes along with it, all the distractions that money can bring."

"So now, you're getting a chance to see them in that situation, basically being a professional before they even get to you and see how they handle themselves," Jeremiah said. "I think it can be a plus."

Pirates sticking to their plan with No. 1 pick Skenes

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Paul Skenes is looking every bit the ace the Pittsburgh Pirates thought they were getting when they selected the hard-throwing right-hander with the first overall pick in last year's draft.

Just don't expect Pirates general manager Ben Cherington to shift whatever internal timeline the club has on Skenes' arrival in Pittsburgh.

Yes, the 21-year-old has been electric at Triple-A Indianapolis, his fastball reaching triple digits with startling regularity. He was impressive again Wednesday, allowing two runs

(one earned) in 4⅓ innings against Omaha while throwing 50 of his 71 pitches for strikes.

Skenes is clearing every hurdle the Pirates are putting in front of him. While his stuff looks ready for major-league hitters — Skenes has posted 34 strikeouts in 17 innings — Pittsburgh remains intent on bringing perhaps the most celebrated pitching prospect in 15 years along slowly.

"He's working on things that will allow him to be a good major league pitcher more than just he's trying to be a good AAA pitcher," Cherington said Wednesday.

That means not just overwhelming opponents with his fastball, but developing the rest of his expanding repertoire. Skenes has five different pitches at his disposal, including what is being called a "splinker," a mix between a splitter and a sinker.

The 71 pitches Skenes threw on Wednesday were his most in a professional start, though Cherington declined to get into specifics on what threshold he'd like to see Skenes get to before deeming him ready for a call-up.

Pitching efficiently can be a challenge for someone who en-

courages so much swing-and-miss. Strikeouts also tend to run up pitch counts, though Cherington stressed he's not trying to turn Skenes into someone he's not.

"The guy that's gonna live on ground balls and nine-pitch innings, that may not be him," Cherington said. "It's efficiency related to who he is as a pitcher. That's what we're going after."

The Pirates have talked to other clubs about how to handle high-end pitching prospects, though Cherington said there is no real blueprint because every pitcher is different.