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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Protesters across US assail Trump, Musk

Associated Press

Crowds of people angry about the way President Donald Trump is running the country marched and rallied in scores of American cities Saturday in the biggest day of demonstrations yet by an opposition movement trying to regain its momentum after the shock of the Republican's first weeks in office.

So-called Hands Off! demonstrations were organized for more than 1,200 locations in all 50 states by more than 150 groups, including civil rights organizations, labor unions, LGBTQ+ advocates, veterans and elections activists. The rallies appeared peaceful, with no immediate reports of arrests.

Thousands of protesters in cities dotting the nation from Midtown Manhattan to Anchorage, Alaska, including at multiple state capitols, assailed Trump and billionaire Elon Musk's actions on government downsizing,

the economy, immigration and human rights. On the West Coast, in the shadow of Seattle's iconic Space Needle, protesters held signs with slogans like "Fight the oligarchy." Protesters chanted as they took to the streets in Portland, Ore., and Los Angeles, where they marched from Pershing Square to City Hall.

Demonstrators voiced anger over the administration's moves to fire thousands of federal workers, close Social Security Administration field offices, effectively shutter entire agencies, deport immigrants, scale back protections for transgender people and cut funding for health programs.

Musk, a Trump adviser who runs Tesla, SpaceX and the social media platform X, has played a key role in the downsizing as the head of the newly created Department of Government Efficiency. He says he is

saving taxpayers billions of dollars.

Asked about the protests, the White House said in a statement that "President Trump's position is clear: he will always protect Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid for eligible beneficiaries. Meanwhile, the Democrats' stance is giving Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare benefits to illegal aliens, which will bankrupt these programs and crush American seniors."

Kelley Robinson, president of the Human Rights Campaign advocacy group, criticized the administration's treatment of the LGBTQ+ community at the rally at the National Mall in Washington, D.C., where Democratic members of Congress also took the stage.

"The attacks that we're seeing, they're not just political. They are personal, y'all," Robinson said. "They're trying to ban our books, they're slashing

HIV prevention funding, they're criminalizing our doctors, our teachers, our families and our lives.

"We don't want this America, y'all," Robinson added. "We want the America we deserve, where dignity, safety and freedom belong not to some of us, but to all of us."

In Boston, demonstrators brandished signs such as "Hands off our democracy" and "Hands off our Social Security."

Mayor Michelle Wu said she does not want her children and others' to live in a world in which threats and intimidation are government tactics and values like diversity and equality are under attack.

Hundreds of people also demonstrated in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., a few miles from Trump's golf course in Jupiter, where he spent the morning at the club's Senior Club Championship.

Flooding, tornadoes batter US South and Midwest

Associated Press

DYERSBURG, Tenn. — A storm system sweeping over large areas of the U.S. South and Midwest resulted in at least 16 weather-related deaths by early Sunday, with overnight tornado and flash flood warnings setting up more severe weather that forecasters say could cause rising waterways for days to come.

Many of the impacted areas already are heavily water-logged by days of severe storms that spawned deadly tornadoes. New tornado warnings were issued overnight in Alabama and Mississippi, along with flash flood warnings for several counties in Kentucky, Mississippi

and Tennessee.

Saturday included more of the torrential rain and flash flooding that has pounded the central U.S., rapidly swelling waterways and prompting emergencies from Texas to Ohio.

Forecasters warned that flooding could persist for days, as torrential rains lingered over many states, including Kentucky, Tennessee and Alabama. Tornadoes are possible in Alabama, Georgia and Florida, forecasters said.

Louisville Mayor Craig Greenberg said Saturday that the Ohio River rose 5 feet in 24 hours and would continue to swell for days.

"We expect this to be one of the top 10 flooding events in Louisville history," he said.

The 16 reported deaths since the start of the storms on Wednesday included 10 in Tennessee.

A 9-year-old boy in Kentucky was caught up in floodwaters while walking to catch his school bus. A 5-year-old boy in Arkansas died after a tree fell on his family's home and trapped him, police said. A 16-year-old volunteer in Missouri died in a crash while seeking to rescue people caught in the storm.

The National Weather Service said on Sunday that dozens of locations in multiple states

were expected to reach a "major flood stage," with extensive flooding of structures, roads, bridges and other critical infrastructure possible.

There were 521 domestic and international flights cancelled within the U.S. and more than 6,400 delayed on Saturday, according to FlightAware.com, which reported 74 cancellations and 478 delays of U.S. flights early Sunday.

Officials warned of flash flooding and tornadoes Saturday across Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee and Kentucky.

All of eastern Kentucky was under a flood watch through Sunday morning.

Cameras set for MSC ships to deter assault

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy will begin installing security cameras in passageways of 100 civilian-run ships in June to deter sexual assault and harassment following multiple accusations of rape at sea.

The security cameras, which are required to record video and audio, will be placed in passageways to view the doors of the crew's staterooms aboard Military Sealift Command ships, according to the memo dated March 27. Titled "Safer Seas Act Implementation," the memo was sent to masters, chief engineers and shore staff last month by the command, which operates 125 Navy-owned ships that are crewed by civilians for the purpose of replenishing warships at sea.

"These efforts are intended to

prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment in the U.S. maritime industry," according to the memo.

The Safer Seas Act is legislation that mandated significant changes for owners and operators of U.S.-flagged commercial service vessels, notably creating new reporting procedures for sexual assault and harassment incidents. The act also empowers the U.S. Coast Guard to revoke or suspend the credentials of those found guilty of sexual misconduct offenses.

An installation schedule outlines security cameras will be installed first on the USNS Guadalupe and USNS Arctic in June.

The plan is to install cameras on three ships per month, according to a Dec. 9 memo ordering the implementation by Rear Adm. Philip Sobeck, the commander of

the Military Sealift Command. But beginning in August, installation will increase to six ships per month.

The installation effort is expected to be complete by July 2028 but could be accelerated to December 2026 if installation increases to six ships per month. Installation priority will be given to ships housing the most mariners, according to the December memo.

The Safer Seas Act was enacted as part of the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act, an annual law that sets priorities and spending for the Defense Department. The law was in response to an accusation of rape in September 2021 aboard the U.S.-flagged commercial vessel hosting a Merchant Marine Academy midshipman. Hope Hicks' account of being raped by a supervisor in 2019

while participating in the academy's "Sea Year" program rocked the maritime industry, igniting calls for civilian mariner protections, according to multiple news reports.

The maritime industry was still experiencing shockwaves from Hicks' lawsuit when Elsie Dominguez, a civilian engineer, sued the U.S. government in 2023, claiming she was raped by a supervisor, and it could have been prevented with adequate security and safety policies. The lawsuit filed by Dominguez argues security cameras aboard the USNS Carson City did not capture her captain using his master key to access her stateroom because the cameras had not been operational for more than a year. Dominguez said the captain raped her while she was unconscious in 2021.

Head of Colo. information operations command fired

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The commanding officer of a Colorado information operations command was fired, the Navy said Thursday.

Cmdr. Christopher Johnson was relieved of his duties Wednesday due to a loss of confidence in his ability to lead. Navy Information Operations Command-Colorado is a subordinate command of Naval Information Operations Command Pacific, which is headquartered at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii.

The U.S. military routinely cites only a vague "loss of confidence" when removing commanders and other leaders from authority positions.

"The Navy maintains the highest standards for commanding officers and holds

them accountable when those standards are not met," the Navy said in a statement.

Johnson was temporarily reassigned to U.S. Fleet Cyber Command.

Cmdr. Mark Tuner, the naval information forces liaison officer to U.S. Fleet Cyber Command, will temporarily serve as NIOC-Colorado's commanding officer.

Johnson assumed command of the information operations command in May 2023.

Johnson, a native of Michigan, graduated from the University of Michigan and commissioned through Officer Candidate School, according to his biography on the Naval Information Forces website.

He also earned a master's degree in electrical engineering from the Naval Post Graduate School.

Huljack takes command of Destroyer Squadron 15

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A contingent of international military officers joined U.S. sailors Friday as command of the Navy's largest destroyer squadron passed to its deputy commodore.

Capt. David Huljack relieved Capt. Justin Harts as commander of Destroyer Squadron 15 and Task Force 71 during a ceremony on the flight deck of the guided-missile destroyer USS John Finn on Friday.

As the new task force commodore, Huljack is expected to coordinate approximately 3,000 sailors and 10 Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers that are the primary battle force in the Indo-Pacific for the U.S. 7th Fleet.

The squadron also deploys as escorts alongside the fleet's air-

craft carrier, now the USS George Washington, and its strike group.

"You are the epitome of the quiet professionals," Harts told sailors during the ceremony. "There's no time for dancing with lampshades on your head when you need to go to work. This work has to get done, and you do it."

Harts will go on to the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, R.I., to teach either international relations or strategy and policy, he said.

Huljack has served aboard numerous surface warships and commanded the guided-missile destroyer USS Barry while it was homeported at Yokosuka. He graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and earned a master's in national security and strategic studies from the Naval War College.

Houthis, Trump differ on US attack info

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Suspected U.S. airstrikes killed at least two people overnight in a stronghold of Yemen's Houthi rebels, the group said Sunday, while a bombing video posted by U.S. President Donald Trump suggested casualties in the overall campaign may be higher than the rebels acknowledge.

The strikes in Saada killed two people and wounded nine others, with footage aired by the Houthis' al-Masirah satellite news channel showing a strike collapsing what appeared to be a two-story building. The Iranian-backed Houthis aired no footage from inside the building, which

they described as a solar power shop.

The intense campaign of airstrikes in Yemen under Trump targeting the rebels over their attacks on shipping in Mideast waters stemming from the Israel-Hamas war has killed at least 69 people, according to casualty figures released by the Houthis.

However, the Houthis have not acknowledged any casualties from their security and military leadership — something challenged after an online video posted by Trump.

Early Saturday, Trump posted what appeared to be black-and-white video from a drone of a group of over 70 people gathered in a circle. An explosion detonated

nates during the 25-second video, with a massive crater left in its wake.

"These Houthis gathered for instructions on an attack," Trump claimed, without offering a location for the attack or any other details about the strike. "Oops, there will be no attack by these Houthis! They will never sink our ships again!"

The U.S. military's Central Command, which oversees America's Mideast military operations, has not published the video, nor offered any specific details about the strikes it has conducted since March 15. The White House has said there have been over 200 strikes so far targeting the Houthis.

The rebel-controlled SABA news agency in Yemen, citing an anonymous source, described the bombing as targeting "a social Eid visit in Hodeida governorate."

"Those present at that gathering had no connection to the operations carried out by the (Houthis), which are implementing the decision to ban navigation on ships linked to the American and Israeli enemy," the SABA report said, adding that the attack killed and wounded "dozens."

However, the Houthis previously have not acknowledged any strike on Hodeida during that time with such a high casualty count.

Maya Angelou work among books pulled by academy

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Books on the Holocaust, histories of feminism, civil rights and racism, and Maya Angelou's famous autobiography, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," were among the nearly 400 volumes removed from the U.S. Naval Academy's library this week after Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's office ordered the school to get rid of ones that promote diversity, equity and inclusion.

The Navy late Friday provided the list of 381 books that have

been taken out of its library. The move marks another step in the Trump administration's far-reaching effort to purge so-called DEI content from federal agencies, including policies, programs, online and social media postings and curriculum at schools.

In addition to Angelou's award-winning tome, the list includes "Memorializing the Holocaust," which deals with Holocaust memorials; "Half American," about African Americans in World War II; "A Respectable

Woman," about the public roles of African American women in 19th century New York; and "Pursuing Trayvon Martin," about the 2012 shooting of the Black 17-year-old in Florida that raised questions about racial profiling.

Other books clearly deal with subjects that have been stridently targeted by the Trump administration, including gender identity, sexuality and transgender issues. A wide array of books on race and gender were targeted, dealing with such topics as Afri-

can American women poets, entertainers who wore blackface and the treatment of women in Islamic countries.

Also on the list were historical books on racism, the Ku Klux Klan and the treatment of women, gender and race in art and literature.

In a statement, the Navy said officials went through the Nimitz Library catalog, using keyword searches, to identify books that required further review. About 900 books were identified in the search.

Cambodia opens expansion to base Chinese will use

Associated Press

SIHANOUKVILLE, Cambodia — Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet on Saturday presided over the opening of an expansion of his country's main naval base, which analysts and the U.S. government suspect will be used as a strategic outpost by China.

Construction of a new pier to accommodate much larger ships, a dry dock for repairs and other features was completed in

recent weeks at the Ream Naval Base in southern Cambodia, on the Gulf of Thailand.

The project has drawn great attention mainly because Washington — noting that China is Cambodia's closest ally and main source of investment and aid — believes that Beijing has been secretly granted special and exclusive privileges to use the base, a claim repeatedly denied by Cambodian officials.

Hun Manet at the inaugura-

tion noted that the ceremony was taking place two weeks ahead of a visit to Cambodia by Chinese President Xi Jinping. He praised Xi's government for help in building the expansion and other projects, describing bilateral relations as good and strong.

At the same time, he declared that the Ream base expansion was not hidden from other countries, and said warships from all friendly countries can

visit the base and hold joint military exercises, except for very big warships that cannot be physically accommodated.

"I would like to take this opportunity to make it clear that the Cambodian government led by the Cambodian People's Party has no intention, in the past or today or in the future, of violating its Constitution by allowing any country's troops to establish exclusive bases on Cambodian territory," he said.

Zelenskyy meets European military leaders

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine— Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met the leaders of the British and French armed forces in Kyiv on Saturday to discuss the potential deployment of a multinational peacekeeping force to Ukraine, despite the reluctance of U.S. President Donald Trump to provide security guarantees.

The U.K. Ministry of Defense said that officials addressed the structure, size and composition of any future “reassurance force,” while the chief of the defense staff, Adm. Antony Radakin, emphasized that the U.K.

would look to “build on the formidable capabilities of the Ukrainian army and put them in the strongest possible position to deter Russian aggression.”

The weekend discussions are planned to set the ground for a further meeting between defense ministers in Brussels and the Ukraine Defense Contact Group on Friday.

Britain has been promoting the idea of a European-led peacekeeping force for Ukraine in the event of a ceasefire but it has said such a force needed a U.S. “backstop” to make it credible in the face of possible Rus-

sian reprisals.

Building a force big enough to act as a credible deterrent — U.K. officials have talked about possibly 10,000 to 30,000 troops — would be a considerable effort for nations that shrank their militaries after the Cold War but are now rearming.

On Sunday, one person was killed Sunday as Russian air strikes hit the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, while the death toll from Friday’s deadly attack on the central Ukrainian city of Kryvyi Rih continued to rise.

In a statement on social media, Zelenskyy said the inten-

sifying Russian attacks showed that there is still insufficient international pressure on Moscow.

He said Russia has launched more than 1,460 guided aerial bombs, nearly 670 attack drones and more than 30 missiles at Ukraine in the past week alone.

Also Sunday, Economy Minister Yuliia Svyrydenko said she will send a team to Washington next week to begin negotiations on a new draft of a deal that would give the U.S. access to Ukraine’s valuable mineral resources.

White House studying Greenland takeover cost

The Washington Post

The White House is preparing an estimate of what it would cost the federal government to control Greenland as a territory, according to three people with knowledge of the matter, the most concrete effort yet to turn President Donald Trump’s desire to acquire the Danish island into actionable policy.

While Trump’s demands elicited international outrage and a rebuke from Denmark, White House officials have in recent weeks taken steps to determine the financial ramifications of

Greenland becoming a U.S. territory, including the cost of providing government services for its residents, the people said.

At the White House budget office, staff have sought to understand the potential cost to maintain Greenland if it were acquired, two of the people said. They are also attempting to estimate what revenue to the U.S. Treasury could be gained from Greenland’s natural resources.

One option under analysis is to offer a sweeter deal to the government of Greenland than the Danes, who currently subsi-

dize services on the island for about \$600 million every year.

Trump’s interest in wresting control of the island from a NATO ally has set off shock and disbelief in Copenhagen, which has repeatedly offered openness to the idea of Washington increasing its military and economic presence in Greenland without changing territorial boundaries.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen is planning a three-day visit to the island starting Wednesday at the invitation of Greenland’s new government

— in part to demonstrate Denmark’s commitment to deepening ties with the territory.

Trump has eyed control of Greenland as a strategic win for the United States, both because of its mineral resources and also because of its strategic location. Poised at a crucial chokepoint between the Arctic and Atlantic oceans, it is near sea lanes that are important for shipping and also military travel, including the submarines that are a crucial way for countries that possess nuclear weapons to project their power.

Senate GOP approves framework for tax breaks

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans plugged away into early Saturday morning to approve their multitrillion-dollar tax breaks and spending cuts framework, hurtling past Democratic opposition toward what President Donald Trump calls the “big, beautiful bill” that’s central to his agenda.

The vote, 51-48, fell along mostly party lines, but with sharp dissent from two prominent Republicans. It could not

have come at a more difficult political moment, with the economy churning after Trump’s new tariffs sent stocks plummeting and experts warning of soaring costs for consumers and threats of a potential recession. Republican Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Rand Paul of Kentucky both voted against the measure.

But with a nod from Trump, GOP leaders held on. Approval paves the way for Republicans in the months ahead to try to

power a tax cut bill through both chambers of Congress over the objections of Democrats, just as they did in Trump’s first term with unified party control in Washington.

Democrats were intent on making the effort as politically painful as possible, with action on some two dozen amendments to the package that GOP senators will have to defend before next year’s midterm elections.

Among them were proposals

to ban tax breaks for the super-wealthy, end Trump’s tariffs, clip his efforts to shrink the federal government, and protect Medicaid, Social Security and other services. One, in response to the Trump national security team’s use of Signal, sought to prohibit military officials from using any commercial messaging application to transmit war plans. They all failed, though a GOP amendment to protect Medicare and Medicaid was accepted.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Falls from wall drop sharply with troop patrols

CA SAN DIEGO — The number of people seriously hurt falling off the U.S.-Mexico border wall in San Diego County has dropped sharply since the Trump administration intensified security measures, according to the two trauma hospitals that treat those injuries.

University of California, San Diego Health said last week it has treated 25 people for such falls so far this year. Of those, 22 occurred in January, and just two in February and one in March.

Scripps Health, which shares border trauma duties, reported treating 10 border fall cases in January and zero in February, compared to 32 and 42 for the same months in 2024. Data was not yet available for March.

Arrest over bathroom law thought to be first

FL TALLAHASSEE — A transgender college student declared "I am here to break the law" before entering a women's restroom at the Florida State Capitol and being led out in handcuffs by police. Civil rights attorneys say the arrest of Marcy Rheintgen last month is the first they know of for violating transgender bathroom restrictions passed by numerous state legislatures across the country.

Capitol police had been alerted and were waiting for Rheintgen, 20, when she entered the building in Tallahassee on March 19. They told her she would receive a trespass warning once she entered the women's restroom to wash her hands

and pray the rosary, but she was later placed under arrest when she refused to leave, according to an arrest affidavit.

Rheintgen faces a misdemeanor trespassing charge punishable by up to 60 days in jail and is due to appear in court in May.

Botched butt implant cited in man's arrest

NY NEW YORK — A New York City man has been charged with performing medical procedures without a license after a patient was left near death during a botched butt-implant removal procedure in his home, prosecutors and law enforcement officials said Thursday.

Felipe Hoyos-Foronda injected the 31-year-old woman with the local anesthetic lidocaine, causing her to go into cardiac arrest on March 28, according to a criminal complaint.

The woman was taken from Hoyos-Foronda's home in Queens to a hospital, where a doctor said she "has no brain activity" and showed evidence of lidocaine toxicity.

Hoyos-Foronda, 38, was apprehended at JFK International Airport attempting to board a flight, authorities said. Prosecutors said he was arraigned on charges of assault and unauthorized practice of a profession and was held without bail.

Snatched pets, livestock deaths blamed on wolves

NM ALBUQUERQUE — Commissioners in a rural New Mexico county say pets are being snatched from front yards and livestock are being maimed and killed by endangered Mexican gray

wolves that seem to have no fear of humans, prompting them to consider declaring a state of emergency.

In the latest flash point over efforts to reintroduce wolves into the western U.S., the commissioners in Catron County are meeting Thursday to consider a resolution that would make available funds to hire more people to investigate the damage reports and help haze the wolves.

"This is an immediate health and safety hazard to individuals and property," Catron County commissioners said in a recent news release. "Please be aware of your surroundings when outdoors at all times. Maintain constant supervision of children and pets. Alert our elderly citizens to take appropriate precautions."

Minot mayor resigns after sending lewd video

ND MINOT — The mayor of one of North Dakota's largest cities resigned after an investigation into him mistakenly sending a lewd video to the city attorney.

Minot Mayor Tom Ross resigned Tuesday, the same day an investigative report was made public that found Ross sent a video of himself masturbating to City Attorney Stefanie Stalheim in January. He sent the video minutes after the two had a telephone call discussing a police officer's suicide.

Ross asked Stalheim to delete the video, not to watch it and to keep the incident between them, the report said.

Ross told an interviewer he had recorded the video at home during a lunch break and meant to send it to his romantic part-

ner, not to Stalheim. He had said it was "a sexy video for his girlfriend."

The report said Stalheim struggled with whether to make a formal report. Ross was her direct supervisor, and Stalheim's annual review was pending at the time, the report said.

Her complaint asked for an apology from Ross and that he consider resigning as mayor.

Toddler knew right word to save his family

CA LOS ANGELES — Aiden may be just 3 years old, but he was old enough to know something was wrong recently at his family's home.

When the toddler woke up in his grandparents' room on Wednesday, the smell of smoke hung in the air. His grandparents had already gone to work, and his parents were sleeping in another room.

The toddler walked to his parents' room and started to pull on his mother's blankets. She didn't immediately wake up, said Aiden's grandfather, Abel Sanchez, 57. He kept tugging on her blankets to get her attention and would not stop.

Aiden is learning more words every day, his grandfather said. So, as the house filled with smoke, the boy shouted one of the few words he knows, "Fire! Fire!"

That did the trick, waking up his parents and his 4-month-old baby sister. The family fled as smoke poured out of the home, Sanchez said.

The cause of the fire, which was put out in 19 minutes, is under investigation, according to the Los Angeles Fire Department.

— From wire reports

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Houston stuns Duke to reach title game

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Sorry guys, "Phi Slama Jama" is already taken. How 'bout something simple, like "Comeback Kids."

"National champs" might be a possibility, too.

Houston's no-room-to-breathe defense wiped away a 14-point deficit in the final eight minutes, erased Cooper Flagg and Duke's title hopes and brought the Cougars within a victory of winning a championship of their own Saturday night with a 70-67 stunner over the Blue Devils.

Led by Joseph Tugler's four blocks and an amoeba-like defense that smothers everything, Houston held Duke to a grand total of one field goal over the last 10½ minutes. The 67 points were Duke's second-lowest output of its now-ended season.

The Blue Devils' second-to-last attempt during their contest-ending 1-for-9 stretch was a step-back jumper in the paint by Flagg that J'Wan Roberts disrupted. The last was a despera-

tion heave by Tyrese Proctor that caught nothing at the buzzer and sent Flagg and company shuffling off in shock.

"We just had to keep that belief and keep the faith," said L.J. Cryer, who won a title with Baylor in 2021 and led the Cougars in this one with 26 points.

This is Houston's first trip to the final since 1984 — which marked the official close of the Phi Slama Jama era, a fun-and-gun dunkfest that never won the title despite the efforts of Clyde Drexler and Hakeem Olajuwon, who was at the Alamodome for this one.

Lots has changed since then. One constant: Defense wins championships.

Houston has allowed the fewest points this season and even against Duke, with Flagg, Kon Knueppel (16 points) and a roster with five or six NBA prospects, it made things impossible down the stretch.

"Got to give them a lot of credit for what they do every single night they play," Flagg said. "We could have been a little bit

more sharp down the stretch executing some things. At the end of the day, you got to give them a lot of credit, as well."

It was Roberts' two free throws with 19.6 seconds left that gave the Cougars their first lead since 6-5. Cryer made two more to push the edge to three, matching Houston's biggest lead of the night.

The Cougars (35-4), who have never won a title, will play Florida on Monday night for the championship.

Florida's 79-73 victory over Auburn in the early game was a free-flowing bundle of fun. This one would've looked perfect on a cracked blacktop and a court with chain-link nets. Neither team cracked 40% shooting.

That's just how Houston likes it.

It closed the game on a 9-0 run in the final 33 seconds, and though Flagg, the AP Player of the Year, finished with 27 points, he did it on 8-for-19 shooting and never got a good look after his 3 at the 3:02 mark put the Blue Devils (35-4) up by

nine.

Trailing 64-55, things looked dire for the Cougars. But they were just getting started.

A team that prides itself on getting three stops in a row — calling the third one the "kill stop" — strung together two stretches like that, broken up only by Flagg's 3.

Duke settled for a measly three free throws in the final 3 minutes. One came when Tugler got a technical for batting the ball from Sion James' hands as he was trying to throw an in-bounds pass.

That didn't make things any better for the Blue Devils.

On the possession following the technical, Tugler rejected Knueppel, then Emanuel Sharp (16 points) made a 3 to cut the deficit to three.

Mylik Wilson stole the next inbounds pass and missed a game-tying 3, but Tugler tipped it in to cut the deficit to one.

Proctor missed the front end of a 1-and-1 with 20 seconds left to set the stage for the Roberts free throws.

Clayton lifts Gators over Auburn; Cougars up next

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Walter Clayton Jr. is having an NCAA Tournament for the ages. Florida just needs him to deliver one more time.

Set to face Houston in the title game Monday night at the Alamodome, the Gators finally are getting a shot at another national championship after another special performance from their All-America guard.

Clayton scored 34 points with five 3-pointers, giving him the first consecutive 30-point games this deep in the tournament since Larry Bird, and Florida beat Southeastern Conference rival Auburn 79-73 in the Final Four on Saturday night. The Gators are going to the national championship game for the first time since

their titles in 2006 and 2007.

"Clayton was the difference. He was just flat out the difference," Auburn coach Bruce Pearl said. "We couldn't contain him down that end."

No team has against the leading scorer in this NCAA Tournament. He is the first player with 30-point games in the Elite Eight and semifinals since Bird for Indiana State in 1979, according to ESPN Stats.

"He's poised, calm and collected, confident in himself. We have that confidence in him," Gators guard Will Richard said. "We see him practice, see his work ethic. We're glad everybody else is getting to see him do it in a game."

The Gators (35-4) got this far only after Clayton rallied them twice in this tournament. He scored 13 of his 23 points in the fi-

nal eight minutes in a 77-75 victory in the second round that ended UConn's pursuit of a third national title in a row, then had two late 3s last Sunday when they came from nine points down with less than three minutes left to beat Texas Tech.

"I'm just used to seeing him put the ball in the basket, I guess," Gators coach Todd Golden said. "But he's done what he's done all year for us. In big moments, stepped up, hit huge shots, settled our team down and made winning plays when we needed it the most."

Clayton had a driving layup with 2:24 left in the national semifinal, on the possession right after Australian big man Alex Condon drew a charge against Johni Broome, the other All-American

in the game — and who was dealing with an injured right elbow.

The first SEC matchup in a Final Four ended with Clayton chasing down a loose rebound and tipping it back inbounds to keep the clock running out on the win. When he started to walk back on the court, teammate Allijah Martin was standing watching him at the end line nodding with a smile to greet him.

"We're just all together, on the court and off the court," Clayton said.

Chad Baker-Mazara, with his left hand partially wrapped because of a thumb issue, led Auburn with 18 points, including four 3-pointers. Broome finished with 15 points on 6-for-14 shooting and had seven rebounds — he had only three points after halftime.

Verstappen gets 1st win of F1 season

Associated Press

SUZUKA, Japan — Max Verstappen won Sunday's Japanese Grand Prix for his first victory of the young season and just the third in 17 races but needed a drive that his Red Bull team engineer called "perfection" to get it done.

It was Verstappen's fourth straight victory on the Suzuka circuit in central Japan and breaks the momentum of the McLarens of Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri, who won the season's first two races in Australia and China.

"We still have work to do," Verstappen said. "But it does show if we nail everything we can be up there."

He did just that.

The four-time defending Formula 1 champion, Verstappen started from pole position after setting a course-record time in qualifying, which he called "insane." Norris placed second and Piastri was third. The track was dry despite rain earlier in the day to produce an incident-free race.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc finished fourth followed by George Russell of Mercedes and teammate Kimi Antonelli in sixth. Japanese driver Yuki Tsunoda finished 12th in his first drive with Red Bull's top team.

Norris leads in the standings after three of 24 races with 62 points to 61 for Verstappen.

The weekend turned when Verstappen took the pole on his record lap Saturday in qualifying. And there was only one incident of note in Sunday's race — one that's being dubbed the "grass-cutting moment."

Most of the leaders pitted around the 20-lap mark with Verstappen and Norris exiting the pits at almost exactly the same time with Norris forced to drive over the grass, unable to get past as he tried to access the track.

Norris said he had no bone to pick with Verstappen.

Kelly leads Cubs over Padres

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Carson Kelly homered and drove in four runs, and the Chicago Cubs beat the San Diego Padres 7-1 on Saturday for their fifth consecutive victory.

Dansby Swanson also went deep as Chicago improved to 7-2 since it dropped its first two games in Tokyo against the Los Angeles Dodgers. Nico Hoerner had two hits and drove in a run.

Cubs left-hander Matthew Boyd (1-0) pitched six innings of five-hit ball in his first career start at Wrigley Field. He was struck by Jackson Merrill's comebacker on the final out of the sixth, but he appeared to be OK.

It was San Diego's second straight loss after opening the season with seven victories.

The Padres scored their only run on Fernando Tatis Jr.'s two-out RBI single in the seventh. They also managed just one run in the series opener on Friday.

Kelly hit a run-scoring single off Nick Pivetta (1-1) in the second. His three-run shot with two out in the sixth lifted Chicago to a 7-0 lead.

Kelly agreed to an \$11.5 million, two-year deal with the Cubs in December. He hit for the cycle against the A's on Monday night.

Pivetta gave up three runs and six hits in three innings. He struck out four and walked three.

Tigers 7, White Sox 2: Kerry Carpenter homered for the third time in two games and Spencer Torkelson had a home run and a double as Detroit beat visiting Chicago for its fourth win in five games following an opening three-game losing streak.

Chicago lost its fourth straight and dropped to 2-6, a year after a 1-9 start en route to a post-1900-record 121 defeats. The White Sox have scored two runs or fewer in four games.

Twins 6, Astros 1: Jose Miranda's three-run homer high-

lighted a six-run fourth inning that ignited Minnesota in a victory over visiting Houston.

The Twins were hitless against Spencer Arighetti (1-1) until the fourth, when Miranda sent a two-out, two-strike curveball into the left-field seats for a 4-1 lead. Matt Wallner added an RBI double during that 10-batter inning aided by two errors and Arighetti's wildness.

Nationals 4, Diamondbacks 3: James Wood hit a two-run double over center fielder Alek Thomas in a three-run first inning and Josh Bell tripled for the third time since 2022, helping host Washington beat Arizona to stop a four-game losing streak.

Mitchell Parker (2-0) allowed one run, two hits and four walks in six innings and Kyle Finnegan got his second save, giving up Thomas' RBI single.

Yankees 10, Pirates 4: Trent Grisham homered twice, including a three-run shot to fuel a six-run fifth-inning rally, and New York won at Pittsburgh.

Paul Goldschmidt had three hits for New York, which has a record 25 home runs through eight games.

Dodgers 3, Phillies 1: Roki Sasaki allowed one run while pitching into the fifth, Kiké Hernández and Michael Conforto homered and Los Angeles won at Philadelphia for a 9-1 start.

Still seeking his first major league win and making his third start, Sasaki gave up singles to Trea Turner and Kyle Schwarber in the first, followed by Alex Bohm's run-scoring groundout. Sasaki was removed after walking J.T. Realmuto starting the fifth and allowing Bryson Stott's single on his 68th pitch.

Orioles 8, Royals 1: Jackson Holliday highlighted a four-run sixth inning with a two-run single, Tomoyuki Sugano was solid through five-plus innings and visiting Baltimore defeated Kansas City to snap a three-game skid.

Heston Kjerstad and Ramón

Urias also had RBI singles in Baltimore's big inning. Gary Sánchez hit a two-run single in the second and Tyler O'Neill had a two-run triple in the seventh for the Orioles, whose five through nine batters went 8-for-19 with all eight RBIs.

Rangers 6, Rays 4: Wyatt Langford hit a go-ahead two-run homer in the seventh inning after Jacob deGrom allowed a four-run lead to slip away and Texas beat visiting Tampa Bay for its fourth straight victory.

After the Rays trailed 4-0 after one inning, Jonathan Aranda hit a two-run homer as part of Tampa Bay's three-run sixth that tied it at 4.

Aranda's homer and Cameron Misner's double knocked deGrom from the game.

Reds 11, Brewers 7: TJ Friedl went 4-for-5 and hit one of Cincinnati's four homers off Elvin Rodríguez as its lineup finally awoke in a victory at Milwaukee.

Marlins 4, Braves 0: First baseman Matt Mervis tallied his first two homers of the season in his first career two-home run game as Miami evened the series with a win at Atlanta.

Mets 3, Blue Jays 2: Francisco Lindor's walk-off sacrifice fly capped a late comeback that was keyed by Jesse Winker's two-run triple in the eighth inning, leading New York to a victory over visiting Toronto.

Athletics 7, Rockies 4: Jacob Wilson atoned for hitting into a triple play with a two-run double that sent the visiting Athletics on their way to a win over struggling Colorado.

Giants 4, Mariners 1: Matt Chapman hit two RBI doubles to back a strong start by Robbie Ray and San Francisco beat visiting Seattle to extend its winning streak to six games.

Angels 10, Guardians 4: Mike Trout and Logan O'Hoppe hit two-run homers in a seven-run fifth, Jack Kochanowicz threw five solid innings and host Los Angeles beat Cleveland.

Kings win, get help to lock up playoffs

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Kevin Fiala scored his 30th goal of the season, Darcy Kuemper made 27 saves in his fifth shutout of the season and the Los Angeles Kings beat the Edmonton Oilers 3-0 on Saturday, then wrapped up a playoff spot hours later when Vegas beat Calgary.

Andrei Kuzmenko and Trevor Lewis also scored.

Los Angeles remained three points behind Pacific Division-leading Vegas — a 3-2 overtime winner in Calgary in the last game of the night — and is four points ahead of third-place Edmonton.

Calvin Pickard made 26 saves for the Oilers, who had won three in a row.

Golden Knights 3, Flames 2 (OT): Reilly Smith scored his second goal of the game at 4:31 of overtime to give visiting Vegas a victory over Calgary, a result that gave the Los Angeles Kings a playoff spot.

Akira Schmid made 21 saves for the victory in his first start of the season.

Blues 5, Avalanche 4: Zack Bolduc scored two power-play

goals, Robert Thomas added a goal and three assists, and host St. Louis extended its franchise-best winning streak to 12 games with a victory over Colorado.

St. Louis has the longest winning streak in the NHL this season and has won 11 straight home games.

Jake Neighbours and Pavel Buchnevich also scored for the Blues and Jordan Binnington made 35 saves.

Penguins 5, Stars 3: Sidney Crosby had three goals and an assist, and visiting Pittsburgh rallied to beat Dallas.

Evguenii Dadonov scored three goals for his second hat trick for Dallas.

Devils 4, Rangers 0: Timo Meier scored twice and Jacob Markstrom made 26 saves as host New Jersey defeated New York in an outcome that clinched the Tampa Bay Lightning their eighth straight playoff berth.

Jesper Bratt and Nico Hischier also scored as New Jersey won its third straight while the Rangers had their two-game winning streak snapped.

Senators 3, Panthers 0: An-

ton Forsberg made 40 saves in his third shutout of the season as host Ottawa beat Florida.

Jake Sanderson had a goal and an assist and Drake Batherson and Matthew Highmore also scored for Ottawa.

Canucks 6, Ducks 2: Brock Boeser had a goal and an assist in Vancouver's five-goal first period in a victory over visiting Anaheim.

Connor Garland, Filip Hronek, Dakota Joshua, Max Sasson and rookie defenseman Elias Pettersson also scored for Vancouver.

Maple Leafs 5, Blue Jackets 0: William Nylander and Nick Robertson each scored twice, Anthony Stolarz made 27 saves and host Toronto beat Columbus for its fourth straight victory.

Auston Matthews also scored, and Morgan Rielly added two assists.

Sabres 3, Lightning 2 (SO): Jack Quinn and Alex Tuch scored shootout goals, and host Buffalo rallied from a pair of one-goal deficits in a win over playoff-bound Tampa Bay.

Despite the loss, the Light-

ning clinched their eighth straight playoff berth following the New York Rangers' 4-0 loss to New Jersey earlier in the day.

Bruins 5, Hurricanes 1: David Pastrnak had a hat trick and two assists, Jeremy Swayman stopped 39 shots for his 100th career win and host Boston snapped a 10-game winless streak with a victory over Carolina.

Morgan Geekie had a goal and four assists for the Bruins.

Canadiens 3, Flyers 2: Nick Suzuki had a goal and an assist and host Montreal scored three times in the third period, rallying to beat Philadelphia.

Suzuki's short-handed goal gave him 83 points for the season.

Utah 4, Jets 1: Clayton Keller and Barrett Hayton each had a goal and an assist, and host Utah beat NHL-leading Winnipeg.

Mark Scheifele scored for the Jets, and Connor Hellebuyck finished with 24 saves.

Kraken 5, Sharks 1: Jared McCann had two goals and an assist, Joey Daccord stopped 23 shots and visiting Seattle beat San Jose.

Bane's 38 help Grizzlies top Pistons, improve seeding

Associated Press

DETROIT — Desmond Bane scored 38 points, Zach Edey had a career-high 21 rebounds and the Memphis Grizzlies held off the Detroit Pistons 109-103 on Saturday night.

Ja Morant was a late scratch for the Grizzlies, who had lost seven of nine, because of an illness. Jaren Jackson had 27 points and 11 rebounds.

Cade Cunningham, returning after missing six games with a calf strain, had 25 points and nine rebounds for the Pistons, who have lost three of four. Au-sar Thompson added 18 points and 11 rebounds.

Detroit trailed 91-85 when

center Isaiah Stewart sat with five fouls. With Detroit's usual starter, Jalen Duren, missing the game with an injury, the Pistons were forced to use 6-foot-6 Thompson against the 7-3 $\frac{3}{4}$ Edey.

The Grizzlies are in a three-way tie for sixth place in the Western Conference.

Knicks 121, Hawks 105: Karl-Anthony Towns had 30 points and 11 rebounds, and hot-shooting New York took command with 40 points in the second period and beat host Atlanta.

OG Anunoby scored 24 points and Mikal Bridges added 20 for the Knicks, who solidified their

hold on third place in the Eastern Conference.

The Knicks made 15 of 29 3-pointers and overall were good on 53.6% of their shots from the field (45 of 84).

Bucks 121, Heat 115 (OT): Giannis Antetokounmpo had 36 points, 15 rebounds and 10 assists, Kevin Porter Jr. had 24 points off the bench and visiting Milwaukee beat Miami in overtime.

Porter had 12 rebounds, eight assists and a layup with 11 seconds left in overtime for a 119-115 lead.

Bam Adebayo had 31 points, 12 rebounds and five assists for Miami.

The Bucks clinched a playoff berth earlier Saturday when New York beat Atlanta, then moved past Detroit — which lost to Memphis — into the No. 5 spot in the Eastern Conference.

Timberwolves 114, 76ers 109: Anthony Edwards scored 37 points, Rudy Gobert added 23 points and 19 rebounds and visiting Minnesota extended its winning streak to five games with a victory over Philadelphia.

Clippers 135, Mavericks 104: Ivica Zubac was 11-for-11 from the floor for 25 points, Kawhi Leonard and James Harden scored 29 each and host Los Angeles blew out Dallas.