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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

DOD may turn to Musk to launch satellites

The Washington Post

Elon Musk's SpaceX could significantly expand its share of military business as the Pentagon, faced with Trump administration budget constraints, considers overhauling a program to deploy hundreds of missile-tracking satellites.

In a Capitol Hill hearing last month, Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., said he's worried the Pentagon will restructure the Space Force satellite program, which was designed to have multiple contractors, and rely on SpaceX for a significant portion of the work.

Cramer's comments come at a time when Musk has consolidated enormous power and influence as a close adviser to President Donald Trump. Musk's role as chief of the U.S. Space Force has concerned his rivals, who fear its broad access to government data could include their proprietary information, creating conflicts of interest with Musk's SpaceX, ac-

cording to multiple industry officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retribution.

Dramatically upending the Space Force's satellite program would further consolidate power in SpaceX, which has followed an improbable trajectory from an outside start-up that fought to disrupt the aerospace and defense industries to becoming the world's most prolific rocket launch provider and satellite operator.

Competitors have fallen so far behind SpaceX that many fear they won't be able to catch up, leaving NASA and the Pentagon with few other options as it faces increased competition in space from China and other nations. Musk's hard-charging company rakes in billions of dollars from the U.S. government, flying everything from cargo to astronauts to some of the Defense Department's most sensitive satellites. The company also operates more than 7,000 Starlink

internet satellites in orbit, more than any other entity.

SpaceX's successful track record means that "they don't need to cheat," said Todd Harrison, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. "They don't need an unfair advantage. But the fact that Elon's in the White House is going to make people wonder if there is some unfair advantage. There will be an asterisk next to every SpaceX win. It taints everything, whether it's fair or not."

Cramer's office did not respond to a request for comment. SpaceX and the White House also did not respond. Musk has said that he will recuse himself from matters that pose a conflict of interest.

One industry official said Musk's influence could shape policy and significantly alter lucrative programs. "If you're standing beside the president, as closely as you are, then people around you fall into line pretty quick," the person said.

"He has so much power that ... he doesn't need to ask for anything. It's just knowing that that's the desire."

The Space Force has repeatedly said that it wants to rely on a large number of contractors that would compete against each other and drive innovation, efficiency and lower prices.

Speaking during the confirmation hearing of Troy Meink, Trump's pick for Air Force secretary, Cramer said relying largely on SpaceX in one of the Space Force's flagship programs would go against its stated policy to "foster growth in the U.S. space industrial base."

Meink, who serves as the principal deputy director of the National Reconnaissance Office, said he was not aware of any move to turn over the program to SpaceX, which operates a militarized version of its Starlink network known as Starshield for the Pentagon and intelligence agencies.

Condemnation of Russia's Palm Sunday attack grows

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — Russia on Monday claimed its deadly missile attack on Ukraine's Sumy that killed and wounded scores including children had targeted a gathering of Ukrainian troops, while European leaders condemned the attack as a war crime.

Ukrainian officials have said two ballistic missiles on Palm Sunday morning hit the heart of Sumy, a city less than 20 miles from Ukraine's border with Russia, killing at least 34, including two children, and wounding 119. It was the second

large-scale attack to claim civilian lives in just over a week.

Asked about the attack, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia's military only strikes military targets. Russia's Defense Ministry said the strike targeted a gathering of senior military officers and accused Kyiv of using civilians as shields by holding military meetings in the city's center.

The ministry claimed to kill over 60 troops. Russia gave no evidence to back its claims.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has called for a global response to the attack,

saying the first strike hit university buildings and the second exploded above street level. "Only real pressure on Russia can stop this. We need tangible sanctions against those sectors that finance the Russian killing machine," he said on social media.

Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski, whose country holds the European Union's rotating presidency, called the attacks "Russia's mocking answer" to Kyiv's agreement to a ceasefire proposed by the U.S. over a month ago.

"I hope that President [Donald] Trump, the U.S. adminis-

tration, see that the leader of Russia is mocking their goodwill, and I hope the right decisions are taken," Sikorski told reporters in Luxembourg, where EU foreign ministers met.

Finnish Foreign Minister Eliana Valtonen noted that the attack on Sumy came shortly after Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, was in St. Petersburg for talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin. It demonstrates that "Russia shows full disregard for the peace process, but also that Russia has zero regard for human life," Valtonen said.

Houthis: Alleged US strikes kill at least 7

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates—Suspected U.S. airstrikes around Yemen's rebel-held capital killed at least seven people and wounded 29 overnight, the Houthis said Monday as they also claimed shooting down another American MQ-9 Reaper drone.

Since its start nearly a month ago, the intense campaign of U.S. airstrikes under President Donald Trump targeting the rebels over their attacks on shipping in Mideast waters — related to the Israel-Hamas war — has killed over 120 people, according to casualty figures released Monday by the Houthis' Health Ministry.

Footage aired by the Houthis'

al-Masirah satellite news channel showed firefighters spraying water on a raging fire they described as being sparked by the airstrikes.

Rubble littered a street as rescuers carried one person away from the site, which the rebels claimed was a ceramics factory in the Bani Matar neighborhood of Sanaa, the capital. The Associated Press could not independently verify what was struck.

U.S. Central Command, which oversees American military operations, did not acknowledge the strikes. That follows a pattern for the command, which now has authorization from the White House to conduct strikes at will in the campaign that began March 15.

The American military also hasn't been providing any information on targets hit.

The White House has said over 200 strikes have been conducted so far.

The Houthis separately claimed Sunday night they shot down an MQ-9 Reaper drone over Yemen's Hajjah governorate, which sits to the northwest of the country on the Red Sea on the border with Saudi Arabia.

Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree, a Houthi military spokesman, described the downing in a prerecorded video message as the fourth in two weeks by the rebels. Saree said the rebels targeted the drone with "a locally manufactured missile." The Houthis have surface-to-air

missiles — such as the Iranian missile known as the 358 — capable of downing aircraft.

Iran denies arming the rebels, though Tehran-manufactured weaponry has been found on the battlefield and in sea shipments heading to Yemen for the Houthi rebels despite a United Nations arms embargo.

General Atomics Reapers, which cost around \$30 million apiece, can fly at altitudes over 40,000 feet and remain in the air for over 30 hours.

They have been flown by both the U.S. military and the CIA for years over Afghanistan, Iraq and now Yemen.

CENTCOM said it was aware of "reports" of the drone being shot down but did not elaborate.

Next Iran-US nuclear talks said to be set for Rome

Associated Press

ROME—Talks between Iran and the United States over Tehran's nuclear program appeared ready Monday to leave the Middle East, as an Italian source said the next round of negotiations would take place in Rome.

Meanwhile, the head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog separately confirmed he would be taking a trip to Iran later in the week, possibly to discuss ways to improve access for his inspectors to Tehran's program.

The stakes of the negotiations couldn't be higher for the two nations closing in on half a century of enmity. President Donald Trump repeatedly has threatened to unleash airstrikes targeting Iran's nuclear program if a deal isn't reached. Iranian officials increasingly warn that they could pursue a nuclear

weapon with their stockpile of uranium enriched to near weapons-grade levels.

A source in the Italian government confirmed that the next round would take place in Rome on Saturday. The person spoke on condition of anonymity. The person's comments came as Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani separately told journalists in Osaka, Japan, that the Italian government has given its OK to host the talks.

"We received the request from the interested parties, from Oman, which plays the role of mediator and we gave a positive response," Tajani said. "We are ready to welcome, as always, meetings that can bring positive results, in this case on the nuclear issue."

Both Iranian and U.S. officials did not immediately acknowledge the venue of the second round of negotiations.

State Department seeking reports of anti-Christian bias

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As the Christian world commemorates Holy Week leading up to Easter Sunday, the State Department has issued an appeal for its employees to report instances of alleged anti-Christian bias, including formal or informal actions due to opposition to vaccines or personal pronoun choice, that may have occurred during the Biden administration.

The call comes amid heightened fear and anxiety in the American diplomatic corps, which is bracing for a new update on the Department of Government Efficiency-inspired budget and staff cuts that was due to be presented to the White House on Monday. That update was expected to include the State Department's latest estimates of voluntary retirements and separations and how those will affect potential future

layoffs to meet benchmarks from Elon Musk's DOGE and the government's human resources agency, according to officials familiar with the process.

While foreign and civil service employees await word on their futures, the State Department has moved ahead with an initiative aimed at rooting out religious bias in its policies and hiring practices with a specific emphasis on anti-Christian activity that may have occurred under President Joe Biden.

There is no immediate indication that such discrimination, as defined by President Donald Trump's State Department, took place under Biden.

In a cable sent Friday to all U.S. diplomatic missions, Rubio asked that staffers report any perceived discriminatory actions taken against Christians or employees advocating on their behalf between January 2021 and January 2025.

Electronics tariff exemptions temporary

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Tariff exemptions announced Friday on electronics like smartphones and laptops are only a temporary reprieve until the Trump administration develops a new tariff approach specific to the semiconductor industry, U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said Sunday.

White House officials, including President Donald Trump himself, spent Sunday downplaying the significance of exemptions that lessen but won't eliminate the effect of U.S. tariffs on imports of popular consumer devices and their key components.

"They're exempt from the reciprocal tariffs but they're included in the semiconductor tariffs, which are coming in probably a month or two," Lutnick told ABC's "This Week" on Sunday.

Trump added to the confusion

hours later, declaring on social media that there was no "exception" at all because the goods are "just moving to a different" bucket and will still face a 20% tariff as part of his administration's move to punish China for its role inentanyl trafficking.

The Trump administration had said Friday it would exclude electronics from broader so-called reciprocal tariffs, a move that could help keep the prices down for phones and other consumer products that aren't usually made in the U.S.

China's commerce ministry in a Sunday statement welcomed the change as a small step even as it called for the U.S. to completely cancel the rest of its tariffs.

Sparing electronics was expected to benefit big tech companies like Apple and Samsung and chip makers like Nvidia.

U.S. Customs and Border Pro-

tection said items like smartphones, laptops, hard drives, flat-panel monitors and some chips would qualify for the exemption. Machines used to make semiconductors are excluded too. That means they won't be subject to most of the tariffs levied on China or the 10% baseline tariffs elsewhere.

It was the latest tariff change by the Trump administration, which has made several U-turns in its massive plan to put tariffs in place on goods from most countries. White House officials sought to dismiss any suggestion of a reprieve as the weekend progressed.

"It's not really an exception. That's not even the right word for it," U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer told CBS' "Face the Nation" on Sunday. "This type of supply chain moved from the tariff regime for the global tariff, the

reciprocal tariff, and it moved to the national security tariff regime."

Greer added that "the president decided that we're not going to have exemptions. We can't have a Swiss cheese solution to this universal problem that we're facing."

On Air Force One on Saturday, President Donald Trump told reporters he would get into more specifics on exemptions on Monday. In his post Sunday on Truth-Social, he promised the White House was "taking a look at Semiconductors and the WHOLE ELECTRONICS SUPPLY CHAIN."

Some had assumed the exemption filed Friday reflected Trump's realization that his China tariffs are unlikely to shift more manufacturing of smartphones and other gadgets to the U.S. any time soon, if ever.

Xi, on visit to Southeast Asia, says 'no winners' in tariff war

Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam — China's leader Xi Jinping said no one wins in a trade war as he kicked off a diplomatic tour of Southeast Asia on Monday, presenting China as a force for stability in contrast with President Donald Trump's latest tariffs moves.

Although Trump has paused some tariffs, he has kept in place 145% duties on China, the world's second-largest economy.

"There are no winners in a trade war, or a tariff war," Xi wrote in a commentary jointly published in Vietnamese and Chinese official media. "Our two countries should resolutely safeguard the multilateral trading system, stable global industrial and supply chains, and open and cooperative international environment."

Xi's visit lets China show it is a "responsible superpower in

the way that contrasts with the way the U.S. under President Donald Trump presents to the whole world," said Nguyen Khac Giang, a fellow at Singapore's ISEAS—Yusof Ishak Institute.

Xi was greeted on the tarmac by Vietnam's President Luong Cuong at the start of his two-day visit, a mark of honor not often given to visitors, said Nguyen Thanh Trung, a professor of Vietnamese studies at Fulbright University Vietnam. Students of a drum art group performed as women waved the red and yellow Chinese and Communist Party flags.

While Xi's trip likely was planned earlier, it has become significant because of the tariff fight between China and the U.S. The visit offers a path for Beijing to shore up its alliances and find solutions for the high trade barrier that the U.S. has imposed on Chinese exports.

Trump attacks '60 Minutes' and CBS after broadcast

Associated Press

President Donald Trump bitterly attacked "60 Minutes" shortly after the CBS newsmagazine broadcast stories on Ukraine and Greenland on Sunday, saying the network was out of control and should "pay a big price" for going after him.

"Almost every week, 60 Minutes ... mentions the name 'TRUMP' in a derogatory and defamatory way, but this Weekend's 'BROADCAST' tops them all," the president said on his Truth Social platform. He called on Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr to impose maximum fines and punishment "for their unlawful and illegal behavior."

The network had no immediate comment.

Trump has an ongoing \$20 billion lawsuit against "60 Minutes" for how it edited an interview with Democratic presidential candi-

date Kamala Harris last fall. The president claims it was edited in a way to make Harris look good, something the newscast denies.

But there are ongoing reports that Trump's lawyers and CBS' parent company are involved in settlement talks.

Despite the legal battle, "60 Minutes" has been unstinting in its coverage of Trump's administration, particularly correspondent Scott Pelley. He traveled to Ukraine to conduct an interview with that country's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, on the site of a Russian attack where nine children were killed this month.

In the interview broadcast on Sunday, Zelenskyy invited Trump to his visit his country to see what has been done.

Also Sunday, correspondent Jon Wertheim reported from Greenland on what some people in that nation are saying about Trump's desire to take control.

Shapiro arson suspect sought violence

Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. — A Harrisburg man was charged with the attempted homicide of Gov. Josh Shapiro and his family for setting three fires in the residence, according to the criminal complaint filed Sunday.

Cody Balmer, 38, turned himself in to State Police on Sunday afternoon and admitted to “harming a hatred” toward Shapiro. Balmer told investigators if he found him at the property, he would have “beaten him with a hammer” he had brought with him to break into the residence,

according to the complaint.

Balmer evaded police while on the property, breaking a window and throwing a Heineken beer bottle filled with gasoline into the piano room in a wing of the governor’s mansion in Harrisburg, according to the criminal complaint. He then went to the attached dining room, broke a window, entered the residence and lit two more homemade “Molotov cocktails” before fleeing on foot.

It’s unclear how State Police, who have a 24/7 detail assigned to Shapiro and additional security at the governor’s residence, allowed

Balmer to enter the property, start a fire, then break into the building and start two more fires before fleeing on foot without apprehension.

According to the complaint, Balmer’s “ex-paramour” called police and said that Balmer had confessed to her and wanted her to call police to turn him in. Balmer then appeared at State Police headquarters in Harrisburg on Sunday afternoon to turn himself in, the complaint said.

Balmer also told police he walked an hour to the residence early Sunday before scaling a

fence on the property, breaking in to start the fires and fleeing on foot.

Balmer started the fires on the first night of Passover. State Police said Sunday that “all avenues” were being explored as for Balmer’s motive, including potential hate crimes. The criminal complaint filed Sunday notes that Balmer hated Shapiro, but does not detail whether it is in relation to his Judaism.

Shapiro, who was uninjured, had been staying in the residence that night with his family and some extended family.

Wisconsin teen accused of plot to assassinate Trump

The Washington Post

A Wisconsin teenager charged with killing his parents was planning to assassinate President Donald Trump as part of a plot to overthrow the government, according to an FBI affidavit unsealed Sunday.

The 17-year-old, Nikita Casap, faces two counts of first-degree murder, two counts of hiding a corpse, theft and other charges in connection with the deaths of his mother, Tatiana Casap, and his stepfather, Donald Mayer.

Federal authorities who reviewed the teenager’s communications allege that he killed them to “obtain the financial means and autonomy necessary” to carry out his plans to kill the president in order to destabilize the U.S. government and “save the white race.”

Officials found a three-page antisemitic manifesto that praised Adolf Hitler and had bomb-making instructions.

They also found messages in Russian and communications on TikTok and Telegram, a messaging app, in which he detailed a plot to kill his parents as well as proclaim his allegiance to neo-Nazi, racially-motivated extremist groups.

The bodies of his mother and stepfather were found in advanced decomposition in the family’s home in Waukesha, a Milwaukee suburb, on Feb. 28 after Donald Mayer’s mother requested a welfare check on the residence.

School officers at Waukesha West High School had also requested a welfare check after Casap had missed school for about two weeks.

Authorities believe Casap shot and killed his parents and lived with their corpses for weeks before running away with Mayer’s SUV, about \$14,000, passports, phones, his parents’ wallets, a firearm and the family dog.

The teenager was arrested during a traffic stop in Kansas soon after his parents’ bodies were found.

Casap is in custody and on a \$1 million bond at the Waukesha County jail and is due in court next month to enter a plea.

According to the affidavit, Casap “was in touch with other parties about his plan to kill the President and overthrow the government of the United States. And he paid for, at least in part, a drone and explosives to be used as a weapon of mass destruction to commit an attack.”

Blue Origin launches all-female celebrity crew into space

Associated Press

Jeff Bezos’ Blue Origin launched his fiancee Lauren Sanchez into space Monday with an all-female celebrity crew that included Katy Perry and Gayle King.

It was the latest wave in space tourism, where more of the rich and famous than ever before — or lucky and well-connected — can enter the zero-gravity realm traditionally dominated by professional astronauts.

The New Shepard rocket blasted off on the quick up-and-down trip from West Texas. The fringes of space beckoned 66 miles up and provided a few precious minutes of weightlessness.

Sanchez, a helicopter pilot and former TV journalist, invited the others along for the 10-minute, fully automated flight, packing on the star power with singer-songwriter Perry and “CBS Mornings” co-host King. Moved by the views of Earth below, Per-

ry said she couldn’t resist singing “What a Wonderful World” in space.

Also sharing the ride were film producer Kerianne Flynn; Aisha Bowe, a former NASA engineer who started her own companies to promote science education; and Amanda Nguyen, a scientist who studied planets around other stars and now advocates for survivors of sexual violence.

Blue Origin declined to say how much the flight cost or who

paid what. The trip came two months before Sanchez and Bezos are set to marry in Venice.

It was the 11th human spaceflight for the Washington state-based company, founded by Bezos in 2000 after making a fortune with Amazon. He strapped in for Blue Origin’s first space tourist flight in 2021 and accompanied the latest crew to the pad.

The celebrity launch was the nation’s first spaceflight where women filled each seat.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

FAA: Helicopter tour company shutting down

NY NEW YORK — The Federal Aviation Administration said Sunday that the helicopter tour company whose sightseeing chopper broke apart in flight and crashed in New York, killing the pilot and a family of five visitors from Spain, is shutting down operations immediately.

The FAA, in a statement posted on X, also said it would launch an immediate review of New York Helicopter Tours' operating license and safety record.

The move came hours after New York Sen. Chuck Schumer had called on federal authorities to revoke the operating permits of New York Helicopter Tours.

The company's sightseeing helicopter broke apart in midair and plunged into the Hudson River on Thursday, killing the tourists from Spain and the pilot, a Navy SEAL veteran.

Thursday's crash has renewed safety concerns about New York's sightseeing excursions, a popular tourist draw that whisks passengers high above the city, offering soaring views of the Statue of Liberty, One World Trade Center and other landmarks.

Cuban woman sentenced for role in fatal smuggling

FL MIAMI — A Cuban woman was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison by a federal district judge in Miami on Friday for her role in a tragic human smuggling operation that left 16 people dead, many of them

children.

On Nov. 16, a small fishing boat carrying 18 Cuban migrants departed Playa Jaimanitas, Cuba, en route to South Florida. About 30 miles into the Florida Straits, the overloaded vessel sank. Sixteen people drowned; only two survived. According to the two survivors, the boat was overcrowded, lacked life jackets and was captained by someone with little to no navigation experience.

Federal prosecutors said Yaquequin Dominguez-Nieves, 25, and her boyfriend partially organized the smuggling trip.

Court documents state that Dominguez-Nieves collected over \$11,500 from relatives of the passengers living in South Florida.

3 arrested in 'massive' labor trafficking bust

GA ATLANTA — When a coalition of federal and local law enforcement agents swarmed a Bartow County flooring manufacturer late last month, some workers picked up and ran, mistakenly thinking an immigration raid was taking place.

The authorities' arrival at Wellmade Industries in Cartersville, roughly 40 miles north of Atlanta, was the culmination of what an official described as a "massive" labor trafficking investigation.

At an April 4 news conference, Steven Schrank, special agent with a division of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, said law enforcement encountered 60 victims of "horrific" forced labor.

He confirmed that the plant was just one of eight locations

searched, in addition to seven residences where workers were being held in cramped conditions.

Cop-killer called 'evil' is 2nd to die by firing squad

SC COLUMBIA — At 6:01 p.m. Friday, in a crack of rifle shots, Mikal Mahdi was executed inside of the Broad River Road Correctional Institution in Columbia, S.C.

The convicted double murderer let out a groaning yell as the bullets struck his chest, followed 80 seconds later by a deep guttural moan as the life seemed to leave him. He was pronounced dead around 6:05 p.m.

"There was some agony in the cries," said Jeffrey Collins with The Associated Press. Collins, who has witnessed 12 executions, said that it was the first time he had heard an audible expression of pain from a condemned person.

Mahdi was sentenced to death following a 2004 crime spree across five states. In Winston-Salem, N.C., Mahdi shot and killed Christopher Boggs, a gas station clerk before ambushing and executing Orangeburg Department of Public Safety Capt. James Myers at his home in Calhoun County.

Officials: No health risk from sediment on beaches

CA LOS ANGELES — As warmer days approach, many Angelenos eager to once again spread their toes in the sand may find an unwelcome sight along the shoreline: dark, ashy sediment still sitting on beaches from the devastat-

ing January firestorm.

But residents need not fear the detritus, which is composed of fine ash that swirled together with sand and washed ashore, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health announced.

Tests performed by the L.A. Regional Water Quality Control Board found that the charred silt does not contain wildfire-related chemicals at levels considered to be dangerous to human health, the health department concluded.

There are no plans to scrape away the ashy sediment as part of the wildfire debris removal process, as doing so could cause coastal erosion and destroy marine habitat, officials said.

Harvard professors sue Trump over funds threat

MA BOSTON — Harvard University's professors sued the Trump administration on Friday over its threat to scrutinize billions of dollars of federal funding.

The lawsuit, filed by Harvard's chapter of the American Association of University Professors, accuses the administration of exploiting Title VI of the Civil Rights Act to "coerce universities into undermining free speech and academic inquiry in service of the government's political or policy preferences."

The administration's review of Harvard includes \$8.7 billion in grants and \$225.6 million in contracts. The university came under scrutiny after the government indicated it would seek major changes at the country's top educational institutions after pro-Palestinian student protests.

— From wire reports

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McIlroy wins Masters to finish Grand Slam

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — The closer Rory McIlroy came to fulfilling his lifetime dream — winning the Masters — the more it kept slipping away. Sunday at Augusta National felt like his last 11 years in the majors, blunders mixed in with sheer brilliance.

A two-shot lead gone in two holes. A four-shot lead gone in three holes with a shocker of a mistake. A 5-foot putt on the final hole to win narrowly missed.

And then McIlroy turned what could have been another major collapse into his grandest moment of all when he hit wedge to 3 feet for birdie in a sudden-death playoff against Justin Rose to become — finally — a Masters champion and take his place in golf history as the sixth player with the career Grand Slam.

"There were points in my career where I didn't know if I would have this nice garment over my shoulders," McIlroy said, that Masters green jacket looking like a perfect fit. "But I didn't make it easy today. I certainly didn't make it easy. I was nervous."

"It was one of the toughest days I've ever had on the golf course."

The reward was greater than McIlroy imagined, and it showed. He rapped in that final putt, raised both arms in the air and let the putter fall behind him. He covered his head, dropped to his knees, and before long his forehead was on the green as his chest heaved with emotion.

That was 11 years of pent-up emotion from McIlroy's last major, when he began to carry the burden of getting the final leg of the Grand Slam. It was 14 years of remembering the time he wasted a four-shot lead with an 80 on the final day as a 21-year-old.

"I started to wonder if it would ever be my time," McIlroy said.

The thought could have easily crossed McIlroy's mind during the final round.

What could have been a coro-

nation for McIlroy along the back nine turned into a heart-racing, lead-changing, jaw-dropping finish at golf's greatest theater that ended with him sobbing with joy and disbelief.

It ended with more heartache for Rose, who lost to Sergio Garcia in a playoff in 2017 and forced this one with a clutch 20-foot birdie on the 18th hole for a 6-under 66. He wound up joining Ben Hogan as the only players to lose twice in playoffs at Augusta National.

"It's the kind of putt you dream about as a kid, and to have it and hole it, it was a special feeling," Rose said. "And unfortunately, the playoff, they always end so quickly. If you're not the guy to hit the great shot or hole the great putt, it's over. But not really anything I could have done more today."

The joy on McIlroy's face never left him from the time that putt dropped — on the green, in Butler Cabin when defending champion Scottie Scheffler first helped him into the green jacket, and during the trophy presentation on the 18th green.

"My dreams have been made today," McIlroy said.

Moments later, speaking to 4-year-old daughter Poppy, he told her: "Never give up on your dreams. Never, ever give up on your dreams."

This was shaping up as another horror show for McIlroy, who in 2011 lost a four-shot lead on the final day with a 43 on the back nine, a highlight reel that can now start collecting dust.

"I didn't make it easy today," McIlroy said.

Right when it looked as though he would throw away another major, McIlroy delivered two majestic shots when nothing less would do, two birdies that sent him to the 18th hole with a one-shot lead.

That still wasn't enough. He hit a wedge into the bunker and wound up missing a 5-foot par putt for a 1-over 73 and the first Masters playoff in eight years.

Faced with more failure, McIlroy responded with another booming drive, and this wedge bounced onto the slope of the top shelf with enough spin to trickle down toward the hole, closer and closer, until it stopped 3 feet away.

And when Rose missed from 15 feet, McIlroy finally sealed it.

"I just think all week how I responded to setbacks, that's what I'll take from this week," McIlroy said, though he could have been speaking for the last decade. "Couldn't be more proud I myself for that and being able to back bounce when I needed to."

McIlroy went 11 long years without any major, knowing the Masters green jacket was all that kept him from joining Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, Ben Hogan and Gene Sarazen as the only winners of golf's four professional majors.

Nicklaus and Player spoke Thursday about how they thought this was McIlroy's time. Woods was among those to congratulate McIlroy and welcome him to the club.

So wild was this Sunday at Augusta National that McIlroy set a Masters record as the first champion to make four double bogeys — two in the first round that put him seven shots behind, two in the final round that turned this into a thriller.

U.S. Open champion Bryson DeChambeau, who beat McIlroy at Pinehurst No. 2 last June, had the lead after two holes when McIlroy opened with a double bogey. DeChambeau crashed out with a pair of three-putts and two shots into the water on the back nine, closing with a 75.

Ludvig Aberg, a runner-up in his Masters debut a year ago, suddenly had a share of the lead when McIlroy fell apart on the middle of the back nine. He missed a birdie putt from the fringe to take the lead, then finished bogey-triple bogey.

McIlroy and Rose finished at 11-under 277, two shots ahead of former Masters champion Pa-

trick Reed (69). Scheffler, trying to win the Masters for the third time in four years, never got anything going this week and still shot 69 to finish fourth.

Rose had every reason to believe he threw away his chances on Saturday with a 75 that put him seven shots behind and then two bogeys on the front nine. Even as he steadied himself, he was four shots back and running out of time.

Rose did his part in a 10-birdie round and that dynamic birdie putt to cap it off.

McIlroy did his part, too.

Nothing was more shocking than the 13th. McIlroy played it safe, leaving himself a big target from 82 yards away and a lob wedge. He missed his mark by some 20 yards, the ball disappearing into the tributary of Rae's Creek and leading to double bogey.

Rose was on the par-3 16th and hit his tee shot to 4 feet for birdie, and suddenly they were tied. Then, McIlroy hit a weak drive to the right and was blocked by pines. He didn't reach the green, didn't make the par putt and no longer had the lead.

But McIlroy was resilient as ever — he's been like that his entire career. Seemingly in trouble left of the 15th fairway, he hit 7-iron around the trees and onto the green to 6 feet.

McIlroy missed the eagle putt — the birdie still helped him regain a share of the lead. Two holes later, facing a semi-blind shot, he drilled 8-iron and chased after it, urging it to "Go! Go! Go!" And it did, barely clearing the bunker and rolling out to 2 feet for birdie and a one-shot lead.

Turns out that wasn't enough, either. McIlroy was 5 feet away from victory and badly missed the putt, leaving him more work to do — another chance to fail.

Not this time. The 35-year-old from Northern Ireland never wavered in what he came to Augusta National to do. He leaves with a green jacket.

Clippers lock up spot with win in OT

Associated Press

The Los Angeles Clippers worked overtime to clinch a playoff spot — and send the Golden State Warriors to the NBA's play-in tournament.

The final game to end the regular season was a big one for seeding in the Western Conference, with the Clippers beating the Warriors 124-119 in overtime Sunday to clinch the No. 5 seed.

Golden State fell to No. 7 and will host No. 8 Memphis on Tuesday, with the winner earning the No. 7 seed.

Had the Warriors won, Los Angeles would have fallen to seventh. But James Harden prevented that with 39 points, 10 assists and seven rebounds to cap an All-Star season for the former NBA MVP and give the Clippers an eighth straight win and a 50-32 record.

"We're a good team and we're

excited to show the world, but we're a good team," Harden said in a postgame interview with ESPN on the court.

The West bracket wasn't set until a final day that had numerous teams in the running for numerous positions after the top three of Oklahoma City, Houston and the Los Angeles Lakers was already determined.

The Denver Nuggets regrouped after their chaotic final week that included the firing of coach Michael Malone to secure the No. 4 seed and home-court advantage in the first round against the Clippers by beating the Rockets 126-111.

The Lakers, Nuggets and Clippers all finished 50-32, with the Lakers having the tiebreaker to finish No. 3 and start a series in LA for the first time since 2012.

Minnesota — which could have slipped all the way to

eighth in some scenarios — instead landed in the No. 6 spot at 49-33 following its 116-105 victory over Utah. Anthony Edwards scored 43 points after stressing to his teammates the urgency to avoid having to play at least one more game.

"Like, we don't want to play in the play-in, because I've been in both situations," the All-Star guard said. "We want to be fully prepared going into the playoffs. We want that whole week."

So did Golden State, which has never won a game in the play-in tournament. It would have finished sixth to set up another marquee matchup between Stephen Curry and LeBron James in the postseason and have just two days to shake off the disappointment.

"We're right where we want to be," forward Jimmy Butler said. "We've still got an oppor-

tunity and we control our own fate. We're going to be just fine."

The Kings are No. 9 and the Mavericks are No. 10 in the West. They will play Wednesday in Sacramento, with the winner having to beat the loser of the Golden State-Memphis game to face the top-seeded Thunder in the first round.

There was no final-day drama in the East, where everything had already been decided.

Cleveland is No. 1 and Boston is No. 2, and they will await the two teams to advance from the play-in. The No. 3 New York Knicks will face No. 6 Detroit, and No. 4 Indiana will meet No. 5 Milwaukee.

Orlando is No. 7 and will host eighth-seeded Atlanta on Tuesday, with the winner advancing to face the Celtics. The loser will get another shot against the winner of the game between No. 9 Chicago and No. 10 Miami.

Maple Leafs closer to clinching Atlantic Division title

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Joseph Woll made 25 saves and the Toronto Maple Leafs moved closer to clinching the Atlantic Division title by defeating the Carolina Hurricanes 4-1 on Sunday, reaching the 50-win mark.

Pontus Holmberg, Auston Matthews, William Nylander and John Tavares scored for the Maple Leafs, who have won three straight and seven of their last eight overall. Morgan Rielly had three assists.

Toronto has 104 points, and Tampa Bay, which began the day four points back, could equal that mark at best.

Sebastian Aho scored on a third-period power play, but the Hurricanes have lost five of their last six games. Frederik Andersen, who stopped 16 shots, lost his third consecutive game.

Flames 5, Sharks 2: Yegor Sharangovich broke a tie at 1:30

of the third period with the first of his two goals and host Calgary beat San Jose to bolster its late playoff push.

The Flames won for the third time in four games to pull within two points of the Blues for the second wild-card spot in the Western Conference.

Blue Jackets 4, Capitals 1: Adam Fantilli scored twice, Jet Greaves made 29 saves to win his third start in four days and visiting Columbus remained in playoff contention by beating Eastern Conference-leading Washington.

The Blue Jackets outscored the Capitals 11-1, sweeping the teams' weekend home-and-home and winning their fourth in a row. They still need to win their final two games and get some help from Montreal's opponents the rest of the way to get the East's second wild card.

Alex Ovechkin scored his

896th career goal to give Washington a 1-0 lead 70 seconds in.

Oilers 4, Jets 1: Corey Perry had a goal and an assist, Connor McDavid had two assists and visiting Edmonton beat Winnipeg, hours after the Jets wrapped up their first Presidents' Trophy as the NHL regular-season leader.

Winnipeg — at 55-22-4 with a game left — took the Presidents' Trophy when Washington lost to Columbus earlier Sunday. Against the Oilers, the Jets rested star goalie Connor Hellebuyck along with Josh Morrissey, Adam Lowry, Neal Pionk and Luke Schenn.

Avalanche 4, Ducks 2: Charlie Coyle had a goal and two assists in visiting Colorado's four-goal third period, and the Avalanche rallied to beat Anaheim.

The Avs, locked into a first-round matchup with Dallas, rested several stars, including

Nathan MacKinnon, Artturi Lehkonen, Cale Makar, Jonathan Drouin and Valeri Nichushkin.

Senators 4, Flyers 3 (OT): Tim Stutzle capped a two-goal effort with the power-play winner 1:40 into overtime to lead host Ottawa to a comeback win over Philadelphia.

Islanders 1, Devils 0: Bo Horvat scored late in the second period and Ilya Sorokin made 25 saves as visiting New York topped New Jersey.

Bruins 4, Penguins 1: Elias Lindholm had a goal and an assist, Joonas Korpisalo made 24 saves and visiting Boston beat Pittsburgh.

Lightning 7, Sabres 4: Jake Guentzel scored twice to reach the 40-goal mark, NHL scoring leader Nikita Kucherov had two goals and an assist and host Tampa Bay rallied to beat Buffalo.

Red Sox win, Crochet dominates ex-team

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Garrett Crochet struck out 11 in 7 1/3 innings in his first start against his former team, and the Boston Red Sox beat the Chicago White Sox 3-1 on Sunday to avoid a series sweep.

Trevor Story hit a two-run double and a solo homer for Boston, which had dropped five of six. Alex Bregman had two hits and scored a run.

Crochet (2-1) lost his bid for a no-hitter when Chase Meidroth hit a one-out single in the eighth. The ace left-hander was lifted after Meidroth's grounder went into left field.

Crochet threw 96 pitches, 65 for strikes, while walking just one.

"I felt like I kept a lot in reserves," Crochet said. "I didn't really start ramping it up in velo until later in the game. Yeah, I feel like I could have thrown five more innings."

Crochet was traded from the White Sox to the Red Sox in December for a package of four prospects that included Meidroth.

Shane Smith (0-1) pitched six innings of two-run ball for Chicago.

Twins 5, Tigers 1: Edouard Julien homered off former Auburn teammate Casey Mize, Byron Buxton also went deep and host Minnesota beat Detroit to stop a three-game losing streak.

Buxton and Ty France had two hits apiece for the Twins, who won for just the second time in eight games.

Simeon Woods Richardson (1-1) allowed one run and five hits with five strikeouts, and Louis Varland, Cole Sands, Griffin Jax and Jhoan Duran each followed with a hitless inning, combining for seven strikeouts and one walk.

Cardinals 7, Phillies 0: Matthew Liberatore pitched six shutout innings, Willson Contreras and Jordan Walker homered and host St. Louis beat

Philadelphia.

Liberatore (1-1) allowed three hits, walked one and matched his season high with seven strikeouts.

Phil Maton, JoJo Romero and Kyle Leahy each pitched a scoreless inning for the Cardinals, who got their second shutout of the season after blanking the Phillies on Friday night.

Rays 8, Braves 3: Junior Caminero hit a three-run homer, and host Tampa Bay beat Atlanta in front of a sellout crowd of 10,046 at George M. Steinbrenner Field.

Yandy Díaz also went deep for the Rays, who won two of three in the weekend series. Joe Boyle (1-0) struck out seven in five hitless innings.

Caminero committed a costly error in the Braves' three-run sixth. But he responded with a drive to right in the bottom half.

Reds 4, Pirates 0: Hunter Greene pitched seven sparkling innings, and host Cincinnati completed a three-game sweep of Pittsburgh with a victory.

Greene (2-1) allowed two hits, struck out eight and walked one. He extended his scoreless streak to 18 1/3 innings.

Santiago Espinal hit a two-run single against Carmen Mlodzinski (1-2) in the third. Elly De La Cruz added an RBI single in Cincinnati's two-run fifth.

Giants 5, Yankees 4: Jung Hoo Lee homered in consecutive at-bats off Carlos Rodón for his first career multi-homer game, and visiting San Francisco rallied from a three-run deficit to beat New York.

The Giants have won nine of 12 and took a regular-season series in the Bronx for the first time.

The Yankees have lost five of seven games and three of their last four series. Their starters have a 5.40 ERA, tied with Baltimore for highest in the major leagues.

Royals 4, Guardians 2: Cole Ragans (1-0) struck out 10,

walked none and allowed four hits in 7 1/3 innings, getting his first win this season as visiting Kansas City overcame a two-run deficit to beat Cleveland and stop the Guardians' five-game winning streak.

Maikel Garcia had three hits, including a tiebreaking, two-run double off Ben Lively (0-2) in the fifth that put the Royals ahead 4-2. Salvador Perez had tied the score in the fourth with his second home run this season, a two-run drive.

Astros 7, Angels 3: Isaac Paredes hit a three-run homer to cap Houston's five-run second inning, Hayden Wesneski struck out a career-high 10 and host Houston beat Los Angeles.

Cam Smith and Mauricio Dubón hit RBI singles off Angels starter Kyle Hendricks (0-1) before Paredes launched his home run to give the Astros a 5-2 lead. Paredes has homered in three straight games.

Blue Jays 7, Orioles 6 (10): Myles Straw drove in the go-ahead run in the 10th inning to cap a comeback that carried visiting Toronto past Baltimore.

Alejandro Kirk homered and drove in two runs for the Blue Jays, who trailed 6-3 in the eighth before rallying to earn a split of the rain-shortened two-game series.

Marlins 11, Nationals 4: Matt Mervis hit a three-run homer in the seventh inning, and host Miami beat Washington in the rubber game of the weekend set.

Miami manager Clayton McCullough sent Mervis up to hit for Jonah Bride with two outs and two on. Mervis drove a fastball from Jorge López deep to center for his fifth homer this season.

Padres 6, Rockies 0: Michael King threw a two-hitter for his first career complete game, and host San Diego shut out Colorado for the third straight game.

It was the 34th time a team had shut out its opponent for an

entire series of three-plus games since 1901, and the first since Cleveland did it against Kansas City in August 2017.

Mets 8, Athletics 0: Kodai Senga became the first Mets pitcher to throw seven innings this year, and visiting New York beat the Athletics for its fourth straight series win.

Senga (2-1) allowed four hits, struck out four and walked two, throwing a season-high 79 pitches and lowering his ERA to 1.06. A.J. Minter and Max Kranick combined for one-hit relief in the Mets' third shutout in 15 games; last year, they got their first shutout in game No. 92.

Mariners 3, Rangers 1: Cal Raleigh homered for a third straight game to spark host Seattle to a win and a sweep of Texas.

Logan Gilbert (1-1) allowed just one run — a second-inning homer by Dustin Harris — in five innings. He surrendered three hits and a walk, striking out seven. It was the second homer for Harris in 10 major league at-bats.

Diamondbacks 5, Brewers 2: Josh Naylor hit a go-ahead single in the seventh, and host Arizona overcame a two-run, first-inning deficit to beat Milwaukee for its fourth win in five games.

Corbin Carroll singled leading off Bryan Hudson (0-1) starting the seventh, advanced on a balk and Geraldo Perdomo's sacrifice, then scored on Naylor's single.

Cubs 4, Dodgers 2: Pete Crow-Armstrong hit his first two home runs of the season, including a go-ahead solo shot in the seventh inning, Michael Busch homered against his former team again and visiting Chicago beat Los Angeles.

Ethan Roberts (1-0), the fourth of seven Cubs pitchers used, got the win after getting two outs in the sixth inning. Ryan Pressly pitched a perfect ninth for his fourth save.