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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

2nd carrier in Mideast as Iran-US talks near

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A second U.S. aircraft carrier is operating in Mideast waters ahead of the next round of talks between Iran and the United States over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program, satellite photos analyzed Tuesday by The Associated Press showed.

The presence of the USS Carl Vinson and its strike group in the Arabian Sea comes as suspected U.S. airstrikes pounded parts of Yemen controlled by the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels overnight into Tuesday. American officials repeatedly have linked the U.S.' monthlong campaign against the Houthis under President Donald Trump as a means to pressure Iran in the negotiations.

Questions remain over where the weekend talks between the countries will be held after officials initially identified Rome as hosting the negotiations, only for Iran to insist early Tuesday they would return to Oman. American officials so far

haven't said where the talks will be held.

The stakes of the negotiations are high for the two nations. 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.

But even Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei reportedly described the first round of talks as going "well," even while still couching his remarks Tuesday.

U.S. Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff, who represented America in last weekend's talks in Oman, separately signaled that the Trump administration may be looking at terms of the 2015 nuclear deal that the president unilaterally withdrew from in 2018 as a basis for these negotiations. He described the talks last weekend as "positive, constructive, compelling."

"This is going to be much

about verification on the enrichment program, and then ultimately verification on weaponization," Witkoff told Fox News on Monday night. "That includes missiles, the type of missiles that they have stockpiled there. And it includes the trigger for a bomb."

He added: "We're here to see if we can solve this situation diplomatically and with dialogue."

Satellite photos taken Monday by the European Union's Copernicus program showed the Vinson, which is based out of San Diego, operating northeast of Socotra, an island off Yemen that sits near the mouth of the Gulf of Aden.

The Vinson is accompanied by the Ticonderoga-class guided missile cruiser USS Princeton and two Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyers, the USS Sterett and the USS William P. Lawrence.

The U.S. ordered the Vinson to the Mideast to back up the USS Harry S. Truman, which has been launching airstrikes against the Houthis since the

American campaign started March 15. Footage released by the Navy showed the Vinson preparing ordnance and launching F-35 and F/A-18 fighter jets off its deck in recent days.

The Vinson's arrival came as Khamenei, while speaking to high-ranking government officials in Tehran on Tuesday, endorsed the progress of the talks.

"We shouldn't be overly optimistic about this dialogue, nor overly pessimistic," the 85-year-old Khamenei said. "The first steps have been taken well and executed properly. From here on, the process should be followed carefully. The red lines are clear — both for the other side and for us. We may or may not reach a result, but either way, it's worth pursuing."

He also urged officials "not to tie the country's affairs" to the talks, which are scheduled to have a second round Saturday.

"Of course, we don't fully trust them — we know who we're dealing with," Khamenei added. "But we are optimistic about our own capabilities."

DOD report: Drug overdoses drop sharply in recent years

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

Drug overdoses among troops dropped by more than 40% over a two-year span, the Defense Department said this week in a new report that found fentanyl-related deaths at a seven-year low.

The findings, part of a mandated report to Congress, also showed that military overdoses were significantly lower than among the general population, the Pentagon said Monday.

Overall active-duty fatal

drug overdoses reached an eight-year low in 2023, the most recent year recorded in the study. Fatal overdoses involving fentanyl reached a seven-year low, the Defense Department said.

The Pentagon did not release the full report and all the data associated with it, but rather a summary of the findings that were submitted to Congress.

Still, the findings that were publicly released Monday point to improvement when it comes to curbing overdoses in the

ranks.

In a similar report to Congress in 2023, DOD reported that fentanyl was involved in 88% of the deaths of service members who overdosed on illicit drugs in 2021, a steep increase from 36% five years earlier.

During the 2019-2023 period, the fatal overdose rate for service members averaged about 4.4 out of 100,000 service members.

Among the general American population, that averaged

number was about 29.2 out of 100,000 people.

"Any drug overdose or drug use remains unacceptable, as the Defense Department and the military services maintain a zero-tolerance policy regarding drug use," the department said in a statement.

Congress began requiring the Pentagon to report data on overdose deaths in 2022.

The mandate came amid broader national concerns about an opioid crisis in the United States.

Caine takes over as Joint Chiefs chairman

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Air Force Gen. Dan Caine has been sworn in as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff after a flurry of paperwork was finished to allow him to fill the job nearly two months after President Donald Trump fired his predecessor.

A formal White House ceremony is expected to take place this week.

Caine, a decorated F-16 fighter pilot and well-respected officer, took over on Saturday after Trump signed the necessary documents. He will serve the remainder of the four-year term of Air Force Gen. CQ Brown Jr., who was fired by Trump as part of a broader purge of military officers believed to endorse diversity and equity programs.

Brown, a history-making fighter pilot and just the second Black chairman, had served 16

months in the job when he was fired Feb. 21. Caine's term as chairman will run through Sept. 30, 2027.

Because he has never served as a combatant commander or a service chief, Caine did not meet the basic prerequisites for the job set out in a 1986 law. As a result, Trump had to sign a waiver allowing him to serve as chairman. Under the law, the requirements can be waived if there is a determination that "such action is necessary in the national interest."

Caine — whose call sign is "Raizin" — is the first officer to be called back from retirement and returned to active duty to take the chairman's job.

He had an unusual path to the chairman's post, including his start in the military.

Caine was commissioned as an officer in 1990 through the ROTC

program at the Virginia Military Institute, but after pilot training, he got a waiver to move from active duty to the Air National Guard so that he could fly fighter jets. At the time, there weren't as many open slots for pilots in the active duty service.

In 2001, while serving as a pilot with the 121st Fighter Squadron at Andrews Air Force Base (now Joint Base Andrews) in Maryland, he was in the second rotation of fighter jets that were patrolling the skies over Washington, D.C., on Sept. 11. Two months later, he deployed to Kuwait as an F-16 mission commander.

Caine got his master's degree in 2005 from American Military University, in Charles Town, W.Va. Much of his early career was as a pilot and instructor, and he has 2,800 hours, including more than 100 in combat.

During his career, Caine

moved in and out of full-time active duty jobs. He served in leadership roles in multiple special operations commands, in some of the Pentagon's most classified programs and at the CIA. He also worked on staff and as a fellow at the White House.

His most recent job before he retired last year was as the associate director for military affairs at the CIA. He retired as a three-star lieutenant general.

The Senate confirmed Caine after 2 a.m. Friday, by a bipartisan vote of 60-25, with 15 Democrats and independent Sen. Angus King of Maine voting in support of his nomination.

Trump's relationship with Caine dates to his first administration. They met during a trip to Iraq, as Trump recounted in a 2019 speech. He has said Caine is "a real general, not a television general."

San Diego's Coast Guard head, enlisted leader fired

BY GARY WARNER

Stars and Stripes

The commander of Coast Guard Sector San Diego has been fired more than five months after service leaders temporarily removed the officer from his post amid an investigation into "unfair treatment of individuals" under his command.

Coast Guard Rear Adm. Joseph Buzzella on Oct. 24 temporarily removed Capt. James Spitler and Master Chief Petty Officer Michael Dioquino, the sector's top enlisted leader, citing "a loss of confidence due to failures in leadership, judgment, and integrity."

Buzzella has now permanently dismissed Spitler and Dioquino from their posts. Spitler's removal was made permanent on

April 8. Dioquino was fired in January, the service said.

Sector San Diego is part of the Eleventh Coast Guard District, which includes thousands of miles of coastal and ocean waters from California to South America and operations in Arizona, Nevada and Utah. The district is based in Alameda, Calif., on the east side of San Francisco Bay.

Capt. Patrick Dill, chief of incident management for the service's District Eleven, has been acting commander of the San Diego sector, the service said.

The Coast Guard has said it would release no additional information on what led to the dismissal of Spitler and Dioquino. Coast Guard records show no charges have been filed against either man.

NORAD: No threat after Russian aircraft detected

Stars and Stripes

Russian military aircraft were tracked operating in the Alaskan Air Defense Identification Zone on Monday, according to North American Aerospace Defense Command.

NORAD did not identify the number or type of Russian aircraft it identified and tracked through international airspace, according to a news release Monday from the command in Colorado Springs, Colo.

"This Russian activity in the Alaskan ADIZ occurs regularly and is not seen as a threat," the release said.

An air defense identification zone, or ADIZ, begins where sovereign airspace ends.

While not universally recognized, it serves as a buffer area where aircraft are expected to

identify themselves for national security purposes.

NORAD did not provide further information about the Russian aircraft's route, direction or whether U.S. aircraft intercepted them. A spokesperson for the command was not immediately available to respond Monday.

Russian military flights in the region have increased in recent years. On Sept. 23, a Russian Su-35 fighter flew dangerously close to a U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon that was shadowing a Russian bomber in the Alaskan ADIZ. Cockpit footage from the incident showed the Su-35 passing closely along the left side of the F-16, its underside visible as it banked away. On Sept. 14, NORAD tracked a pair of IL-38 surveillance aircraft crossing into the Alaskan zone.

White House proposes trimming State Department by nearly 50%

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House's Office of Management and Budget has proposed gutting the State Department's budget by almost 50%, closing a number of overseas diplomatic missions, slashing the number of diplomatic staff, and eliminating funding for nearly all international organizations, including the United Nations, many of its agencies and for NATO headquarters, officials said.

The proposal, which was presented to the State Department last week and is still in a highly preliminary phase, is not expected to pass muster with either the department's leadership or Congress, which will ultimately be asked to vote on the entire federal budget in the coming months.

Officials familiar with the proposal say it must still go through several rounds of review before it even gets to law-

makers, who in the past have amended and even rejected White House budget requests. Though the proposal is preliminary, it gives an indication of the Trump administration's priorities and coincides with massive job and funding cuts across the federal government, from Health and Human Services and the Education Department to the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Notes from an internal meeting about the proposal have been circulated in online chat groups among foreign service officers since the weekend but exploded Monday when the State Department was due to present a separate unrelated reorganization plan to the OMB.

One senior U.S. official familiar with the OMB proposal called it "aggressive" in terms of cost-cutting, but also stressed that it was an early outline that mirrored what OMB chief Rus-

sell Vought sought to do in President Donald Trump's first administration when he served in the same job. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal administration deliberations.

So did two people familiar with the matter who confirmed the proposal, one of whom also said it originated from OMB.

OMB spokesperson Alexandra McCandless said that "no final funding decisions have been made." The National Security Council did not respond to a request for comment on the proposed cuts.

OMB's efforts to severely reduce the State Department's budget during Trump's first term were met with fierce resistance on Capitol Hill and largely failed. However, Trump's second administration has moved swiftly to scale back the federal government, slashing jobs and funding across agencies.

El Salvador president won't release deported man

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's top advisers and Nayib Bukele, the president of El Salvador, said Monday that they have no basis for the nation to return a Maryland man who was wrongly deported there last month. Bukele called the idea "preposterous" even though the U.S. Supreme Court has called on the administration to "facilitate" Kilmar Abrego Garcia's return.

Trump administration officials emphasized that Abrego Garcia, who was sent to a notorious gang prison in El Salvador, was a citizen of that country and that the U.S. has no say in his future. And Bukele, who has been a vital partner for the Trump administration in its deportation efforts, said "of course" he would not release him back to U.S. soil.

"The question is preposterous. How can I smuggle a terrorist into the United States?" said Bukele, seated alongside Trump on Monday.

Should El Salvador want to return Abrego Garcia, the U.S. would "facilitate it, meaning provide a plane," Attorney General Pam Bondi said.

But "first and foremost, he was illegally in our country, and he had been illegally in our country," she said. "That's up to El Salvador if they want to return him. That's not up to us."

The refusal of both countries to allow the return of Abrego Garcia, who had an immigration court order preventing his deportation over fears of gang persecution, is intensifying the battle over the Maryland resident's future. It has also played out in contentious court filings, with repeated refusals from the government to tell a judge what it plans to do, if anything, to repatriate him.

ICE arrests Palestinian activist who visited immigration office for interview

Associated Press

A Palestinian man who led protests against the war in Gaza as a student at Columbia University was arrested Monday at a Vermont immigration office where he expected to be interviewed about finalizing his U.S. citizenship, his attorneys said.

Mohsen Mahdawi, a legal permanent resident who has held a green card since 2015, was detained at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services office in Colchester by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents, his lawyers said.

The attorneys said they do not know where he is. They

filed a petition in federal court seeking an order barring the government from removing him from the state or country.

"The Trump administration detained Mohsen Mahdawi in direct retaliation for his advocacy on behalf of Palestinians and because of his identity as a Palestinian. His detention is an attempt to silence those who speak out against the atrocities in Gaza. It is also unconstitutional," attorney Luna Droubi said in an email.

According to the court filing, Mahdawi was born in a refugee camp in the West Bank and moved to the United States in 2014.

He recently completed cour-

sework at Columbia and was expected to graduate in May before beginning a master's degree program there in the fall.

The petition describes him as a committed Buddhist who believes in "non-violence and empathy as a central tenet of his religion."

As a student, Mahdawi was an outspoken critic of Israel's military campaign in Gaza and organized campus protests until March 2024.

He co-founded the Palestinian Student Union at Columbia with Mahmoud Khalil, another Palestinian permanent resident of the U.S. and graduate student who recently was detained by ICE.

Trump considers pause on auto tariffs

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Monday suggested that he might temporarily exempt the auto industry from tariffs he previously imposed on the sector, to give carmakers time to adjust their supply chains.

"I'm looking at something to help some of the car companies with it," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office. The president said automakers needed time to relocate production from Canada, Mexico and other places. "And they need a little bit of time because they're going to make them here, but they need a

little bit of time. So I'm talking about things like that."

Matt Blunt, president of American Automotive Policy Council, an association representing Ford, General Motors and Stellantis, said the group shared Trump's goals of increased domestic production.

"There is increasing awareness that broad tariffs on parts could undermine our shared goal of building a thriving and growing American auto industry and that many of these supply chain transitions will take time," Blunt said.

Trump's statement hinted at yet another round of reversals

on tariffs as Trump's onslaught of import taxes has panicked markets and raised concerns from Wall Street economists about a possible recession.

When Trump announced the 25% auto tariffs on March 27, he described them as "permanent." His hard lines on trade have become increasingly blurred as he has sought to limit the possible economic and political blowback from his policies.

Last week, after a bond market sell-off pushed up interest rates on U.S. debt, Trump announced that for 90 days his broader tariffs against dozens of countries would instead be set

at a baseline 10% to give time for negotiations.

At the same time, Trump increased the import taxes on China to 145%, only to temporarily exempt electronics from some of those tariffs by having those goods charged at a 20% rate.

"I don't change my mind, but I'm flexible," Trump said.

Trump's flexibility has also fueled a sense of uncertainty and confusion about his intentions. The S&P 500 stock index was up 0.8% Monday, but it's still down nearly 8% this year. Interest rates on 10-year U.S. Treasury notes were elevated at roughly 4.4%.

White House freezes \$2.2B in funds to Harvard

Associated Press

BOSTON — The federal government says it's freezing more than \$2.2 billion in grants and \$60 million in contracts to Harvard University, after the institution said it would defy the Trump administration's demands to limit activism on campus.

The hold on Harvard's funding marks the seventh time President Donald Trump's administration has taken the step at one of the nation's most elite

colleges, in an attempt to force compliance with Trump's political agenda. Six of the seven schools are in the Ivy League.

In a letter to Harvard Friday, Trump's administration had called for broad government and leadership reforms at the university, as well as changes to its admissions policies. It also demanded the university audit views of diversity on campus and stop recognizing some student clubs.

The federal government said

almost \$9 billion in grants and contracts in total were at risk if Harvard did not comply.

Trump's administration has normalized the extraordinary step of withholding federal money to pressure major academic institutions to comply with the president's political agenda and to influence campus policy. The administration has argued universities allowed antisemitism to go unchecked at campus protests last year against Israel's war in Gaza.

The government's demands included that Harvard institute what it called "merit-based" admissions and hiring policies and conduct an audit of the study body, faculty and leadership on their views about diversity. The administration also called for a ban on face masks at Harvard and pressured the university to stop recognizing or funding "any student group or club that endorses or promotes criminal activity, illegal violence, or illegal harassment."

US launches investigations into key imports for tariffs

Associated Press

BANGKOK — The Trump administration has taken its next steps toward imposing more tariffs on key imports, launching investigations into imports of computer chips, chip making equipment and pharmaceuticals.

The Department of Commerce posted notices about the probes late Monday on the Federal Register, seeking public comment within three weeks.

Although President Donald

Trump paused most tariff hikes last week, apart from those for imports from China, he said he still plans tariffs on pharmaceutical drugs, lumber, copper and computer chips.

The Commerce Department said it is investigating how imports of computer chips, equipment to make them and products that contain them — which include many daily necessities such as cars, refrigerators, smart phones and other items — affect national security. Section

232 of the 1962 Trade Expansion Act permits the president to order tariffs for national security purposes.

The probe includes assessing the potential for U.S. domestic production of computer chips to meet U.S. demand.

After Trump said electronics would not be included in what his administration calls "reciprocal" tariffs of up to 50% on some nations, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick explained in an ABC News that

pharmaceuticals, semiconductors and autos will be handled with "sector specific" tariffs.

More than 70% of the materials, or active pharmaceutical ingredients, used to make medicines made in the United States are produced in other countries, with India, the European Union and China leading suppliers.

The U.S. produces about a fifth of all pharmaceuticals made worldwide, but consumes about 45%, far more than any other country.

Israeli airstrike hits Gaza field hospital

Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — An Israeli airstrike hit the northern gate of a field hospital in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, killing a medic and wounding nine other people, a spokesman for the hospital said.

The strike hit the Kuwaiti Field Hospital in the Muwasi area, where hundreds of thousands have sought shelter in sprawling tent camps.

The wounded were all patients and medics, and two of the patients were in critical condition after the strike, said Saber Mohammed, a hospital spokesman.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

In a separate development, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated his opposition to

Palestinian statehood in a phone call with French President Emmanuel Macron, who had said France aimed to recognize a Palestinian state later this year.

The military has struck and raided hospitals on several occasions during the 18-month war, accusing Hamas militants of hiding out in them or using them for military purposes.

Hospital staff have denied the allegations and accused Israel of recklessly endangering civilians and gutting Gaza's health system.

On Sunday, Israel struck the last major hospital providing critical care in northern Gaza after ordering an evacuation.

A patient died during the evacuation, and the strike severely damaged the emergency room, pharmacy and surrounding

buildings, according to Al-Ahli Hospital.

The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, which runs the hospital, condemned the strike.

Israel said it targeted a Hamas command and control center within the facility, without providing evidence. Hamas denied the allegations.

The war began when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting 251. Fifty-nine hostages are still inside Gaza, 24 of whom are believed to be alive, after most of the rest were released in ceasefire agreements or other deals.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 51,000 people, according to an updated toll re-

leased by Gaza's Health Ministry on Tuesday. That includes more than 1,600 people killed since Israel ended a ceasefire and resumed its offensive last month.

In the call with Macron, Netanyahu said the creation of a Palestinian state would be "a huge reward for terrorism" and result in a militant-run entity just miles from Israeli cities.

In his own statement posted on X, Macron called for another ceasefire, the release of hostages and renewing the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza, which Israel has blocked for over a month.

Macron said last week that France should aim to recognize a Palestinian state by June when it joins Saudi Arabia in hosting an international conference on implementing a two-state solution.

Motive still unclear in Pa. governor's mansion fire

Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Investigators worked Tuesday to uncover the motive behind a fire set over the weekend at Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro's mansion.

Authorities were looking into the background of suspect Cody Balmer, who they say scaled an iron security fence in the middle of the night, eluded police and set fire to the mansion. Balmer, 38, of Harrisburg, was denied bail Monday as he faced charges including attempted homicide, terrorism and arson. He did not enter a plea.

He had told police he planned to beat Shapiro with a small sledgehammer if he encountered him after breaking into the building, according to court docu-

ments. A motive for the attack, including whether it had anything to do with Shapiro's politics or religious beliefs, wasn't immediately clear.

Balmer's mother told The Associated Press on Monday that she had made calls in recent days about his mental health issues, but "nobody would help." Christie Balmer said her son was not taking his medicine.

However, in his first court appearance, Balmer politely told a judge he did not suffer from mental illness.

Shapiro said he, his wife, their four children, two dogs and another family had celebrated the Jewish holiday of Passover on Saturday night in the room where the fire was started.

Study: Abortions up in US, fewer traveling for one

Associated Press

Fewer people in the U.S. crossed state lines to obtain abortions in 2024 than a year earlier, a new survey has found.

The Guttmacher Institute, a research organization that supports abortion rights, estimates in a report released Tuesday that the overall number of clinician-provided abortions in states where it's legal rose by less than 1% from 2023 to 2024. But the number of people crossing state lines for abortions dropped by about 9%.

The report, based on a monthly survey of providers, is the latest look at how the abortion landscape in the U.S. has evolved since the Supreme Court reversed Roe v. Wade in 2022 in a ruling

that eliminated a national constitutional right to abortion and opened the door to state bans and restrictions.

Guttmacher estimates there were 1.04 million abortions in 2024, up about 1% from its total the previous year.

Twelve states currently enforce abortion bans with limited exceptions at all stages of pregnancy. Four more have bans that kick in after about six weeks.

Guttmacher's tally does not capture self-managed abortions such as people obtaining abortion pills from community networks, foreign pharmacies or through telehealth from medical providers in states that have laws intended to protect those who send pills into places with bans.

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Bueckers to Dallas as No. 1 WNBA draft pick

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Paige Bueckers is ready for her next chapter after a whirlwind week that started with her helping UConn win its 12th national championship and ended with her becoming the WNBA's No. 1 draft pick by the Dallas Wings.

"I'm just extremely excited to be there. I've only heard great things about the city," Bueckers said of Dallas. "So excited to start that new chapter and be in a new city and explore that and give everything I have to the Wings organization. I know we're going to do great things, and it's a fresh start, and I think we're all ready to do something special."

The versatile UConn star is the latest Huskies standout to go No. 1, joining former greats Sue Bird, Diana Taurasi, Tina Charles, Maya Moore and Breanna Stewart.

Bueckers has had a busy time since helping UConn win the title April 6. She has split her time between New York and Connecticut doing morning and nighttime talk shows. On Sunday, she

took part in the Huskies' championship parade.

"I'm glad New York and Storrs are pretty close to each other because there's been a lot of back and forth," Bueckers said. "Part of me wants to stay at school, celebrate with the team, be with them, enjoy the last moments of being in Storrs, and the other part of me has to get ready for the next chapter."

Bueckers got to enjoy the moment Monday night with her UConn teammates and coach Geno Auriemma who were in the audience at the draft, which was held at The Shed in New York. Bueckers choked up when talking about her former Huskies teammates.

"They mean everything to me. They helped me get through highs and lows," Bueckers said.

Seattle followed Dallas' selection by taking 19-year-old French star Dominique Malonga with the No. 2 pick. The 6-foot-6 Malonga was part of the silver medal winning French Olympic basketball team. She's the first French player to be drafted this high since 1997,

when Isabelle Fijalkowski went second.

"I was so proud to achieve that goal," Malonga said. "It showed that French basketball has evolved as we've seen the past few years on the NBA side. We see Wemby (Victor Wembanyama) and Zaccarie (Risacher) show that French basketball is great."

Malonga became the first French female to dunk in a game last fall after winning silver at the Paris Games by losing a doozy of a gold medal game to the United States. She can also shoot from outside the 3-point line. She averaged 15.0 points and 10.3 rebounds so far this season while playing for Lyon.

Not bad for someone who doesn't turn 20 until Nov. 16.

Malonga said playing internationally in FIBA toughened her up. Just check the video from any of France's games at the 2024 Summer Olympics.

"You all watched it and you could see that the games were — every game was tight. We could see great players that evolve in this league, so of

course it was like high-level teams," Malonga said. "Every minute that I spent on the court there, I know that I learned something and that I improved on my game. Yeah, FIBA basketball is something today, and I think that it really helped me to be ready for the league."

The Washington Mystics, with a new coach and general manager, then took Notre Dame's Sonia Citron with the third pick, and Southern Cal's Kiki Iriafen with No. 4. They also took Kentucky guard Georgia Amoore with the sixth pick.

The expansion Golden State Valkyries made Juste Jocye of Lithuania with the first draft choice in franchise history.

Connecticut had consecutive picks and took LSU's Aneesah Morrow seventh and N.C. State's Saniya Rivers eighth.

Los Angeles took Alabama's Sarah Ashlee Barker ninth. Chicago drafted Ajsa Sivka from Slovenia 10th, and then TCU's Hailey Van Lith next.

Dallas closed out the first round drafting Aziah James of N.C. State.

Yankees' Judge named US captain for 2026 WBC

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Appointed U.S. captain for next year's World Baseball Classic, Aaron Judge will be playing for more than himself and his teammates.

"It's something special getting a chance to represent our country," the New York Yankees star said after manager Mark DeRosa's announcement Monday. "Just thinking about all the brave men and women that have fought for this country and laid their lives down for us to get a chance to go out here, and especially me, to get a chance to go out here and play a game, it's a pretty humbling experience."

DeRosa announced the appointment of the two-time American League Most Valuable Player four days after he was named U.S. manager for the second straight WBC.

"I got an opportunity before I get too old and Mark doesn't want me anymore," Judge said alongside DeRosa at a Yankee

Stadium news conference.

Judge takes over from the Los Angeles Angels' Mike Trout, the U.S. captain at the 2023 tournament. The United States lost the 2023 championship game to Japan 3-2 as Shohei Ohtani struck out Trout, his then-Angels teammate, to end the game.

"I reached out to Trout yesterday, told him where we were going. He said, 'He's the one,'" DeRosa said.

Having just gone through free agency and being named New York's captain, Judge declined to play in the 2023 tournament.

"I felt like first my responsibility was to the Yankees," Judge said. "I wanted to be a big part of getting the Yankees back where they need to be, so I felt I couldn't miss that first spring training."

Judge, who turns 33 on April 26, was the first player announced for the U.S. roster. The outfielder entered Monday hitting .357 with a major league-leading 20 RBIs and six

home runs, tied for the big league high.

The U.S. is grouped with Britain, Brazil, Italy and Mexico in Group B of the first round of next year's World Baseball Classic at Houston's Minute Maid Park from March 6-11.

"Something happens when you put U.S.-A across your chest and you walk into the dugout and you see all those games," DeRosa said. "You're playing for way more than yourself. You're playing for your great-grandfather. You're planning for your grandparents, your parents, what they represent, your morals, your values, everything."

Judge said he did not give New York advance notice of his selection.

"I think it's the perfect face to be the captain of Team USA," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said. "Certainly one of the faces of the baseball. Such a magnetic personality that people gravitate to, that people around the game love and respect."

Tatis powers Padres to 11-0 mark at home

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Fernando Tatis Jr. homered twice and scored the go-ahead run on a wild pitch as the San Diego Padres improved to 11-0 at home by beating the Chicago Cubs 10-4 on Monday night in the opener of a three-game series between National League division leaders.

The Padres have the best record in the majors at 14-3.

Tatis hit a solo homer with two outs in the third inning, scored the tiebreaking run on a wild pitch in a three-run seventh and then hit a two-run shot in the eighth. He has six home runs overall — tying seven other players for the big league lead — and five in his last six games. It was his 12th career multi-homer game.

Luis Arraez also homered in the eighth, his second, to give San Diego its first back-to-back homers this season.

The Cubs took a 3-1 lead in the fourth. Michael Busch hit a two-run homer off Dylan Cease, his fourth, after Justin Turner reached on a fielding error by third baseman Manny Machado.

Busch's homer ended a 37-inning scoreless streak by the Padres' pitching staff, dating to the third inning Wednesday at the Athletics. San Diego shut out the Colorado Rockies in a three-game weekend series.

Rays 16, Red Sox 1: Rookie Kameron Misner homered twice and drove in three runs, Shane Baz threw six strong innings and host Tampa Bay beat Boston.

Yandy Diaz and Junior Caminero also homered and each drove in a pair for the Rays. Six Tampa Bay players registered multiple hits.

Misner finished 3 for 4 with homers off Tanner Houck (0-2) and Brennan Bernardino, his first home runs since a historic walk-off shot on opening day.

Baz (2-0) allowed two hits, one earned run and no walks

with a career-high 11 strikeouts. His only mistake was an 0-1 slider to Kristian Campbell, who homered in the top of the third. After that, Baz retired the next 11 Red Sox in order.

The Rays tagged Houck (0-2) for 10 hits and 12 runs, 11 earned, in 2½ innings.

Cardinals 8, Astros 3: Nolan Arenado homered and Brendan Donovan went 4 for 4, helping Sonny Gray and host St. Louis beat Houston.

Arenado also doubled twice and scored two runs in the opener of a three-game series. Donovan extended his hitting streak to 10 games.

Gray (3-0) pitched seven scoreless innings. He allowed three hits, struck out four and walked one.

The Cardinals have won Gray's last eight home starts dating to last season.

Astros left-hander Framber Valdez (1-2) was tagged for seven runs — six earned — in four-plus innings. Five of the 10 hits he allowed were doubles.

Pirates 10, Nationals 3: Paul Skenes bounced back from the worst start of his career as host Pittsburgh beat Washington.

Skenes (2-1) allowed three hits and two runs, one earned, with six strikeouts in six innings. He and catcher Henry Davis made MLB history as the first pair of No. 1 draft picks to be battery mates.

Oneil Cruz had two hits and scored twice while batting leadoff. Emmanuel Valdez and Ke'Bryan Hayes both drove in three runs. Bryan Reynolds drove in a pair of runs.

Nasim Nunez had two of the Nationals' five hits. Brad Lord (0-1) slogged through 4½ innings, allowing four runs, three earned, on six hits with three walks and a strikeout.

Yankees 4, Royals 1: Trent Grisham, Ben Rice and Austin Wells each hit a solo home run off Seth Lugo in the fifth in-

ning, and host New York beat Kansas City in their first meeting since last year's AL Division Series.

Jazz Chisholm Jr. tied the score in the fourth with his sixth homer, an inning after Bobby Witt Jr.'s home run against Carlos Carrasco (2-1) on the 10th pitch of his at-bat put the Royals ahead.

Carrasco and four relievers combined on a two-hitter for the Yankees, whose starters entered with a 5.40 ERA.

New York (9-7) had lost five of its previous seven games. The Yankees beat Kansas City in four games during their ALDS last October.

Mets 5, Twins 1: Juan Soto hit his first home run since the opening weekend of the season and visiting New York beat Minnesota.

Pete Alonso and Luisangel Acuña had two hits apiece for the Mets, who have won nine of 11. Alonso delivered an early RBI single, and Acuña stole a base and scored twice while reaching safely three times from the No. 9 spot in the batting order.

The Twins finished with three hits on a damp and chilly evening and tied a season high with 13 strikeouts.

With New York up 3-1 in the seventh inning and a runner on, Soto drilled a changeup from Jorge Alcalá into the front row of seats in right-center for his first home run since March 28 in Houston.

Braves 8, Blue Jays 4: Austin Riley had two home runs and five RBIs, Sean Murphy also connected and Atlanta beat Toronto for its second road win of the season.

Braves right-hander Grant Holmes didn't allow a hit until Myles Straw homered to begin the bottom of the sixth.

Holmes (1-1) pitched a career-best 7½ innings. He allowed three runs and two hits.

Atlanta snapped a six-game losing streak in road meetings

with the Blue Jays.

Dodgers 5, Rockies 3: Mookie Betts hit a two-run homer, Shohei Ohtani also went deep and host Los Angeles beat Colorado.

The Rockies have dropped six of seven, but they scored for the first time since last Thursday on Kyle Farmer's RBI double in the sixth. They were outscored 16-0 in three losses to the Padres last weekend and have just three wins so far while losing nine of 10 on the road.

Dustin May (1-1) got his first victory since May 6, 2023, allowing one run and three hits in six innings. He struck out seven and walked none. Tanner Scott pitched the ninth for his fifth save.

Giants 10, Phillies 4: Willy Adames and Mike Yastrzemski homered, and Tyler Fitzgerald also went deep, doubled and tripled to lead visiting San Francisco to a win over Philadelphia.

The Giants took two of three over the weekend from the Yankees and added a win against the defending NL East champions. Only San Diego (13-3) was off to a better start than San Francisco (11-4) entering Monday.

Nick Castellanos homered for the Phillies, who have lost four of their last five games.

Tigers 9, Brewers 1: Tarik Skubal struck out nine while allowing four hits and no walks in seven shutout innings as visiting Detroit trounced Milwaukee.

The reigning AL Cy Young Award winner didn't allow a baserunner until Rhys Hoskins singled to start the fifth. The Tigers already led 9-0 by that point.

Kerry Carpenter homered and went 2 for 4. Gleyber Torres drove in three runs and scored twice. Andy Ibáñez was 2 for 5 with one run and two RBIs. Javier Báez scored twice.

Demidov debuts, but Habs can't clinch

Associated Press

MONTREAL — Ivan Demidov made quite the first impression in his anticipated NHL debut on Monday night.

The 19-year-old Russian forward had a goal and an assist in the first period of Montreal's 4-3 shootout loss against Chicago.

Frank Nazar scored the only goal of the shootout, and the Blackhawks kept the Canadiens from clinching a playoff spot.

Montreal has 89 points — four more than Columbus with one game remaining Wednesday at home against Carolina. The Blue Jackets have two games left. If Columbus fails to win both its remaining games in regulation or the Canadiens earn at least one point against the Hurricanes, Montreal advances to the postseason.

Nazar had a goal and an assist, and Tyler Bertuzzi and Lukas Reichel also scored in regulation as Chicago rallied from a 2-0 deficit to take a 3-2 lead.

Arvid Soderblom stopped 18 shots.

Demidov danced around a defender to set up Alex Newhook in the slot on his third shift. Then he flashed his hands by picking up a puck that bounced off the end boards, faking a slap shot and calmly beating Arvid Soderblom to the backhand on his first shot.

"I got some good stuff today from the game," Demidov said. "It's pretty nice experience. Yeah, I love the city. These fans."

Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis was impressed.

"He was great," St. Louis said. "There was one player that wasn't worried about much and not stressed out, it was him."

Blackhawks prospect Ryan Greene also made his NHL debut after a whirlwind couple of days.

Greene played for Boston University in a loss to Western Michigan in the Frozen Four final in

St. Louis on Saturday night.

Greene skated for almost 13 minutes in his first game. He centered a line between captain Nick Foligno and rookie Oliver Moore, and went 3-for-9 in the faceoff circle.

Demidov was the No. 5 pick in last year's NHL draft. He led his Russian club, SKA Saint Petersburg, in scoring with 49 points (19 goals, 30 assists) in 65 games this season, setting a Kontinental Hockey League record for under-20 players despite having inconsistent ice time.

Montreal fans watched from afar while Demidov continued his impressive play in Russia. They've been buzzing with even more excitement since his arrival.

Canadiens defenseman Mike Matheson said the fervor surrounding Demidov's arrival has been crazy.

"It obviously shows how excited our fans are," the 31-year-old Matheson said. "Social

media kind of causes it to be way (bigger) than it could have ever been when I was growing up."

Demidov's move to Montreal this season appeared highly improbable a week ago.

The slick forward had been expected to join the Canadiens in 2025-26, but he signed an entry-level contract last week after he was suddenly released by SKA more than a month before his contract ran out.

General manager Kent Hughes, scout Nick Bobrov and special adviser Vincent Lecavalier drew criticism for visiting their prospect last December in Russia amid the country's ongoing war in Ukraine, but Hughes believes that trip helped make the early signing possible.

"It's always better to have established relationships, to have gotten the chance to meet them face-to-face instead of only over the phone," he said of meeting the SKA organization, including coach Roman Rotenberg.

Kings clinch home ice for first-round series vs. Oilers

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Adrian Kempe had a goal and two assists and Warren Foegele and Kevin Fiala each had a goal and an assist as the Los Angeles Kings beat the depleted Edmonton 5-0 on Monday night and officially clinched home-ice against the Oilers in the first round of the playoffs.

Quinton Byfield and Vladislav Gavrikov also scored for the Kings, who have won seven of their last eight.

Darcy Kuemper had 16 saves before being replaced by David Rittich before the midway mark of the third period, seemingly for precautionary reasons. Rittich finished with five saves.

Calvin Pickard had 31 saves for Edmonton, which snapped a three-game win streak. The Oilers were without several key

players, including Connor McDavid (rest), Leon Draisaitl (undisclosed), Mattias Ekholm (undisclosed), Trent Frederic (ankle), Zach Hyman (undisclosed), Evander Kane (hip, knee), Troy Stetcher (undisclosed) and Jake Walman (undisclosed). All but Ekholm are expected to either start the playoffs or be available within the first couple of postseason games.

Red Wings 6, Stars 4: Moritz Seider had a tiebreaking, power-play goal early in the third, Lucas Raymond scored midway through the period and Vladimir Tarasenko added an empty-net goal to lift host Detroit to a win over Dallas.

Wyatt Johnston scored to pull the Stars within a goal with 7:04 left and shortly after they pulled goaltender Jake Oettinger to

add an extra skater, Tarasenko scored to seal the win with 1:56 remaining.

The Red Wings' Jonatan Berggren tied the game a few minutes before Seider's go-ahead goal and Cam Talbot stopped 25 shots.

Rangers 5, Panthers 3: Vincent Trocheck scored a short-handed goal early in the third period against his former team, and visiting New York beat Florida.

Trocheck, playing in his 800th game, got the go-ahead goal during a Rangers comeback like none other this season. New York was 0-30-1 in games where they trailed by two or more goals, the NHL's only winless team this season in such a scenario.

Utah 7, Predators 3: Clayton Keller had two goals and two as-

sists, and visiting Utah beat Nashville.

Logan Cooley had a goal and two assists, Michael Kesselring had a goal and an assist, and Nick Schmaltz, Nick Bjugstad and Kevin Stenlund also scored for Utah. Alexander Kerfoot had two assists and Matt Villalta finished with 27 saves to get his first career win in his second NHL start.

Canucks 2, Sharks 1 (OT): Jake DeBrusk scored in overtime and host Vancouver defeated San Jose.

DeBrusk scored for the Canucks with 18 seconds left in overtime on a wrist shot. Brock Boeser and Quinn Hughes each had an assist on the goal.

Linus Karlsson also scored for Vancouver. Karlsson's third-period backhand shot tied the game 10:57 into the third period.