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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Zelenskyy blasts Russia's ceasefire claim

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused Russia on Sunday of creating a false appearance of honoring an Easter ceasefire, saying Moscow continued to launch attacks after Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a unilateral temporary truce.

"As of Easter morning, we can say that the Russian army is trying to create a general impression of a ceasefire, but in some places, it does not abandon individual attempts to advance and inflict losses on Ukraine," Zelenskyy said in a post on X.

Despite Putin's declaration of an Easter ceasefire on Saturday, Zelenskyy said Sunday morning that Ukrainian forces had recorded 59 instances of Russian shelling and five as-

saults by units along the front line, as well as dozens of drone strikes.

In a later update, Zelenskyy said that despite Ukraine declaring a symmetrical approach to Russian actions, there had been an increase in Russian shelling and drone attacks since 10 a.m. He said, however, that it was "a good thing, at least, that there were no air raid sirens."

"In practice, either Putin does not have full control over his army, or the situation proves that in Russia, they have no intention of making a genuine move toward ending the war, and are only interested in favorable PR coverage," he wrote.

Zelenskyy said that Russia must fully adhere to the ceasefire conditions and reiterated Ukraine's offer to extend the truce for 30 days, starting midnight Sunday. He said the pro-

posal "remains on the table" and added: "We will act in accordance with the actual situation on the ground."

Zelenskyy said Saturday night that some areas were quieter since the ceasefire was announced, which he claimed showed Putin to be the "true cause" of the war. "As soon as Putin gave an order to scale back the attacks, the intensity of strikes and killings dropped. The only source of this war and its prolongation is in Russia," he wrote on X.

Russia's Defense Ministry said Sunday that Ukrainian forces launched overnight attacks in the Donetsk region despite the ceasefire and had sent 48 drones into Russian territory.

According to the ministry, there were "dead and wounded among the civilian population," without giving details. It

claimed Russian troops had strictly observed the ceasefire.

Russia-installed officials in the partially occupied Ukrainian region of Kherson also said that Ukrainian forces continued their attacks.

Just hours after announcing the ceasefire, Putin attended an Easter service late Saturday at Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour led by Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church and a vocal supporter of Putin and the war.

According to the Kremlin, the ceasefire was to last from 6 p.m. Moscow time on Saturday to midnight following Easter Sunday.

Putin offered no details on how the ceasefire would be monitored or whether it would cover airstrikes or ongoing ground battles that rage around the clock.

Honored former Marine sworn into Reserve by Hegseth

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Sgt. Dakota Meyer, a Medal of Honor recipient, recommitted to serve his country Thursday during an enlistment ceremony hosted by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

Meyer joining the Marine Corps Reserve comes nearly 15 years after he was awarded the nation's highest military award for combat valor in 2011 by former President Barack Obama for his actions during an ambush in the Ganjgal Valley of Afghanistan.

At the time of the ambush in 2009, Meyer was a 21-year-old corporal serving as a turret gunner with an embedded training

team from the III Marine Expeditionary Force out of Okinawa, Japan. Meyer left active-duty service in 2010 and has since become a firefighter and motivational speaker.

"The mission never left me," said Meyer, now 36. "You might hang up the uniform and you might continue that fight on in other ways — as a civilian, as a veteran, as a firefighter, all those things — but I just don't think the warrior inside you is ever going to go away."

Meyer fought down a mountain side in Afghanistan to rescue wounded troops and recover the bodies of those already killed. He ventured into direct enemy fire times to reach the troops, defying orders to stay in

a safer position. Marine Corps officials credited Meyer with helping save the lives of 36 U.S. and Afghan troops. The ambush claimed the lives of five Marines and nine Afghan allies.

Meyer was only the third living service member from the war in Afghanistan to receive the award and the first living Marine to be given the honor for battlefield heroics since the Vietnam War.

"This is a guy who has put it all on the line and done the most difficult things you can imagine, testing the human resolve, and yet after all of that, he is standing before us today saying, 'I want to do more,'" Hegseth said during the ceremony at the Pentagon.

Hegseth, who Meyer described as a longtime friend, said Meyer is an example of the Defense Department's commitment to ensure the country's "best and brightest are willing to wear the uniform."

The process for Meyer to enlist in the Marine Corps Reserve began about two years ago. The decision to join the Reserve force, Meyer said, was something that he has considered since he left active-duty service.

"I have always been willing to serve this great nation because I believe in the people of the United States of America," Meyer told reporters before the ceremony.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

IG: Navy falls short on suicide crisis plans

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The Navy has no way of knowing whether its commanders have created a suicide crisis plan in the face of persistently alarming numbers of sailor suicide deaths, a Defense Department Inspector General audit found.

That's because the service lacks a dedicated office to track the plans and ensure that they include essential elements, such as mental health resources and contact information, the agency said in a report released Tuesday.

"Commands may not have the procedures in place to respond appropriately in a timely manner to a sailor in crisis, validate that lethal means of suicide are restricted and ensure that sailors in crisis have sufficient oversight," the report stated.

The Navy has struggled for more than a decade with rising suicides, as underscored by three USS George Washington

sailors who killed themselves during one week in April 2022 as the aircraft carrier was undergoing maintenance.

That year, 71 active-duty and seven reserve sailors, respectively, took their lives, according to Navy statistics. In 2023, 68 active-duty and eight reserve sailors died by suicide.

The service has worked to better identify and help sailors at risk, including increasing its suicide prevention budgets for 2024 and 2025, according to the report.

But of 277 commanders in U.S. Fleet Forces Command and U.S. Pacific Fleet surveyed by the DOD IG, 39 did not have a local crisis response plan, according to the report.

An additional 38 said they had a plan but did not submit it for review, and two more did not answer questions about whether they had a plan, the IG said.

The Navy pushed back on the finding that a lack of a central oversight office was to blame.

Establishing such an office is impractical and would undermine a commander's authority and responsibility as well as pose an undue burden on the fleet, said Rear Adm. Jay Clark, director of the Navy's Culture and Force Resilience Office.

"In this specific case, centralized reporting for crisis response plans would do little to ensure a command's ability to effectively respond in a crisis," Clark said in a March 19 response to the report.

Clark agreed that having the plans is critical and that they "should be treated with the same level of care as warfighting tactic, technique or procedure."

The Navy will continue to emphasize the importance of crisis response to its commanders and update its policy to better highlight responsibilities, he said.

The review included 277 survey responses from commanding officers, of whom 198 submitted their local crisis plans

for evaluation. Nearly half of those plans did not include a reporting requirement to the Sailor Assistance and Intercept for Life, or SAIL, program, according to the report.

The program provides rapid assistance, ongoing risk assessment, care coordination and re-integration assistance for active-duty sailors, according to the Navy. A total of 21% of the submitted plans did not have a list of mental health resources and contact information and 6% were not specifically tailored to their commands, according to the report.

The DOD IG required Clark to provide additional comments within 30 days, noting that its recommendation for the oversight office remained unresolved. In addition to recommending the establishment of the central office, the DOD IG also advised the Navy to implement a plan to ensure all commands have a completed local crisis plan.

Hegseth aides ousted over leaks decry 'baseless attacks'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Three former senior advisers to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth decried on Saturday what they called "baseless attacks" after each was escorted from the Pentagon in an expanding probe on information leaks.

Dan Caldwell, a Hegseth aide; Colin Carroll, chief of staff to Deputy Defense Secretary Stephen Feinberg; and Darin Selnick, Hegseth's deputy chief of staff were among four officials in Hegseth's inner circle who were ousted during this past week.

While the three initially had been placed on leave pending the investigation, a joint state-

ment shared by Caldwell on X said the three were "incredibly disappointed by the manner in which our service at the Department of Defense ended. Unnamed Pentagon officials have slandered our character with baseless attacks on our way out the door."

"At this time, we still have not been told what exactly we were investigated for, if there is still an active investigation, or if there was even a real investigation of 'leaks' to begin with," the post said.

Former Pentagon spokesman John Ulyot also announced he was resigning last week.

The Pentagon said, however, that Ulyot was asked to resign.

The upheaval comes less than 100 days into the Trump administration where the Pentagon has found itself frequently in the epicenter of controversial moves — from firings of senior military and civilian staff to broad edicts to purge content that promoted diversity, equity or inclusion.

That led to images or other online content of heroes like the Tuskegee Airmen and Jackie Robinson being temporarily removed from the military's websites, causing public uproar.

Last month, Hegseth announced that the Pentagon's intelligence and law enforcement arms were investigating what it says are leaks of national secur-

ity information following reports that Elon Musk was set to receive a classified briefing on potential war plans with China.

In the announcement by Hegseth's chief of staff, Joe Kasper, the office warned that Defense Department personnel could face polygraphs in the probe.

The departures also follow the firings of senior military officers, including Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. CQ Brown; Chief of Naval Operations Lisa Franchetti; National Security Agency and U.S. Cyber Command director Gen. Tim Haugh; and Vice Adm. Shoshana Chatfield, the U.S. military representative to the NATO Military Committee.

Supreme Court blocks new deportations

Associated Press

The Supreme Court on Saturday blocked, for now, the deportations of any Venezuelans held in northern Texas under an 18th-century wartime law.

In a brief order, the court directed the Trump administration not to remove Venezuelans held in the Bluebonnet Detention Center "until further order of this court."

Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito dissented.

The high court acted in an emergency appeal from the American Civil Liberties Union contending that immigration authorities appeared to be moving to restart removals under the

Alien Enemies Act of 1798. The Supreme Court had said earlier in April that deportations could proceed only if those about to be removed had a chance to argue their case in court and were given "a reasonable time" to contest their pending removals.

"We are deeply relieved that the Court has temporarily blocked the removals. These individuals were in imminent danger of spending the rest of their lives in a brutal Salvadoran prison without ever having had any due process," ACLU lawyer Lee Gelernt said in an email.

The Trump administration later Saturday filed paperwork urging the high court to recon-

sider its hold. Press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Saturday in a post on X: "We are confident we will ultimately prevail against the onslaught of meritless litigation brought by radical activists."

On Friday, two federal judges refused to step in as lawyers for the men launched a desperate legal campaign to prevent their deportation, even as one judge said the case raised legitimate concerns. Early Saturday, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals also refused to issue an order protecting the detainees from being deported.

The ACLU had already sued to block deportations of two Ve-

nezuelans held in the Bluebonnet facility and sought an order barring removals of any immigrants in the region under the Alien Enemies Act.

In an emergency filing early Friday, the ACLU warned that immigration authorities were accusing other Venezuelan men held there of being members of the Tren de Aragua gang, which would make them subject to President Donald Trump's use of the act.

The act has only been invoked three previous times in U.S. history, most recently during World War II to hold Japanese-American civilians in internment camps.

Anti-Trump protesters hold rallies across the country

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Opponents of President Donald Trump's administration took to the streets of communities large and small across the U.S. on Saturday, decrying what they see as threats to the nation's democratic ideals.

The disparate events ranged from a march through midtown Manhattan and a rally in front of the White House to a demonstration at a Massachusetts commemoration of "the shot heard 'round the world" on April 19, 1775, marking the start of the Revolutionary War 250 years ago.

Thomas Bassford was among the demonstrators at the reenactment of the Battles of Lexington and Concord outside Boston. The 80-year-old retired mason from Maine said he believes Americans are under attack from their own government and need to stand up against it.

"This is a very perilous time in America for liberty," said Bassford, who was with his partner, daughter and two grandsons. "I wanted the boys to learn about the origins of this country and that sometimes we have to fight for freedom."

In Denver, hundreds of pro-

testers gathered at the Colorado State Capitol with banners expressing solidarity with immigrants and telling the Trump administration: "Hands Off!" People waved U.S. flags, some of them held upside down to signal distress.

Thousands of people also marched through downtown Portland, Ore., while in San Francisco, hundreds spelled out the words "Impeach & Remove" on a sandy beach along the Pacific Ocean, also with an inverted U.S. flag. People walked through downtown Anchorage, Alaska, with handmade signs listing rea-

sons why they were demonstrating, including one that one that read: "No sign is BIG enough to list ALL of the reasons I'm here!"

Elsewhere protests were planned outside Tesla car dealerships against billionaire Trump adviser Elon Musk and his role in downsizing the federal government. Others organized more community service-oriented events such as food drives, teach-ins and volunteering at local shelters.

The protests come just two weeks after similar nationwide demonstrations.

Florida State classes resume Monday after shooting

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Classes will resume at Florida State University on Monday, four days after a deadly shooting on campus left two people dead and six others injured, school officials said.

Students and instructors will have the option of holding classes remotely or in person, depending on the class. The school

has waived all mandatory attendance policies that could affect grades, so students won't be punished if they choose not to go to class in person, FSU President Richard McCullough said in a letter to students and faculty.

Students also can request an incomplete grade for their class if they feel they are unable to complete a course, McCullough

said.

"We want everyone to receive the support and help they need. For some students that may mean not going back into the classroom," McCullough said. "For others, the idea of community and gathering, as well as the opportunity to focus on academics, may be beneficial."

The gunman, identified as the stepson of a sheriff's deputy, ar-

rived on campus an hour before the shooting and stayed near a parking garage before he walked in and out of buildings and green spaces while firing a handgun just before lunchtime, police said.

In roughly four minutes, officers confronted 20-year-old Phoenix Ikner, a Florida State student, and shot and wounded him, Tallahassee police said.

US, Iran make plans for more nuke talks

Associated Press

ROME — Iran and the United States plan to meet over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program again this week, after both sides said they made progress in their talks Saturday in Rome.

A U.S. official confirmed that at a point during the negotiations in Rome, President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi spoke face to face.

Before they meet again in Oman on April 26, Araghchi said technical-level talks would be held in the coming days. That experts would be discussing details of a possible deal suggests movement in the talks and comes as Trump has pushed for a rapid agreement while threatening military action against Iran.

The sides "made very good

progress in our direct and indirect discussions," according to a senior Trump administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a private diplomatic meeting.

In a post on X, Araghchi similarly said they made "progress on principles and objectives of a possible deal." He added, however, that "optimism may be warranted but only with a great deal of caution." He told Iranian state television earlier that "I hope that we will be in a better position after the technical talks."

While the U.S. said both direct and indirect discussions were held, Iranian officials described them as indirect, like those last weekend in Muscat, Oman, with Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi shuttling between them in different rooms.

"These talks are gaining mo-

mentum and now even the unlikely is possible," al-Busaidi said on X.

In a separate post, Oman's Foreign Ministry said the sides agreed to keep talking to seek a deal that ensures Iran is "completely free of nuclear weapons and sanctions, and maintaining its ability to develop peaceful nuclear energy."

That talks are even happening represents a historic moment, given the decades of enmity between the two countries. Trump, in his first term, unilaterally withdrew from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers in 2018, setting off years of attacks and negotiations that failed to restore the accord that drastically limited Tehran's enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

At risk is a possible American or Israeli military strike on

Iran's nuclear sites, or the Iranians following through on their threats to pursue an atomic weapon. Meanwhile, tensions in the Middle East have spiked over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza and after U.S. airstrikes targeting Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels.

"I'm for stopping Iran, very simply, from having a nuclear weapon," Trump said Friday. "I want Iran to be great and prosperous and terrific."

Before the Iran talks started, Witkoff met in Rome with Rafael Mariano Grossi, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, according to a person familiar with the meeting who spoke on condition of anonymity to share details that were not made public. The U.N. nuclear watchdog agency would likely be key in verifying compliance by Iran should a deal be reached.

Netanyahu: Hamas rejected Israel plan to halt Gaza war

Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said again Saturday that Israel has "no choice" but to continue fighting in Gaza and will not end the war before destroying Hamas, freeing the hostages and ensuring that the territory won't present a threat to Israel.

The prime minister also repeated his vow to make sure Iran never gets a nuclear weapon.

Netanyahu is under growing pressure not only from families of hostages and their supporters but also from reservist and retired Israeli soldiers who question the continuation of the war after Israel shattered a ceasefire last month. In his statement, he said Hamas has rejected Israel's latest proposal to free half the hostages in return for another temporary truce. Hamas has said it will only free the remaining hostages in return for an Israeli withdrawal and

a lasting ceasefire, as called for in the agreement that Israel ended.

Israeli strikes meanwhile killed more than 90 people in 48 hours, Gaza's Health Ministry said Saturday. Israeli troops have been increasing their attacks to pressure Hamas to release the hostages and disarm.

Children and women were among the 15 people killed overnight, according to hospital staff. At least 11 dead were in the southern city of Khan Younis, several of them in a tent in the Muwasi area where hundreds of thousands of displaced people stay, hospital workers said. Israel has designated it as a humanitarian zone.

Israel's military in a statement said it killed more than 40 militants over the weekend. Separately, the military said a soldier was killed Saturday in northern Gaza and confirmed it was the first soldier death since Israel resumed the war on March 18.

Vance, pope meet on Easter amid dispute on migration

Associated Press

VATICAN CITY — Vice President JD Vance met briefly with Pope Francis on Sunday to exchange Easter greetings, after they got into a long-distance tangle over the Trump administration's migrant deportation plans.

Francis, who is recovering from a near-fatal bout of pneumonia, received Vance in one of the reception rooms of the Vatican hotel where he lives. The 88-year-old pope offered the Catholic vice president three big chocolate Easter eggs for Vance's three young children, who did not attend, as well as a Vatican tie and rosaries.

"I know you have not been feeling great but it's good to see you in better health," Vance told the pope. "Thank you for seeing me."

Vance's motorcade entered Vatican City through a side gate while Easter Mass was being celebrated in St. Peter's Square.

Francis had delegated the celebration of the Mass to another cardinal.

The Vatican said they met for a few minutes at the Domus Santa Marta "to exchange Easter greetings." Vance's office said that they met, but provided no further details. In all, Vance's motorcade was on Vatican territory for 17 minutes.

He later joined his family for Easter Mass at St. Paul Outside the Walls, one of the four pontifical basilicas in Rome. The Vances visited the tomb of the apostle St. Paul that is said to be located there. Vance, who converted to Catholicism in 2019, and the pope have tangled sharply over migration and the Trump administration's plans to deport migrants en masse. Francis has made caring for migrants a hallmark of his papacy. Vance has acknowledged Francis' criticism but has said he will continue to defend his views.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Flaming sex toys sparked blaze damaging 3 homes

NY NEW YORK — A man busted for starting a fire that damaged three Staten Island homes and threatened the life of an elderly woman told authorities the blaze started when he tried to burn sex toys in his backyard, documents reveal.

"I started the fire. I was in the backyard at my house and I lit two sex toys on fire," Harry Torres, 37, told investigators, according to a criminal complaint against him.

The fire, which authorities initially called "suspicious," quickly spread to two neighboring buildings, which were then extensively damaged, according to FDNY officials.

A woman in her 80s who lived in one of the houses that caught fire was forced to flee after the blaze reached her home, her adult children told the SI Advance.

Torres is charged with arson and reckless endangerment, according to the FDNY.

Dog rescues 2-year-old who wandered 7 miles

AZ SELIGMAN — A 2-year-old boy is back with his family after a rancher's dog found him in the desert 7 miles from his home in Arizona, authorities said.

The family of Boden Allen reported him missing last Monday after he wandered away in Seligman, the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office said in a statement. Deputies and more than 40 search-and-rescue personnel from the Arizona Department of Public Safety, the neighboring Coconino County

Sheriff's Office and other agencies sprang into action.

"After 16 hours of searching, a rancher approximately 7 miles away reported that a young child had walked onto his property," the sheriff's office said.

Buford, an Anatolian Pyrenees, had come to the rescue, finding the child on his nightly patrol for coyotes and other wildlife, rancher Scotty Dunton told the sheriff's office. He was heading out to town the next morning when he saw Buford sitting at the end of his driveway with the boy.

Court: Transitioning teen cannot change name

MS JACKSON — The Mississippi Supreme Court on Thursday upheld a ruling denying a transgender teen's name-change petition.

The ruling comes nearly two years after a then 16-year-old undergoing a gender transition filed a petition to change his name to better fit his gender identity. Both of the teen's parents consented to the name change. But Hinds County Chancery Judge Tametrice Hodges in November 2023 denied the petition, citing the teen's lack of maturity.

The Mississippi Supreme Court voted 8-1 to uphold the ruling.

Man killed wife after posing as ex-boyfriend

CO BROOMFIELD — A Colorado man was convicted Thursday of killing his wife after stalking her while posing as her ex-boyfriend.

Jurors reached the verdict against Daniel Krug, 44, a day

after beginning deliberations. They found him guilty of all four charges he faced — first-degree murder as well as two counts of stalking and one count of criminal impersonation.

With his marriage to Kristil Krug falling apart, prosecutors said Krug decided to play "puppet master" by scaring his wife and then trying to win her back by protecting her from the fake stalking, uniting them against a common threat.

Kristil Krug, a biochemical engineer, kept a log tracking the increasingly threatening texts and emails that suggested she was being watched. As police investigated, prosecutors said Daniel Krug began to realize that he could face criminal charges and started plotting how to kill his wife to silence her and because she didn't want to be with him anymore.

Prosecutors said he waited for her to return to their suburban Denver home on Dec. 14, 2023, after taking two of their children to school and then knocked her unconscious and stabbed her in the heart.

Millions of honey bees killed in poisoning

VA STAFFORD — Millions of dead honey bees were found by a Virginia beekeeper in what he said was a calculated attack on his farm.

Sixty colonies of honey bees were fatally poisoned and "steel chains and locks" were found on the gates of the farm, Jerry Mattiaccio, owner of Rock Hill Honey Bee Farms in Stafford, said in a statement on Facebook.

Between 20,000 and 100,000 honey bees make up a colony, according to Clemson University's College of Agriculture, For-

estry and Life Sciences. Photos Mattiaccio shared on social media showed heaps of dead bees lying at the base of apiaries on his farm.

"None of these actions could be accidental," Mattiaccio said in the post. "This was clearly intentional, hoping to injure my operation."

The suspected poisoning will cost him about \$20,000 in business losses, Mattiaccio told WRC-TV.

Afghan teenager pleads guilty to Election Day plot

OK OKLAHOMA CITY — An Afghan teenager accused of taking part in an Oklahoma plot to carry out an Election Day attack has pleaded guilty, federal prosecutors said Thursday.

Abdullah Haji Zada, 18, a citizen of Afghanistan who was living in Moore, pleaded guilty to knowingly receiving and conspiring to receive a firearm and ammunition to be used in a terrorist attack, court records show. Zada, who was 17 at the time of his arrest, is awaiting sentencing and faces up to 15 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Zada also agreed to be removed from the U.S. after he is released from prison, court records show.

Zada's co-defendant, Nasir Ahmad Tawhedi, 27, who previously worked as a security guard for a U.S. military installation in Afghanistan, is currently awaiting trial.

Prosecutors allege Zada and Tawhedi took steps to obtain AK-47 rifles and ammunition and planned to carry out an attack targeting large crowds on Election Day last year.

—From wire reports

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Wolves rout Lakers despite Doncic's 37

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Anthony Edwards was not at all surprised when the Minnesota Timberwolves showed enough talent and togetherness to turn Luka Doncic's playoff debut with the Lakers into a rout for the visitors.

Jaden McDaniels scored 25 points, Naz Reid added 23 with six 3-pointers, and the Timberwolves overcame Doncic's 37-point effort for a 117-95 victory Saturday night.

Edwards had 22 points, nine assists and eight rebounds in the first-round series opener for the sixth-seeded Wolves, who have won 18 of their last 22 games.

"I got a great group of guys," Edwards said. "But it wasn't tonight. I learned that in training camp. It just takes a minute for us to gel as a new team. It just took a minute for us to figure each other out, and I feel like now we just go."

The Timberwolves weathered Doncic's 16-point first quarter in front of a roaring LA

crowd before taking control with a 38-20 second quarter.

They poured it on after halftime, too. Julius Randle and Edwards hit four 3-pointers apiece as the Timberwolves made a franchise playoff-record 21 3-pointers on 42 attempts — with many of those shots taken without a defender in sight.

"It means Game 1," Minnesota coach Chris Finch said. "We know it's going to be a long series. We're not under any assumption that it's going to be this type of game in Game 2. It'll be a completely different game. We got a lot left. A lot of meat on the bone out there. A lot of things. I know we can do better."

LeBron James had 19 points to begin his 18th NBA postseason, but the third-seeded Lakers were overwhelmed by the Wolves' shot-making and playoff poise.

"This Minnesota team, they're going to be physical," James said. "That's what they bring to the table. It took us one game ... (to) understand that.

They took homecourt advantage from us tonight, but we have to control the controllables, and if we do that, we'll have a much better chance to win than we did tonight."

While Los Angeles is still searching for chemistry after acquiring Doncic two months ago, Minnesota is eager to improve on last season's run to the Western Conference finals.

Game 2 in the best-of-seven series is Tuesday night in Los Angeles.

"They're a great opponent," JJ Redick said after losing his playoff coaching debut. "They're one of the best teams in basketball. It's not to say our guys weren't ready to withstand playoff-level basketball. We were mentally ready, and I thought our spirit was right. ... I'm not sure physically we were ready, if that makes sense. When they start playing with a lot of thrust and physicality, we really just couldn't respond to that."

Minnesota's superior physicality was obvious for long

stretches, even with Rudy Gobert playing only 24 minutes. But the Wolves took control and kept it largely because they hit 21 3-pointers on only 42 attempts.

The Lakers lack a dominant big man after trading Anthony Davis, and Jaden McDaniels took advantage of that while scoring 25 points. But that doesn't explain the Lakers' poor effort on the perimeter, where they have enough athletes to guard most teams competently when they make the effort.

"I think it was physical, (and) they were hitting a lot of 3s," Doncic said. "We have to limit their 3s, especially their lasers. We weren't physical. They were running. They were getting anything they want, and we have to be better."

One day after the Dallas Mavericks' season ended in the Play-In Tournament, Doncic produced the 11th-highest scoring playoff game of his career — and it wasn't nearly enough, thanks to the Timberwolves' prolific team effort.

Knicks go on 21-0 run in 4th to beat Pistons in Game 1

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jalen Brunson scored 34 points, Cam Payne had 11 of his 14 in the fourth quarter and New York stunned Detroit with a 21-0 run in the final period to rally for a 123-112 victory in Game 1 of their first-round playoff series Saturday night.

Karl-Anthony Towns had 23 points and 11 rebounds in his first playoff game with the Knicks and OG Anunoby also scored 23 points for the No. 3-seeded Knicks. They will host Game 2 on Monday night.

The Pistons held up well for more than three quarters of their first playoff game since 2019 and had a 98-90 lead, a little more than nine minutes from ending their NBA-record, 14-

game postseason losing streak.

By the time they scored again, the Knicks were ahead by 13 points, the delirious fans inside Madison Square Garden roaring louder with every Pistons miscue after they played with such poise for much of the game.

Payne converted a three-point play to start the run, Brunson scored and Payne made a 3-pointer to tie it at 98, and the onslaught would last for nearly five minutes. Payne and Brunson combined for the first 17 points before Josh Hart had the final two baskets to make it 111-98 with 4:50 remaining.

Tobias Harris scored 25 points for Detroit, but just three in the second half. Cade Cunningham had 21 points and 12 assists, but the Knicks limited the

star guard to 8-for-21 shooting in his playoff debut.

Nuggets 112, Clippers 110 (OT): Nikola Jokic scored 29 points and Aaron Gordon added 25, including two free throws with 12 seconds left, and Denver roared back from a 15-point first-half deficit to power past visiting Los Angeles in overtime in the opener of their Western Conference playoff series.

Jamal Murray added 21 points, nine rebounds and seven assists for the fourth-seeded Nuggets, who improved to 4-0 under interim coach David Adelman, Michael Malone's replacement.

The No. 5 seed Clippers' loss was their first since March 30 at Cleveland. They rolled into the playoffs having won 18 of 21, in-

cluding their past eight, and they jumped out to an early lead that held until the final minutes of regulation.

Game 2 is Monday night at Ball Arena.

Pacers 117, Bucks 98: Pascal Siakam finished with 25 points and seven rebounds and Tyrese Haliburton added 10 points and 12 assists to lead Indiana past visiting Milwaukee for a 1-0 lead in their first-round series.

Indiana led by 28 and fended off a charge that got the Bucks within 12 midway through the third quarter by holding the Bucks to only three points over the final 5:24. Myles Turner's 3-pointer with 1:59 sealed the win. Turner had 19 points and four blocks.

MacKinnon scores 2 as Avs top Stars

Associated Press

DALLAS — Nathan MacKinnon took a stick to the face, had a part in both of Colorado's strange goals in the second period and capped his night with an empty-netter for his 50th career playoff goal.

And Mackenzie Blackwood backed up the Avalanche in a big way in the goaltender's first playoff game after 252 regular-season games for three teams over eight seasons.

The two goals in the second period put the Avalanche ahead to stay, and Blackwood had 23 saves in a 5-1 victory over the Dallas Stars in the opener of their first-round Western Conference playoff series Saturday night.

"I thought it was solid, really solid," MacKinnon said of the opener of the Avs' eighth consecutive postseason. "We had a lot of good looks, a lot of attempts. Maybe hit the net a little bit more, but I thought we played a pretty solid two-way game."

MacKinnon scored on a shot that deflected off Stars defenseman Ilya Lyubushkin, and knuckled past goalie Jake Oettinger late in the second period. That came during an extended power play, a double minor against the Stars after he took a high stick to the face.

"Obviously they're going to key on him like we do on some of their players," coach Jared Bednar said of last season's NHL MVP. "But really strong defensive game from him, and obviously get-up and go on the offensive side, he was making plays all night."

Blackwood stopped four shots in a span of 11 seconds midway through the second period just before MacKinnon assisted on Artturi Lehkonen's goal.

Lehkonen was following his initial shot and falling down after a collision in front of the net when the puck ricocheted off his lower left leg into the top corner of the net. The play was reviewed and officials ruled that there was no kicking motion by

Lehkonen while tumbling to the ice with Mavrik Bourque.

There wasn't much Oettinger could do on either of those goals as the Stars lost Game 1 in their eighth consecutive series in the NHL playoffs since 2022. They are 0-7 in series openers under coach Pete DeBoer, six of those coming at home.

"I guess the good news is we've come back and won more than our share of those series where we have (lost Game 1)," said DeBoer, whose teams made it to the West final each of the past two seasons. "So I think we got to concentrate on that."

Game 2 is Monday night in Dallas, before the series shifts to Denver.

Devon Toews gave Colorado a 3-1 lead with 7:04 left. MacKinnon had an empty-net tally with 3:08 left, 11 seconds before Charlie Coyle scored.

This series-opening loss for the Stars came after they finished the regular season on an 0-5-2 stretch that included four losses at home after being 28-5-3

before that.

Blackwood is one of 11 players who have seen action since being acquired through Colorado's eight in-season trades. He came from San Jose in December and played in 37 games for the Avs.

Those deals included the Avalanche trading Mikko Rantanen on Jan. 24 to Carolina in the East. He played only 13 games before a deadline deal March 7 sent him back to the Central Division with the Stars and included a \$96 million, eight-year contract extension.

Rantanen, who had 101 points (34 goals, 67 assists) in 81 playoff games for the Avalanche had three shots and one block over 18 minutes in his postseason debut with the Stars.

Oettinger had 19 saves, three when Colorado had a two-man advantage in the first period when Cale Makar drew two tripping penalties only 36 seconds apart from each other.

Bednar got his 50th playoff win with the Avs — in his 82nd postseason game.

Connor's late goal sends Jets over Blues in opener

Associated Press

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Kyle Connor's one-timer with 1:36 remaining in the third period snapped a 3-3 tie and lifted the Winnipeg Jets to a 5-3 victory in Saturday's opening game of the Stanley Cup playoffs against the St. Louis Blues.

Connor also contributed two assists and captain Adam Lowry capped the victory with an empty-netter with 53 seconds left.

Game 2 in the best-of-seven series is Monday at Canada Life Centre, which featured a loud "whiteout" full house of 15,225 fans.

Mark Scheifele had a goal and two assists and Jaret Anderson-Dolan also scored for the Jets.

Scheifele became the Jets' franchise leader in playoff points with 41.

"To do it in front of the fans tonight was pretty special," he said. "That was a fun game to be a part of, just had a fun time."

Scheifele passed former captain Blake Wheeler's franchise mark of 39 playoff points.

"Every year, (Scheifele) seems to work on some new skills, come back an even better player than he was before," Lowry said. "It's difficult to kind of understand that someone in their 30s is continuing to get better, they're not kind of plateauing. But he puts in the work, he's rewarded for it."

Connor Hellebuyck made 14 saves for the Jets, who had the best regular-season record (56-22-4).

Jordan Kyrou gave the Blues a 3-2 lead with a power-play goal early in the second period, but

Winnipeg's top-line winger Alex Iafallo tied it at 9:18 of the third.

"That's playoff hockey," Hellebuyck said. "You have to play right to the last minute and right to the last second. It was fun. ... The guys were buzzing out there."

Robert Thomas also scored on the power play for St. Louis. Oskar Sundqvist added one at even strength and Justin Faulk had two assists.

The Jets outshot the Blues 9-2 in the third.

"You have to control your emotions," Blues captain Brayden Schenn said. "It's the playoffs and special teams are huge. ... We'll be fine for (the) next game. Obviously, Game 1 a lot of emotion with the buildup."

Jordan Binnington stopped 21

shots for St. Louis, which grabbed the Western Conference's final wild-card spot with a final-game victory.

The Jets won their regular-season series against the Blues 3-1.

A four-goal first period ended in a 2-2 tie.

St. Louis outshot the Jets 9-7 in the opening period, and dished out 32 hits to Winnipeg's 14.

The Blues came out of the first intermission and used the power play for Kyrou's goal at 1:13 and a 3-2 lead.

Winnipeg couldn't capitalize on its early third-period man advantage but came close when Binnington denied Connor on a one-timer.

After Lowry's goal, players paired up for some fighting with 19 seconds left.

García's walk-off HR lifts Rangers

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Adolis García hit a two-run homer off former Texas closer Kirby Yates in the ninth inning, lifting the Rangers to a 4-3 victory over the Los Angeles Dodgers on Saturday.

The fourth home run of the season from García kept Japanese rookie Roki Sasaki from getting his first major league victory. The 23-year-old right-hander pitched six solid innings in the longest of his five big league outings.

Josh Smith almost tied it against Yates (1-1) leading off the Texas ninth, missing a homer by a couple of feet foul down the line in right field. Smith slapped a double the other way before García's 394-foot drive into the seats in left.

The Dodgers were without two-way star Shohei Ohtani, who announced the birth of his first child — a girl — during the game, as did manager Dave Roberts during an in-game interview on national television.

The defending champions were well on their way to a 2-0 start in the three-game series matching the past two World Series winners before García's blast.

Sasaki surrendered a two-run homer to Kyle Higashioka in the third but allowed just two hits. The right-hander walked three and struck out four.

Freddie Freeman hit a tying two-run homer in the fourth, and Max Muncy put the Dodgers ahead with a two-out, ground-rule double later in the inning.

Jacob Webb (2-0) pitched two scoreless inning for Texas.

Guardians 3, Pirates 0: Kyle Manzardo spoiled Paul Skenes' bobblehead day, taking the young Pittsburgh ace deep in visiting Cleveland's victory.

Manzardo led off the seventh by taking the first pitch he saw from Skenes (2-2) and sending it over the right-field stands.

The fifth home run of the season by Cleveland's designated hitter landed 411 feet from home plate before bouncing into the Allegheny River.

Red Sox 4, White Sox 3 (10): Triston Casas hit a bases-loaded single off the Green Monster to drive in the winning run in the 10th inning, lifting Boston over visiting Chicago.

Luis Robert Jr. hit a two-run shot for the White Sox, who lost their sixth in a row and fell to 4-16 and 0-8 on the road, the worst road start in team history.

Rays 10, Yankees 8 (10): Brandon Lowe tied the score with a two-run single in a four-run ninth inning off Devin Williams, Jonathan Aranda hit a two-run homer in the 10th and host Tampa Bay stopped New York's five-game winning streak.

Williams, an All-Star closer acquired from Milwaukee during the offseason, has a 9.00 ERA and has allowed runs in four of nine appearances. He has walked seven in eight innings.

Tigers 3, Royals 1: Spencer Torkelson hit a tiebreaking, three-run homer in the fifth inning off Seth Lugo, and host Detroit extended Kansas City's losing streak to six.

Detroit won the first three games of the four-game series and is 8-1 at Comerica Park, its best home start since nine straight wins to begin 1993.

Braves 4, Twins 3: Alex Verdugo, making his second start as Atlanta's left fielder and leadoff hitter, had four hits that included a go-ahead single in the sixth inning, and the Braves beat visiting Minnesota for their first back-to-back wins of the season.

Verdugo was recalled on Thursday to help boost a slumping offense after signing a \$1.5 million, one-year contract on March 20. He had two doubles and scored two runs.

Phillies 11, Marlins 10: Trea Turner had four hits, Bryson Stott and Johan Rojas each had three and Philadelphia survived visiting Miami's six-run ninth inning.

Dane Myers hit a three-run homer and Liam Hicks added a two-run shot, both off Jordan Romano in the ninth for the Marlins. Romano, in the midst of a rough first season in Philly, was heavily booed as he trudged off the mound.

Cubs 6, Diamondbacks 2: Seiya Suzuki and Michael Busch hit consecutive home runs in a four-run second-inning as Chicago beat visiting Arizona.

A day after a wild 13-11 win, Kyle Tucker tripled and drove in two runs along with Suzuki and Busch, Dansby Swanson added two hits for the NL Central leader, including a double.

Mets 3, Cardinals 0: Kodai Senga extended his scoreless streak to 19 innings, Pete Alonso homered and host New York beat St. Louis for the third straight day.

Alonso drove in two runs and Juan Soto had an RBI single for the Mets, who have won the first three games of the four-game series.

Mariners 8, Blue Jays 4 (12): Randy Arozarena hit a tiebreaking single in the 12th inning, Rowdy Tellez added his fifth career grand slam and visiting Seattle stopped Toronto's three-game winning streak.

Ben Williamson had two hits, including his first big league home run, and scored twice for Seattle.

Orioles 9, Reds 5: Ramón Laureano came off the bench and hit two home runs, and Baltimore went deep five times in its victory over visiting Cincinnati.

Cedric Mullins and Gunnar Henderson led off the first with back-to-back home runs off Hunter Greene (2-2), who lasted only three innings and al-

lowed five runs. Jordan Westburg also homered for Baltimore, snapping an 0-for-30 drought with a solo shot in the seventh.

Nationals 12, Rockies 11: Jordan Beck took a called third strike from Kyle Finnegan to end the game with a runner on third, and Washington held on to win at Colorado after nearly wasting a 10-run lead.

Dylan Crews homered twice, had three hits and four runs; James Wood had four RBIs, three hits and a home run; and Josh Bell homered as Washington built a 12-2 seventh-inning lead. All four home runs were off Chase Dollander.

Athletics 3, Brewers 1: Luis Severino allowed three hits and one run in eight innings for his first win with the Athletics since signing a \$67 million, three-year contract with the team, while Brent Rooker and Shea Langeliers homered in a victory at Milwaukee.

Severino (1-3) struck out one and did not issue a walk in a 92-pitch outing.

Astros 3, Padres 2: Isaac Paredes hit a tiebreaking RBI single in the seventh inning after Christian Walker's two-run homer in the sixth tied it, leading Houston to a win at San Diego.

Paredes hit a bloop single to short center field with two outs off San Diego's Jeremiah Estrada (0-1), who had allowed two hits in 10⅓ innings before Saturday.

Giants 3, Angels 2: Landen Roupp struck out a career-high nine in seven innings, Matt Chapman hit a two-run home run, and San Francisco held on for a victory at Los Angeles.

Roupp gave up two runs and five hits and walked one in his 96-pitch effort. Tyler Rogers retired the side in order in the eighth, and Ryan Walker got Nolan Schneuel to fly out to left field with a runner on second in the ninth for his fifth save.