

Pope Francis passes after Easter Sunday

Associated Press

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis, history's first Latin American pontiff who charmed the world with his humble style and concern for the poor but alienated conservatives with critiques of capitalism and climate change, died Monday. He was 88.

Bells tolled in church towers across Rome after the announcement, which was read out by Cardinal Kevin Farrell from the chapel of the Domus Santa Marta, where Francis lived.

"At 7:35 this morning, the Bishop of Rome, Francis, returned to the home of the Father. His entire life was dedicated to the service of the Lord and of his Church," said Farrell, the Vatican camerlengo, who takes charge after a pontiff's death.

Francis, who suffered from chronic lung disease and had part of one lung removed as a young man, was admitted to Gemelli hospital on Feb. 14, for

a respiratory crisis that developed into double pneumonia. He spent 38 days there, the longest hospitalization of his 12-year papacy.

He made his last public appearance on Easter Sunday — a day before his death — to bless thousands of people in St. Peter's Square, drawing wild cheers and applause. Beforehand, he met briefly with Vice President JD Vance.

Francis performed the blessing from the same loggia where he was introduced to the world on March 13, 2013, as the 266th pope.

From his first greeting that night — a remarkably normal "Buonasera" ("Good evening") — to his embrace of refugees and the downtrodden, Francis signaled a very different tone for the papacy, stressing humility over hubris for a Catholic Church beset by scandal and accusations of indifference.

After that rainy night, the Argentine-born Jorge Mario Bergoglio brought a breath of fresh

air into a 2,000-year-old institution that had seen its influence wane during the troubled tenure of Pope Benedict XVI, whose surprise resignation led to Francis' election.

But Francis soon invited troubles of his own, and conservatives grew increasingly upset with his progressive bent, outreach to LGBTQ+ Catholics and crackdown on traditionalists. His greatest test came in 2018 when he botched a notorious case of clergy sexual abuse in Chile, and the scandal that festered under his predecessors erupted anew on his watch.

And then Francis, the crowd-loving, globe-trotting pope of the peripheries, navigated the unprecedented reality of leading a universal religion through the coronavirus pandemic from a locked-down Vatican City.

He implored the world to use COVID-19 as an opportunity to rethink the economic and political framework that he said had

turned rich against poor.

"We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented," Francis told an empty St. Peter's Square in March 2020. But he also stressed the pandemic showed the need for "all of us to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other."

Flags flew at half-staff Monday in overwhelmingly Roman Catholic Italy, and tourists and the faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square, where bells tolled in mourning.

Johann Xavier, who traveled from Australia, hoped to see the pope during his visit. "But then we heard about it when we came in here. It pretty much devastated all of us," he said.

Francis' death sets off a weekslong process of allowing the faithful to pay their final respects, first for Vatican officials in the Santa Marta chapel and then in St. Peter's for the general public, followed by a funeral and a conclave to elect a new pope.

Hegseth reportedly shared info on 2nd Signal chat

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth created another Signal messaging chat that included his wife and brother where he shared details of a March military airstrike against Yemen's Houthi militants that were similar to those sent in another chain with top Trump administration leaders, The New York Times reported.

A person familiar with the contents and those who received the messages, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters, con-

firmed the second chat to The Associated Press.

The second chat on Signal — which is a commercially available app not authorized to be used to communicate sensitive or classified national defense information — included 13 people, the person said. They also confirmed the chat was dubbed "Defense / Team Huddle."

The New York Times reported that the group included Hegseth's wife, Jennifer, who is a former Fox News producer, and his brother Phil Hegseth, who was hired at the Pentagon as a

Department of Homeland Security liaison and senior adviser. Both have traveled with the defense secretary and attended high-level meetings.

Neither the White House nor Hegseth denied that he had shared such details in a second chat, blaming what they called disgruntled employees and the media and claiming no classified information was shared.

On Monday, the White House expressed support for Hegseth.

"The president stands strongly behind Secretary Hegseth, who is doing a phenomenal job

leading the Pentagon," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Monday. "And this is what happens when the entire Pentagon is working against you and working against the monumental change that you are trying to implement."

The Times said the second chat had the same warplane launch times as the first chat. Multiple former and current officials have said sharing those operational details before a strike would have certainly been classified and their release could have put pilots in danger.

Store stocks removed books for midshipmen

The Washington Post

On a sunny afternoon this month, Jinny Amundson cracked open a cardboard box of books that had just arrived to her downtown Annapolis, Md., bookstore, the entryway bell jingling as customers filed in and out.

"Light From Uncommon Stars," by Ryka Aoki, read one book cover. Another was: "The Last White Man," by Moshin Hamid. Then, "Horse," by Geraldine Brooks, and "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," by Maya Angelou.

This wasn't a typical book order for Amundson. She chose this selection because each title was on the list of 381 books that were removed from the shelves of Nimitz Library at the U.S. Naval Academy, many of them related to race or gender.

Navy leadership led the removal of the books to ensure the

school's library offerings aligned with "directives outlined in Executive Orders issued by the President," Cmdr. Tim Hawkins, a Navy spokesperson, said in a statement. That includes directives related to ending diversity, equity and inclusion programming in the federal government and removing related materials from schools. Since April 1, the books have been stowed away in a room where library visitors can't access them, Hawkins said.

The situation didn't sit right with Amundson, nor did it with a group of Annapolis-area residents and Naval Academy alumni. Over the past two weeks the group formed a coalition to counteract the Navy's decision by making these books as available as possible to Naval Academy students. It's a project they're calling "Operation Caged Bird," an homage to Angelou's auto-

biography that in part recounts the racism she encountered while growing up.

The effort began when retired Navy Cmdr. William Marks, a 1996 Naval Academy graduate and former spokesperson for the Defense Intelligence Agency, launched a fundraiser April 5 to purchase the books for the students. The day after he started the fundraiser, Marks called Amundson at Old Fox Books. He remembered that her store was located near the academy yard and wondered if she'd be willing to help. Unbeknownst to him, she had already begun ordering the books — about \$1,500 worth — to provide to Naval Academy student shoppers for free.

Old Fox Books, a homey, hand-decorated hole-in-the-wall shop, looks like something that could have existed when George Washington walked the city's narrow

streets in the 1700s. It functions as an unofficial bookstore for both the Naval Academy and nearby St. John's College, Amundson said. Students come to study at the adjoining coffee shop in the back or browse the specially tailored sections for their areas of study.

"Our students very much think of this as a safe space, especially our younger mids — the plebes," Amundson said, referring to the academy's term for first-year students. "They don't really have a lot of time off the yard, so a lot of them find solace here."

The Navy declined to comment on the effort.

The initial fundraising goal for the project was \$3,810, Marks said. That was reached in less than a week. Then he raised it to \$9,600. That was achieved shortly after. As of Friday, the fundraiser had surpassed \$36,000.

Repelling an island attack part of US-Philippines drills

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Thousands of allied American and Filipino forces opened annual combat drills Monday that are set to include repelling an island attack to simulate the defense of the Philippine archipelago and seas in a "full-scale battle scenario" that has antagonized China.

The annual Balikatan military exercises between the longtime treaty allies are scheduled from April 21 to May 9 with about 9,000 American and 5,000 Filipino military personnel. Fighter jets, warships and an array of weaponry including a U.S. Marine anti-ship missile system will be involved, U.S. and Philippine military officials said.

China has steadfastly opposed such war drills in or near the disputed South China Sea and in

northern Philippine provinces close to Taiwan, especially if they involve U.S. and allied forces that Beijing says aim to contain it and, consequently, threaten regional stability and peace.

"We are ready," U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Gen. James Glynn told a news conference when asked if U.S. and Philippine forces have built up the capability to address an act of aggression in the Taiwan Straits or South China Sea after years of joint combat exercises.

"Our combined strength ... possesses a degree of lethality for a force that possesses an indomitable warrior ethos and spirit," Glynn said in a speech in the opening ceremony of the exercises. "It's all dedicated to one purpose, to ensure the defense of the Philippines and to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific."

Nimitz sailor search ongoing as boater is presumed lost

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Coast Guard suspended its weeklong search for a missing boater near Guam, while a separate effort to find a U.S. Navy sailor continued into its third day Monday.

First responders on Saturday officially ended the search for Jeffrey Hattori, 58, who was reported missing April 12 after departing Guam for a fishing trip, U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micro-nesia/Sector Guam said in a news release Monday. Searchers covered more than 120,000 square miles with help from military ships and aircraft.

Hattori's family requested a delay in publicly announcing the suspension until Monday, Coast Guard spokeswoman Chief Warrant Officer 2 Sara Muir told Stars and Stripes.

Meanwhile, the search continued Monday for a missing sailor identified as Gabriel D. Holt, who is assigned to the visiting aircraft carrier USS Nimitz. He was last seen at 11:57 p.m. Friday between Hotel Nikko and Gun Beach, according to the Guam Police Department.

Muir confirmed that a 45-foot vessel from Coast Guard Station Apra Harbor and the Coast Guard cutter Oliver Henry were assisting. She referred further questions to the Navy.

Lt. Cmdr. Tim Pietrack, spokesman for Carrier Strike Group 11, declined to provide additional details about Holt or the circumstances of his disappearance, citing privacy laws and the ongoing investigation.

The Nimitz departed Guam on Monday, according to a news release from the carrier.

Houthis: US airstrikes hit Yemen's capital

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — U.S. airstrikes targeted Yemen's capital, killing 12 people and wounding 30 others, the Houthi rebels said early Monday.

The strikes mark the latest in America's intensified campaign of strikes targeting the rebels. U.S. Central Command declined to answer questions about the strike or discuss civilian casualties from its campaign.

The Houthis described the strike as hitting the Farwa neighborhood market in Sanaa's Shuub district. That area has been targeted before by the Americans.

Footage aired by the Houthis'

al-Masirah satellite news channel showed damage to vehicles and buildings in the area, with screaming onlookers holding what appeared to be a dead child. Others waited on stretchers heading into a hospital.

Strikes overnight into Monday also hit other areas of the country, including Yemen's Amran, Hodeida, Marib and Saada governorates.

The strikes come after U.S. airstrikes hit the Ras Isa fuel port in Yemen last week, killing at least 74 people and wounding 171.

The U.S. is targeting the Houthis because of the group's attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, a crucial global trade route, and on Israel.

The Houthis are the last militant group in Iran's self-described "Axis of Resistance" that is capable of regularly attacking Israel.

The new U.S. operation against the Houthis under Trump appears more extensive than attacks on the group were under President Joe Biden, an AP review found.

The new campaign started after the rebels threatened to begin targeting "Israeli" ships again over Israel blocking aid from entering the Gaza Strip.

From November 2023 until this January, the Houthis targeted more than 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two of them and killing four sailors.

That has greatly reduced the flow of trade through the Red Sea corridor, which typically sees \$1 trillion of goods move through it. The Houthis also launched attacks targeting American warships without success.

Assessing the toll of the month-old U.S. airstrike campaign has been difficult because the military hasn't released information about the attacks, including what was targeted and how many people were killed.

The Houthis, meanwhile, strictly control access to attacked areas and don't publish complete information on the strikes, many of which likely have targeted military and security sites.

Sigonella galley earns top Navy food service award

By ALISON BATH

Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — If there's a secret to keeping service members well-fed and happy, the galley at the Navy's largest air station in Italy has the recipe for it down pat.

Ristorante Bella Etna at Naval Air Station Sigonella on the Italian island of Sicily recently received the Capt. Edward F. Ney Memorial Food Service Award as the best overseas galley for 2025, the base said in a statement Thursday.

Given annually, it's the Navy's highest honor for food service, and NAS Sigonella has now won it seven times over the past 15 years. The recipients were named April 3.

"We try to make Bella Etna feel like a home away from home," Chief Warrant Officer 3 Joe Mattia, food service officer for Bella Etna, said in the statement.

Galley employees put in significant effort and long hours to achieve a five-star rating, Mat-

tia said.

Earning the rating means a galley can then be nominated for the award, which recognizes the best general messes — onshore and at sea — in the fleet.

The galley team's efforts this year included showcasing the culinary skills of local Italian employees along with creative offerings, such as presenting seafood in a boat, and crepe and gelato stations. Hearty steak and rotisserie chicken entrees along with a variety of side dishes also were on the menu during the inspection, the statement said.

While demonstrating cooking prowess is important, the rigorous evaluation also includes an inspection of the galley and the food itself by members of the International Food Service Executives Association, or IFSEA, and senior Navy mess management leaders.

Other 2025 award winners include Naval Base San Diego and Naval Station Meridian, Miss., the Navy said.

Joint patrols on Okinawa return to restore trust

By KEISHI KOJA

Stars and Stripes

OKINAWA CITY, Okinawa — A rare joint patrol of the nightlife area outside Kadena Air Base by U.S. military and Okinawa authorities ended early Saturday with a Marine colonel reminding U.S. service members they had broken curfew.

The patrol, launched amid simmering discontent over recent incidents involving U.S. troops, began at 10 p.m. in the Gate 2 Street entertainment district near Koza Music Town.

It was the first of several planned patrols in response to recent sexual crimes allegedly involving U.S. service members.

About 30 representatives from U.S. commands, including Maj. Gen. Brian Wolford of Marine Corps Installations Pacific, joined 20 Okinawa police officers and 50 members of local government and neighborhood associations.

"I saw a lot of surprised faces,

which is good," Wolford said during the patrol.

Senior commanders, enlisted leaders and military law enforcement personnel participated, Marine spokesman Wesley Hayes wrote Monday.

"Joint patrols are one of many ways that the U.S. demonstrates commitment to cooperating with Japanese authorities," he said.

The patrol concluded around 2:20 a.m. Saturday, exceeding the 1 a.m. alcohol curfew announced in September by then-U.S. Forces Japan commander Air Force Lt. Gen. Ricky Rupp. The Navy has set a midnight curfew for sailors.

Col. David Banning, who is in charge of training, operations and planning for Marine Corps Installations Pacific, stopped about 20 service members during the patrol — some in bars, some on the street, a few spilling drinks.

No disciplinary action will be taken against those stopped, Banning said.

Deadly storm hits Oklahoma and Texas

Associated Press

A slow-moving, active storm system brought heavy rain, large hail and tornadoes to parts of Texas and Oklahoma and left three people dead as severe weather Sunday threatened parts of the south-central and Midwest U.S.

On Easter Sunday, communities in Texas and Oklahoma were beginning to assess the damage wreaked by tornadoes. There were 17 reported events Saturday, according to Bob Oravec, lead forecaster with the National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center. Five were confirmed in south-central Oklahoma, including one that inflicted

substantial damage on a small town that was still recovering from a March tornado.

The storm also brought heavy rain to a broad swath of north-central Texas across central-eastern Oklahoma, much of which saw 2 to 4 inches accumulate Saturday into Sunday.

Police in Moore, about 10 miles south of Oklahoma City, received dozens of reports of "high-water incidents" over the weekend, including two cars stranded in flood waters Saturday evening. One car was swept away under a bridge, and police said they were able to rescue some people, but a woman and 12-year-old boy were found dead.

"This was a historical weather event that impacted roads and resulted in dozens of high-water incidents across the city," Moore police said in a statement Sunday. Moore has about 63,000 residents.

The storm also killed one person about 80 miles farther southeast after a tornado touched down in Spaulding, according to the Hughes County Emergency Management. The department wrote on Facebook that several homes and structures were destroyed and there were "numerous washouts" of county roads.

The National Weather Service said the preliminary survey of damage showed that tornado was

at least EF1, with wind speeds between 86 and 110 mph, as was another south of Oklahoma City in Love County.

Oravec said the system wasn't moving much over Texas and Oklahoma Saturday, leaving the area stuck under a very active thunderstorm pattern that produced large hail, flash flooding and tornadoes.

Bill Macon, emergency management director in Oklahoma's Marshall County, said their early assessments show a tornado "skipped and jumped around" over a path of 6 to 7 miles in the rural area that left at least 20 homes damaged, with some destroyed completely.

Russian attacks during Easter ceasefire kill at least 3

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian attacks during the 30-hour Easter ceasefire unilaterally declared by President Vladimir Putin over the weekend killed three people in Ukraine's southern Kherson region, a regional official said Monday.

Oleksandr Prokudin, the head of Kherson's administration, wrote on Telegram that the casualties occurred over the last 24 hours, adding that three others were wounded in the region, parts of which are occupied by Russia.

Overall, Russia violated the ceasefire more than 2,900 times,

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a Telegram statement in the early hours on Monday. Zelenskyy said that Russian forces carried out 96 assault operations along the front line, shelled Ukrainian positions more than 1,800 times and used hundreds of drones during the course of the ceasefire.

"The nature of Ukrainian actions will continue to be mirror-like: we will respond to silence with silence, and our blows will be a defense against Russian blows. Actions always speak louder than words," he said.

Putin announced a temporary

Easter truce on Saturday, citing humanitarian reasons. Ukraine said that it would reciprocate any genuine ceasefire by Moscow, but voiced skepticism over the Kremlin's intentions. Both sides traded accusations of violations shortly after. The ceasefire expired at midnight following Easter Sunday.

Overnight into Monday, the Russian forces fired three missiles at Ukraine's southern regions of Kherson and Mykolaiv regions, as well as 96 Shahed drones targeting other parts of the country, Ukraine's Air Force reported. It said it downed 42 drones, while 47 others were

jammed mid-flight.

In the Dnipropetrovsk region, Russian drones sparked a fire at an "outbuilding" and a "food enterprise," regional administration head Serhii Lysak wrote on Telegram. No one was injured in the attack, he said. An unspecified infrastructure object was damaged in the Cherkasy region overnight, regional head Ihor Taburets said on Telegram.

Four civilians also sustained injuries in the partially occupied Donetsk region, according to regional head Vadym Filashkin, who said that the Russian forces shelled settlements in the region five times over the last 24 hours.

China warns countries against trade deals with US

Associated Press

BEIJING — China on Monday warned other countries against making trade deals with the United States to China's detriment.

Governments including those of Taiwan, Japan and South Korea have begun negotiations with Washington after President Donald Trump announced sweeping tariffs against almost

all of America's trading partners on April 2. The import taxes were quickly paused against most countries after markets panicked, but he increased his already steep tariffs against China.

"China firmly opposes any party reaching a deal at the expense of China's interests," China's Commerce Ministry said in a statement. "If this happens,

China will never accept it and will resolutely take countermeasures in a reciprocal manner. China is determined and capable of safeguarding its own rights and interests."

U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said earlier this month the countries currently negotiating trade deals with the U.S. should "approach China as a group" together with Washing-

ton.

The U.S. tariffs against other countries are economic bullying, the ministry said in the statement attributed to an unnamed spokesperson.

"Appeasement cannot bring peace, and compromise cannot win respect," it added.

China said it's open to talks with Washington but no meetings have been announced.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man sentenced for baby spider monkeys trafficking

CA SAN DIEGO — A 33-year-old Texas man was sentenced in San Diego federal court Friday for coordinating the smuggling of at least six protected baby Mexican spider monkeys through the Calexico Port of Entry, prosecutors said.

U.S. District Judge Robert Huie ordered Sarmad Ghaled Dafar, who pleaded guilty to a conspiracy charge, to serve four months in custody and 180 days of home confinement. He was also ordered to pay about \$23,500 in restitution for the cost of quarantining three of the monkeys at the San Diego Zoo.

According to investigators, Dafar helped coordinate the purchase and smuggling of the monkeys across the border on three occasions between June 2022 and August 2023.

Man held by ICE even after proving citizenship

FL MIAMI — A U.S. citizen was arrested in Florida for allegedly being in the country illegally and held for pickup by immigration authorities even after his mother showed a judge her son's birth certificate and the judge dismissed charges.

Juan Carlos Lopez Gomez, 20, was in a car that was stopped just past the Georgia state line by the Florida Highway Patrol on Wednesday, said Thomas Kennedy, a spokesperson at the Florida Immigrant Coalition.

Gomez and others in the car were arrested under a new Florida law, which is on hold, making it a crime for people who are in the country illegally to enter

the state.

It is unclear if Lopez Gomez showed documents proving he is a citizen to the arresting officers.

Author: Naval Academy canceled lecture over DEI

MD BALTIMORE — The Naval Academy canceled a speech by author and podcaster Ryan Holiday after he declined a request not to reference 381 books and literary works removed from its library as part of a review of diversity, equity and inclusion materials, according to an opinion piece he authored for The New York Times.

Holiday, who has hosted a series of lectures on the virtues of Stoicism to midshipmen for the past four years, was scheduled to speak to the sophomore class on the theme of wisdom.

According to Holiday, Navy officials told Holiday they were worried about "reprisals" related to a portion of his speech that referenced the 381 books recently removed. They asked him to omit that topic from his remarks, he wrote.

Holiday is the author or co-author of 28 books on Stoicism and has delivered speeches to the Cleveland Browns, Nike, Google and the White House Communications Agency.

College coach, player killed in vehicle accident

OR ROSEBURG — An Oregon college softball team traveling from a game was involved in a two-vehicle crash that killed an athlete and coach, authorities said.

The driver of a pickup

crossed a center line and crashed head-on into a bus carrying 10 members of the Umpqua Community College team in Coos County, Oregon State Police said.

Jami Strinz, 46, described on the school's website as the head softball coach, was driving the Chevrolet Express bus. Police said she was later declared dead at a hospital.

Kiley Jones, 19, was declared dead at the scene. The freshman from Nampa, Idaho, played first base, according to the athletics department's website.

The other eight occupants of the bus suffered "moderate to serious injuries and were provided emergency medical services," according to police, and some staff and students remained in hospitals in Eugene and Portland on Saturday, according to the school.

The driver of the Chevrolet Silverado truck was also seriously injured and was taken to an emergency medical center.

Renters urge approval of rent-control bill

WA SEATTLE — Disabled veteran and single parent Duana Ricks-Johnson has moved her family five times in the past four years to keep ahead of rising rents — all while fighting at the state Legislature for a rent control law that hasn't come.

Now, with rent stabilization legislation tantalizingly close to becoming law, last-minute amendments in the Senate have thrown the fate of House Bill 1217 into question as the end of the session looms. The bill passed the Senate with amendments from two lawmakers that raised the rent increase limit

from 7% to 10% plus inflation and exempted single-family homes.

It now goes to the House, and if they reject the Senate changes, it will head to a conference committee with less than two weeks left in the legislative session.

The bill would be one of the first rent stabilization laws in the nation if passed, and add Washington to states like Oregon and California that have turned to such policies in an attempt to curb rampant homelessness.

Members of burned church hold 'cross walk'

CA LOS ANGELES — Carrying a tall wooden cross on his shoulder, Pastor John Shaver walked down the street where his church had stood, just three months ago.

Shaver had led the 102-year-old Community United Methodist Church of Pacific Palisades for barely six months when it burned to the ground in the January wildfire that all but decimated the community. On Good Friday, Shaver and a handful of community members gathered at the gutted church site amid the grating noise of forklifts and jackhammers that were cleaning up and preparing the land for rebuilding.

They then embarked on a Good Friday "cross walk." From their church to the bluffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean, they paused at nine locations reading a Bible verse at each stop — a slight departure from the traditional 14-step devotion commemorating Christ's suffering, crucifixion and death.

— From wire reports

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Thunder rout 5th-biggest in playoffs

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — The Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Memphis Grizzlies 131-80 in Game 1 of their first-round Western Conference playoff series on Sunday, the fifth-biggest margin of victory in NBA postseason history.

The 51-point margin was seven points shy of the record and was the largest Game 1 win in NBA playoff history. The Thunder led by as many as 56 points, but the Grizzlies scored seven of the game's final nine points.

"We were amped up," Thunder coach Mark Daigneault said. "Give the guys a lot of credit for the week of practice that we had. It's a sneaky tough week because it's a lot of days without games and it gets you

out of rhythm of games."

Aaron Wiggins scored 21 points, Jalen Williams scored 20 and Chet Holmgren had 19 points and 10 rebounds. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, the league's scoring champion with nearly 33 points per game, scored just 15. The Thunder still shot 50.5% from the field.

"We played to our identity," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "Nothing more, nothing less than that. We were who we were all year ... and it's going to be the key to our success, just staying true to who we are."

Gilgeous-Alexander had said several times since Oklahoma City's loss to Dallas in last season's Western Conference semifinals that he would be intentional about getting his

teammates better prepared for this postseason.

So far, so good.

"I have a great group of guys around me, and I know that," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "And I've known that for a long time. ... They obviously played amazingly."

There have been two 58-point playoff margins in NBA history: Denver beating New Orleans 121-63 in 2009 and the Minneapolis Lakers beating the St. Louis Hawks 133-75 in 1956. The Los Angeles Lakers beat Golden State by 56 (126-70) in 1973 and the Chicago Bulls beat the Milwaukee Bucks by 54 (120-66) in 2015.

Ja Morant scored 17 points for Memphis on just 6-for-17 shooting.

Jaren Jackson Jr., who averaged just over 22 points in the regular season, scored four points on 2-for-13 shooting. The Grizzlies shot just 34.4% overall.

The Thunder, who finished the regular-season with a league-best 68-14 record, took control with a 20-0 run that gave them a 55-22 lead in the second quarter. They took a 35-point lead into halftime.

"I just felt like after that, the energy just kind of wasn't there and we were just trying to talk to ourselves to get back into the game," Morant said.

This was Memphis' first playoff game under interim coach Tuomas Iisalo. He coached just nine NBA regular-season contests before the play-in games.

Mitchell, Jerome shine as Cavaliers roll past Heat

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Donovan Mitchell quickly put any doubts to rest about whether his left ankle was 100% going into the playoffs for the Cleveland Cavaliers.

Mitchell scored 30 points and tied a playoff career high with four steals as the Cavaliers beat the Miami Heat 121-100 on Sunday night in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference first-round series.

"He can get in the lane and finish and he's a great shooter. Such a complete player," Cavaliers coach Kenny Atkinson said. "Whatever we ask him to do, he'll do it. He never shies away when we ask him to do the dirty work."

It was the seventh straight series where Mitchell has scored at least 30 points in Game 1, tying Michael Jordan, who had two streaks of seven games.

"Just setting the tone. I have to be aggressive and see how the defense reacts to me," Mitchell said.

Ty Jerome had 16 of his 28 points in the fourth quarter for the top-seeded Cavaliers, who host Game 2 Wednesday night.

Jerome had the third-most points in a Cavaliers playoff debut, behind LeBron James and Kyrie Irving.

Atkinson didn't expect Jerome to have this type of debut.

"I should (of expected it) because he's kind of done it all year," Atkinson said.

Jerome also was the fourth player in franchise history to score at least 28 points coming off the bench.

Darius Garland added 27. Garland and Jerome each had five 3-pointers and the Cavaliers were 18-for-43 from beyond the arc.

Bam Adebayo had 24 points and Tyler Herro added 21 for the Heat. They are the first No. 10 seed to advance to the playoffs out of the Play-In Tournament.

Cleveland had a 16-point lead midway through the second quarter, but Miami steadily cut

it down and got to 98-90 with 7:26 remaining in the fourth. Cleveland put it out reach though with a 13-4 run that included 10 straight points by Jerome, who was taking part in his first playoff game.

Jerome was 6-for-7 from the field, and made all three of his 3-point attempts in the fourth quarter.

"He turned the game for us. He did it all tonight," Atkinson said.

Celtics 103, Magic 86: Derrick White scored 30 points, Jayson Tatum had 17 points and finished the game after a scary late fall, and host Boston beat Orlando in Game 1 of their first-round playoff series.

Payton Pritchard added 19 points off the bench for Boston, which hosts Game 2 on Wednesday night. Jaylen Brown played 31 minutes and had 16 points on 6-of-14 shooting after missing the final three games of the regular season due to a lingering knee issue.

With Boston leading 89-73

with 8:28 remaining, Tatum went up for a dunk and was hit hard by Kentavious Caldwell-Pope as he tried to block it. Tatum landed awkwardly on his right side.

He stayed down briefly before eventually rising to his feet, clenching his right hand. He subsequently missed the two free throws but remained in the game.

Paolo Banchero led the Magic with 36 points and 11 rebounds.

Warriors 95, Rockets 85: Stephen Curry scored 31 points and visiting Golden State built a huge lead and held on to beat Houston in Game 1 of the first-round playoff series.

The seventh-seeded Warriors led by 23 in the third quarter, but second-seeded Houston cut it to 69-60 entering the fourth.

A basket by Amen Thompson with about 5 1/2 minutes remaining got the Rockets four. Curry hit his fifth 3-pointer of the night a few seconds later to make it 82-75.

Rested, healthy Canes dominate Devils

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Carolina Hurricanes just wanted to be healthy going into the Stanley Cup Playoffs, even as it meant resting key players and stumbling down the stretch of the regular season.

The first payoff came Sunday.

Logan Stankoven scored two second-period goals in his first playoff game with Carolina as the Hurricanes beat the New Jersey Devils 4-1 to open their first-round series. Carolina led 3-0, more than doubled New Jersey's shot output and kept the pressure on in a strong start to the postseason.

"Obviously it was pretty clear that I think we were looking forward to this day for a bit now," goaltender Frederik Andersen said.

Jalen Chatfield scored a first-period goal for the Hurricanes, who kept steady pressure on Devils netminder Jacob Markstrom. Andrei Svechnikov added an empty-net clincher late in the third.

Carolina had lost seven of its last eight regular-season games since clinching its seventh consecutive playoff trip on April 3, several coming with stars and key contributors out of the lineup. In that sense, it had been a long wait to get here, back on home ice with a rowdy home crowd in playoff mode.

"There's always that worry that maybe you come out a little sluggish or whatever," coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "But obviously that wasn't the case. And we were healthy, a healthy group. So it was a calculated risk maybe, but at least after

Game 1, that was the right decision."

Andersen finished with 23 saves for Carolina, including a key stop on Timo Meier near the crease midway through the third. The Hurricanes also turned away a Devils power play with about eight minutes left to stay in firm control.

Nico Hischier got New Jersey's only goal by taking Jesper Bratt's cross-ice pass and blasting the puck past Andersen during a 4-on-4 chance in the second.

Carolina finished with a 45-24 shot advantage.

"They're not doing anything special," Hischier said. "They play simple hockey, hard hockey, and we've just got to match that."

Chatfield got the Hurricanes off to a quick start with a goal

just 2:24 into the game. Then it was a big day for Stankoven, who was the primary return in a trade-deadline deal that sent scoring winger Mikko Rantanen to Dallas.

Stankoven first zipped the puck past Markstrom off a feed from Jordan Martinook, who had forced Hischier into a turnover along the boards, at 6:37 of the second. He struck again on the power play, with Stankoven blasting a shot past Markstrom and off the inside of the left post for the 3-0 edge.

"I thought the second period, we were just overwhelmed," Hurricanes coach Sheldon Keefe said. "That was not good enough. The third period was good. The damage was done by then."

Game 2 of the series is Tuesday.

Howden keeps scoring, helps Golden Knights top Wild

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Brett Howden had never scored double-digit goals until this season. Then he went out and scored 23.

Turns out, Howden isn't finished.

He had what turned out to be the game-winning goal and later delivered an empty-netter, and the Vegas Golden Knights opened their first-round Western Conference playoff series with a 4-2 victory over the Minnesota Wild on Sunday night.

Golden Knights coach Bruce Cassidy said he told Howden to stick with what he did in the regular season rather than try to do too much in the playoffs. Howden had just six career postseason goals before this game.

"He didn't change his game," Cassidy said. "He played physical. He's part of our penalty kill. He's always out when the goalie's out, typically one of the six guys we use a lot because of his versatility. He can play wing. He

can take draws as a center. He's been real good for us all year and good again tonight."

Tomas Hertl had a goal and an assist for the Golden Knights.

"I've been long excited for this moment," Hertl said. "I always try to play my game, and I think it's kind of playoff style. I'm glad I could help the team today. It was a team effort."

Pavel Dorofeyev scored the other Vegas goal, and Adin Hill made 18 saves.

Matt Boldy scored both Wild goals, Kirill Kaprizov assisted on both and Filip Gustavsson stopped 23 shots.

"I think both teams came to play hard," Wild coach John Hynes said. "Pretty strong defensive efforts. Not a lot of special teams in the game. I thought we did a lot of good things to build on moving forward."

Both teams traded goals in the first period. Hertl took the puck from Minnesota's Brock Faber and hit the net from just inside

the front side of the left circle. The Wild answered 2:20 later when Kaprizov delivered a cross-ice pass to Boldy, who scored off the rush.

Dorofeyev scored the only goal in the second period when Hertl won the faceoff to open a power play. The puck went to Shea Theodore, who skated to the center and set up Dorofeyev for a blast from the right circle.

Maple Leafs 6, Senators 2: Mitch Marner had a goal and two assists as host Toronto beat Ottawa in Game 1 of their first-round playoff series.

William Nylander and John Tavares each had a goal and an assist, and Oliver Ekman-Larsson, Morgan Rielly and Matthew Knies also scored for Toronto. Auston Matthews added two assists and Anthony Stolarz stopped 31 shots.

"It was intense," Tavares said. "It's called the Battle of Ontario for a reason. Hard-fought game. But we know we still can

be a lot better."

Drake Batherson and Ridley Greig scored for Ottawa, and Linus Ullmark finished with 18 saves.

"Have to refocus," Ullmark said. "It's just one game. That's the beauty of it."

Toronto, which has one series victory in nine tries in the Matthews-Marner era, opened the scoring at 7:09 of the first period when Ekman-Larsson fired past Ullmark's glove to send the home fans into a frenzy.

"The atmosphere was great," Stolarz said. "Had goose bumps when you stepped on the ice and the crowd goes nuts. I think that propelled us."

Toronto scored on three of six opportunities with the man advantage.

"We took too many penalties, they scored on (them) and that's the game," Ottawa captain Brady Tkachuk said. "So that's on us. We've got to be more disciplined."

Reds rack up big stats, rout Orioles

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Noelvi Marte had seven RBIs and hit his first career grand slam with a drive off infielder Jorge Mateo, Austin Wynn had a career-high six RBIs and the Cincinnati Reds scored their most runs in 26 years in a 24-2 rout of the Baltimore Orioles on Sunday.

Marte finished with five hits, including his eighth-inning homer off Mateo. Wynn hit a three-run homer in the ninth off catcher Gary Sánchez.

Cincinnati scored its most runs since a 24-12 victory at Colorado on May 19, 1999, and finished with 25 hits.

Baltimore allowed its most runs since a 30-3 loss to Texas on Aug. 22, 2007.

Marte, the No. 8 hitter, and Wynn, batting ninth, combined for 11 hits, the most from the final two spots in a batting order since at least 1901. Their 13 RBIs tied for second-most since RBIs became an official statistic in 1920.

Austin Hays was 4 for 6 and finished his first series against his former team 8 for 14 with five RBIs.

Elly De La Cruz started a seven-run third with a home run off Charlie Morton (0-5), who allowed seven runs, seven hits and four walks in 2½ innings. It was his shortest outing since September 2023.

Taylor Rogers (1-0) worked the fifth inning of a bullpen game for the Reds, and Randy Wynne pitched three innings for his first career save.

Angels 5, Giants 4: Jo Adell hit a bases-clearing double in a four-run ninth inning against San Francisco closer Ryan Walker and host Los Angeles spoiled the day for Justin Verlander in the rubber match of a three-game series.

Verlander was in line for his first victory in his fifth start with the Giants leading 4-1. But Walker (0-1) walked Mike Trout leading off and Jorge Soler followed with a single. Logan O'Hoppe

had a one-out hit to load the bases before Walker hit Zach Neto to force in a run. Adell hit a 1-2 pitch down the left-field line.

Yankees 4, Rays 0: Max Fried lost a no-hit bid in the eighth inning when the official scorer changed an earlier decision to a hit, and New York went on to win at Tampa Bay in a game that featured manager Aaron Boone's first ejection of the season.

Aaron Judge hit a long drive to left in the eighth that the Yankees thought was a home run but was ruled foul, a decision upheld by a video review. Judge was called out on strikes on the next pitch. Boone came out to argue that call, and address the previous call, before he was ejected.

Tampa Bay (9-13) is 9-10 at Steinbrenner Field, the Yankees' spring training home that is being used by the Rays because of hurricane damage at Tropicana Field.

White Sox 8, Red Sox 4: Andrew Vaughn hit a two-run homer, pinch-hitter Edgar Quero added a go-ahead, two-run single and Chicago snapped a six-game losing streak with a victory at Boston, ending its worst road start in team history.

Matt Thaiss added two-run shot for Chicago, which lost its first eight road games.

Mariners 8, Blue Jays 3: Cal Raleigh and Rowdy Tellez each hit two-run homers, Dylan Moore added a solo shot and visiting Seattle beat Toronto to win its three-game series.

Raleigh has nine home runs, tying him with Athletics first baseman Tyler Soderstrom for the major-league lead.

Braves 6, Twins 2: Matt Olson and Drake Baldwin hit two-run homers, Grant Holmes allowed only one run and Atlanta beat visiting Minnesota to complete a three-game sweep.

Marcell Ozuna also homered off Joe Ryan (1-3), who allowed six runs and eight hits and one walk in five innings.

The Braves had not won back-to-back games this season before sweeping the Twins.

Guardians 5, Pirates 4 (10): Steven Kwan and Kyle Manzardo hit two-run homers and Manzardo added a sacrifice fly in the 10th to rally Cleveland to a three-game sweep at Pittsburgh.

The Pirates rallied for three runs in the ninth off Emmanuel Clase, who was going for his third straight save in the series.

Marlins 7, Phillies 5 (10): Javier Sanoja hit his first major league home run and drove in five runs as Miami rallied to defeat host Philadelphia.

Kyle Stowers drove in the go-ahead run on a sacrifice fly in the 10th.

Dodgers 1, Rangers 0: Freddie Freeman hit an eighth-inning sacrifice fly and six relievers completed the shutout after starter Tyler Glasnow left with lower leg cramps in the fifth inning as visiting Los Angeles beat Texas.

Two-way star Shohei Ohtani returned to the Dodgers' lineup after missing the series' previous two games, activated off the paternity list after his wife gave birth to the couple's first child in Southern California. Ohtani went 0-for-3 with a walk that helped produce the game's only run.

Nationals 3-1, Rockies 2-3: Jake Irvin struck out nine in 6½ innings, and Washington beat host Colorado in the first game of a split doubleheader.

Antonio Senzatela pitched six strong innings to get his first win in nearly three years, and Colorado took the second game to snap its eight-game losing streak.

Diamondbacks 3, Cubs 2 (11): Josh Naylor's third hit of the game drove in automatic runner Geraldo Perdomo in the 11th inning with the go-ahead run and visiting Arizona avoided a series sweep.

Naylor grounded a single to right for his second RBI. The top

of the 11th ended when Naylor tried to steal home and was thrown out by reliever Jordan Wicks (0-1).

Padres 3, Astros 2: Fernando Tatis Jr. hit a tiebreaking solo home run and scored all of San Diego's runs as it avoided being swept with a win at Houston.

Tatis sent the first pitch he saw from Tayler Scott (1-2) 427 feet to straightaway center to give the Padres a 3-2 lead in the seventh.

Brewers 14, Athletics 1: Rhys Hoskins went 3-for-5 with a homer, four RBIs and one of host Milwaukee's franchise-record nine steals and Logan Henderson recorded nine strikeouts in his major league debut.

Milwaukee stole six bases in the first inning, the most by any team in a single inning since at least 1961 according to Elias Sports Bureau. The Brewers had all nine of their steals in the first four innings to shatter the team's 33-year-old single-game record.

Royals 4, Tigers 3 (10): Bobby Witt Jr. hit a tiebreaking sacrifice fly in the 10th inning, and Kansas City won at Detroit to stop a six-game losing streak.

With the score 3-3, Jonathan India's groundout off Tyler Holton (1-2) advanced automatic runner Drew Waters to third, and Witt hit a 280-foot fly to left. Waters scored headfirst ahead of Riley Greene's throw.

Mets 7, Cardinals 4: Brandon Nimmo robbed Jordan Walker of a home run in the sixth inning and singled home the tiebreaking run in the seventh as New York beat visiting St. Louis for its first four-game sweep of the Cardinals in 39 years.

Francisco Lindor had three hits, including a leadoff homer, and the Mets completed a four-game sweep of St. Louis at home for the first time in franchise history. The club's previous three four-game sweeps against the Cardinals came in St. Louis, the most recent in April 1986.