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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

DOD may limit medical waivers for recruits

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON—The Pentagon is reviewing the medical standards for military enlistment during the next month with plans to update the list of health conditions for which potential recruits can request medical waivers.

"High, uncompromising, and clear standards are a hallmark of the U.S. military and are essential to helping us remain the most lethal and effective fighting force in the world. To uphold these standards and ensure that our warfighters are capable and ready, no matter the domain, adversary, or conditions, the secretary of defense has directed my office to conduct a review of existing medical standards for enlistment or appointment into military service," said Jules Hurst, a senior Defense Department official for personnel and readiness.

In 2022, the Pentagon eased

restrictions on medical conditions that would have previously disqualified a person from military service unless they were approved for a medical waiver. A medical waiver is a formal request to consider an individual for military service despite a current or past medical condition that does not meet the medical standards for the armed forces. The Defense Department initially eased restrictions on 38 conditions. The list was expanded to include 51 conditions as of October 2024.

The intent was to boost recruiting numbers. By removing the requirement to get a medical waiver for select conditions, the enlistment process could be sped up, as well as free up medical evaluators to review candidates with more complex medical histories.

In recent years, the services have struggled to meet recruiting goals. In 2023, the Air Force reached only 89% of its active-

duty recruiting goal of 26,977 enlistments, according to Defense Department data. The Army also fell short at 77%. In 2022 and 2023, the Navy only contracted 22,000 and 30,000 sailors, respectively, and emptied its delayed-entry pool, a program that allows people to sign up for the armed forces up to one year before they start basic training. Only the Marine Corps met its 2023 goal of nearly 29,000 new recruits. Each of the services reportedly met the 2024 recruiting goals and are on track to meet the 2025 recruiting goals, the Defense Department has said.

The two most-common conditions for which recruits seek new waivers are attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, and childhood asthma, the Defense Department said in late 2024. Changes last year had further eased the restrictions on such conditions, moving the time without treatment for ADHD from the past three years to one

year, and allowing people who have not needed an inhaler for asthma in the last four years to bypass the waiver process entirely.

Military entrance stations conducted 312,000 medical exams from October 2023 to September 2024, with about 36% of people disqualified during the initial exam, the DOD said. That dropped to 19% after service medical waivers were applied.

The new review of medical conditions was ordered Thursday by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. He noted in a memorandum that conditions such as schizophrenia, paraphilic disorders, congestive heart failure, and chronic use of oxygen, are now eligible for medical waivers.

"While the desire to serve the United States is honorable, individuals with such conditions are generally unlikely to complete initial military training or their first term of service," Hegseth said.

\$60M fighter jet falls off USS Truman into Red Sea

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A sailor was injured when a fighter jet and a towing tractor on the USS Harry S. Truman fell overboard as the aircraft carrier made a "hard turn" while operating in the Red Sea, defense officials said Monday.

The Washington Post reported the incident occurred as the carrier turned to avoid an attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels.

Sailors were towing an F/A-18E Super Hornet in the hangar bay Monday when the crew "lost control of the aircraft," the Navy said. The car-

rier made a "hard turn," according to a defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity. The maneuver, the official said, was a contributing factor in the loss of the jet and towing tractor. One sailor sustained a minor injury in the incident.

Fighter jets are routinely towed across the hangar deck to park them for flight operations or other work. It is unclear whether there will be an effort to recover the jet, which costs about \$60 million, according to The Associated Press.

"Sailors towing the aircraft took immediate action to move

clear of the aircraft before it fell overboard," the Navy said.

No one else was injured and all personnel have been accounted for.

The fighter jet was assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron 136 and deployed to the Red Sea as part of the Truman's air wing, which is responsible for defending maritime shipping from Houthi drones and missiles. The jet was part of an air wing made of nine squadrons.

"The Harry S. Truman carrier strike group and embarked air wing remain fully mission capable," the Navy said.

The incident is under investi-

gation and marks the second time in recent months that the Truman has lost a Super Hornet in the Red Sea.

Two Navy aviators had to be rescued in December after the fighter jet that they were flying was shot down in an apparent "friendly fire" incident. The guided-missile cruiser USS Gettysburg, part of the Truman strike group, mistakenly fired on and hit the F/A-18 Super Hornet as it was flying off the carrier. The jet was responding to incoming one-way aerial attack drones and anti-ship cruise missiles threatening U.S. forces in the Red Sea.

In Japan, Navy secretary stresses shipbuilding

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Secretary of the Navy John Phelan, on his first trip abroad since taking office last month, is seeking deeper cooperation from Japanese shipyards as he advances shipbuilding as a priority for the service.

Phelan touched down Monday in Tokyo, where exploring options for joint ship repair and shipbuilding ventures with Japanese shipyards topped his agenda, he said aboard the aircraft carrier USS George Washington that evening.

"One of my main priorities is readiness, and so being able to repair ships here obviously improves readiness," he said.

Earlier, Phelan toured Japan Marine United's Isogo Works shipyard in Yokohama and met with top Japanese defense officials, including Defense Minister Gen Nakatani, to discuss the U.S.-Japan alliance and potential joint ventures.

"I think they're very interested in trying to expand that relation from repair and

maintenance — and potentially others — but I think, again, we have constraints when it comes to what we can and can't do with shipbuilding [in Japan]" he said.

Phelan said he encouraged Japanese officials to consider investing in U.S.-based joint ventures. He pointed to South Korean company Hanwha Ocean's acquisition of the Philly Shipyard as an example of foreign investment that Japan could emulate.

China, identified by the Defense Department as its "pacing challenge" in the region, has 230 times the shipyard capacity of the United States, according to an August report by the Congressional Research Service.

During his confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Phelan emphasized the need to learn from foreign allies and rebuild U.S. shipbuilding infrastructure.

Phelan on Monday dismissed a Nikkei Asia report that he would pitch the idea of producing "dual-use" commercial ships in Japan that could be converted to military

use during a crisis — a strategy employed by China's Maritime Militia.

"What I said was I was impressed by how China had used commercial ships, and they can adapt to military [use] very quickly," he told Stars and Stripes. "And that was something that we needed to be looking at ourselves and thinking about from the commercial ship building side."

In addition to shipbuilding, Phelan said he also arrived in Japan with another priority: improving the quality of life for U.S. sailors.

"At the end of the day, you need sailors — it's not just weapons systems and equipment," he said. "You need sailors, and they need to have a good life in their families. It's what we owe them."

Phelan listed housing, food quality, lengthy deployment schedules and mental health services as his top concerns.

"All these things have cascading effects that we have to keep an eye on," he said.

Phelan is scheduled to travel next to South Korea to reaffirm the U.S.-Korea alliance and visit shipyards.

Airman who was stabbed after wreck is reprimanded

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

SPANGDAHLEM AIR BASE, Germany — An American airman serving in Belgium was reprimanded Monday and ordered to pay \$2,600, ending a saga that saw her accused of killing a cyclist and surviving what her attorneys called a retaliatory stabbing attack.

Staff Sgt. Rebecca Wright, assigned to the 701st Munitions Support Squadron at Kleine Brogel Air Base, pleaded guilty to negligent homicide during a summary court-martial, the lowest of the three levels of severity in military trials.

Wright avoided a general court-martial as part of a last-minute plea deal that allowed her to face the lower maximum punishments associated with the lessened type of proceedings, according to a response from the 52nd Fighter Wing at Spangdahlem.

Prosecutors also sought to have Wright's rank reduced to senior airman, arguing that not demoting her for the offense would set a bad example. However, Judge Col. Andrew Norton appeared to side largely with the defense's contention that the "heinous vigilante attack" on Wright had already inflicted more

severe punishment on her.

The negligent homicide charge resulted from a traffic crash in the Netherlands two years ago that left an Iranian immigrant dead.

Wright said in court Monday that she was driving in Eindhoven, Netherlands, on May 14, 2023, to attend a roller derby match, when she failed to slow down at a yield sign and collided with Faride Khoshnoud Fashandi, who was on a bicycle. Several months later, the victim's husband attacked Wright, stabbing her over 100 times with a kitchen knife to avenge the death, Wright and her lawyers said in court.

VRT, the public broadcaster of Belgium's Flemish community, reported on the stabbing, saying that it happened in Kleine-Brogel on Feb. 20, 2024, and that the 24-year-old victim was left with serious injuries to her hands and face. A local resident heard screams and called police, VRT said.

Speaking through tears in court Monday, Wright said that during the attack, the man choked, punched and stabbed her repeatedly over a span of five minutes. She told the court that she has over two dozen scars from the attack and suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression.

"I deeply regret the tragic loss," Wright said of the fatal collision. "This tragic accident has reshaped my entire life in every aspect."

Wright was shaken by the collision and stayed in the car while her then-boyfriend, another airman, went to check on Fashandi before the paramedics arrived, she said. Fashandi died in the hospital the following day.

Fashandi's only child, Narcis Serafras, told the court Monday that her mother had fled Iran about three decades ago at age 29 for a better life in the Netherlands.

"My mother was an incredibly kind, selfless and courageous woman," Serafras said, adding that her father was unable to get over the loss. He died by suicide in April 2024.

"I lost both my parents in less than a year due to a single moment of negligence by Ms. Wright," Serafras said.

Serafras' father, who wasn't named during the proceedings, stalked Wright for months before he attempted to kill her, Belgian authorities told her.

The investigation into the 2023 crash that killed Fashandi has been closed, a spokesman for the Netherlands East Brabant Police Department said Monday.

White House focuses on border crackdown on Trump's 100th day

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House on Monday opened a weeklong celebration of Donald Trump's first 100 days in office by focusing on his border crackdown, an area of relative strength for the president at a time when there are red flags for him in the latest round of polling.

Yard signs with mugshots of immigrants who have been accused of crimes like rape and murder were posted across the White House lawn, positioned so they would be in the background of television broadcasts outside the West Wing. Tom Homan, Trump's top border adviser, told reporters there has been "unprecedented success" on the border effort and "we're going to keep doing it, full speed ahead."

Immigration is Trump's leading issue in public opinion surveys, and White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said at a morning briefing the administration is in "the beginning stages of carrying out the largest deportation campaign in American history."

About 139,000 people have been removed so far, according to the White House. Deportations have occasionally lagged behind Democratic President Joe Biden's numbers, but Trump officials reject the comparison as not "apples to apples" because so many fewer people are crossing the border now.

Later Monday, Leavitt held a second briefing exclusively for "new media," where Trump-aligned social media influencers asked friendly questions and applauded at the end.

Tuesday was Trump's 100th day in office, and the Republi-

can president planned to mark the day in Michigan, where he was to hold a rally in Macomb County, an automotive hub north of Detroit. After relatively little travel so far in his term, Trump will also deliver a commencement address Thursday at the University of Alabama.

Trump is also doing a number of interviews timed to the 100-day mark, including an Oval Office interview with ABC News that is to air Tuesday night. He also talked with journalists from The Atlantic magazine, a publication he has frequently attacked for its critical reporting.

Trump told The Atlantic he feels more powerful in his second turn in the White House. His administration is stocked with loyalists, and he's become even more confrontational with a judicial system that at times serves as a check on his agenda.

"The first time, I had two things to do — run the country and survive; I had all these crooked guys," he said. "And the second time, I run the country and the world."

Presidents have marked the initial 100 days of their terms since Franklin Delano Roosevelt moved swiftly to counter the Great Depression after taking office in 1933.

Trump wasn't so bullish about the idea during his first term, when he was plagued by setbacks, investigations and turnover in his ranks, at that time calling the 100-day mark "an artificial barrier."

But now he's trying to harness the moment to mark the ambitious agenda he's pursued in his first months. Leavitt said Trump had already signed almost as many executive orders as Biden did during his entire term.

Trump order to offer some relief on 25% auto tariffs

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump planned to sign an executive order Tuesday to relax some of his 25% tariffs on autos and auto parts, the White House said, a significant reversal as the import taxes threatened to hurt domestic manufacturers.

Automakers and independent analyses have indicated that the tariffs could raise prices, reduce sales and make U.S. production less competitive worldwide.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said at a Tuesday briefing that Trump would sign the order later in the day but declined to provide details on the order.

Treasury Secretary Scott Beissert, who joined Leavitt at the White House briefing, said the goal was to enable automakers to create more domestic manufacturing jobs.

"President Trump has had

meetings with both domestic and foreign auto producers, and he's committed to bringing back auto production to the U.S.," Beissert said. "So we want to give the automakers a path to do that, quickly, efficiently and create as many jobs as possible."

Stellantis Chairman John Elkann said in a statement that the company appreciates the president's tariff relief measures.

"While we further assess the impact of the tariff policies on our North American operations, we look forward to our continued collaboration with the U.S. Administration to strengthen a competitive American auto industry and stimulate exports," he said.

General Motors CEO Mary Barra said the automaker is grateful for Trump's support of the industry, and she noted the company looks forward to conversations with the president and working with the administration.

Penn faces violation claims over transgender swimmer

Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. — The Trump administration said Monday that the University of Pennsylvania violated laws guaranteeing women equal opportunities in athletics by letting a transgender swimmer compete on the school's women's team.

The administration's statement does not name Lia Thomas, the transgender swimmer who last competed for the Ivy League school in Philadelphia in 2022 and was the first openly transgender athlete to win a Division I title that year — an award Thomas now faces losing.

But the investigation opened in February by the U.S. Education Department's Office for

Civil Rights focused on Thomas, who became a leading symbol of transgender athletes and a prominent political target of Republicans and President Donald Trump.

The department said Penn violated a law barring sex discrimination in schools and colleges, called Title IX, by "denying women equal opportunities by permitting males to compete in women's intercollegiate athletics and to occupy women-only intimate facilities."

Penn had no immediate comment Monday, but Penn has said in the past that it always followed NCAA and Ivy League policies regarding student participation on athletic teams, both when Thomas swam and currently.

Russia hits civilians, Kyiv derides 3-day truce

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia struck civilian areas of Ukraine with drones in another deadly nighttime attack, officials said Tuesday, as Kyiv officials dismissed Russian President Vladimir Putin's declaration of a unilateral 72-hour ceasefire next week as an attempt "to deceive the United States."

The Russian attack damaged homes in Ukraine's southeastern Dnipropetrovsk region, authorities said, killing a 12-year-old girl and wounding three others, including a 6-year-old.

Russia also launched 20 drones and 31 powerful guided bombs at Kharkiv, the second-largest Ukrainian city.

Debris from an intercepted

Russian drone started a fire in a neighborhood of the capital, Kyiv, according to officials.

Putin announced the temporary ceasefire on Monday.

However, he hasn't offered details on how the truce, which will start May 8 and last through the end of May 10, would be monitored.

It marks the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945, known as Victory Day, and comes more than three years after Russia invaded its neighbor.

Russia has effectively rejected a U.S. proposal for an immediate and full 30-day halt in the fighting by imposing far-reaching conditions.

Ukraine has accepted it, according to Ukrainian President

Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Kyiv is keen to lock in crucial U.S. military aid for the war, amid doubts about whether Europe could pick up the slack if Washington walks away.

President Donald Trump has invested effort in trying to end the fighting, but he expressed skepticism last weekend about Putin's commitment to negotiating a peace deal amid continuing attacks on Ukraine. He said he suspected the Russian leader could be trying to mislead him.

Ukrainian officials scoffed at Putin's ceasefire announcement.

Andrii Yermak, the head of Ukraine's presidential office, said Russia is still trying to

break through the around 620-mile front line while also launching long-range attacks on civilian areas.

"Putin can give the order for his forces to stop," Yermak said, "but he does not do this in the hope of deceiving everyone."

The Institute for the Study of War said Putin likely wants to avoid the embarrassment of Ukrainian strikes on Victory Day, when foreign dignitaries will be visiting Moscow to mark the day.

Putin previously announced a unilateral 30-hour Easter ceasefire and Ukraine voiced readiness to reciprocate any genuine truce at the time. However, each accused the other of continuous attacks.

Vehicle smashes through Illinois building, killing 4

Associated Press

CHATHAM, Ill. — A car smashed through a building Monday afternoon, killing four young people and injuring several others during an after-school program in a small city outside of Springfield, Ill., police said.

Authorities said Tuesday they believe the crash wasn't targeted.

The car traveled through a field, then smashed through the building in Chatham, Ill., on Monday afternoon.

The Sangamon County coroner identified the victims as 18-year-old Rylee Britton of Springfield and three Chatham children: Ainsley Johnson, 8, and Kathryn Corley and Alma Buhnerkempe, both 7. Six more children were taken to hospitals and one remains in critical condition.

The Illinois driver, a 44-year-old woman who was not injured, was taken to a hospital for evaluation and police said toxicology reports were pending. Police

haven't said if the driver was arrested.

The cause was under investigation, but police said the crash doesn't appear to be a targeted attack.

Monday's crash was the latest instance of people driving vehicles into groups of people across the globe. Only two days earlier, a car plowed through a crowded street during a Filipino heritage festival in Vancouver, British Columbia, killing 11.

The struck building and facilities in Illinois house Youth Needing Other Things Outdoors, which holds after-school programs and summer camps, according to its website.

"I am horrified and deeply saddened by the deaths of children and numerous injuries in Chatham this afternoon," Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker said in a statement Monday. "My heart is heavy for these families and the unimaginable grief they're experiencing — something that no parent should ever have to endure."

Liberal Party, Carney win in Canadian election

Associated Press

TORONTO — Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney's Liberal Party has won the federal election, capping a stunning turnaround in fortunes fueled by U.S. President Donald Trump's annexation threats and trade war.

Populist Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre — in the lead until President Donald Trump took aim at Canada with a trade war and annexation threats — was voted out of his Parliament seat in Monday's election.

That capped a swift decline in fortunes for the firebrand Poilievre, who a few months ago appeared to be a shoo-in to become Canada's next prime minister and shepherd the Conservatives back into power for the first time in a decade.

Poilievre, a career politician, campaigned with Trump-like bravado, taking a page from the "America First" president by adopting the slogan "Canada First." But his similarities to Trump may have ultimately

cost him and his party.

The Liberals were projected to win more of Parliament's 343 seats than the Conservatives.

It wasn't immediately clear if they would win an outright majority — at least 172 — or would need to rely on a smaller party to pass legislation and remain in power.

Elections Canada said it has decided to pause counting of special ballots — cast by voters who are away from their districts during the election — until later Tuesday morning.

The Liberals were leading or elected in 168 seats when the counting was paused, four short of a majority.

Elections Canada estimated that the uncounted votes could affect the result in about a dozen districts.

Poilievre hoped to make the election a referendum on former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, whose popularity declined toward the end of his decade in power as food and housing prices rose.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Rock throwing leads to murder conviction for 1

CO GOLDEN — Three Denver-area teens cheered each other during a night of throwing rocks at cars — until one of the stones crashed through a windshield and killed a woman, leading to a murder conviction Friday after the trio turned on one another.

Jurors found Joseph Koenig guilty of first-degree murder in the death of Alexa Bartell on April 19, 2023, after the other young men riding with him reached deals with prosecutors and testified against him. Koenig, now 20, was also convicted of attempted murder and other less serious crimes for rocks and other objects thrown at vehicles the night Bartell was killed and in previous weeks.

Bartell's family and friends hugged and cried in court after the verdict.

Boat collides with ferry near causeway; 1 dead

FL CLEARWATER — A recreational boat crashed into a ferry transporting 45 people on the final day of a sand-sculpting festival in Florida, killing one person and injuring at least 10 others, officials said.

The crash late Sunday in calm waters off Clearwater on the western Florida coast set off an emergency response due to the high number of possible casualties. Video of the accident released by law enforcement Monday at a news conference showed the recreational vehicle plowing into the ferry from behind at dusk near a causeway.

The operator of the recreational boat was cooperating with authorities, and a breathalyzer test showed no alcohol impairment, officials said. All of those injured were aboard the ferry. Police did not provide any information about the person who died.

Police fatally shoot man after shooting injures 11

SC MYRTLE BEACH — A shooting in the popular South Carolina tourist town of Myrtle Beach left 11 people injured, and police fatally shot one person, authorities said.

Myrtle Beach officers responded to a disturbance involving multiple individuals Saturday night in which someone began firing a weapon. In a statement, the department said that "based on the immediate threat," an officer then shot one person, who died from their injuries.

Myrtle Beach Mayor Brenda Bethune told WBTW-TV the officer responded appropriately. The Horry County deputy coroner identified the person shot as 18-year-old Jerrius Davis, according to WBTW.

Woman mistaken for protester chased by mob

NY NEW YORK — A Brooklyn woman said she feared for her life as she was chased, kicked, spit at and pelted with objects by a mob of Orthodox Jewish men who mistook her as a participant in a protest against Israel's far-right security minister.

The assault, recorded by a bystander, unfolded last week near the global headquarters of the Chabad-Lubavitch move-

ment in Crown Heights, where an appearance by Itamar Ben-Gvir set off clashes between pro-Palestinian activists and members of the neighborhood's large Orthodox Jewish community.

The woman, a neighborhood resident in her 30s, told The Associated Press she learned of the protest after hearing police helicopters over her apartment. She walked over to investigate around 10:30 p.m. but by then the protest had mostly dispersed. Not wanting to be filmed, she covered her face with a scarf.

"As soon as I pulled up my scarf, a group of 100 men came over immediately and encircled me," said the woman.

Suspect arrested in theft of Noem's purse

DC WASHINGTON — A suspect has been arrested in connection with the theft last week of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem's purse as she ate at a Washington, D.C., restaurant, officials said Sunday.

Noem's purse was nabbed on Easter Sunday and reportedly contained about \$3,000 in cash, her keys, driver's license, passport and Homeland Security badge. The Homeland Security Department said Noem had cash in her purse to pay for gifts, dinner and other activities for her family on Easter.

A suspect was taken into custody without incident in Washington after an investigation by the U.S. Secret Service and the Metropolitan Police Department, according to Secret Service Washington Field Office Special Agent in Charge Matt

McCool.

The suspect was arrested Saturday, the police department said.

Interim District of Columbia U.S. Attorney Ed Martin told NBC News the suspect was in the country illegally.

In a prepared statement, McCool called the suspect a "serial offender" and said there was no evidence Noem was targeted because of her position.

"There is no indication it was because of that. It was frankly, it was a nice looking purse," Martin told NBC News.

Tesla could benefit most from new car crash rules

NY NEW YORK — Rule changes announced by the Trump administration last week could allow automakers to report fewer crashes involving self-driving cars, with Tesla potentially emerging as the main beneficiary.

The Transportation Department announced that it will no longer require automakers to report certain kinds of non-fatal crashes — but the exception will apply only to partial self-driving vehicles using so-called Level 2 systems, the kind Tesla deploys. Tesla CEO Elon Musk had complained the old reporting rules cast his company in a bad light.

If Tesla and other automakers are required to report fewer crashes into a national database, that could make it more difficult for regulators to catch equipment defects and for the public to access information about a company's overall safety, auto industry analysts say. It will also allow Tesla to trumpet a cleaner record to sell more cars.

— From wire reports

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Cavs look forward after sweeping Heat

Associated Press

MIAMI — Kenny Atkinson didn't need a few months, or a few weeks, or even a few games before figuring out the potential of the Cleveland Cavaliers.

He needed two practices.

Go back to training camp in Bradenton, Fla. The Cavaliers were in Day 2 there, and one of Atkinson's assistant coaches offered some early observations that have stuck with Atkinson for the seven months that have followed.

"He said, 'We're skilled, we're smart and we play really hard.' That was the immediate feedback," Atkinson, in his first year coaching the Cavaliers, recalled this week. "Those three things stood out. Your first impressions count, I guess."

Those impressions were spot on, too.

Skilled, smart and hard-playing sums up the Cavaliers quite nicely, it turns out. They're headed to the Eastern Conference semifinals against either Indiana or Milwaukee, after the

No. 1 seed on that side of the bracket simply dismantled the Miami Heat in a four-game sweep in Round 1.

Donovan Mitchell scored 22 points, De'Andre Hunter added 19 and the Cavaliers led by as many as 60 points before beating the Heat 138-83 on Monday night to complete the sweep in their Eastern Conference series.

The margin of victory in that series: 122 points, the most one-sided matchup in NBA playoff history. Victory margins in Games 3 and 4, both on the road: 37 and 55 points.

The 55-point margin in Game 4 was the fourth-biggest playoff win ever. The record is 58 points, done twice: Minneapolis over St. Louis in 1956 and Denver over New Orleans in 2009. The Los Angeles Lakers beat Golden State by 56 points in 1973.

"They're going to be on probably a long run right now," Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said when Game 4 ended, tipping his

cap to the Cavs. "They're well-coached. They have a group that fits and plays the right way. So, we were humbled — but they had so much to do with a lot of how we looked."

And Cleveland has done this to teams all season. OK, maybe not to this extent; the 55-point win in Game 4 was Cleveland's largest this season, and the 37-point Game 3 win is now tied for its fourth-largest victory of the year.

But this Cavs team is doing something that not even the LeBron James teams in Cleveland did. Cleveland's average margin of victory this season is now 10.5 points per game, on pace to be the best in franchise history. Only nine teams have made it through a regular season and the playoffs with such a margin.

Cleveland star Mitchell was sitting with Cavs rookie Jaylon Tyson during the Game 4 runway. His message was simple: "This is your first playoff series ... and this (stuff) isn't normal," he said.

"We have a bigger goal in mind," Mitchell said. "For us, it's understanding that this is special. We've been doing special things all year. But we didn't come here just to sweep in the first round and get to the second."

They're 68-18 so far this season, including playoffs. There are two teams in Cavaliers history that won more games in a full season: The 2008-09 team went 76-20, and the 2015-16 team — the NBA champions that season — went 73-30.

They'll be favored in Round 2, which will begin in Cleveland — on Saturday at the earliest. They're riding high right now, too. A team that had winning streaks of 16, 15 and 12 games this season is rolling, just like it has been since pretty much the start of training camp.

"There's a fit and a feel. They know how to play," Atkinson said. "I don't think we're like super-athletic. But we've got a lot of guys who know how to play."

And how to win, too.

Butler returns from injury, lifts Warriors to 3-1 edge

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — With Jimmy Butler's tailbone still hurting at the end, he came through in remarkable fashion and in every which way despite all the pain.

The Golden State star returned from a one-game absence and rejoined the starting lineup Monday night for a 109-106 Game 4 Warriors victory in their first-round series against the Houston Rockets, limping at times as he led his team to one win away from advancing to the Western Conference semifinals.

"More than anything I just wanted to play. This is the best time of the year for everybody, this is why you go through what you go through," Butler said. "So to be able to miss a game, I don't

like it, but I'm back, I'm back in a big way."

Butler contributed 27 points, six assists, five rebounds, blocked a shot and converted all 12 of his free throws while playing 40 minutes, less than a week after he sustained a pelvic contusion in a frightening fall early in Game 2 last Wednesday.

He converted three free throws with 58.7 seconds left, grabbed the game-clinching rebound with 4 seconds to go and then made two more free throws.

Houston's Fred VanVleet missed a 3-pointer under pressure at the buzzer.

The teams return to Houston for Game 5 in the best-of-seven series on Wednesday night as seventh-seeded Golden State

tries to close out the No. 2 seed Rockets on their home floor.

"Tonight was great. He played through the injury, it was beautiful," teammate Draymond Green said. "But it's just his presence. What his presence does for this team is humongous. The first three quarters, he couldn't move. Not sure how he started moving in the fourth quarter, but first three quarters he couldn't move. Yet he never complained. He stuck with it."

Butler played just over five minutes during his initial stretch and nearly 18 minutes by halftime in a heated game delayed twice in the second quarter by skirmishes that featured four technical fouls and a flagrant 1 in two separate tussles, including shoving during one

sequence involving Stephen Curry, Green and Dillon Brooks.

With the game tied at 36, Curry dribbled down the sideline when Green put a hard screen on Houston's Amen Thompson. Brooks fouled Curry and he appeared to become angry about the push before going at Curry and Green.

Curry received a technical for "taunting" Brooks, who also received a technical along with Green. Warriors rookie Quinten Post and Houston's Jabari Smith Jr. flailed their arms at each other but avoided technicals.

"I thought it was winning time," Butler said of his play down the stretch, thrilled he began to "move a little bit better."

Panthers score 2 in 11 seconds in win

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Aaron Ekblad and Seth Jones scored third-period goals 11 seconds apart and the Florida Panthers stormed from behind to beat the Tampa Bay Lightning 4-2 on Monday night to take a 3-1 lead in the first-round series.

Anton Lundell also scored and Carter Verhaeghe added an empty-netter. Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 18 shots.

The Panthers had managed just three shots on goal in the third before Ekblad tied it with 3:47 remaining, sending the crowd at Amerant Bank Arena into a roar. Jones found the back of the net shortly after to go ahead and erase a two-goal deficit.

The goals were the fastest by defensemen from the same team in Stanley Cup Playoffs history.

Florida will now have a chance to clinch the series

Wednesday night in Tampa.

"From Game 1 you could feel the hatred in the locker room," Jones said. "You could feel the hatred on the ice. But it's most importantly about winning. The job's not finished. We've got to go to Tampa and have a good game."

Tampa Bay's Brandon Hagel left in the second period after taking a high hit from Ekblad, who made contact with the left wing's chin area and sent him onto his back. Hagel went to the locker room and no penalty was called.

Lundell got the Panthers on the board at 9:06 in the second after Florida had sent many good looks either too wide or high at goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy, who made 19 saves. Mitchell Chaffee and Erik Cernak responded for the Lightning with another pair of goals 11 seconds apart to make it 2-1 heading into the third.

Ekblad had a tying goal overturned in the third after a successful challenge by the Lightning for offside, which kept the score at 2-1 before the defenseman, in just his second game back from a 20-game suspension, picked up a rebound and put it past Vasilevskiy.

"Good for him," said Florida coach Paul Maurice. "The first nongoal was a heater. And you've seen that from him. The tying goal, some great patience. So good for him, does a great job of getting up the ice and timing when to go in and to take that chance. So he's an important part of what we do."

Hagel did not return after the hit from Ekblad, which happened before Tampa Bay's goals. Hagel was back from a one game suspension after his late hit knocked Panthers captain Aleksander Barkov out of Game 2.

The play on Monday reflected

the chippy nature of the series, which has had a somewhat controversial hit in three straight games. After Hagel's hit in Game 2, Florida's Matthew Tkachuk landed a late hit on Jake Guentzel in Game 3 and was assessed a five-minute major, although he was not suspended.

Florida's Niko Mikkola was hit with a five-minute major and a game misconduct early in the third period Monday for boarding Zemgus Girgensons, who was on his knees.

"It's getting tiresome answering questions about a hit every single game," said Tampa Bay coach Jon Cooper. "Why are you asking me the question? If anyone in here has something (to say), stand up and let me know."

The Panthers were able to kill off that penalty, giving Florida the momentum it needed to mount a comeback.

Johnston's quick goal gets Stars rolling in win over Avs

Associated Press

DALLAS — Wyatt Johnston scored the quickest goal ever to start a playoff game for the Dallas Stars, who had a well-timed immediate response back at home in their first-round series against the Colorado Avalanche.

Wyatt Johnston scored 9 seconds into Game 5, then added another goal and an assist for the Stars in a 6-2 win Monday night to take a 3-2 series lead.

"We did probably our best job generating chances tonight and it showed. ... Just a huge win," Johnston said.

"I'm not surprised by our response. We've got a proud group," said coach Pete DeBoer, whose team lost 4-0 in Game 4 on the road two nights earlier. "The last game, we played a poor game. It happens. In a seven-game series you're going to have a night where you're off.

And we were off and we owned it and we fixed it, and we responded."

Mikko Rantanen, who was with the Avalanche in the playoffs the past seven seasons, scored his first postseason goal and had two assists for the Stars as they took a 3-2 series lead.

"We knew as the top guys we needed to step up a little bit and play a little bit better defensively and try to get on the score sheet a little bit more," Rantanen said.

Game 6 is Thursday night in Colorado, where the Stars clinched their second-round series last season.

After Artturi Lehkonen and Nathan MacKinnon scored 2½ minutes apart for the Avs in the second period to get them to 3-2, Johnston scored on a power play that included a secondary assist from Rantanen.

Mason Marchment restored Dallas' three-goal lead before the end of the second period when he deflected Alexander Petrovic's long slap shot past goalie Mackenzie Blackwood.

Dallas goalie Jake Oettinger stopped 27 shots.

Blackwood, who allowed only seven goals the first four games, gave up five on 18 shots.

Johnston's record-setting starter goal came off the opening faceoff, when he shot from the immediate left of the net. The 21-year-old forward already in his 43rd career playoff game was skating toward the back wall and passing the red line when he took the shot that ricocheted off Blackwood.

"I just saw just a little opening," Johnston said. "Figured why not, let's try it. Got lucky."

Johnston became just the eighth player in NHL history to

score within the first 9 seconds of a playoff game. The record is still held by Don Kozak for the Los Angeles Kings, who scored 6 seconds into a game against Boston on April 17, 1977.

Dallas had led only 62 seconds in the first four games, which included two four-goal losses and back-to-back overtime wins in Games 2 and 3.

"I think we answered really well. It's also big to start the way we did," Rantanen said. "It's a lot easier when you play with a lead, and I think that was our first lead for a while in the series. So it's a key factor."

Then in the final minute of the first period, Johnston got the assist on Thomas Harley's goal that Blackwood initially blocked with his right arm. But the puck popped up in the air and came down behind the goalie, bouncing off his back and into the net.

Nimmo ties Mets record with 9 RBIs

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Brandon Nimmo hit a grand slam and matched a franchise record with nine RBIs, helping the New York Mets pound Washington Nationals 19-5 on Monday.

Nimmo also hit a three-run drive in his seventh career multihomer game. The 32-year-old outfielder had four hits and scored four times after beginning the day with a .192 batting average.

New York earned a split of the four-game series. The Mets have won nine of 11 overall to improve to a major league-best 20-9.

Jeff McNeil and Mark Vientos also homered for New York, which finished with 21 hits. Vientos connected for a three-run drive against Washington infielder Amed Rosario in the ninth.

James Wood and Nathaniel Lowe homered for Washington in the eighth.

Twins 11, Guardians 1: Jonah Bride had three of visiting Minnesota's 17 hits, and Bailey Ober (3-1) allowed one run in 7 1/3 innings in a lopsided victory over Cleveland.

The Twins had 10 players with at least one hit, the first time they had done that since

June of last season against the Athletics. Six had at least two hits, including Ryan Jeffers, who had a two-run homer. Jeffers had two hits and drove in three runs.

Edouard Julien also went deep for the Twins, who have won four straight and six of seven.

Reds 3, Cardinals 1: Nick Martinez pitched six sparkling innings, and Cincinnati beat visiting St. Louis for its fifth straight victory.

Martinez (1-3) allowed one run and five hits in the opener of a seven-game homestand. Graham Ashcraft and Tony Santillan each got three outs before Emilio Pagan came in for his eighth save.

Jose Trevino homered for Cincinnati, and Noelvi Marte drove in the go-ahead run with his first career triple.

Orioles 4, Yankees 3: Ryan O'Hearn hit a three-run home run off Will Warren and Baltimore held on for a victory over visiting New York.

Ramón Laureano doubled in Baltimore's other run, and 35-year-old Japanese rookie Tomoyuki Sugano (3-1) struck out a career-high eight in five scoreless innings to help Baltimore stop a three-game losing

streak.

Aaron Judge, hitting a major league-leading .405, had two hits to extend his on-base streak to 25 games and drove in New York's first run when he hit into a forceout against Yennier Cano in the seventh inning.

Athletics 2, Rangers 1: Tyler Soderstrom hit a two-run double to help JP Sears and the Athletics win at Texas.

Sears (4-2) struck out seven in 5 1/3 innings. He allowed one run and five hits in the opener of a seven-game trip.

The A's went ahead to stay in the fifth. Gio Urshela hit a lead-off double and Brent Rooker reached on a two-out walk. Soderstrom then drove a 1-1 pitch from Patrick Corbin into the right-field corner, giving him 24 RBIs on the season.

Braves 6, Rockies 3: Bryce Elder pitched six solid innings, Michael Harris II hit a tiebreaking double in the fifth and Atlanta beat host Colorado.

The Rockies have dropped 15 of their past 16 games and are 4-24, the worst record in the majors.

Elder (1-1) gave up a three-run homer in the first to Hunter Goodman but settled down to scatter three hits the rest of the way. He struck out four and

walked two in matching his season high for innings.

Dodgers 7, Marlins 6 (10): Tommy Edman hit a two-run single in the 10th inning, lifting host Los Angeles over Miami after blowing a five-run lead.

Teoscar Hernández homered in his third consecutive game for the Dodgers.

Dustin May yielded three runs while pitching into the sixth for the Dodgers. He has gone at least five innings in all five starts since returning from a nearly two-year injury absence.

Astros 8, Tigers 5: Jose Altuve hit a two-run homer in the sixth inning that sent Houston to a victory over visiting Detroit.

Christian Walker also had a two-run shot in the fourth to begin Houston's comeback from a 3-0 deficit. The Astros still trailed by one when Jeremy Peña singled in the sixth. Altuve followed with his drive off Jack Flaherty (1-3) that crashed off the wall above the left-field seats to put Houston up 4-3.

Altuve had two hits and three RBIs while batting second for the first time since 2023. He asked to move out of the leadoff spot to give him more time to get ready to hit in the first inning after coming in from the outfield.

Extension will make 49ers' Kittle highest-paid TE

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — George Kittle agreed to a four-year contract extension with the San Francisco 49ers that will make him the highest-paid tight end in NFL history.

Kittle announced the deal on the “Bussin’ With The Boys” podcast on Tuesday, saying the extension was worth \$76.4 million over four years with \$35 million guaranteed at signing. The deal keeps Kittle under contract with San Francisco through the 2029 season.

The 49ers confirmed the deal

with the only remaining member of the original draft class under coach Kyle Shanahan and general manager John Lynch.

“In 2017, our first year with the 49ers, we selected a skinny tight end from Iowa whom we were really excited about. We had high hopes, but no one knew that he would become the player that he is today,” Lynch said in a statement. “George’s leadership, enthusiasm for the game, for his teammates, and the faithful are truly unique and special. He is an outstanding representation for the 49ers on the field

and is an outstanding representative for the organization off the field with his investment in the local and military communities. He has a great sense of pride in his role and has put in the work to be one of the best tight ends in the NFL.”

The 31-year-old Kittle was entering the final year of a five-year, \$75 million extension that he signed in 2020. Kittle didn’t show up for the first few days of the team’s voluntary offseason program last week but arrived later in the week in a sign that a deal could get done soon.

The \$19.1 million average annual value of the extension tops the previous record for a tight end of \$19 million set earlier this offseason when Trey McBride signed an extension with Arizona. The \$35 million guaranteed to Kittle is also the most for any tight end.

After having recent negotiations run deep into the summer, causing players like Deebo Samuel, Nick Bosa, Brandon Aiyuk and Trent Williams to miss at least some time in training camp, the Niners got this deal done with Kittle quickly.