

## Analyst: Blockade gamble could pay off

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

The last-ditch U.S. effort to bring Iran to its knees through a naval blockade in the Persian Gulf is a gamble that will take tremendous resources and come with serious risks, according to analysts and former U.S. military officials.

The bifurcated strategy involves strangling the Iranian economy by keeping ships from entering or exiting the country's ports while eliminating Tehran's chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz, retired Adm. James Stavridis, former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, said in an interview with CNN on Sunday.

The effort will take at least two Navy aircraft carriers, more than a dozen destroyers and other military assets, and the help of regional Arab navies, Stavridis told CNN.

The Navy already has a dual carrier presence and 16 destroyers stationed in the region, along with other vessels and a contingent of Marines. The U.S. wager could pay off, he said.

With Iran's military degraded, internal political dissent starting to rumble and other problems plaguing the country, the regime in Tehran has few options and may be looking for an exit, he said. But Iran "still has cards to play," Stavridis said.

Tehran could use its remaining arsenal of missiles and drones to strike vessels in the strait and target Gulf region oil, gas and fertilizer facilities.

It could also employ cyberwarfare, potentially aided by Russia or China, or terrorism in the American homeland to strike back at the United States, Stavridis said.

"We need to be very wary here, very alert as we go into this phase," he said.

On Monday U.S. forces began a blockade of all maritime traffic entering and exiting Iranian ports.

The blockade "will be enforced impartially against vessels of all nations entering or departing Iranian ports and coastal areas, including all Iranian ports on the (Persian) Gulf and Gulf of Oman," U.S. Central Command

said in a post to its X account.

U.S. forces "will not impede freedom of navigation for vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz to and from non-Iranian ports."

The announcement followed a statement earlier Sunday by President Donald Trump that the U.S. Navy would begin a blockade of all ships transiting the strait.

"At some point, we will reach an 'ALL BEING ALLOWED TO GO IN, ALL BEING ALLOWED TO GO OUT' basis," Trump said in a post on the Truth Social platform.

Iran's chokehold on traffic going through the strait had been reinforced by the recent announcement that it had lost track of its mines in the vital waterway, he said.

The posts followed a breakdown in U.S.-Iran negotiations to end hostilities that saw both sides pointing the finger at each other.

Vice President JD Vance said in Islamabad that Iran had for now rejected "our final and best offer," while Iranian state media said the talks broke down over

the U.S. negotiators' "excessive demands," including issues related to control of the Strait of Hormuz and the removal of nuclear materials from Iran.

On Monday, Trump warned that if Iranian navy fast-attack boats came near the U.S. blockade, "they will be immediately ELIMINATED, using the same system of kill that we use against the drug dealers on boats at Sea."

It's not clear how many sea mines Iran has laid in the strait, a vital waterway in the Persian Gulf through which some 20% of the world's consumption of oil and petroleum products passes through daily.

While U.S. forces had destroyed much of Iran's navy, including mine-laying vessels, and 90% of its mines, the country still has the capability to lay more, Stavridis said.

On Saturday, the Navy destroyers USS Frank E. Peterson Jr. and USS Michael Murphy transited the strait, part of a broader mission to ensure that the waterway was fully clear of sea mines, CENTCOM said in a statement.

## Marines aim to speed up reporting of missing troops

By MATTHEW ADAMS  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Marine Corps wants its leaders to act more quickly when a service member does not report for duty and cannot be found.

Commanders must report a missing Marine to law enforcement within three hours and notify the local chaplain of the service member's absence, according to a service directive authorized by Lt. Gen. William Bowers, deputy commandant for manpower and reserve affairs.

"Response actions will consider safety risk, mental health risk, self-harm risk and personal-circumstance factors," the directive states.

The Marine Corps, until now, had not issued formal guidance for locating missing service members despite a 2022 recommendation by the Government Accountability Office that it do so, the agency reported in February.

The Marine Corps was expected to issue an interim directive in March addressing the

GAO recommendations, with full implementation by January 2028, the report stated, citing service officials.

According to Friday's directive, Phase I is to be initiated within three hours of discovery of absence. Commanders will initiate actions ranging from contacting the Marine using available methods, as well as local police, hospitals or clinics if a service member has sought assistance.

No later than 24 hours after a Marine is discovered missing,

commanders will appoint a preliminary inquiry officer to collect available facts related to the absence.

After 48 hours, commanders should consider the absence to be involuntary "unless a preponderance of available evidence indicates voluntary absence," according to the service directive.

The interim guidance went into effect immediately and will remain in effect until a permanent service policy is published.

# Navy to deactivate long-idle nuclear sub

BY GARY WARNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Navy said Friday it would retire a U.S. nuclear attack submarine whose long-delayed and over-budget overhaul has become a symbol of shipbuilding and maintenance dysfunction.

“We’ve made the tough-but-necessary decision to inactivate the USS Boise,” said Adm. Daryl Caudle, the Chief of Naval Operations. “We owe it to our sailors and the nation to make these tough calls.”

Caudle said the time and money saved on the USS Boise, a 34-year-old Los Angeles-class submarine, could be put to better use accelerating the building of new Virginia-class nuclear attack submarines and Columbia-class nuclear ballistic

missile submarines. Both programs have struggled with their own production delays.

The Navy’s decision to deactivate the Boise came just days after the White House released its fiscal 2027 budget request that calls for \$1.5 trillion in military spending, split between the defense budget and additional funding legislation.

Specifics on the Navy’s shipbuilding plan and request to retire some older ships are expected in the detailed budget plans each military service plans to release on April 21.

Commissioned in 1992, the Boise was one of 62 Los Angeles-class attack submarines that entered the fleet between 1976 and 1996. They were originally designed for a life of up to

33 years.

The Boise fired some of the opening salvos of Tomahawk missiles in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. It has been idle since returning from a 2015 deployment and lost its certification to operate submerged in 2017. Because of long backlogs for other projects at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, the Navy sent the Boise to a private yard in nearby Newport News, Va.

A \$1.2 billion contract for overhaul was awarded in 2024, but officials said Friday that, despite spending \$800 million to date, work on the Boise is less than a quarter complete and won’t be done until 2029.

The Boise has become a symbol of delays in Navy shipbuilding and maintenance programs.

During Caudle’s June 2025 confirmation before the Senate Armed Services Committee, he was asked what he would do about the Boise.

“Is it time we just simply pull the plug on that one?” Sen. Mike Rounds, R-N.D., asked during a confirmation hearing in June 2025.

Caudle called the situation “like a dagger in the heart” to the concept of a well-functioning submarine service.

Navy Secretary John Phelan told the digital news outlet *Semafor* that the Boise overhaul contract was a mistake.

“We screwed up,” Phelan said. “This doesn’t look good. It is what it is. Time to move on and try to get going in the future and move forward.”

## Guam prepares as super typhoon nears Marianas

BY ALEX WILSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

Guam, including its U.S. military bases, are battenning down for a near miss from Super Typhoon Sinlaku, which barreled through the Western Pacific on target to strike the Northern Mariana Islands.

The U.S. territory entered Tropical Cyclone Condition of Readiness 1 at 4 p.m. Monday, meaning potentially destructive winds were expected within 12 hours, according to a news release from Guam’s Joint Information Center.

“[Military] personnel are advised to remain sheltered in place and follow all official guidance until conditions improve,” the center said in the Monday afternoon news release.

Sinlaku was initially forecast to directly impact Guam but has since moved northward, posing a greater threat to Rota, Tinian and

Saipan.

Guam remained under a tropical storm warning and typhoon watch Monday, while the Northern Marianas face a possible direct hit Tuesday afternoon, according to the news release.

Sinlaku will make its closest approach to Guam around 2 p.m. Tuesday, about 103 miles northeast of Andersen Air Force Base, according to the Joint Typhoon Warning Center.

Numerous Guam businesses, including all pharmacies, had closed by Monday afternoon, according to the information center.

On the island’s military installations — Andersen, Naval Base Guam and Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz — operations narrowed to essential functions. Officials said nonessential services had been curtailed, while critical capabilities such as emergency response, command and control remained in place.

## Taiwan set to drill to break potential Chinese blockade

*Bloomberg News*

Taiwan will conduct new drills in coming weeks to ensure the island has access to critical supplies in the event of a Chinese blockade, a risk demonstrated by Iran’s closure of a global energy chokepoint.

A senior Taiwanese official said the government will carry out its first-ever joint exercise between the Interior Ministry and other departments to escort ships carrying natural gas and oil during a naval blockade. He also warned a large-scale denial of access to the area would hinder the entire region.

“If the Taiwan Strait or the surrounding area of Taiwan will be blockaded, it is almost a 100% of the blockade of the regional energy supply,” Sawyer Mars, Taiwan’s deputy interior minister, said in an interview with *Bloomberg News* earlier this month. “It’s not only Taiwan’s problem,

it’s the whole area’s problem.”

While China has made no threats to cut off supplies to Taiwan or other economies, the self-ruled democracy routinely carries out exercises to prepare for potential hostilities by the People’s Liberation Army.

Beijing claims sovereignty over Taiwan and has never disavowed potential use of force to take it. Chinese President Xi Jinping restated his hope for unification on Friday in a meeting with Kuomintang Chairperson Cheng Li-wun, the China-friendly leader of Taiwan’s largest opposition party.

Mars said the Interior Ministry is leading land transportation drills that will take place before July, focused on moving supplies within Taiwan, while the Navy and Coast Guard are responsible for maritime escort operations for ships sailing in waters near Taiwan.

# Moms awarded \$70M in infant formula case

*Chicago Tribune*

A Cook County, Ill., jury on Friday decided that Abbott Laboratories should pay \$17 million in punitive damages — on top of the \$53 million in damages awarded a day earlier — in four cases in which mothers alleged the company's formula for premature infants caused their babies to become severely ill.

The decision Friday came at the close of a monthlong trial that was the first against Abbott in an Illinois state court over whether its formula for babies born prematurely causes a devastating intestinal disease called necrotizing enterocolitis. NEC is an often-fatal illness in which the lining of the intestine becomes inflamed and dies.

The trial has been closely

watched because of its potential implications for both Abbott Park, Ill.-based Abbott and families of premature babies nationwide.

Abbott faces more than 1,700 similar lawsuits across the country over its formula for premature infants.

In the cases that were at trial this month, four mothers — Antonia Mendez, Casie Thompson, Kara Sharpe and Eboni Williams — had alleged that the formula was defective, that Abbott failed to adequately warn of its dangers and that Abbott was negligent. Their babies were all born at Chicago area hospitals before 32 weeks gestation between 2012 and 2019 and all developed NEC after consuming Abbott's Similac Special Care.

Three of the four children underwent surgery as infants, and all four continue to have serious gastrointestinal issues, said Sean Grimsley, an attorney for the mothers and a partner at Olson Grimsley, during the trial.

On Thursday, the jury found Abbott liable on all three counts against it for each child. The jury found that the formula was defective, that Abbott failed to warn about its dangers and that Abbott was negligent.

Also on Thursday, the jury decided to award \$15 million each to two of the children, \$16 million to the third child and \$7 million to the fourth child. Those damages are meant to compensate the children for loss of a normal life, disfigurement, pain and suffering and increased risk of future

harm.

The additional \$17 million in punitive damages the jury decided on Friday are meant to punish the company and deter it from future wrongful conduct. Attorneys for the mothers had sought \$530 million total in punitive damages.

Hariklia Karis, a partner with Kirkland & Ellis representing Abbott, said Abbott had not concealed anything about the risks of NEC, nor shown indifference for the safety of babies.

Abbott has long maintained that its formula does not actually cause the illness. Rather, the four preterm babies at the center of the recent trial would have developed the illness because of other conditions, even if they had not had the formula, Karis argued during trial.

## Minnesota autism centers' fraud not fully explained

*The Minnesota Star Tribune*

MINNEAPOLIS — At two Minnesota autism treatment centers, any child — autistic or not — could be qualified for services, federal prosecutors allege.

That is one way authorities claim those individual health care providers defrauded a state program, billing the Department of Human Services and insurers roughly \$20 million over five years.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Rebecca Kline, who runs the Minnesota federal prosecutors' white-collar crime section, said during a plea hearing in March that children who did not have autism spectrum disorder still were somehow enrolled to receive services at Star Autism in St. Cloud.

Six months after charges were first filed in court, however, it remains unclear exactly how business owners could have green-lit children for services. It's a mystery since industry experts say autism diagnoses — a necessary factor to qualify — rely on in-

depth, one-on-one interviews with the child and parents.

Yet charging documents against the owners of Star Autism and Smart Therapy Center in Minneapolis say non-autistic kids were somehow qualified for services, allowing millions of dollars to fraudulently flow to the businesses. Owners of both businesses have pleaded guilty and await sentencing.

Minnesota has figured prominently in President Donald Trump's battle against fraud in federal programs. The state's Medicaid-funded program for children with autism comprises a good chunk of the \$9.4 billion in human services spending between 2022 and 2025 now under investigation.

National outrage over fraud has given the administration ammunition to pursue cuts to Medicaid and social services, though few cases have been brought to court. A judge on April 6 declined to immediately resume the Medicaid funding.

## Swalwell drops governor bid after allegations

*The Sacramento (Calif.) Bee*

Democratic candidate Eric Swalwell dropped out of the California governor's race Sunday afternoon after a former staffer accused the East Bay congressman of sexual assault and three others accused him of sexual misconduct, prompting key allies to withdraw endorsements and pressure him to withdraw from the race.

"I am suspending my campaign for Governor. To my family, staff, friends, and supporters, I am deeply sorry for mistakes in judgment I've made in my past," Swalwell wrote on X. "I will fight the serious, false allegations that have been made — but that's my fight, not a campaign's."

On Friday, the San Francisco Chronicle published the account of an unnamed woman who said Swalwell, 45, sexually assaulted her while she was too intoxicated to consent while she worked on his staff in 2019 and again after she'd left his office in 2024. Hours later, CNN published its own story of the woman as well as three

others who said Swalwell made unwanted advances. One said she'd ended up in his hotel room with little recollection of what transpired; the others said they'd received unsolicited nude photos.

Swalwell suspended his campaign 48 hours after he repeatedly denied any wrongdoing, as staff members fled, organized labor yanked their support, and Democrats from the California Legislature up to Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi urged him to withdraw from the race. On Monday, the U.S. House Ethics Committee announced it has begun an investigation into whether Swalwell engaged in sexual misconduct, The Associated Press reported.

He hinted at legal action after his attorney Elias Dabaie sent two accusers cease-and-desist letters.

Dabaie on Friday questioned the allegations as politically motivated and said the congressman, a married father of three, would return to the campaign trail to clear his name after taking time off to spend with family.

# Hungary votes out Orban, party after 16 years

*Bloomberg News*

An upstart opposition party in Hungary ousted Prime Minister Viktor Orban after 16 years in a historic election that will redefine the country's relationship with the European Union, Russia and the U.S. administration of President Donald Trump.

Peter Magyar's Tisza party was headed for a supermajority in parliament that will allow it to deliver on promises to dismantle Orban's illiberal system. Tisza had 69% of the parliamentary mandates compared with 28% for Orban's Fidesz, according to the Election Office in Budapest on Sunday, with 82% of the votes counted.

Orban conceded the election,

telling supporters that the result was "painful" for him. He said he had congratulated Magyar on his victory. The forint extended a months-long rally against the euro to rise to the strongest level in three years.

Magyar, a 45-year-old former ruling party insider, galvanized the country over the past two years with his message of change in the face of an increasingly authoritarian regime. As results trickled in, drivers honked their horns in celebration along the Danube river in Budapest as revelers took to the streets.

The result is a blow to Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, who sought to keep the European Union's longest

serving prime minister in power. Trump repeatedly endorsed Orban and sent Vice President JD Vance to Budapest to campaign for him just days before the vote.

The outcome also marks a defeat for the nationalist camp in Europe for whom Orban had been a trailblazer and the driving force behind its Patriots party, now the third-largest inside the European Parliament.

But it came as a big relief for the EU, which had struggled to overcome Orban's obstructionism over the years.

Putin had relied on the Hungarian leader to sow division in the EU, block aid to Ukraine and dilute sanctions against Moscow.

His ouster is now likely to pave the way for the release of \$106 billion in assistance that Kyiv badly needs to stay in the fight after more than four years of Russia's full-scale invasion.

But it's in Hungary — once a poster child for the transition from communism to market democracy, where Orban is a larger than life political figure — where the impact of Sunday's elections will be most keenly felt.

Magyar tapped into growing anger over cronyism, stagnant economy and rapidly deteriorating public services to challenge and eventually break the EU's longest-serving head of government's stranglehold on power.

## Pope vows more criticism of war after Trump attacks

*Bloomberg News*

Pope Leo XIV vowed to keep criticizing the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran, hours after President Donald Trump blasted the pontiff and opened up a fresh political rift with his Italian political allies.

"I will continue to speak out loudly against war, looking to promote peace, promoting dialogus and multilateral relationships among the states to look for just solutions to problems," Leo told reporters Monday.

The comments are likely to further escalate tensions between the president and the U.S.-born pope, who has been denouncing the war in Iran with increasing frequency.

Leo insisted he wasn't seeking to engage Trump, hours after the president attacked him.

"I don't want to get into a debate with him," he said. "I don't think that the message of the Gospel is meant to be abused in the way that some people are doing."

The spat began Friday, when

the pontiff wrote on X: "God does not bless any conflict. Anyone who is a disciple of Christ, the Prince of Peace, is never on the side of those who once wielded the sword who today drop bombs. Military action will not create space for freedom or times of #Peace."

On Sunday evening, Trump lashed out in response.

"I don't want a Pope who thinks it's OK for Iran to have a Nuclear Weapon," he wrote on Truth Social. "I don't want a Pope who thinks it's terrible that America attacked Venezuela, a Country that was sending massive amounts of Drugs into the United States and, even worse, emptying their prisons, including murderers, drug dealers, and killers, into our Country."

Moments later, Trump posted a picture that appeared to echo images of Jesus, depicting himself in robes healing a sick patient. Trump deleted the post Monday after being heavily criticized by supporters.

## Blockade starts; ceasefire hangs by a thread in Iran

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN

*Stars and Stripes*

A U.S. maritime blockade targeting Iranian ports took effect Monday, marking a sharp military escalation as a fragile ceasefire between Washington and Tehran appeared on the brink of collapse.

U.S. Central Command said its forces would block shipping traffic in and out of Iranian ports starting at 10 a.m. Monday, though details on how the blockade is being enforced remain limited.

With the blockade, President Donald Trump is applying severe economic pressure on Iran, which has largely restricted shipping through the Strait of Hormuz since the war began.

The closure of the strait, which usually carries about a fifth of the world's oil, has rattled global markets and sent fuel prices soaring.

The U.S. restrictions appear broad in scope. A U.K. Maritime Trade Operations advisory said the blockade encompasses the

entirety of Iran's coastline, including ports and energy infrastructure, and that neutral vessels currently within Iranian ports have been granted a limited grace period to depart.

In a post on Truth Social, Trump warned that any vessels approaching the blockade would be "immediately ELIMINATED," adding that the U.S. would use "the same system of kill that we use against the drug dealers on boats at Sea."

Earlier, U.S. Central Command said the blockade "will be enforced impartially against vessels of all nations entering or departing Iranian ports and coastal areas, including all Iranian ports on the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman."

"CENTCOM forces will not impede freedom of navigation for vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz to and from non-Iranian ports," the statement added.

The tensions continue to test the already fragile ceasefire, which was agreed to last week.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Family linked to Iranian 'propagandist' arrested

**DC** WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of State on Saturday announced it canceled the green cards of three more Iranian nationals and placed them in custody of federal immigration agents, noting their ties to a former Iranian politician.

The Iranians arrested, Seyed Eissa Hashemi, Maryam Tahmasebi and their son, were based in the Los Angeles area, and are now in the custody of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Their arrest comes amid an escalating crackdown by the Trump administration to strip permanent lawful residency status from Iranians with alleged ties to the Islamic regime, which so far has consisted of arresting relatives of prominent Iranian figures.

Hashemi, the State Department said, is the son of Masoumeh Ebtekar, who gained fame in the U.S. as a spokeswoman for militants who stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979 in support of the Islamic Revolution.

### Cosby wants new trial after order to pay \$60M

**NY** NEW YORK — Disgraced comedian Bill Cosby reportedly wants a civil case in which he was ordered to pay nearly \$60 million in damages to a woman who accused him of sexual assault to be reconsidered.

The 88-year-old sexual predator, who's been accused of abusing dozens of women, was found responsible last month for drugging and raping Donna

Motsinger in 1972. Cosby's attorneys are challenging the amount of money a jury ordered the former "The Cosby Show" star to pay, according to TMZ. His lawyers reportedly filed court papers Thursday asking for a new trial. The filing takes issue with several aspects of the case, including the claim that Motsinger's testimony merits \$19.25 million in compensatory damages.

Cosby's accuser was a waitress who said she was left incapacitated by pills and wine after attending one of the comic's shows in Los Angeles. He denies assaulting anyone but didn't testify in that case, The New York Times said.

### Million-pound fireworks stash led to blast

**CA** LOS ANGELES — A former Yolo County Sheriff's Office lieutenant is one of five people charged with murder following a fireworks warehouse explosion that killed seven workers in the rural Northern California community of Esparto last summer, authorities said.

Samuel Machado is accused of illegally having 1 million pounds of fireworks on his property at the time of the blast and using his law enforcement position to shield the illicit operation from scrutiny for years, according to the Yolo County district attorney's office.

Machado was placed on administrative leave following the violent July 1 explosion, which was felt by residents up to 20 miles away, destroyed a family farm and sparked a 78-acre grass fire.

Devastating Pyrotechnics LLC and Blackstar Fireworks

Inc. are accused of manufacturing and storing explosives — including some too powerful to even be legally considered fireworks — on Machado's property. On Friday, Yolo County District Attorney Jeff Reisig announced a 30-count felony indictment had been filed against seven people connected to the blast, following the largest investigation he's seen in two decades at the office.

The most serious counts are seven second-degree murder charges — one for each of the warehouse workers who died.

### TikTok psychic appeals \$10M federal jury award

**ID** BOISE — A woman ordered to pay \$10 million in damages to a University of Idaho professor who she repeatedly accused on social media of orchestrating the 2022 murders of four college students in Moscow, Idaho, has appealed the jury's award in federal court.

Ashley Guillard, 41, of Houston, filed a notice of appeal last week in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in response to the verdict in the civil defamation case brought against her by history professor Rebecca Scofield. After a four-day damages trial in February held in Boise in the U.S. District Court for the District of Idaho, a seven-member jury unanimously settled on the dollar figure owed by Guillard.

"Unfortunately, because the verdict doesn't align with the evidence or facts of the case, I have to appeal," Guillard told the Idaho Statesman in a text message the day after the Idaho jury's verdict. "I was hoping for a fair and impartial verdict so

that we all could move on."

In the weeks after the November 2022 murders, Guillard took to TikTok to initially level the allegations against Scofield, a tenured faculty member who chairs the university's history department. Even after the arrest of suspect Bryan Kohberger in late December 2022, Guillard said tarot card readings led her to Scofield, 40, and that she ordered the killings after having a romantic relationship with one of the four victims.

### Cops shoot man dead after machete attack

**NY** NEW YORK — A machete-wielding man screaming he was "Lucifer" was shot dead by cops after he slashed three elderly subway commuters in a terrifying, unprovoked attack in Grand Central Station in Midtown Manhattan on Saturday, police said.

Holding his weapon firmly in his hand, Anthony Griffin, 44, refused to drop his massive blade after two NYPD Transit detectives confronted him on the platform inside Grand Central Station around 9:40 a.m., Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said.

The detectives ordered him 20 times to drop his weapon, but he refused, Tisch said. When that didn't work, the detectives tried to defuse the situation by offering to help him if he dropped the menacing blade.

In the end, Griffin "advanced to the officers with his knife extended," Tisch said. "Officers fired, striking the perpetrator twice and immediately began using life saving measures." Griffin died of his wounds at Bellevue Hospital.

— From wire reports

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# McIlroy captures 2nd straight Masters

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Rory McIlroy is the Masters champion again, this time without falling to his knees on the 18th green and sobbing over finally achieving his lifelong dream.

That didn't make Sunday at Augusta National any easier.

McIlroy coughed up a six-shot lead in the third round. He fell two shots behind two players, Cameron Young and Justin Rose, in an electric final round. And then he delivered two big birdies around Amen Corner to join more elite company.

A year ago, his playoff victory over Rose made McIlroy only the sixth player with the career Grand Slam. With another green jacket, McIlroy joined Tiger Woods, Nick Faldo and Jack Nicklaus as the only repeat winners of the Masters.

"I thought it was so difficult to win last year because of trying to win the Masters and the Grand Slam, and then this year I realized it's just really difficult to win the Masters," McIlroy said after holding on for a one-shot victory over Scottie Scheffler. "Just incredible."

As usual, he kept everyone on edge until the very end.

His wedge barely cleared the false front of the par-5 15th, a shot that could have been disastrous.

His putt from behind the 16th green made a sharp turn down the slope to inches away for par. He saved par with a tough chip on the 17th. Staked to a two-shot lead, his tee shot on the 18th wound up closer to the 10th fairway.

"I'd say walking off the 18th tee not knowing where my ball was, that was the moment of greatest stress," McIlroy said.

He drilled 8-iron around the trees into a bunker, blasted out to 12 feet and took two putts for bogey and a 1-under 71. He thrust both arms in the air and made good on a promise.

"My parting message last year was I can't wait to come back and put the jacket on myself," McIlroy said at the trophy presentation. "I wasn't quite correct."

For the first time since Woods won back-to-back in 2002, it was left to the Augusta National chairman — Hootie Johnson for Woods, Fred Ridley for McIlroy — to do the honors. "It still fits," McIlroy said.

Better than ever.

He now has six majors, tied with Faldo, Lee Trevino and Phil Mickelson. And that sense of freedom he brought back to Augusta made him the finish line.

McIlroy seized control for good with a bold shot over Rae's Creek to 7 feet for birdie on the

par-3 12th. Then he blistered a 350-yard drive on the par-5 13th — he had been in the trees the previous three rounds — that set up another birdie to move three shots ahead.

He finished at 12-under 276.

It was more heartache for Rose, and frustration for the others who had a chance.

Rose had a two-shot lead that evaporated around Amen Corner with two bogeys and a three-putt par. He had to settle for a third close call at the Masters.

Young lost his two-shot lead much earlier with a long three-putt bogey on the par-3 sixth and taking bogey on the next hole when he hit wedge from the fairway into a bunker. One shot behind going to the back nine, Young closed with nine straight pars.

"There is no negative to take away other than obviously I would've loved a different result," Young said. "I pretty much had a birdie chance on every hole and didn't make any. That's how it goes sometimes."

As for Scheffler, the world's No. 1 player was in position to shatter the Masters record with the largest 36-hole comeback in history. He was 12 behind going into the weekend. He was two shots behind as he approached the turn. But he ran off 11 straight

pars, and that wasn't going to cut it during a final round with accessible pins to create excitement.

Scheffler had to settle for his third runner-up finish in the majors to go along with four titles. His 65-68 weekend made him the first player since 1942 to go bogey-free on the weekend at Augusta.

"I put up a good fight in order to give myself a chance," Scheffler said.

Rose, at age 45 trying to become the second-oldest Masters champion behind Jack Nicklaus (46) in 1986, made a most improbable birdie with a shot out of the trees to a foot on the seventh. That was the start of three straight birdies to close out the front nine and give him the lead.

But his approach to the 11th was well to the right and he failed to save par. His tee shot on the 12th was long, and his delicate chip didn't reach the green, leading to another bogey. And his 30-foot eagle putt on the par-5 13th ran 8 feet by the hole and he missed the birdie putt.

"Chance that got away," Rose said. "I was by no means free and clear and was nowhere kind of close to having the job done, but I was right in position. ... I was playing great, but just momentum shifted for me around the Amen Corner."

## Jokic eligible for NBA awards as Nuggets top Spurs

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Three-time MVP Nikola Jokic exited after playing the first half of the Denver Nuggets' 128-118 victory against the San Antonio Spurs on Sunday night, making an appearance in his 65th game to qualify for NBA awards.

Jokic had 23 points, eight rebounds, two assists and a blocked shot while playing 18 minutes, 15 seconds in the first half of Denver's regular-season finale.

"I think he embraced it because how hard those guys were playing with him," Nuggets coach David Adelman said. "There is a respect value there when he sees guys playing for opportunities. A guy like him who has

done everything in this game, I think he respects that. I heard the 'overrated' (chant by Spurs fans). I don't know about the overrated thing. He was on pace for 46 and 16, but anyway, it seemed like he had a good time out there."

The NBA requires players to participate in 65 games to be eligible for MVP, All-NBA and Defensive Player of the Year honors. The league allows two exemptions of 15 to 19:59 minutes played to count as an official game. Jokic had one exemption remaining.

Jokic was listed as questionable with an injured right wrist, but entered the finale having played in 64 games.

Jokic did not speak to reporters after the

game, exiting the locker room after grabbing his belongings.

Denver secured the No. 3 seed and will host Minnesota on Saturday in the opening round of the playoffs.

The Nuggets set a franchise record with their 26th road victory and did so while executing their game plan for Jokic.

"Yeah, he'll play the first half," Adelman said before tipoff. "Then we'll reconvene at halftime and see where he's at, where the game's at. It's what the rules provide. So we'll follow the rules."

Jokic, who won MVP in 2021, 2022 and 2024, has been named to the All-NBA Team in seven of his 11 seasons.

# Gibbs cruises to first Cup win at Bristol

Associated Press

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Outdueling two NASCAR Cup Series champions for the first victory of his career, Ty Gibbs made an emphatic and emotional breakthrough Sunday at Bristol Motor Speedway.

The win came in the 131st Cup start for the grandson of NASCAR Hall of Fame team owner and former Super Bowl-winning coach Joe Gibbs.

Ty Gibbs is also the son of the late Coy Gibbs, who also helped run his father's team before unexpectedly dying in his sleep Nov. 6, 2022 — the day after his son won the championship in NASCAR's second-highest division.

Ty Gibbs, 23, moved to the Cup series the next year and had multiple near-misses (runner-up finishes at Darlington in 2024 and Chicago last year) before reaching victory lane in his fourth season.

"This is one of my best experiences" Joe Gibbs said. "When I think about Coy, he brought Ty up the entire time. I know

he's probably watching."

Ty Gibbs interrupted his grandfather's postrace interview in the pits with a hug.

"This is the man right here," said Ty, whose mother, Heather, also is a co-owner of JGR. "I've never seen somebody work so hard in my life, him and my mom. I come to the shop at 6 a.m. or 7 p.m., and there's nobody there, but they are always there. They work their (butts) off. He's a great role model. I wouldn't be here unless it was for him."

Gibbs led the final 25 laps at Bristol, inheriting first place under caution on a strategy gamble by staying on track in his No. 54 Toyota while Ryan Blaney pitted from the lead along with Kyle Larson, who led a race-high 284 of 505 laps.

Blaney and Larson both restarted outside the top five, and Gibbs was cruising toward a win before the yellow flew again on the 498th lap to set up the first overtime restart at Bristol in 11 years.

Despite Blaney and Larson

having tires that were nearly 100 laps fresher, Gibbs fended off the star drivers on a two-lap shootout to the checkered flag.

"Honestly, I didn't really know or care if I was going to win or not," Gibbs said. "I thought the race was awesome. I really appreciate always racing Ryan Blaney and Kyle, too. Those guys always run me really well."

Blaney, the 2023 Cup champion who started from the pole position, finished second after leading 190 laps in the No. 12 Ford.

Larson, the defending Cup Series champion who won the first two stages, finished third and remained winless in the past 32 races with his No. 5 Chevrolet.

The Toyotas of Tyler Reddick and Chase Briscoe rounded out the top five.

Gibbs became the sixth NASCAR driver to earn his first Cup victory at Bristol, joining Dale Earnhardt (1979), Rusty Wallace (1986), Ernie Irvan (1990), Elliott Sadler (2001)

and Kurt Busch (2002).

"It's awesome to be with great people," the younger Gibbs said. "To be in this position is great. I'd love for my father to have seen this. I know he knew it was going to happen and expected it as well. Yeah, it was a great day for us. This is our family, so it's just such a great deal."

## Hendrick woes

While Larson excelled at the front, two of his Hendrick Motorsports teammates were struggling mightily.

William Byron started from the rear because of unapproved adjustments to his No. 24 Chevrolet, which had steering problems in practice and qualifying Saturday. Byron, who has led at every active track but Bristol, was off the pace from the start and finished five laps down.

Returning from missing four races because of vertigo, Alex Bowman started 27th and finished last after being involved in a multicar crash started by Shane van Gisbergen.

# Canadiens knock Islanders out of playoff contention

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Nick Suzuki had a goal and an assist to pass the 100-point mark for the season and the Montreal Canadiens beat New York 4-1 on Sunday, eliminating the Islanders from playoff contention.

Ivan Demidov, Alex Newhook and Zachary Bolduc also scored for Montreal, which continues its push for home-ice advantage in the opening round and a potential Atlantic Division title. Jacob Fowler made 30 saves, and defenseman Lane Hutson added three assists.

Casey Cizikas scored for New York and Ilya Sorokin stopped 18 shots, but the Islanders lost for the sixth time in their last seven games to fall out of postseason contention.

The Canadiens broke the game open late in the second period, scoring three goals in a 55-second span.

Suzuki opened the scoring with his 29th goal of the season, reaching the 100-point mark for the first time in his career.

Demidov made it 2-0 just 28 seconds later, finishing a one-timer off Suzuki's feed on the power play. It was Suzuki's 72nd assist.

Newhook capped the surge at 16:51 of the second with a wrist shot on a two-on-one rush.

Cizikas redirected a shot from Scott Mayfield to spoil Fowler's shutout bid midway through the third period.

**Capitals 3, Penguins 0:** Logan Thompson stopped 24 shots, and host Washington kept its slim playoff hopes alive by beating

Pittsburgh in perhaps the final home of Alex Ovechkin's brilliant career.

To reach the postseason, the Capitals must defeat Columbus in the season finale Tuesday night and hope Philadelphia fails to win either of its last two games.

**Bruins 3, Blue Jackets 2:** Mark Kastelic scored with 9:38 remaining and visiting Boston snapped a five-game losing streak with a win over Columbus that moved it into the first Eastern Conference wild-card spot while virtually eliminating the Blue Jackets from playoff contention.

Columbus has lost five of its last seven games to fall out of playoff contention after sitting as high as second place in the Metropolitan Division on March 24. Jet Greaves made 19 saves.

**Devils 4, Senators 2 (OT):** Nico Hischier scored his second goal of the game on the power play with 1:45 left in overtime to give host New Jersey a win over Ottawa.

The Devils trailed 3-2 after two periods, but Dawson Mercer scored a short-handed goal with 7:32 left in the third period to tie it at 3-3, setting the stage for Hischier's winner.

**Canucks 4, Ducks 3 (OT):** Marco Rossi scored with 9.5 seconds left in overtime to help visiting Vancouver beat Anaheim and prevent the Ducks from clinching a playoff spot.

**Flames 4, Mammoth 1:** Brayden Pachal scored his first NHL goal of the season and added two assists as Calgary's hot streak at home continued with a victory over Utah.

# Ex-Cardinal Contreras leads Red Sox to win

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Willson Contreras homered against his former team and matched a career high with four hits, leading the Boston Red Sox past the St. Louis Cardinals 9-3 on Sunday.

Trevor Story also had four hits for Boston. Contreras launched a two-run shot in the second inning off Andre Pallante and finished with three RBIs. He was acquired by the Red Sox from St. Louis in a December trade.

“I kind of played like little mind games,” Contreras said. “I got on the plate. I got on the box, and everything went south for him (Pallante). A 3-1 count, I wasn’t swinging. I was expecting like a hit by pitch or something like that, because I was on top of the plate. He executed and, then, I was like there’s no way he’s throwing off-speed right here. So I was looking for that sinker, especially middle down, and that’s when I got it.”

Contreras singled in the third, fourth and seventh before popping out to left field in the ninth. It was his eighth career four-hit game and first since June 2023 with the Cardinals against the Chicago Cubs in London.

Brayan Bello (1-1) allowed two runs and six hits over 6⅓ innings in his 100th career start.

Jordan Walker hit his major league-leading seventh home run in the second for St. Louis. Alec Burleson also went deep, but Pallante (1-1) gave up seven runs and 10 hits in five innings.

**Orioles 6, Giants 2:** Samuel Basallo hit a two-run homer, Pete Alonso also drove in two runs and host Baltimore defeated San Francisco.

Orioles starter Cade Povich (1-0) retired the first 12 batters and yielded one run in 6⅓ innings on his 26th birthday. The left-hander allowed five hits and no walks and struck out five.

**Diamondbacks 4, Phillies 3:**

Jose Fernandez and Adrian Del Castillo hit RBI singles in the eighth inning as visiting Arizona rallied to send Philadelphia to its fourth loss in five games.

James McCann doubled and had two hits, and Taylor Clarke (1-0) pitched a scoreless seventh for the win as the Diamondbacks won for the fourth time in five games and took two of three from the Phillies.

**Twins 8, Blue Jays 2:** Tristan Gray hit a three-run home run, Kody Clemens added a solo shot and visiting Minnesota beat Toronto.

Taj Bradley (3-0) allowed one run and five hits in five innings with four walks and seven strikeouts to win his third straight start as the Twins took two of three from the Blue Jays. Minnesota has won six of seven overall.

**Angels 9, Reds 6:** José Soriano struck out 10 over seven shutout innings to become the major leagues’ first four-game winner, and Los Angeles beat Cincinnati for its first series victory at Great American Ball Park since 2007.

Soriano (4-0) allowed two hits and three walks, throwing 106 pitches and lowering his big league-best ERA to 0.33. He became the first Angels pitcher to win his first four games since Jered Weaver won six straight in 2011.

**Athletics 1, Mets 0:** Nick Kurtz hit his first home run this season, sending the visiting Athletics to a victory and a three-game sweep of slumping New York.

Aaron Civale (2-0) allowed four hits in 5⅓ innings as the A’s won their fifth straight. They swept the Mets for the first time, immediately after winning a series against the Yankees in New York for the first time since 2016.

**Tigers 8, Marlins 2:** Tarik Skubal outpitched Sandy Alcántara in a matchup of Cy Young Award winners, Dillon

Dingler, Kevin McGonigle and Kerry Carpenter homered and host Detroit earned a three-game sweep with a win over Miami.

Skubal (2-2) retired the first nine batters he faced and the two-time reigning AL Cy Young winner had a no-hit bid broken up by Austin Slater’s bloop single with two outs in the sixth. He allowed a run and a season-low two hits with seven strikeouts in 6⅓ innings.

**Rays 5, Yankees 4:** Drew Rasmussen allowed one hit in six scoreless innings, and host Tampa Bay completed its first three-game sweep of New York since 2021.

Returning after missing time for the birth of his daughter, Rasmussen (1-0) struck out seven without a walk. The Rays moved above .500 for the first time this season at 8-7 and extended the Yankees’ losing streak to five games.

**White Sox 6, Royals 5:** Tanner Murray hit his first major league home run, Colson Montgomery also connected and visiting Chicago outlasted Kansas City after the first pitch was pushed back three hours because of rain.

Dustin Harris led off the seventh inning with a pinch-hit double and scored the tiebreaking run for the White Sox on a wild pitch by John Schreiber (0-2).

**Padres 7, Rockies 2:** Ty France went 3-for-3 with a home run and scored three times as surging San Diego finished a four-game sweep of visiting Colorado.

Ramón Laureano hit a two-run homer and Jackson Merrill also went deep for the Padres, who have won five in a row and eight of nine. Starting pitcher Nick Pivetta, however, exited with right elbow stiffness in the fourth inning.

**Mariners 6, Astros 1:** Logan Gilbert threw seven innings of one-run ball, and host Seattle beat Houston to extend the As-

tros’ losing streak to seven.

Luke Raley had three hits and two RBIs for the Mariners, who won the first three games of the four-game series after a five-game losing streak. They beat Houston for the 100th time.

**Rangers 5, Dodgers 2:** Shohei Ohtani hit his second straight leadoff home run, but visiting Texas rallied to beat Los Angeles and avoid a three-game sweep.

Evan Carter hit a tying home run off Roki Sasaki (0-2) in the third, and Brandon Nimmo drove in two runs for the Rangers.

**Nationals 8, Brewers 6:** Keibert Ruiz singled home two runs to break an eighth-inning tie and visiting Washington defeated Milwaukee to complete its first series sweep of the Brewers in 15 years.

Brice Turang hit two solo shots and Jake Bauers also went deep for Milwaukee, which has lost five straight for its longest skid since June 2023.

**Cubs 7, Pirates 6:** Michael Busch ended an 0-for-30 slide with a tying, two-run single in the eighth inning and Carson Kelly had a winning single in the ninth as host Chicago overcame a five-run deficit to beat Pittsburgh.

Busch, benched from the starting lineup, pinch hit for Matt Shaw with two outs in the eighth after a pair of walks by Justin Lawrence and looped an opposite-field single into short left that tied the score 6-6.

**Braves 13, Guardians 1:** Jorge Mateo had four hits, Dominic Smith launched a two-run homer and Chris Sale (3-1) threw six innings of one-run ball to cruise to his third win of the season as host Atlanta pounded Cleveland.

The Braves took two of three games from the Guardians and are the only team yet to lose a series this season (4-0-1). Atlanta, which got 19 hits, leads the NL East by two games.