

## Trump says US, Iran to hold more talks

*Stars and Stripes*

U.S. negotiators will travel to Pakistan for another round of talks with Iran, President Donald Trump said Sunday, continuing diplomacy as tensions in the Strait of Hormuz threaten to unravel a fragile ceasefire.

In a post on Truth Social, Trump said his representatives will be in Islamabad on Monday evening for negotiations, despite Iran firing on ships in the strait a day earlier — a move he said “wasn’t nice” and represented a “Total Violation” of the U.S.-Iran ceasefire.

“We’re offering a very fair and reasonable DEAL, and I hope they take it,” Trump said, warning that if Iran does not agree, the United States would “knock out every single Power Plant and every single Bridge in Iran,” repeating a threat he has made in recent weeks.

“NO MORE MR. NICE GUY!” he added.

It was not immediately clear

whether more talks would take place.

Iranian state media reported late Sunday that Iran will not participate in more negotiations until the U.S. ends its naval blockade.

The possibility of more talks follows a whirlwind several days that have left both the state of the U.S.-Iran conflict and the timeline for reopening the Strait of Hormuz increasingly unclear.

After Iran unexpectedly announced Friday the strait would be open during a ceasefire, Trump said a U.S. naval blockade on Iran would remain in place.

Within hours, Iran reversed course, reimposing restrictions and firing on commercial ships trying to pass through.

Iran’s military said Saturday that its “strict management and control” of the strait would continue until the U.S. ends its naval blockade.

The Strait of Hormuz has been effectively shut down since the launch of the joint U.S.-Israel military operation against Iran nearly two months ago.

The U.S. Navy blockade aims to wrest control from Iran, whose retaliatory measures have reduced maritime traffic there to a trickle.

Since the start of the blockade last week, 23 ships have complied with direction from U.S. forces to turn around and return to Iran, U.S. Central Command said Saturday.

A British maritime security monitoring group reported that multiple ships either came under fire or were struck by projectiles in the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday.

The developments show how dangerous the situation remains in the vital shipping lane, and how it could easily worsen, even as both sides signal a willingness to keep negotiating.

In a national address Saturday, Iran’s parliamentary speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, who has played a key role in negotiations, said Tehran remains engaged in diplomacy but is prepared for further conflict.

He said Iran does not trust the United States and warned that escalation remains possible, while also asserting that Iran maintains control over the Strait of Hormuz.

There were also signs the ceasefire in Lebanon — linked to Iran’s decision to allow Hormuz traffic — may be fraying.

The Israeli military said it struck “saboteurs” approaching its troops in violation of the truce.

The developments upend rising optimism that the U.S. and Iran were nearing a broad agreement to end the war that has claimed thousands of lives and disrupted energy exports from the Persian Gulf.

## Navy confirms Triton crash as drone losses mount

**By ALISON BATH**

*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy — The Navy last week confirmed the loss of a multimillion-dollar reconnaissance drone, one of more than a dozen costly unmanned aerial vehicles the U.S. has reportedly lost so far during the Iran war.

The MQ-4C Triton intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance drone was listed as having crashed April 9, according to a Naval Safety Command mishaps report released Tuesday. The report withheld the drone’s location, citing operational security.

Several open-source intelligence analysts said a Triton drone crashed into the Persian Gulf that day after sending emergency communications following a mission over the Strait of Hormuz.

The drone was returning to Naval Air Station Sigonella on the Italian island of Sicily, the analysts said. It’s unclear whether the aircraft was shot down or experienced some sort of other problem.

U.S. Central Command did not answer questions about the incident, including whether there were plans to recover the drone.

The Navy has maintained a rotational Triton drone detachment at Sigonella since March 2024.

The base also has a rotational P-8 Poseidon patrol and reconnaissance detachment.

Sigonella’s location in the Mediterranean Sea enables deployment of aircraft throughout Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

On Thursday, it appeared that a replacement MQ-4C had arrived at the base from the U.S., according to online reports. The drone was transmitting the same registration as the one that disappeared over the

Persian Gulf, one open-source intelligence analyst noted.

The Navy has about 20 Tritons, which cost about \$238 million each, according to a report by the defense online news site The War Zone.

More than a dozen multimillion-dollar U.S. drones have been lost since the U.S. and Israel launched a joint attack on Iran in February, The Wall Street Journal reported.

Of those, about a dozen were lost to air or ground attacks by Iranian missiles, while another was mistakenly shot down by a Persian Gulf nation, according to the report.

# N. Korea shows 'increase' in nuclear capacity

By JULIE MASSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

A recent surge in nuclear facility activity suggests North Korea may be significantly advancing its ability to produce nuclear weapons, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog said.

Rafael Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, told reporters in Seoul, South Korea, on Wednesday that the uptick in Pyongyang's operations, including at the Yongbyon nuclear complex, "point to a very serious increase" in its current weapons development capacity.

On Sunday, North Korea launched multiple short-range ballistic missiles toward the sea, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of

Staff said in an Associated Press report.

The missiles fired from the North's Sinpo area flew about 87 miles each toward the country's eastern waters, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

South Korea's military was analyzing whether the latest launches were made from a submarine, a land-based launcher or both platforms, the AP report said, citing South Korean media.

The U.S. and Japanese militaries also said they detected the launches.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said it remains committed to the defense of the U.S. homeland and its allies in the region.

Grossi was in Seoul to meet with South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Hyun to discuss the North's nuclear program and the South's plan to develop its own nuclear-powered submarines.

The IAEA in June said North Korea appeared to be building a new facility with "dimensions and features" like those at its other major nuclear site in Kangson, in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Grossi at his press conference confirmed Pyongyang is building a new facility at Yongbyon resembling its existing uranium enrichment plant.

Although precise production levels are difficult to determine without on-site access, the new

facility's external features suggest a "significant increase" in enrichment capacity, Grossi said.

In his meeting with Cho, the two leaders expressed "deep concerns" about North Korea's nuclear program and underscored the IAEA's "indispensable verification role in support of much-needed renewed diplomatic efforts on this issue," according to an IAEA statement Wednesday.

Cho in the statement reaffirmed Seoul's commitment to fully comply with its obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as it pursues plans for conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines.

## Trump order to ease restrictions on psychedelic drugs

*Bloomberg News*

President Donald Trump signed an executive order to expedite research and access to psychedelics used outside the U.S. to treat post-traumatic stress disorder.

"Today's order will ensure that people suffering from debilitating symptoms might finally have a chance to reclaim their lives and lead a happier life," Trump said in an Oval Office ceremony Saturday.

The order directs the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to issue new guidance to researchers on ibogaine, a psychedelic compound extracted from the iboga plant in Africa that's used to treat depression, anxiety and PTSD for military veterans. The hallucinogen is considered a Schedule I controlled substance and is prohibited for use in the U.S.

While the order doesn't reclassify the drug for medical

use, Trump urged the health professionals arrayed behind him at the event to reclassify it quickly.

Trump's directive calls for a \$50 million federal research investment into ibogaine, and opens an opportunity for terminally ill, or "desperately" ill, patients to try the drug under the Right to Try law passed during his first term.

Ibogaine has been shown in small studies to reduce opioid

withdrawal symptoms and help treat traumatic brain injuries, though clinical evidence remains limited. Its classification has made ibogaine almost impossible to study in the U.S. It's also known for serious medical risks, particularly heart complications.

Psychedelic therapy has gained momentum in recent years, with some studies suggesting benefits of using hallucinogens.

## Navy: Fire aboard USS Eisenhower injures 3 sailors

By GARY WARNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Three sailors were injured Tuesday by a fire aboard the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Navy said Thursday.

The Navy's second-oldest aircraft carrier, which was commissioned in 1977, is currently

undergoing maintenance at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth, Va.

"On April 14, USS Dwight D. Eisenhower experienced a small fire that was immediately contained and extinguished by ship's force and Norfolk Naval Shipyard personnel, who responded swiftly as trained," the

Navy said in a statement.

"Three sailors were treated by ship's medical and returned to full duty."

The cause of the fire is under investigation.

Capt. Anthony Falvo, spokesman for Navy Fleet Forces in Norfolk, said the incident would not delay the Dwight D. Eisen-

hower finishing its maintenance cycle later this year.

The Dwight D. Eisenhower has been undergoing post-deployment maintenance since January 2025 at the Navy shipyard adjacent to its homeport at Norfolk Naval Station. It was last deployed in 2023-24 with the 5th Fleet in the Middle East.

# Budget resolution for ICE to be released

*CQ-Roll Call*

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans plan to release a budget resolution this week that would kick-start the process for a reconciliation bill on immigration enforcement funding and help end a partial shutdown of the Department of Homeland Security, lawmakers said Thursday.

The party is aiming to provide about \$70 billion in funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Border Patrol to sustain them for at least the next three years, without placing any new guardrails on federal immigration agents sought by Democrats.

The budget resolution would contain instructions to the Home-

land Security and Governmental Affairs and Judiciary panels, which would be charged with writing the details of the upcoming reconciliation bill.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said Thursday that the chamber is “hoping to get on a budget resolution by middle to end of next week.”

“It’s drafted,” Thune said. “Text hasn’t been released, but we’ve been working on it for some time.”

Thune said Republicans have had “a number of conversations” with Senate Parliamentarian Elizabeth MacDonough, who provides guidance about what is allowed in reconciliation under Senate rules.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., has said he would hold up a Senate-passed bill that funds the department except for immigration enforcement functions until a budget reconciliation bill providing funding to those agencies is passed.

The administration has set a June 1 deadline for that bill, which could mean another month and a half of the shutdown.

Some Republicans in both chambers, especially the House, have been calling for the party to take this opportunity to pursue a wider reconciliation package that could encompass everything from farm aid to defense and voter ID measures.

But the Senate is hesitant to ex-

pand the package, especially with the shutdown continuing. Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D., said the Senate is responding to the House’s request for immigration enforcement funding to clear a path for the Senate’s DHS appropriations bill.

“Every time you add stuff to it, you add committees of jurisdiction, you add complexity, and you add more time, right?” he said. “So if they want it expeditiously, which is what we’re working on right now, then you wouldn’t add stuff, right?”

Top DHS officials, meanwhile, took to Capitol Hill on Thursday to bemoan the shutdown and highlight its negative repercussions.

# Senate passes short-term surveillance extension

*CQ-Roll Call*

WASHINGTON — The Senate passed a short-term extension of a key spy authority on Friday, sending to President Donald Trump a patchwork agreement intended to give House lawmakers more time to work out a deal over the privacy protections and other issues.

The measure, passed by voice vote in the Senate, would extend Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act through April 30. Senate passage came hours after the

House passed the measure.

The program allows the U.S. government to collect digital communications of foreigners located outside the country. But Section 702 is controversial because it also sweeps up the communications of Americans and allows the FBI to search through data without a warrant, using information such as an email address.

The statutory authority for the program was set to expire Monday without congressional intervention.

The 10-day extension was an off-ramp for Republican House leadership, after initial plans to pass a longer-term “clean” reauthorization imploded on the House floor, with privacy hawks in both parties wanting to see further privacy guardrails in the bill.

The short-term patch will ensure the government can continue to take in information from electronic communication service providers, as part of a program that U.S. intelligence agencies say is indispensable to

U.S. national security.

In particular, those spy agencies argue that the authority protects critical U.S. infrastructure, helps foil attacks and assists authorities in identifying foreign actors targeting people in the U.S.

But the program has been marred by controversy for many years, both because it allows searches through data using an American’s name and phone number, but also because of high-profile cases of past misconduct.

# Blue Origin successfully lands reused rocket booster

*Orlando (Fla.) Sentinel*

Jeff Bezos’ Blue Origin joined Elon Musk’s SpaceX in the club of commercial companies to launch, land and reflly a rocket booster during a mission that lifted off from Florida’s Space Coast early Sunday.

It’s a club SpaceX had been the lone member of for more than nine years.

But on only its third flight ever, a New Glenn rocket using the

same booster flown on its second mission lifted off from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station’s Launch Complex 36 at 7:25 a.m.

For good measure, the booster stuck its landing about 375 miles downrange in the Atlantic once again.

The booster is named “Never Tell Me the Odds,” in reference to Han Solo’s retort to C-3PO telling him the chances of successfully navigating an asteroid

field was approximately 3,720-1 in the 1980 film now named “Star Wars: Episode V — The Empire Strikes Back.”

While the booster fuselage was the same, the seven BE-4 engines powering the heavy-lift rocket were new. Combined they provided 3.85 million pounds of thrust on liftoff, compared to the 1.7 million pounds of thrust on a Falcon 9.

Just over nine minutes after

liftoff, the booster slowed to a pinpoint landing on the ship Jacklyn, which is named after Bezos’ mother. As the smoke cleared from the live stream of the landing, cheers from different watch parties among Blue Origin offices around the country drowned out the commentators.

Along for the ride was a payload from Midland, Texas-based AST SpaceMobile.

# Bear suit used in luxury car insurance scam

*Los Angeles Times*

LOS ANGELES — “Operation Bear Claw” was definitely a new kind of insurance fraud case.

The target: a Rolls-Royce and two Mercedes-Benzes.

The weapon: a bear suit and meat claws.

A Southern California woman and two men, who pleaded no contest last week in a scheme to rip off insurance companies by putting on a bear costume and staging fake attacks on luxury vehicles, have been sentenced to jail time.

The scam was strictly small-time. Insurance companies lost a total of \$141,839. But authorities said it represented a highly unusual take on car insurance fraud that was uncovered only when an investigator from one of the insurance companies took a care-

ful look at surveillance video of one of the orchestrated attacks.

“It’s definitely out of the ordinary,” said Capt. Eric Hood, a 20-year veteran with the California Department of Insurance who led the probe, in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* on Friday. “I don’t think we saw anything to that extent in the past where they got a bear suit. It’s definitely unique.”

“What may have looked unbelievable turned out to be exactly that — and now those responsible are being held accountable,” state Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara said in a statement.

The state’s investigation into the bizarre scheme started in 2024 after the group claimed a bear entered their 2010 Rolls-Royce Ghost, which retails for \$245,000 new, in Lake Arro-

whead and scratched up the inside of the car.

In an attempt to bolster their story, they even submitted a video of the incident — but it ultimately would be their undoing, authorities said.

Video of the attack released by the Department of Insurance shows what appears to be, to the casual observer, at least, a person in a brown bear costume entering a car and rummaging around and pawing at the inside. The video includes photos of superficial scratches on the vehicle’s expensive leather seats and door panel.

But when an insurance company claims investigator reviewed the video footage, they noticed something odd. Aside from the fact that there hasn’t been a true brown bear, or Cali-

fornia grizzly, in the Golden State since in the 1920s, the way the ferocious — albeit slightly skinny — beast was moving looked less ursine and more human.

Detectives enlisted help from a California Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist to review the video, and they agreed it was clearly a human in a bear suit.

Through their investigation, authorities discovered the individuals made two additional insurance claims — one for a 2015 Mercedes G63 AMG and another for a 2022 Mercedes E350 — with separate companies. All three of the claims, which authorities allege were fraudulent, had the same date of loss and the same location. And all included very similar videos.

Two of the companies fell for the ruse, officials said.

## Trial date set in lawsuit against ‘Rust’ producers

*Los Angeles Times*

Nearly two years after actor Alec Baldwin was cleared of criminal charges in the “Rust” movie shooting death, a long simmering civil negligence case is inching toward a trial this fall.

On Friday, a Los Angeles Superior Court judge denied a summary judgment motion requested by the film producers Rust Movie Productions LLC, as well as actor/producer Baldwin and his company El Dorado Pictures to dismiss the case.

During a hearing, Superior Court Judge Maurice Leiter set an Oct. 12 trial date.

The negligence suit was brought more than four years ago by Serge Svetnoy, who served as the chief lighting technician on the problem-plagued western film. Svetnoy was close friends with cinematographer Halyna Hutchins and held her in his arms as she lay dying on the floor of the New Mexico movie set. Baldwin’s firearm had discharged, launch-

ing a .45 caliber bullet, which struck and killed her.

Svetnoy was the first crew member of the ill-fated western to bring a lawsuit against the producers, alleging they were negligent in Hutchins’ October 2021 death. He maintains he has suffered trauma in the years since. In addition to negligence, his lawsuit also accuses the producers of intentional infliction of emotional distress.

Prosecutors dropped criminal charges against Baldwin, who has long maintained he was not responsible for Hutchins’ death.

The judge denied the defendants’ request to dismiss the negligence, emotional distress and punitive damages claims. One count directed at Baldwin, alleging assault, was dropped.

Svetnoy has said the bullet “narrowly missed him,” according to the gaffer’s suit.

Attorneys for Baldwin and the producers were not immediately available for comment.

## Feds shake up probe into alleged Trump conspiracy

*Bloomberg News*

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department is shaking up the team probing former CIA Director John Brennan as part of a broad investigation into an alleged years-long conspiracy against President Donald Trump, according to people familiar with the matter.

The prosecutor leading the day-to-day operations in the Brennan investigation, which is being run out of the U.S. attorney’s office in Miami, is no longer handling the case, according to the people, who asked not to be named speaking about a confidential inquiry. It wasn’t immediately clear why the prosecutor, Maria Medetis Long, left the case. The Justice Department portrayed the move as being common inside U.S. attorneys’ offices.

“As a matter of routine practice, attorneys are moved around on cases so offices can most effectively allocate resources,” the Justice Department said in a

statement. “It is completely healthy and normal to change members of legal teams.”

A former top aide to Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche, Christopher-James DeLorenz, also relocated from Justice Department headquarters to work as an assistant U.S. attorney for the Southern District in recent months, according to people familiar with the matter. DeLorenz is working on the Brennan investigation as well as other office cases, the people said.

The government has subpoenaed Brennan and others asking for information related to the intelligence community’s assessments around whether Russia interfered in the 2016 election.

The move comes after Trump fired Attorney General Pam Bondi this month and replaced her with Blanche, her former deputy. Trump and his allies have called for the department to prosecute their perceived political enemies, including Brennan.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Leader of SantaCon pub crawl a conman, feds say**

**NY** NEW YORK — SantaCon is led by a conman who siphoned more than a million dollars raised for charity during the yearly crimson plague of drunken revelry — a grinch who “stole Christmas from tens of thousands of victims,” federal prosecutors in Manhattan charged last week.

Suspected Bad Santa Stefan Pildes pleaded not guilty to wire fraud in Manhattan Federal Court, hours after his early morning arrest for allegedly diverting to a slush fund at least half of the roughly \$2.7 million raised for charity by SantaCon participants from 2019 to 2024.

U.S. Attorney Jay Clayton said the leader of the notorious pub crawl for years promoted SantaCon “as an event grounded in charitable giving, but instead of donating the millions of dollars he raised, he ran his own con game.”

“He took advantage of New Yorkers’ generous holiday spirit to finance his lifestyle through personal expenses, big and small,” Clayton said in a statement.

“No matter how you dress it up, fraud is fraud.”

Pildes, 50, of Hewitt, N.J., was released on an \$300,000 bond and barred from involvement with this year’s SantaCon.

**Woman tried to run over mail carrier, police say**

**FL** MIAMI — A Miami woman called a U.S. Postal Service mail carrier a racial slur and tried to hit her with her SUV, police said.

The carrier was delivering

mail around 4:25 p.m. Tuesday when she was allegedly confronted by 34-year-old Lourdes Maria Portugues.

Portugues’ child went up to the carrier to collect the mail while Portugues was standing by the front door, according to an arrest affidavit by the Miami Police Department. Portugues yelled at her child not to speak to the mail carrier, calling the woman a racial slur, police said.

Portugues grabbed a hose and started spraying the mail carrier, who called police.

Portugues got inside her Lincoln Nautilus SUV and sped toward the mail carrier, who moved out of the way, police said.

Portugues is accused of trying to hit her with the SUV two more times. Several witnesses and the victim ran toward the sidewalk to avoid being hit, police said. The incident was captured on video surveillance.

**Lawsuit: Police wrong to swarm birthday party**

**CO** DENVER — An alert from Denver’s gunshot detection system prompted police officers to swarm a Montbello woman’s 70th birthday party with guns drawn and detain Black partygoers for close to an hour — even though the ShotSpotter alert was 20 minutes old, for a neighboring address and was likely triggered by fireworks, according to a new lawsuit.

The two dozen or so people at Augusta Horton’s home in the 5100 block of Crown Boulevard on the evening of April 13, 2024, told Denver police officers that no one had fired any shots around them and that their neighbors were setting off fire-

works, but the officers nevertheless detained the partygoers — at times at gunpoint — and forced them to submit to unlawful searches, according to the complaint filed in Denver District Court on Monday.

The lawsuit claims unreasonable searches and seizures and failure to intervene, as well as claims related to the police department’s initial refusal to release records related to the incident.

**Man arrested near golf course with ‘Joker’ rifle**

**CA** LOS ANGELES — A man armed with a rifle that bore phrases from the Batman villain “The Joker” is facing felony firearms charges after he was seen running in traffic near the Trump National Golf Club in Rancho Palos Verdes, sheriff’s officials said.

Sean Steiner, 36, of Glendale, Ariz., was charged with possession of an assault weapon, possession of a short-barreled rifle or shotgun, possession of a large-capacity magazine and carrying a loaded firearm in public, according to Los Angeles County Superior Court records. Steiner has not yet entered a plea and could not be reached for comment.

Steiner was arrested on March 29 when Los Angeles County sheriff’s deputies responded after someone called to report that a man was running in traffic. Steiner had also been seen hiking through trails wearing a bulletproof vest and gloves and armed with several weapons, according to the Sheriff’s Department.

When Steiner was arrested, deputies seized a loaded “joker-

style” rifle that was painted in green and purple and had the phrases “Why so serious?” and “Let’s put a smile on that face” written on it. The tip of the firearm was painted orange, resembling a toy gun, the Sheriff’s Department said. Steiner told deputies that he had fired one of the guns he was carrying near a landslide area to get “some anger out,” according to the Sheriff’s Department.

**Few police have required training in de-escalation**

**WA** SEATTLE — Only a fraction of Washington law enforcement officers have completed de-escalation and mental-health training mandated by state law and intended to reduce the use of force and improve public interactions with police, according to a state performance audit.

The requirements were required by a sweeping citizens initiative, I-940, which took effect in 2018 and overhauled accountability requirements for the state’s 11,000 sworn police officers. Among its provisions was the Law Enforcement Training and Community Safety Act, which requires officers to receive 40 hours of training emphasizing de-escalation, mental health and cultural awareness.

However, the state audit, released Tuesday, shows that just 16% of veteran officers and 14% of new officers have completed the training. The audit states that, at the current rate of training, fewer than half of the state’s officers will have completed the basic patrol-tactics portion by 2028, a deadline set by the statute.

— From wire reports



Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com).

**Reporting World, National and Military News**

# Rockets fail to stop Lakers without Durant

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Kevin Durant was ruled out of Houston's playoff opener against the Los Angeles Lakers with a bruised right knee about 90 minutes before tipoff.

The rest of the Rockets were neither ready nor able to pick up the slack.

Houston is in an early postseason hole and Los Angeles is feeling awfully good about its upset chances after the Lakers' 107-98 victory on Saturday night.

Both teams were without their top scorer to begin the first-round series, but only LA responded to the challenge with the necessary determination and production. With Durant, Luka Doncic and Austin Reaves — a combined 82.8 points per game — all watching in street clothes, the Lakers surprisingly controlled Game 1.

While Los Angeles got double-digit scoring from all five starters and 60.6% shooting overall, the Rockets didn't have a 20-point scorer or anybody who could make more than 50% of his

shots except reserve Tari Eason. Those results were even more disturbing because Houston grabbed 21 offensive rebounds, and coach Ime Udoka thought his team got plenty of good looks.

"Whoever (is) playing, we play with them," Rockets center Alperen Sengun said. "But we missed (Durant) for sure tonight, and hopefully we see him soon."

Sengun had 19 points on 6-for-19 shooting, while Reed Sheppard and Amen Thompson got 17 points apiece on a combined 13 of 38 from the field. Sheppard went 5 for 14 on 3-point attempts, and his teammates combined to hit just six additional 3-pointers.

Houston seems confident Durant's bruised right knee isn't a long-term problem, although Udoka said Durant's knee is "very tender. ... Tough to bend in certain ways. Hit it in a very awkward spot, I suppose. Pain tolerance is one part, but (also) limited movement."

The fifth-leading scorer in NBA history collided with a

teammate during practice Wednesday, and he was added to the Rockets' injury report Friday.

Durant was a late scratch, while the Lakers have had more than two weeks to adjust to being without injured Doncic and Reaves.

That preparation time showed. Most notably, Luke Kennard continued to step up as a starter with a career playoff-high 27 points and 5-for-5 shooting on 3-pointers, providing more reason for LA to be grateful for his midseason arrival in a trade with Atlanta.

"Since I've been here, we haven't been really healthy a lot, so this just speaks on the guys in the locker room staying ready, being ready," Kennard said. "Guys stepping up in big moments, making big shots. I feel like everybody did that tonight."

Deandre Ayton delivered a confident 19 points and 11 rebounds, and Rui Hachimura also showed offensive aggression — an all-too-rare quality in the forward — while scoring 14

points. Veteran guard Marcus Smart added 15 points and eight assists, and 41-year-old LeBron James merely controlled the floor while racking up 19 points, 13 assists and eight rebounds.

"It's just our playoff mentality," Lakers coach JJ Redick said. "You can't worry about who's in or out of the lineup. It's our game plan. It's our standards. It's how we play, and we've built towards that. I thought our guys just responded well and met the moment. That's the biggest thing. You've got to meet the moment in every game, and (the Lakers) were able to do that. There's a lot that you have to do (against) Kevin, and you just kind of scrap that and you move on to all the other stuff we worked on."

Durant's absence and Los Angeles' performance in Game 1 have both suddenly provided significant credibility to the Lakers' determination to hang with Houston long enough for Doncic and Reaves to have an opportunity to return to the post-season.

## Murray scores 30 as Nuggets defeat T-wolves in Game 1

Associated Press

DENVER — Jamal Murray scored 30 points, going 16 of 16 from the free-throw line, and Nikola Jokic had a triple-double as the Denver Nuggets shook off a sluggish start to beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 116-105 on Saturday in the opener of their first-round playoff series.

Jokic had 25 points, 13 rebounds, 11 assists and a bloody nose in a physical game between the Northwest Division foes. There were 42 fouls called, along with an unsportsmanlike technical on Jaden McDaniels for pushing Jokic in the back and a technical on Denver coach David Adelman.

The Nuggets have won 13 straight since their last loss March 18.

Murray and Denver trailed by as many as 12 points early, but used a 17-2 run in the third quarter to build a double-digit lead. Minnesota, which was held scoreless for more than four minutes at one point in the third, trimmed the deficit to 97-95 with 6:23 left.

Jokic had a five-point stretch to hold off the Timberwolves. Murray had one of the biggest shots of the game from halfcourt. With the shot clocking winding down, he heaved it at the hoop and it grazed the rim to reset the clock. It eventually led to a dunk from Aaron Gordon to give the Nuggets a 108-101 lead with 1:50 left. Gordon had 17 points despite early foul trouble.

Game 2 is Monday night.

Anthony Edwards scored 22 points while playing on a sore right knee. Donte DiVincenzo

had four 3-pointers.

**Knicks 113, Hawks 102:** Jalen Brunson scored 28 points, Karl-Anthony Towns had 19 of his 25 in the second half and host New York beat Atlanta in Game 1 of their Eastern Conference playoff series.

The No. 3 seed in the East again this season hosts Game 2 on Monday night.

CJ McCollum had 26 points for the Hawks, who went 20-6 after the All-Star break to earn the No. 6 seed.

Brunson, who already owns the Knicks' record with eight 40-point games in the postseason, was almost halfway to another in the first quarter. He made his first six shots and had 19 points as New York led 30-24. McCollum had 12 points in the second as At-

lanta cut it to 57-55.

**Lakers 107, Rockets 98:** Luke Kennard scored a career playoff-high 27 points, LeBron James had 19 points and 13 assists, and short-handed Los Angeles capitalized on Kevin Durant's injury absence for a home victory over Houston in the opener of their first-round playoff series.

Deandre Ayton had 19 points and 11 rebounds for the fourth-seeded Lakers, who pulled off an impressive win without their top two scorers.

Both teams played the opener without their most important player. Luka Doncic and Austin Reaves have been out indefinitely with injuries since April 2, while Durant was a late scratch with a bruised right knee.

# Flyers defeat Pens in return to playoffs

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Travis Sanheim scored the go-ahead goal midway through the third period and the Philadelphia Flyers announced their return to the playoffs with a 3-2 win over Sidney Crosby and the Pittsburgh Penguins on Saturday night.

Philadelphia pulled off a stunner in the opener when Sanheim split a pair of Penguins at the top of the zone, glided down the slot and then fired the puck by Stuart Skinner. Porter Martone, the Flyers' 19-year-old rookie forward, provided some needed insurance when he beat Skinner on a wrist shot with 2:37 to play.

Game 2 is in Pittsburgh on Monday.

Jamie Drysdale also scored for the Flyers, who hardly appeared intimidated by an electric PPG Paints Arena crowd buzzing by Pittsburgh's first playoff appearance since 2022. Dan Vladar stopped 14 shots to pick up the first postseason win of his six-year career.

"We've been playing big games for the last month, month

and a half, meaningful games, must-win games," Flyers forward Sean Couturier said. "We're put to the test and thought we did a good job of preparing ourselves and being ready."

Evgeni Malkin scored his 68th career playoff goal for Pittsburgh but the Penguins, the NHL's third-highest scoring team during the regular season, had trouble sustaining pressure against the Flyers.

Bryan Rust pounded home a rebound with 1:01 remaining to get Pittsburgh within a goal, but Vladar stoned Anthony Mantha in the final seconds as Philadelphia held on.

"We got away from things that worked," first-year Penguins coach Dan Muse said. "Part of that is intensity. Everything is ramped up in the playoffs. They've been playing that way for a while."

**Hurricanes 2, Senators 0:** Logan Stankoven and Taylor Hall scored and Frederik Andersen came through with a big third-period performance in net

to help host Carolina beat Ottawa to open their first-round playoff series.

Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour had gone with Andersen's veteran experience as the starter over Brandon Bussi for this one, and it paid off for the Eastern Conference's top seed.

Andersen finished with 22 saves, including back-to-back stops on a third-period power play that had Ottawa buzzing with quality chances. One of those was initially ruled a goal, only for a replay review to overturn the call in showing Andersen had gloved a loose puck as it bounced off his skate near the post.

By the end of the game, Andersen held up despite spending most of the last 2½ minutes facing a 6-on-4 Senators' advantage after they pulled Linus Ullmark from the net while on the power play.

Game 2 is Monday night in Raleigh.

The Hurricanes are in the playoffs for the eighth straight year, reaching the Eastern Con-

ference Final in two of the past three years and thrice overall in this current run that began in 2019.

**Wild 6, Stars 1:** Matt Boldy had two goals with an assist, Joel Eriksson Ek scored two power-play goals and rookie goalie Jesper Wallstedt stopped 27 shots in his postseason debut to help visiting Minnesota beat Dallas in Game 1 of their Western Conference playoff series.

Kirill Kaprizov added a goal and two assists and Mats Zuccarello had three helpers for the Wild, who have lost nine consecutive playoff series since 2015. This was an impressive start in a long-expected matchup of Central Division rivals who finished behind Presidents' Trophy winner Colorado.

Kaprizov and Boldy, the first Wild teammates with 40 goals in the same season, scored during a three-goal surge in the first 6½ minutes of the second period for a 4-0 lead. Ryan Hartman scored in between, after having the primary assist on Kaprizov's goal.

## Bengals acquire Lawrence from Giants, sign him to extension

Associated Press

The Cincinnati Bengals acquired three-time Pro Bowl defensive tackle Dexter Lawrence from the New York Giants for the 10th pick in the upcoming NFL draft.

The teams announced the deal Sunday after agreeing to it Saturday night pending a physical.

Cincinnati then signed Lawrence to an extension that pays him an average of \$28 million through the 2028 NFL season, according to a person familiar with the situation. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because terms of the deal were not disclosed.

The Giants now have the fifth and 10th picks for the draft that begins Thursday night. They're

heading into their first draft under coach John Harbaugh after finishing 4-13 last season.

The Bengals paid a hefty price for the 28-year-old Lawrence, who asked for a trade because he wanted a new contract. He was set to make roughly \$20 million each of the next two seasons and is now under contract for three more.

Barring a trade, it'll be the first time Cincinnati doesn't have a first-round pick since 1989, when the Bengals traded the next-to-last pick in the draft (No. 27) to Atlanta for a second-round pick (No. 35), a fourth (No. 89) and a 10th (No. 256).

The 6-foot-4, 340-pound Lawrence had a career-high nine sacks in 2024, but only registered a half-sack last season. He made the Pro Bowl in 2022-

24 and was a second-team Associated Press All-Pro in 2022 and 2023.

Cincinnati ranked near the bottom in several defensive categories last season. The Bengals were 31st in yards allowed, 30th in points allowed and 30th against the run.

With Joe Burrow, Ja'Marr Chase and Tee Higgins leading a dynamic offense, improving the defense was a must this off-season. Lawrence gives Cincinnati a proven star in the middle of the defensive line., though the cost was steep.

New York will be the 22nd team in the common draft era (since 1967) to have two top 10 picks and fifth in the last five years. The Giants did it in 2022 with Kayvon Thibodeaux (fifth) and Evan Neal (sev-

enth). The Bears took Caleb Williams first and Rome Odunze ninth in 2024. The Texans selected C.J. Stroud second and Will Anderson Jr. third in 2023. The Jets got Sauce Gardner fourth and Garrett Wilson 10th in 2022.

On Tuesday, New York general manager Joe Schoen said the team was having productive talks with Lawrence's camp.

"We'd like for Dexter to be here, and at some point we'll come to a resolution here, whatever that may be," Schoen said. "We'll see. But conversations have been really good, they've been productive and we'll see what happens here down the road."

But owning two top 10 picks was too good to pass up.

# Kelly, Cubs hand Mets 10th straight loss

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Pinch-hitter Carson Kelly connected for a tiebreaking three-run homer in the sixth inning, and the Chicago Cubs handed the New York Mets their 10th consecutive loss with a 4-2 victory on Saturday.

Ian Happ also homered for Chicago in its fourth consecutive win. Jameson Taillon (1-1) pitched six crisp innings.

It's the longest losing streak for New York since it dropped 11 in a row from Aug. 28 to Sept. 8 in 2004. It has been outscored 60-18 during the slide.

Mark Vientos homered for the Mets. Francisco Lindor and Luis Robert Jr. each had two hits.

**Tigers 4, Red Sox 1:** Tarik Skubal (3-2) struck out a season-high 10 over six innings of one-run ball, Kerry Carpenter hit a solo homer and visiting Detroit beat Boston, ending its nine-game road losing streak.

It was the Tigers' longest winless road stretch since a 10-gamer in 2010. Rookie Kevin McGonigle had an RBI single and two hits.

Red Sox starter Brayan Bello (1-2) was roughed up for four runs in four innings. Boston has lost all 12 games this season when its starter doesn't go at least six innings and won all eight when they do.

**Brewers 5, Marlins 2:** Brice Turang hit a two-run homer and stretched his on-base streak to 18 games as visiting Milwaukee beat Miami.

William Contreras and Luis Rengifo doubled and Brandon Lockridge added an RBI single for the Brewers, who have won four straight after a six-game losing streak.

Brandon Woodruff (2-0) pitched a season-high seven innings, allowing one run on three hits with four strikeouts to move to 5-0 in seven career starts against the Marlins.

**Athletics 7, White Sox 6 (11):** Max Muncy drove in the winning run with a sacrifice fly in

the 11th inning to lift the host Athletics over Chicago.

Jack Perkins (2-0) struck out three and gave up one hit in 2½ innings of scoreless relief.

The White Sox stranded 14 runners and went 3 for 17 with runners in scoring position. The White Sox also loaded the bases in the ninth but failed to score.

**Cardinals 7, Astros 5:** Masyn Winn hit a two-run homer and José Fermín and Alec Burleson added solo shots to lead visiting St. Louis over Houston.

Winn's homer made it 4-1 in the third, and the second home run of Fermín's career pushed the lead to 5-1 in the sixth. Burleson's shot to the second deck in right field in the seventh made it 6-1.

Jordan Alvarez hit his major league-leading ninth homer in the first inning and Shay Whitcomb hit a three-run homer in the ninth, but it wasn't enough to keep the Astros from losing for the 11th time in 13 games.

**Braves 3, Phillies 1:** Chris Sale (4-1) struck out seven in seven innings to outduel Christopher Sánchez (2-2) in a matchup of two of baseball's best pitchers, and visiting Atlanta beat Philadelphia.

Mauricio Dubón had a pair of RBIs for the Braves, who have won four games in a row and eight of 10.

Felix Reyes homered in his first at-bat in his big league debut for the Phillies, who have dropped nine of their last 12 games. Reyes became the sixth Philadelphia player to homer in his first at-bat.

**Rays 8, Pirates 7 (13):** Cedric Mullins led off the 13th inning with a two-run home run and visiting Tampa Bay outlasted Pittsburgh.

Griffin Jax (1-2) pitched a scoreless 12th. Yoendrys Gomez allowed a run-scoring single to rookie Konnor Griffin in the bottom of the 13th, then struck out Joey Bart with runners on second and third to end it.

Both teams scored a run in the

11th. The Rays' Taylor Walls came around from first on a wild pickoff throw by Ramirez (2-1). The Pirates countered with Griffin's run-scoring fielder's choice.

**Yankees 13, Royals 4:** Cody Bellinger hit a pair of two-run homers and drove in five runs as host New York rolled to a rout of Kansas City.

Yankees starter Will Warren (2-0) tied a career high with 11 strikeouts and pitched two-run ball for seven innings.

Bellinger hit a two-run shot during a five-run third off Noah Cameron (1-1) and powered New York to its most lopsided victory this season. Bellinger then hit another off Mitch Spence in the sixth after contributing an RBI single in the fourth.

**Reds 5, Twins 4:** Dane Myers had an RBI single in the ninth inning and visiting Cincinnati scored the game's final three runs to beat Minnesota.

The Reds' bullpen tossed 4½ innings of scoreless relief with Kyle Nicolas (1-0) striking out the side in the eighth before Tony Santillan struck out two in a clean ninth for his first save.

Pinch-hitter Spencer Steer opened the ninth by reaching on a single that deflected off the glove of Twins shortstop Brooks Lee. Sacrificed to second base, Steer scored on a bloop single by Myers off Cole Sands (0-1).

**Giants 7, Nationals 6 (12):** Matt Chapman's RBI single in the 12th inning lifted visiting San Francisco to its third straight victory, beating Washington.

The Nationals had the bases loaded with nobody out in the 10th, but didn't score. After each team was also blanked in the 11th, Chapman led off the 12th with a single off Cionel Pérez (1-2) to break the 6-all tie.

**Guardians 4, Orioles 2:** Gavin Williams struck out 11 over seven innings to push his majors-leading total 40, Brayan Rocchio hit a three-run homer

and host Cleveland beat Baltimore.

Williams (3-1) allowed a run on three hits and walked one in a dominant outing. He had his sixth career double-digit strikeout game and second of the season.

**Mariners 7, Rangers 3:** George Kirby threw 5½ innings of one-run ball and Luke Raley hit his fifth home run of the season as host Seattle beat Texas to snap a four-game losing streak.

Raley gave the Mariners a 4-1 lead in the sixth inning on a solo homer off Rangers starter Nathan Eovaldi (2-3). It traveled 381 feet, and gave Raley more home runs than he hit all of last season (four).

**Diamondbacks 6, Blue Jays 2:** Corbin Carroll hit a grand slam to break an eighth-inning tie and host Arizona beat Toronto for its fourth straight victory.

Ildemaro Vargas led off the eighth against reliever Jeff Hoffman (1-2) with a single, extending his majors-leading hitting streak to 17 games dating to last season. Alek Thomas followed with a single and Ketel Marte drew a four-pitch walk.

**Rockies 4, Dodgers 3:** Troy Johnston had a go-ahead, two-run double in the sixth inning and finished with three hits to lead host Colorado over Los Angeles.

The Rockies had been 5-22 against the Dodgers over the past three seasons, including 3-12 at Coors Field. LA had won 11 of its previous 13 games and entered Saturday 6-1 in road games this season.

**Padres 4, Angels 1:** Ramón Laureano and Fernando Tatis Jr. each drove in two runs apiece, Germán Márquez threw 5½ scoreless innings in a strong start and visiting San Diego beat Los Angeles.

Adrian Morejon (2-0) struck out two in 1½ scoreless relief innings for the win, and Mason Miller earned his seventh save despite giving up a single and a walk in the ninth.