

## US and Iran dig in; blockade continues

*Bloomberg News*

The U.S. and Iran showed little sign of breaking their impasse and agreeing to another round of peace talks, with President Donald Trump insisting that the Navy's blockade is working.

Trump told Axios the blockade of Iran's ports is "somewhat more effective than the bombing" and "choking" the country by restricting its oil exports.

At the same time, U.S. military commanders are set to brief Trump on new plans for Iran, Axios reported, citing unnamed sources. U.S. Central Command, which oversees U.S. forces in the Middle East, has prepared a plan for a short wave of strikes on Iran to break the negotiating deadlock, Axios said.

Brent oil rose to a wartime

high as traders factor in an even longer closure of the Strait of Hormuz and a potential breakdown of the U.S. and Iran's shaky ceasefire, which has been in place since early April. Brent surged as much as 7.1% to more than \$126 a barrel on Thursday, before paring gains to \$121.40.

"Trump wants to end the Iran war, but not on the terms proposed by Tehran," said Becca Wasser and Chris Kennedy, analysts at Bloomberg Economics. "That suggests the question is no longer whether he escalates to push for a better offer, but when and how. We think the most likely window for action is within the next two weeks, and that renewed U.S. strikes are the most likely course."

Iran has said it won't reopen

the strait to commercial vessels until the U.S. lifts its blockade. It's unclear how long Iran has left before it runs out of oil storage and is forced to cut production.

Signs of strain on the Iranian economy have emerged in recent days, with the currency weakening to a fresh low.

Trump on Wednesday told reporters that talks are continuing "telephonically" between the two sides after an abortive effort to meet in Pakistan over the weekend.

Here's more on the war:

■ U.S. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell warned the energy shock brought by the war "hasn't even peaked yet," saying at a press conference that "the conflict in the Middle East has

added to" economic "uncertainty."

■ The U.S. is seeking forfeiture of two Iran-linked oil tankers seized by naval forces enforcing the blockade against the Islamic Republic, according to a senior White House official.

■ Increasing numbers of so-called clean tankers that transport fuels like diesel and gasoline are becoming dirty crude carriers as the impact of the war in Iran makes switching more profitable.

■ Top Pentagon officials finally put a price tag on the war in Iran so far during a contentious congressional hearing on Wednesday. Analysts say the \$25 billion figure they cited underestimates the total cost by a large amount.

## Reports: USS Gerald R. Ford to leave Middle East

BY ALEX WILSON  
AND ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

The more than 4,500 service members embarked on USS Gerald R. Ford may soon return to their families as the aircraft carrier begins its sunset cruise on a record-breaking deployment, according to media reports.

The Ford is expected to depart the Middle East soon and return by mid-May to Naval Station Norfolk, Va., The Washington Post and The Associated Press reported Wednesday, both citing anonymous U.S. officials.

The Navy has not publicly announced the carrier's return. U.S. Central Command did not immediately respond to questions Thursday asking if Ford would soon head back to the U.S.

On Thursday, the Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group entered its 310th day of deployment, a post-Vietnam War record that could eclipse some of the lengthiest carrier deployments since 1964.

The group includes the destroyers USS Winston S. Churchill and USS Mahan and Carrier Air Wing 8.

That reduction of U.S. firepower in the Middle East comes as President Donald Trump ratchets up pressure on Iran with an economic blockade aimed at forcing the Iranian regime to give up its nuclear ambitions.

On Wednesday, Trump renewed his threats to Iran, posting an AI-generated photo of himself holding a gun on Truth Social with the words: "NO MORE MR. NICE GUY!"

The post went on to say that

Iran didn't know how to sign a non-nuclear deal and couldn't get its act together.

"They better get smart soon," Trump said in the post.

Ford's pending departure also follows the arrival of the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush, which is operating in the Arabian Sea alongside the carrier USS Abraham Lincoln. Bush had been expected to relieve Ford.

The three carriers represent the highest number deployed to the Middle East since 2003, when five were deployed during the Iraq War.

There are about 15 other destroyers operating in the Middle East along with the Tripoli Amphibious Ready Group and multiple other Navy vessels. Four more destroyers are operating in the Eastern Mediterranean, USNI News reported on

Monday.

Ford left Norfolk in late June on what was expected to be a routine deployment to Europe. Since then, the carrier's more than 10-month whipsaw deployment has included duty in the Mediterranean, Caribbean and Red seas.

For example, the carrier was ordered in October to the Caribbean and was in the region for the capture and arrest of former Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro in January.

Ford presumably was nearing the end of an eight-month deployment when it was ordered to the Middle East in February amid increased tensions with Iran.

It entered the Red Sea in early March, continuing its role in Operation Epic Fury, the joint U.S.-Israeli campaign against Iran.

# Hegseth, lawmakers clash on Iran war

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on Wednesday castigated Democrats for their “reckless, feckless and defeatist” comments about the Iran war, calling them “the biggest adversary we face” as he made his first public appearance on Capitol Hill since the war began.

He included “some Republicans” in his criticism as he testified before the House Armed Services Committee in a hearing on the Pentagon’s record \$1.5 billion budget request that repeatedly turned into a heated debate on the war.

“My generation understands how long we were in Iraq, how long we were in Afghanistan, how long we were in Vietnam,” Hegseth said in his opening remarks, adding that the U.S. was only “two months in on an existential fight for the safety of the American people.”

“We are proud of this undertaking. I am proud that President (Donald) Trump has had the courage to do it,” the secretary said after lashing out at members of Congress, mostly Democrats, for posing the “biggest challenge” in the war before lawmakers had asked a single question.

Democrats, in turn, assailed Hegseth for “lying” about the war “since Day 1,” describing it as a quagmire that has sparked a global energy crisis, caused hundreds of casualties among American service members and thousands among Iranians and rapidly depleted critical munitions.

The clash continued on Thursday when Hegseth testified before a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing.

On Wednesday, Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, put the number of U.S. troops that had died at 14, including an Army National Guard member who died in Kuwait from a medical emergency as part of the count.

The chief financial official for the Pentagon said the war has cost \$25 billion so far, mostly in munitions.

Rep. John Garamendi, D-Calif., said he held Hegseth ultimately responsible for the conduct of the war.

While he praised the “extraordinary courage and tactical skill” of the military, he said the strategic direction of the conflict remained adrift.

Republicans largely avoided criticizing Hegseth, though two members — Don Bacon, of Nebraska, and Austin Scott, of

Georgia — voiced their objection to a recent wave of firings at the Pentagon, including the ousters of Gen. Randy George as the Army’s top uniformed officer and John Phelan as the secretary of the Navy.

Bipartisan pushback to the Iran war is expected to increase as the conflict reaches the 60-day mark on Friday, a deadline by which some Republicans have said they want to see Trump either wind down the conflict or seek congressional authorization to continue it.

On Thursday, Hegseth told Senators that Trump has had the courage “unlike other presidents to ensure that Iran never gets a nuclear weapon and that their nuclear blackmail never succeeds. We have the best negotiator in the world driving a great deal.”

According to The Associated Press, Sen. Jack Reed, the committee’s ranking Democrat, argued that the war with Iran has left the U.S. in a worse strategic position.

“I am concerned that you have been telling the president what he wants to hear instead of what he needs to hear,” Reed said. “Bold assurances of success are a disservice to both the commander in chief and the troops who risked their lives based on them.”

## Trump considers US troop reductions in Germany

BY JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — The United States is weighing a potential troop reduction in Germany, with a final decision expected soon, President Donald Trump said late Wednesday.

His comments come after German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said this week that the U.S. was being “humiliated” by Iran during the course of the prolonged war in the Middle East.

“The United States is studying and reviewing the possible reduction of Troops in Germany, with a determination to be made over the next short period

of time,” Trump said on his Truth Social media platform.

In an earlier post, Trump blasted Merz for a lack of support for the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran, saying the German leader “thinks it’s OK” for Iran to have a nuclear weapon.

Before the Iran war, Merz and Trump were considered to have warm relations, in part because of Germany’s efforts to bolster its own defense.

After Merz’s criticism of Trump this week, the German leader sought to bring down the temperature, saying on Wednesday that “the personal relationship between the American president and me is, from my perspective, still good.”

Even so, Trump’s insistence that European allies haven’t been supportive enough of the Iran war could have longer-term implications for how the U.S. deals with NATO members.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, who reposted Trump’s social media comment about possible troop cuts in Germany, told Congress on Wednesday that he expected allies to get on board with U.S. war efforts.

When allies “do not step up, there will be consequences,” Hegseth said during a hearing of the House Armed Services Committee.

“In recent weeks, for instance, far too many of our NA-

TO allies showed that they could not be relied upon to support our nation’s operations against Iran. ... This is unconscionable, and we will remember,” Hegseth added.

Some European countries have complained that the Trump administration didn’t consult them ahead of the U.S.-Israeli attacks on Iran. At the same time, multiple NATO countries have enabled U.S. operations against Iran via bases positioned around Europe.

If Trump decides to follow through on troop cuts in Germany, he has many options. The U.S. has roughly 34,000 troops spread out at various bases and installations across the country.

# Supreme Court limits Voting Rights Act

*Los Angeles Times*

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court's conservative majority on Wednesday sharply limited a part of the Voting Rights Act that has forced states to draw voting districts to help elect Black or Latino representatives to Congress as well as state and local boards.

In a 6-3 decision in *Louisiana vs. Callais*, the court ruled that creating these majority-minority districts may amount to racial discrimination that violates the 14th Amendment.

When weighing what the Voting Rights Act requires, “we start with the general rule that the Constitution almost never permits the federal government or a state to discriminate on the basis of race,” Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr. wrote for the court.

Alito said states may draw election districts for partisan advantage but may not use race as a basis for redistricting.

In reaction to the ruling, Loui-

siana canceled its congressional primaries, The Associated Press reported Thursday.

Gov. Jeff Landry and Attorney General Liz Murrill, both Republicans, said in a joint statement that the ruling effectively prohibits the state from carrying out the primaries under the current districts. Early voting had been scheduled to begin Saturday in advance of the May 16 primary.

The ruling in the Louisiana case appears to clear the way for Republican-led states across the South to redraw their election maps and eliminate voting districts that favor Black or Latino candidates for Congress, state legislatures and county boards.

UCLA law professor Rick Hasen said, “It is hard to overstate what an earthquake this will be for American politics,” adding that the decision makes the Voting Rights Act a “much weaker and potentially toothless law.”

Hasen said it's unclear how the decision will affect the November election because in many states early voting has already started and primaries have already taken place.

But the ruling's long-term consequences for minority representation in Congress, state legislatures and local government are almost “certainly” going to be felt in 2028, Hasen said.

Republican leaders in states across the South have already signaled they intend to move quickly to redraw congressional maps in the wake of the ruling.

At issue in the case was how to ensure equal representation for Black and Latino citizens.

About one-third of Louisiana's voters are Black, but the state seeks an election map that will elect white Republicans to five of its six seats in the House of Representatives.

Lower courts said that map violated the Voting Rights Act because it denied fair represen-

tation to Black residents.

The state had one Black-majority district, in New Orleans.

Two years ago, judges upheld the creation of a second Black-majority district that stretched from Shreveport to Baton Rouge on the grounds that it was required under the law.

The state's Republican leaders appealed and argued that race was the motivating factor in drawing the second district.

Alito and the conservatives agreed and called that district an “unconstitutional racial gerrymander.”

The three liberals dissented. The consequences of the ruling “are likely to be far-reaching and grave,” said Justice Elena Kagan, adding that it will allow “racial vote dilution in its most classic form.”

The ruling is likely to have its greatest impact in the Southern states, where white Republicans are in control and Black Democrats are in the minority.

## SOCOM seeks help adopting new technology

By COREY DICKSTEIN

*Stars and Stripes*

Special Operations Command is asking American companies, researchers and non-profit organizations to assist it in rapidly putting new tech into the hands of the U.S. military's most elite forces.

The command responsible for training and employing the nation's special operators said it was looking to “accelerate” a new effort aimed at fielding cutting-edge capabilities, especially those for use in maritime operations, in an April 24 industry solicitation posted to the SAM.gov government contracting website.

SOCOM calls it the Advancing Naval Capabilities through Holistic Opportunities and Resources, or ANCHOR, Initiative.

The ANCHOR Initiative in-

tends to “form a sphere of technological excellence ... to rapidly and efficiently propose and carry out ... the development of prototype solutions that sustain and expand strategic superiority within broadly stated special operations focus areas of interest,” according to the solicitation.

The program is being run by SOCOM's Special Operations Forces Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics organization under a legal authority designed to allow the Defense Department to quickly develop and field prototypes outside of the constraints of the normal acquisitions process, which can take years to develop and field weapons, according to the solicitation.

The SOCOM request outlines the needs defense officials have identified as critical to special

operators' success on their wide-ranging missions now and in the future, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The solicitation outlines six key areas in which SOCOM wants help from partners under the ANCHOR initiative.

First, SOCOM wants help in developing new unmanned and autonomous platforms, including aerial drones and surface and underwater maritime platforms.

SOCOM also wants help building new counter-drone capabilities and to develop new command, control, communications, computer, cyber, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, or C5ISR, platforms that enable “operators to sense, process, and act faster than the adversary.”

It also wants to bolster its

“scalable effects” portfolio, which includes both lethal and non-lethal means to impact operations and is seeking help with human performance capabilities, including efforts to build “comprehensive physical conditioning programs” and “cognitive performance enhancement” plans.

Finally, the command is seeking help improving human-machine teaming capabilities, especially those that enable “intuitive control of unmanned systems through natural human interfaces” and those that provide “immersive training environments for high-risk scenarios,” including through various forms of augmented or virtual reality.

SOCOM has given interested parties until June 1 to participate in the ANCHOR program, according to the solicitation.

# Shooting highlights Secret Service failures

*Los Angeles Times*

According to acting Attorney General Todd Blanche and other top Trump administration officials, U.S. Secret Service agents did a fine job protecting President Donald Trump and much of his Cabinet from the gunman who barged into the White House Correspondents' Association dinner Saturday intent on killing them.

"That horrible act was stopped because of the courage and professionalism of law enforcement — the officers who responded without hesitation and did their jobs as they were trained to do," Blanche said Monday.

However, according to a detailed accounting filed Wednesday by federal prosecutors in the criminal case against suspect Cole Tomas Allen, the per-

formance of the nation's preeminent protection agency was marred by inattentiveness and misfires and saved by "extraordinary good fortune" and the gunman falling to the ground on his own.

"The defendant, armed with a 12-gauge shotgun, a .38 caliber pistol, two knives, four daggers, and enough ammunition to take dozens of lives, was apprehended by (Secret Service) officers mere feet away from the ballroom where his primary target was located, along with other members of the Cabinet," prosecutors wrote Wednesday, in a filing arguing for Allen to be held in detention pending trial on one charge of trying to kill the president and two firearms charges.

Contradicting a prior claim by Blanche that officers had

"promptly tackled and detained" Allen, prosecutors wrote that the 31-year-old tutor from Torrance, Calif., simply "fell to the ground" after blowing past a team of agents just two open flights of stairs from the ballroom.

They wrote that one officer fired at Allen five times, but never hit him.

The same officer observed Allen fire his shotgun "in the direction of the stairs leading down to the ballroom," prosecutors wrote, and that officers later discovered "one spent cartridge in the barrel and eight unfired cartridges in the magazine tube."

They said nothing about the Secret Service officer who Blanche said was shot in his ballistic vest during the incident — adding to speculation that the officer may have been shot not by

Allen, but by a fellow officer.

In all, the court filing brought further into focus a chaotic Secret Service response that appeared flawed from the start, including in a video Trump posted shortly after the incident in which agents appeared to be idling around an unobstructed entrance when Allen ran past them.

It added to concerns law enforcement, security experts and members of Congress had already begun raising about the performance of an agency that has been repeatedly called on to improve following previous attempts on Trump's life. A gunman fired on him at a 2024 campaign rally in Butler, Pa., grazing his ear, and another prepared to fire on him from the unsecured perimeter of a Florida golf course the same year.

## Trump portrait added to special edition passport for USA's 250th birthday

*New York Daily News*

President Donald Trump's portrait will be added to a special edition U.S. passport that the State Department is rolling out to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence this summer.

An estimated 25,000 to 35,000 of the limited edition documents including Trump's image on an inside page will be available to applicants at the Washington, D.C., passport office starting shortly before July 4.

"The State Department is preparing to release a limited number of specially designed U.S. passports to commemorate this historic occasion," State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott said. "These passports will feature customized artwork and enhanced imagery while maintaining the same se-

curity features that make the U.S. passport the most secure documents in the world."

The Trump passport, first reported by The Bulwark, will be the default document provided to people who apply in person at the Washington office. Those who prefer the standard passport can apply online or outside Washington, officials said.

The special passport will feature Trump's picture over a gold version of his signature on an interior page of the document that millions of Americans use to travel overseas. The cover features the words "United States of America" in bold gold print at the top and "Passport" at the bottom, a reversal of the normal layout. A small gold American flag, with the number 250 encircled by stars, is added to the bottom of the back cover.

## Prosecutors allege D4vd dismembered teen girl

*Los Angeles Times*

LOS ANGELES — D4vd allegedly used a chainsaw to dismember the body of a teenager he was sexually abusing, then amputated two of her fingers to destroy a tattoo linking him to the girl, according to a court document made public Wednesday afternoon by LA County prosecutors in the singer's murder case.

David Anthony Burke, 21, is charged with murder, continuous sex abuse of a minor and mutilating a corpse. Los Angeles police stormed a Hollywood Hills home and arrested him last month. He pleaded not guilty last week. Prosecutors say Burke killed 14-year-old Celeste Rivas Hernandez because she threatened to expose his abuse and ruin his music career.

In advance of a preliminary hearing that was supposed to begin Friday, Los Angeles County Deputy District Attorney Beth Silverman filed a nine-page brief

laying out the evidence she planned to present. In the document, Silverman wrote that Burke killed Hernandez in April 2025, then ordered chainsaws, body bags, an inflatable pool and a shovel delivered to his home in order to dispose of the body.

"Knowing he had to silence the victim before she ruined his music career as she had threatened, very soon after her arrival at his home, defendant stabbed the victim to death multiple times and stood by while she bled out," Silverman wrote.

The singer has long been linked to Hernandez's disappearance and death, after her badly decomposed body was found in the trunk of a Tesla he owned at a Hollywood tow yard last September. Authorities said Hernandez was last seen at Burke's Hollywood residence on April 23, 2025.

An autopsy report made public last week revealed Hernandez died from a pair of stab wounds.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Feds to block state's ban on credit card swipe fees

**IL** CHICAGO — The federal government has officially moved to block a controversial Illinois law banning certain credit card fees, a decision that favors financial institutions but could leave state-chartered banks in a lurch as lawmakers weigh next steps.

The Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, an independent bureau of the U.S. Department of the Treasury, last week issued an order preempting Illinois' first-in-the-nation law on credit card interchange fees. Banking associations celebrated the move while retailers decried it.

Passed in 2024, the state law bans so-called swipe fees, also known as interchange fees, on the tax and tip portions of customers' bills. The goal is to reduce the fees that credit card companies can charge retailers. Those credit card companies and financial institutions currently charge retailers based on total transaction amounts, including goods, taxes and tips. The law bans fees on the tax or tip portions of customers' bills.

Financial institutions have argued that complying with the law would be burdensome and costly, affecting not only their industry but also small businesses and consumers. Processing fees average just over 2% per transaction, according to the National Retail Federation.

### Lawmakers vote to eliminate Chavez Day

**MI** LANSING — The Michigan House on Tuesday voted almost unanimously to eliminate Cesar E.

Chavez Day as a state holiday in the wake of allegations the former labor leader sexually assaulted women.

Last month, a New York Times investigation detailed years-long sexual abuse allegations against Chavez, the late cofounder and president of the United Farm Workers of America, who received a posthumous Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1994.

The bill introduced by state Rep. Josh Schriver, R-Oxford, which passed 103-2, would eliminate the state holiday marking Chavez's birthday on March 31. A Democratic amendment that would have renamed the holiday Farm Workers Day was rejected Tuesday.

The bill proceeds next to the Democratic-led Senate.

Schriver argued Tuesday that the continued use of a state holiday in Chavez's honor would indicate that "some legacies are too important to scrutinize" and that "protecting an image outweighs protecting the innocent."

### Suspicious package leads to seizure of 39 guns

**CT** HARTFORD — Police seized more than three dozen firearms and thousands of rounds of ammunition from a home in Branford, Conn., after an investigation that began when a package containing a firearm suppressor was intercepted at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York.

The package was intercepted on April 21 and was addressed to Alexander Oranzo, 46, of Branford, according to the Branford Police Department.

Police said the package was

shipped from China and was marked as containing an automotive filter. Investigators found a firearm suppressor inside and noted that Oranzo is a convicted felon prohibited from having guns or firearm accessories, according to police.

Branford police said they became involved after being notified about the package by the Department of Homeland Security. Officers came up with an "operational plan" before a "controlled delivery" of the package was carried out at Oranzo's home, according to police.

Investigators searched the home after the package was accepted, reportedly finding a "significant cache of weapons and contraband," police said.

Oranzo was taken into custody and arrested on numerous charges.

### City pays to settle suit on treatment of protesters

**MA** BOSTON — The City of Boston has agreed to pay \$850,000 to settle a federal lawsuit filed by four protesters who allege they were beaten with wooden batons and pepper-sprayed by police during a 2020 George Floyd demonstration.

The settlement agreement was announced Tuesday by attorneys representing the protesters — Jasmine Huffman, Justin Ackers, Caitlyn Hall and Benjamin Chambers-Maher — who filed suit against the city and three Boston police officers five years ago.

The four protesters allege they were beaten and pepper-sprayed by the officers "while lawfully exercising their First Amendment rights on May 31,

2020," according to the announcement from their attorneys.

Three of the protesters were allegedly beaten with wooden riot batons. Two were pepper-sprayed. Three out of four submitted video recordings of their assaults as evidence, their attorneys said, while emphasizing that none had committed nor were ever charged with a crime in connection with the demonstration.

Mayor Michelle Wu's office and the Boston Police Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

### Woman dies aboard cruise ship near Catalina

**CA** LOS ANGELES — A woman aboard a Carnival cruise ship off the coast of Southern California died Monday after officials say she fell off her room's balcony and landed on a deck below.

The woman, who was not identified, had been traveling with family members, who alerted the crew of the incident, Julie Leonardi, a spokesperson for Carnival Cruise Line, said in a statement.

Leonardi did not immediately respond to questions about the cruise's itinerary, but said the woman's family was able to depart the ship and return home.

They had been aboard the Carnival Firenze, one of the company's major cruise ships known for its Italian-themed amenities.

Law enforcement came aboard the ship while it was docked at Catalina Island on Monday to "collect information," Leonardi said, a process that she called customary.

— From wire reports

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# Cunningham nets 45, keeps Pistons alive

Associated Press

DETROIT — Cade Cunningham came through for Detroit when it needed him. With the Pistons teetering on the brink of elimination, Cunningham outdueled Orlando's Paolo Banchero in a sensational scoring matchup of former No. 1 overall picks.

Cunningham had a franchise playoff-record 45 points and top-seeded Detroit held off the eighth-seeded Magic for a 116-109 win on Wednesday night in Game 5 of their first-round series, avoiding elimination for at least a couple of days.

"We dug ourselves a hole and now it's time to climb our way out," Cunningham said. "It's possible."

Orlando leads the series 3-2 and will get a second chance to

advance at home Friday night. If the Pistons win their first road game of the series, they will host a decisive Game 7 on Sunday.

Banchero also scored 45 points for a playoff career high, but missed 7 of 12 free throws and fell one point short of equaling the franchise postseason record shared by Tracy McGrady and Dwight Howard.

The Magic were out-rebounded by 16 and made just 16 of 30 free throws.

"We got to be better on the glass and obviously, better on the free-throw line," said Banchero, drafted No. 1 overall by Orlando in 2022. "If we make our free throws, we got a real chance of winning the game. We lost by seven, and missed 14 free throws. That's the game."

Cunningham set a single-game playoff scoring record for Detroit that had stood since Dave Bing had 44 points in 1968. Isiah Thomas approached that mark with a 43-point performance in 1988.

In NBA history, there was only one other playoff game with two players scoring 45 or more. Donovan Mitchell scored 51 points for Utah in a win over Denver in 2020, while the Nuggets' Jamal Murray had 50 points.

When the Pistons drafted Cunningham first overall in 2021, it was hoping he would have games like this one.

He was 13 of 23 from the field, made a playoff career-high five 3-pointers and was 14 of 14 at the line.

"We're going to see this a long

time," Detroit coach J.B. Bickerstaff said. "He's going to do a lot of special things."

The Pistons never trailed, going ahead by 17 points in the first half and by 15 early in the fourth quarter.

The Magic pulled within three points on Banchero's sixth 3-pointer with 1:09 left.

On the ensuing possession after Ausar Thompson hustled for an offensive rebound, Cunningham made a step-back, 16-foot jumper to help seal it.

"Not everybody is blessed with those opportunities to have pressure and have things on the line like that," Cunningham said. "I'm just thankful for it and trying to make the most out of it."

"We've had a great season so far and none of us want it to end."

# Schroder's halftime speech helps spark Cavs to victory

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — James Harden garnered the most attention in the series of moves Cleveland made near the NBA trade deadline.

The Cavaliers, however, would have been in dire straits Wednesday night without Dennis Schroder.

Schroder scored 11 points in the fourth quarter as Cleveland came back to beat the Toronto Raptors 125-120 in Game 5 of their first-round series.

"This guy's played in huge games in the NBA and then on the international scene, so this type of game fits him," Cavs coach Kenny Atkinson said. "I think it started with him getting to the rim and then that loosened up the jumper for him. And then I thought his defense on (RJ) Barrett really got under him, harassed him. He really was Dennis the Menace tonight."

Schroder — acquired from Sacramento on Feb. 1 along with Keon Ellis — finished with 19 points on 7-for-11 shooting, including three 3-pointers, in 21 minutes. This is the 17th time Schroder has scored at least 19 points in a playoff game. He had 20 for Detroit in Game 2 of its first-round series against New York last year.

It was the third-most points Schroder has scored since joining Cleveland.

"I love big games, I love the playoffs. You've just got to embrace it," Schroder said. "I've been through a lot of big games of my career, and I've seen it. I think experience matters, but at the end of the day, the urgency and the energy, you've got to have it."

Schroder's biggest contribution came before the fourth quarter. The Cavaliers trailed 74-67 at halftime. The 13-year veteran gave a detailed 2-3 minute breakdown in the locker room on what was needed to come back.

"I just wanted to see Cavs basketball, how we played when we first got here. We did a great job even throughout this season when we first got here, but I think we got a little bit away from that," Schroder said. "We need the big guys. Jarrett (Allen) and Evan Mobley are the key to our team. We've got two superstars with Don (Donovan Mitchell) and with Uno (James Harden), but those two big guys, we've got to use them."

Schroder and Cleveland will try to close out the series Friday night in Toronto.

**Rockets 99, Lakers 93:** Jabari Smith Jr. scored 22 points, Tari Eason added 18 and visiting Houston avoided playoff elimination for the second straight game with a victory over Los Angeles in Game 5, trimming the Lakers' lead in the first-round series to 3-2.

Alperen Sengun had 14 points, nine rebounds and eight assists for the fifth-seeded Rockets, who sent the series back to Houston for Game 6 on Friday night with a gritty performance to overcome Austin Reaves' return to the LA lineup.

The Rockets have won two straight even without top scorer Kevin Durant, who has missed four of the series' five games with injuries.

"We put ourselves in a bad position, but we can still make history and come back one game at a time," Sengun said. "Play at home, come back here, just do the same thing we're doing."

No team has ever recovered from an 0-3 deficit to win an NBA playoff series, but Houston is halfway there. Only four of the 159 teams to start a series down 0-3 have ever even forced a Game 7.

LeBron James scored 17 of his 25 points in the second half and added seven assists, but the Lakers lost their second straight after stealing Game 3 with an improbable rally in the final seconds of regulation.

James' teams have never blown a 2-0 series lead in his entire 23-year NBA career.

"Listen, it's one game," James said. "You give credit where credit is due. They played well the last two games, exceptionally well, and we've got to answer the call."

# York scores in OT as Flyers eliminate Pens

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Cam York flicked a wrist shot for an overtime winner that ignited a Flyers' celebration 14 years — through retread coaches, insignificant hockey, and old front-office failings — in the making when he slithered free from the mob of exuberant teammates and chucked his stick deep into the stands.

York launched his stick and watched it soar like the Schwarzbombs routinely hit across the street, only no one was really sure in the moment where it landed.

"I hope everyone's OK," York said with a laugh. "Definitely don't want a lawsuit. Just honestly blacked out. I didn't know what to do. I was so excited."

York roared back like he was going to fling a boomerang. Flyers fans blew horns and whistles around the concourse and belted out on repeat the opening "oh oh oh" of the White Stripes' "Seven Nation Army." Flyers forward Christian Dvorak's celebration hit a little too hard — a cut busted open above his right eye during the victorious on-ice party and blood

streamed down his cheek.

Like he went a few rounds in a fight. More like six grueling games with Sidney Crosby and a Penguins team that has hoisted Stanley Cups and kicked their cross-state rival to the curb so many times over the last 15-plus years that the matchups often felt less like a heated rivalry and the Flyers treated more like a pesky speed bump in a long regular season.

Not this season. Not in Philadelphia. Not even when the resurgent Penguins threatened to make a run at playoff history and storm back from a 3-0 series deficit and crush the spirit of a Flyers team that became the NHL's first to make the playoffs after being 10 points out of contention with 22 or fewer games remaining.

York and goalie Dan Vladar and his 42 saves had other plans.

The Flyers' 1-0 Game 6 overtime victory over the Penguins on Wednesday night served as early validation that general manager Danny Briere was astute in orchestrating an overdue rebuild and the payoff was a first playoff series win in a full NHL season since 2012. The Flyers

accelerated their postseason timeline — in large part due to the late-season arrival of teen sensation Porter Martone — and are essentially playing with house money as they gear up for a second-round series with the top-seeded Carolina Hurricanes.

"We played a great series," Flyers forward Travis Konecny said. "Now we get a chance to play again."

Vladar, a journeyman turned Olympian voted the team's MVP this season, turned away everything the Penguins threw at him in much of the series. He had his first shutout of the season (with 27 saves) in Game 2, shook off an unspecified arm injury in Game 3 and put the Flyers on his back in Game 6 — getting the better of a fantastic Arturs Silovs — to steady a position long an albatross for the franchise since the Stanley Cup championship days of Bernie Parent.

All Vladar did was shut out the NHL's third-highest scoring team during the regular season.

"There was never a doubt," Vladar said. "Good things happen to good people, and we are good people here."

Vladar also gave a nod to the odds the Flyers faced just to reach this point of the season and pointed out teammates wearing their good-luck gear.

The Flyers celebrated wearing T-shirts emblazoned with Parent's 1970s mask with sleeves that had "3.8 percent" printed on them as a nod to their slim postseason chances a couple months ago.

Vladar — the fifth goalie in franchise history with a series-clinching shutout — also made the fourth-most saves in a series-clinching shutout win over the past 70 years. The only goaltenders with more are Patrick Roy (63 in Game 4 of 1996 Stanley Cup Final), Andrei Vasilevskiy and Carey Price.

The Flyers were still feeling sky high well after the final horn.

As for York's stick? Well, it did stick the landing and was gleefully grabbed by a man wearing a white Flyers sweatshirt.

He high-fived fans around him and boasted one heck of a postseason souvenir.

The Flyers can only hope there's so much more fun to come in May.

## Canadiens put Lightning on brink with another road win

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Alexandre Texier broke a tie 1:06 into the third period and the Montreal Canadiens beat the Tampa Bay Lightning 3-2 on Wednesday night to take a 3-2 lead in the first-round series.

Rookie Jakub Dobes stopped 38 shots to help Montreal move within a victory of advancing for the first time since losing to the Lightning in the Stanley Cup Finals in 2021. Brendan Gallagher got his first goal in his first game this series and Kirby Dach also scored for the Canadiens.

Game 6 is Friday night in Montreal, where the teams split Games 3 and 4. All five games

have been decided by one goal, including overtime in the first three.

Dominic James scored his first career playoff goal and Jake Guentzel also connected for the Lightning. They are one loss from being eliminated in the first round for the fourth straight season.

Tampa Bay has lost 10 of its last 12 home games in the postseason despite 460 consecutive sellouts.

"We got no choice now. We got to show up or we're out," Lightning forward Brayden Point said.

Texier took a long pass from Lane Hutson, skated into the left circle and ripped a shot that bounced off Andrei Vasilevskiy's

glove and into the net for a 3-2 lead early in the third.

The Canadiens jumped ahead three minutes into the game when Gallagher wristed in a rebound after Vasilevskiy kicked away Alex Newhook's backhander. Gallagher, the 14-year veteran, spent time the first four games giving the young players advice.

"I was happy for him and happy for us," Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis said about Gallagher. "Really happy the way he's handled everything and not surprised the way he played."

**Golden Knights 5, Mammoth 4 (2OT):** Brett Howden scored a short-handed goal at 5:28 of the second overtime to give Vegas a

home victory over Utah and put the Golden Knights one victory away from winning the first-round series.

The Golden Knights take a 3-2 lead into their best-of-seven NHL playoffs series on Friday night in Salt Lake City.

Vegas' Pavel Dorofeyev's six-on-five goal with 52.7 seconds left in regulation forced overtime and gave him the sixth playoff hat trick in franchise history. Dorofeyev had two goals in 13 career playoff games before this one.

John Marino, Lawson Crouse and Dylan Guenther scored for the Mammoth and Clayton Keller had two assists. Karel Vejmelka made 31 saves.

# Olson's 2-run HR lifts Braves over Tigers

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Matt Olson hit a two-run homer in the ninth inning off Kenley Jansen, ruining a dominant performance by Tarik Skubal and rallying the Atlanta Braves to a 4-3 victory over the Detroit Tigers on Wednesday night.

Jansen, who blew his third save in nine chances, walked Ozzie Albies to lead off the ninth. Olson followed with his ninth homer, a shot into Atlanta's bullpen to end the game.

Skubal fell behind on Ozzie Albies' two-run shot in the first but gave up only three hits the rest of his seven-inning stint, with two of those runners wiped out by double plays.

The two-time reigning AL Cy Young Award winner gave the Tigers a bit of a scare in the seventh, rubbing his left arm after a 2-2 pitch to Olson to draw a visit from the trainer and manager A.J. Hinch. Skubal threw one warmup pitch, decided he was OK and struck out the side to end his night. He allowed five hits, fanned seven and didn't walk anyone.

But Jansen couldn't finish it for the Tigers.

Atlanta rookie JR Ritchie turned in another solid outing. He gave up three runs (two earned) in 5½ innings, with five hits, four walks and four strikeouts.

Reynaldo López (2-1), who began the season as Atlanta's No. 2 starter before being demoted to the bullpen this week, pitched two perfect innings for the win.

**Mariners 5, Twins 3:** Cole Young had three late-inning RBIs for Seattle, including the go-ahead two-run single in the ninth that fueled a road victory over Minnesota.

Young reached for an outside pitch he slapped in front of the mound and just past the glove of Eric Orze (0-1), who watched the ball scoot past a diving second baseman Luke Keaschall with the infield drawn in. Orze

retired only one of five batters he faced in the three-run inning for the Mariners.

Andrés Muñoz pitched a perfect ninth for his sixth save in seven attempts as the Mariners won for the eighth time in 11 games. The 22-year-old Young, who also delivered a tying double with two outs in the seventh, is batting .383 with 10 RBIs in 47 at-bats over his last 13 games.

**Blue Jays 8, Red Sox 1:** Ernie Clement hit a two-run home run, Brandon Valenzuela added a solo homer and host Toronto beat Boston.

Kazuma Okamoto hit a two-run single and Vladimir Guerrero Jr. went 3 for 3 with a walk as the Blue Jays took two of three from the Red Sox. It was Toronto's third straight series win after losing the previous six.

George Springer returned from the injured list to deliver a pinch-hit RBI single as the Blue Jays improved to 9-2 when scoring five runs or more.

After winning their first two games under interim manager Chad Tracy, the Red Sox have lost the past two and seen ace left-hander Garrett Crochet land on the 15-day injured list because of shoulder inflammation.

**White Sox 3, Angels 2 (10):** Rookie Sam Antonacci hit a tying triple with two outs in the ninth inning and Colson Montgomery had a winning single in the 10th, lifting host Chicago over Los Angeles for a three-game sweep that extended its losing streak to six.

Mike Trout hit his 10th home run of the season for the Angels, who have lost 10 of 11 and dropped to 12-20. Los Angeles starter Yusei Kikuchi left after two innings with left shoulder tightness.

With the White Sox trailing 2-1, Tristan Peters was hit by a Ryan Zeferjahn pitch with one out in the ninth and scored on Antonacci's triple.

**Guardians 3, Rays 1:** Chase DeLauter had two hits and

drove in a pair of runs, Gavin Williams allowed one unearned run and struck out nine in 7⅔ innings and the Cleveland Guardians defeated the Tampa Bay Rays 3-1 on Wednesday to stop a four-game losing streak.

Brayan Rocchio had three hits and scored two runs as the Guardians avoided being swept in the three-game series.

Tampa Bay had its six-game winning streak snapped and allowed more than two runs for the first time in seven games. Chandler Simpson had two hits for the Rays, who had won 13 straight games against American League opponents.

**Marlins 3, Dodgers 2:** Javier Sanoja singled in the go-ahead run with two outs in the eighth inning, lifting visiting Miami over Los Angeles.

Liam Hicks and Esteury Ruiz hit solo homers for the Marlins, who took two of three from the Dodgers for the first time in Los Angeles since April 2018 and improved to 5-10 on the road.

The Dodgers trailed in the bottom of the ninth in all three games.

**Rangers 3, Yankees 0:** Nathan Eovaldi allowed four hits over seven scoreless innings, hot-hitting Josh Jung had a two-run single and host Texas beat AL-best New York to avoid a three-game sweep.

Jung's grounder through the left side of the infield with the bases loaded in the fifth inning put Texas up 2-0 and chased Elmer Rodriguez (0-1), a top Yankees prospect making his big league debut. Jung has hit .381 (32 of 84) with 17 RBIs over 24 games in April.

**Cubs 5, Padres 4:** Pete Crow-Armstrong hit his third home run of the season and drove in three runs to lead Chicago to a road win over San Diego.

The Cubs have won 12 of their last 15 games.

**Rockies 13, Reds 2:** Hunter Goodman homered twice, Brett Sullivan hit a three-run double,

and Tomoyuki Sugano pitched 5½ scoreless innings as visiting Colorado beat Cincinnati.

Goodman and Sullivan both went 3 for 4 and drove in three. Brenton Doyle, TJ Rumfield and Willi Castro had two hits apiece as the Rockies had 15 hits in all, the fourth time they have had 15-plus hits in a game this season.

**Nationals 14, Mets 2:** Brady House capped a seven-run fourth inning with his first career grand slam and visiting Washington routed reeling New York.

Curtis Mead homered late and had four of Washington's 15 hits as the Nationals set a season high for runs. He also scored four times.

**Cardinals 5, Pirates 4:** Rookie Nathan Church ended the game by robbing Nick Gonzales of what would have been a game-ending, two-run homer by making a leaping catch at the left-field wall, giving St. Louis a road win over Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh has lost a season-high four straight. The Pirates went 1 for 12 with runners in scoring position and stranded 11 runners.

**Diamondbacks 6, Brewers 2:** Nolan Arenado hit a three-run homer, Ildemaro Vargas extended his hitting streak to 22 games, and visiting Arizona beat Milwaukee.

Adrian Del Castillo, Corbin Carroll and Ketel Marte also homered for the Diamondbacks and starter Eduardo Rodriguez struck out four and allowed five hits, two runs and four walks in 4½ innings.

**Athletics 5, Royals 2:** Lawrence Butler hit a three-run home run, Luis Severino gave up one run and struck out eight in seven innings, and host Athletics beat Kansas City by snapping its four-game win streak.

Nick Kurtz hit an RBI double and walked, his 18th consecutive game with a walk, tying him with Barry Bonds for the longest such streak in nearly 80 years.