

US hits 70% vaccination rate goal

Associated Press

The United States on Monday finally reached President Joe Biden's goal of getting at least one COVID-19 shot into 70% of American adults — a month late and amid a fierce surge by the delta variant that is swamping hospitals and leading to new mask rules and mandatory vaccinations around the country.

In a major retreat in the Deep South, Louisiana ordered nearly everyone, vaccinated or not, to wear masks again in all indoor public settings, including schools and colleges. And other cities and states likewise moved to reinstate precautions to counter a crisis blamed on the fast-spreading variant and stubborn resistance to getting the vaccine.

"As quickly as we can discharge them, they're coming in and they're coming in very sick. We started seeing entire families

come down," lamented Dr. Sergio Segarra, chief medical officer of Baptist Hospital Miami. The Florida medical-center chain reported an increase of over 140% in the past two weeks in the number of people now hospitalized with the virus.

Biden had set a vaccination goal of 70% by the Fourth of July. That figure was the low end of initial government estimates for what would be necessary to achieve herd immunity in the U.S. But that has been rendered insufficient by the highly contagious delta variant, which has enabled the virus to come storming back.

There was no celebration at the White House on Monday, nor a setting of a new target, as the administration instead struggles to overcome skepticism and outright hostility to the vaccine, especially in the South and other

rural and conservative areas.

The U.S. still has not hit the administration's other goal of fully vaccinating 165 million American adults by July 4. It is about 8.5 million short.

New cases per day in the U.S. have increased sixfold over the past month to an average of nearly 80,000, a level not seen since mid-February. And deaths per day have climbed over the past two weeks from an average of 259 to 360.

Those are still well below the 3,400 deaths and a quarter-million cases per day seen during the worst of the outbreak in January. But some places around the country are watching caseloads reach their highest levels since the pandemic began, and nearly all deaths and serious illnesses now are in unvaccinated people.

The surge has led states and cities across the U.S. to beat a re-

treat, just weeks after it looked as if the country was going to see a close-to-normal summer.

Health officials in San Francisco and six other Bay Area counties announced Monday that they are reinstating a requirement that everyone — vaccinated or not — wear masks in public indoor spaces.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said New York City airport and transit workers will have to get vaccinated or face weekly testing. He stopped short of mandating either masks or inoculations for the general public, saying he lacks legal authority to do so.

Denver's mayor said the city will require police officers, firefighters and certain other municipal employees to get vaccinated, along with workers at schools, nursing homes, hospitals and jails.

Carl Vinson strike group deploys with F-35C fighters

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

The USS Carl Vinson and its strike group steamed from San Diego on Monday, marking the first time that a carrier strike group is deploying with F-35C Lightning II fighter jets and Navy CMV-22B Osprey aboard, the Navy said.

The carrier completed a 17-month upgrade late last summer so it could support F-35s, the newest generation of fighter jet, as well as Ospreys, the tiltrotor aircraft that can land vertically like a helicopter and fly like a fixed-wing plane.

The fifth-generation F-35C is the carrier version of the stealth fighter that costs \$94.4 million each, according to the Navy. Air superiority is its designated role. The CMV-22B Osprey is the replacement for the fixed wing C-2A Greyhound, a logistics workhouse that delivers people, mail and

cargo from shore to ship.

The strike group trained near the Hawaiian Islands for two weeks in June at the same time the Russian navy held a massive exercise in nearby waters that included targeting a mock carrier strike group with missiles.

The ships and aircraft deployed as Carrier Strike Group 1 include the Carl Vinson, nine squadrons of Carrier Air Wing 2, the guided-missile cruiser USS Lake Champlain and six guided-missile destroyers of Destroyer Squadron 1.

Those destroyers are USS Higgins, USS O'Kane, USS Chafee, USS Dewey, USS Stockdale and USS Michael Murphy.

The deployment of the strike group, which is manned by more than 7,000 sailors, is "in support of global maritime security operations," the Navy said in a news release Sunday.

The service does not disclose future locations or operations of its ships, but the Indo-Pacific seems a likely place to deploy because there is no U.S. carrier in the region.

The carrier USS Ronald Reagan, which is homeported at Yokosuka Naval Base, south of Tokyo, is deployed to the Middle East. The USS Theodore Roosevelt arrived in Washington last month to undergo its own lengthy retrofit for F-35 fighters, along with other needed upgrades.

Great Britain deployed the carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth and a strike group to the Pacific this summer, and it was patrolling the contested South China Sea late last week.

The Marine Corps' Fighter Attack Squadron 211 is operating F-35s from the carrier.

The Navy guided-missile destroyer USS The Sullivans is also part of that strike group.

Taliban take much of key provincial capital

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban pressed ahead with their advances in southern Afghanistan on Tuesday, capturing nine out of 10 districts of the Helmand provincial capital, residents and officials said. Afghan government forces launched airstrikes, backed by the U.S., in a desperate effort to defend the city of Lashkar Gah.

The fall of Lashkar Gah would be a major turning point in the offensive the Taliban have waged over the past months as U.S. and NATO forces complete their pullout from the country. It would also be the first provincial capital captured by the Taliban in years.

Residents of the city, speaking to The Associated Press over the telephone, said the fighting has them trapped, hunkered

down inside their homes and unable to step out for basic supplies. They said Taliban fighters were out openly in the streets, and that all but one Lashkar Gah district was under Taliban control.

Elite commando units were dispatched from Kabul to aid Afghan forces as the government held on to key government buildings, including the local police and army headquarters.

Majid Akhund, deputy chairman of the Helmand provincial council, confirmed that the Taliban control nine Lashkar Gah districts and also the city's TV and radio station, which had both gone off the air.

The Afghan forces commander for Helmand, Gen. Sami Sadat, in an audio message shared with journalists Tuesday urged residents in neighborhoods cap-

tured by the Taliban to evacuate immediately, though he did not clarify how they could do that amid the ongoing clashes. The message was an indication more airstrikes were planned.

Lashkar Gah is one of three provincial capitals under siege by the Taliban as they stepped up their onslaught against government forces. In recent months the Taliban swept through dozens of districts across the country, many in remote and rural, sparsely populated areas. Afghan troops in those battles often surrendered or pulled out with barely a fight, frequently lacking re-supplies and reinforcements. Over the past weeks, the Taliban have also captured several lucrative border crossings with Iran, Pakistan and Tajikistan.

Most recently, the Taliban

have turned their guns on provincial capitals as the withdrawal of the U.S. and NATO forces is now more than 95% complete. The final U.S. and NATO soldier are expected to be out of Afghanistan by Aug. 31.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on Monday blamed the hasty withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops for the deteriorating security situation, while analysts say deep corruption and poor training has left Afghan forces overwhelmed, leaving the elite commando units as the only bulwark against the advancing Taliban.

The U.S. and other world leaders have warned the Taliban against a military takeover of Afghanistan, saying they would become an international pariah again if they tried to take power by force.

UK navy warns of 'potential hijack' of ship off UAE coast

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The British navy warned Tuesday of a "potential hijack" of a ship off the coast of the United Arab Emirates in the Gulf of Oman, without elaborating.

The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations initially warned ships Tuesday that "an incident is currently underway" off the coast of Fujairah. Hours later, they said the incident was a "potential hijack." They did not elaborate.

The U.S. military's Mideast-based 5th Fleet and the British Defense Ministry did not immediately return calls for comment. The Emirati government did not immediately acknowledge the incident.

Earlier, four oil tankers announced around the same time via their Automatic Identification System trackers that they were "not under command," according

to MarineTraffic.com. That typically means a vessel has lost power and can no longer steer.

An Oman Royal Air Force Airbus C-295MPA, a maritime patrol aircraft, was flying over the area where the ships were, according to data from FlightRadar24.com.

The event comes just days after a drone struck an oil tanker linked to an Israeli billionaire off the coast of Oman, killing two crew members. The West blamed Iran for the attack, which marked the first known assault to have killed civilians in the yearslong shadow war targeting commercial vessels in the region.

Iran denied playing any role in the incident, though Tehran and its allied militias have used similar "suicide" drones in attacks previously.

Israel, the United States and United Kingdom vowed a "collective response" to the attack, without elaborating.

Defense industry told to focus on what Navy needs to compete

BY CAITLIN DOORBOS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Top military commanders on Monday urged defense industry leaders to concentrate on the new weapons and ships that the Navy needs to compete with rival nations such as China and Russia.

Adm. Mike Gilday, chief of naval operations, requested that the defense industry stop lobbying Congress to build equipment the Navy no longer wants and "be a bit more agile in pivoting to new technologies and new platforms."

"Although it's in industry's best interest ... building the ships that you want to build, lagging on repairs to ships and submarines, lobbying Congress to buy aircraft that we don't need ... it's not helpful," the Navy's top officer said Monday at the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space conference — the first in-person major naval conference since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. "It really isn't in a bud-

get-constrained environment."

In the proposed 2022 Navy budget, service leaders call for canceling one of two guided-missile destroyers planned for 2022 and speeding the divestment of F/A-18 Hornet fighter jets. Congress has been critical of the plans, proposing to save the second guided-missile destroyer in a House Armed Services Committee markup of the budget on Wednesday and regularly questioning divestments.

The Navy feels a "sense of urgency" against a rising China, and the service has been working to "move the needle in a bureaucracy that's not really designed to move very fast," Gilday said. To do so, he said, the service must work with industry leaders.

Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said at the conference that adapting to a new "character of war" will require a change in what the military buys — and urged industry leaders to back those needs.

Eviction moratorium ends, court cases rise

Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Gabe Imondi, a 74-year-old landlord from Rhode Island, had come to court hoping to get his apartment back. He was tired of waiting for federal rental assistance and wondered aloud “what they’re doing with that money?”

Hours later, Luis Vertentes, in a different case, was told by a judge he had three weeks to clear out of his one-bedroom apartment in nearby East Providence. The 43-year-old landscaper said he was four months behind on rent after being hospitalized for a time.

“I’m going to be homeless, all because of this pandemic,” Vertentes said. “I feel helpless, like I can’t do anything even though I work and I got a full-time job.”

Scenes like this played out from North Carolina to Virginia to Ohio and beyond Monday as the eviction system, which saw a dramatic drop in cases before a federal moratorium expired over the weekend, rum-

bled back into action. Activists fear millions of people will be tossed onto the streets as the delta variant of the coronavirus surges.

The Biden administration allowed the federal moratorium to expire over the weekend and Congress was unable to extend it.

Historic amounts of rental assistance allocated by Congress had been expected to avert a crisis. But the distribution has been painfully slow: Only about \$3 billion of the first tranche of \$25 billion had been distributed through June by states and localities. A second amount of \$21.5 billion will go to the states.

More than 15 million people live in households that owe as much as \$20 billion to their landlords, according to the Aspen Institute. As of July 5, roughly 3.6 million people in the United States said they faced eviction in the next two months, according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse

Survey.

In Columbus, Ohio, Chelsea Rivera showed up at Franklin County court Monday after receiving an eviction notice last month. A single mom, she’s behind \$2,988 in rent and late fees for the one-bedroom apartment she rents for herself and three young sons.

The 27-year-old said she started to struggle after her hours were cut in May at the Walmart warehouse where she worked. She’s applied to numerous agencies for help but they’re either out of money, have a waiting list or not able to help until clients end up in court with an eviction notice.

Rivera said she’s preparing herself mentally to move into a shelter with her children.

“We just need help,” she said, fighting back tears. “It’s just been really hard with everyday issues on top of worrying about where you’re going to live.”

Bipartisan infrastructure bill leaves out key climate steps

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure package unveiled by the Senate includes more than \$150 billion to boost clean energy and promote “climate resilience” by making schools, ports and other structures better able to withstand extreme weather events such as storms and wildfires.

But the bill, headed for a Senate vote this week, falls far short of President Joe Biden’s pledge to transform the nation’s heavily fossil-fuel powered economy into a clean-burning one and stop climate-damaging emissions from U.S. power plants by 2035.

Notably, the deal omits mention of a Clean Electricity Standard, a key element of Biden’s climate plan that would require the electric grid to replace fossil fuels with renewable sources such as solar, wind and hydropower.

Nor does it include a Civilian Climate Corps, a Biden favorite and a nod to the Great Depression-era New Deal that would put millions of Americans to work on

conservation projects, renewable energy and helping communities recover from climate disasters.

The White House says the bipartisan deal is just the first step, with a proposed \$3.5 trillion, Democratic-only package following close behind. The larger bill, still being developed in Congress, will meet Biden’s promise to move the country toward carbon-free electricity, make America a global leader in electric vehicles and create millions of jobs in solar, wind and other clean-energy industries, supporters say.

While the bipartisan plan is “a good start,” lawmakers will “deal with the climate crisis in the magnitude, scope and scale that’s required” in the Democratic-only bill, said Sen. Ed Markey, D-Mass.

One of the lead negotiators, Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, acknowledged that no one got everything they wanted in the bipartisan bill. “But we came up with a good compromise that’s going to help the American people,” he said.

Cuomo sexually harassed multiple women, probe finds

Associated Press

NEW YORK — An investigation into New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo found that he sexually harassed multiple current and former state government employees, state Attorney General Letitia James announced Tuesday.

The nearly five-month investigation, conducted by two outside lawyers who spoke to 179 people, found that the Cuomo administration was a “hostile work environment” and that it was “rife with fear and intimidation.”

People interviewed included complainants, current and former members of the executive chamber, State troopers, additional state employees and others who interacted regularly with the governor.

“These interviews and pieces of evidence revealed a deeply disturbing yet clear picture: Gov. Cuomo sexually harassed current and former state employees, federal and state laws,” James said at a press conference on Tuesday.

On at least one occasion, the in-

vestigation found, Cuomo and his senior staff worked to retaliate against a former employee who accused him of wrongdoing. Cuomo was also found to have harassed women outside of government, the investigation found.

James said the investigation wouldn’t have been possible without the “heroic women who came forward.”

The attorney general’s report is expected to play an important role in an ongoing inquiry in the state Assembly into whether there are grounds for Cuomo to be impeached.

The Assembly hired its own legal team to investigate Cuomo’s conduct, plus other allegations of wrongdoing.

The legislature is looking into the help Cuomo got from senior aides to write a book about the pandemic, special access that Cuomo relatives got to COVID-19 testing last year and the administration’s decision to withhold some data on nursing home deaths from the public for several months.

Air travel hits another pandemic high

Associated Press

DALLAS — Air travel in the United States is hitting new pandemic-era highs, and airlines are scrambling to keep up with the summer-vacation crowds.

Despite rising numbers of coronavirus infections fueled by the delta variant, the U.S. set another recent high mark for air travel Sunday, with more than 2.2 million people going through airport checkpoints, according to the Transportation Security Administration.

That is nearly 11,000 more people screened than July 18, and the highest number since Feb. 28, 2020, before the U.S. felt the full brunt of the pandemic. But air travel was still down 17% Sunday from the same Sunday in 2019.

The resurgence of leisure travel, coupled with some bad weather, has led to delays and flight cancellations at airlines struggling to ramp up after being crushed by the pandemic. Airlines have thousands fewer workers than they did before the pandemic, and at times they have been caught short-staffed even though they received \$54 billion in taxpayer money to keep employees on the payroll.

By midafternoon Monday, Spirit Airlines canceled about 290 flights — more than one-third of its schedule — citing weather and “operational challenges.” That was after canceling one-fifth of its flights Sunday.

American Airlines canceled 500 flights, or 16% of Monday’s schedule by late afternoon.

Monday’s cancellations came one day after 7,400 U.S. flights arrived at least 15 minutes behind schedule on Sunday — the government’s definition of late — and more than 900 were canceled, according to tracking service FlightAware. Nearly half of Sunday’s cancellations were at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, American’s largest hub, which was hit with afternoon and evening thunderstorms.

There have been at least 5,000 delayed flights on most days since early July, according to FlightAware figures. Southwest, American and Spirit are among airlines with the biggest problems. For Sunday and Monday combined, Southwest delayed more than 2,500 flights and American more than 1,600.

Record wildfire burns amid drought in Hawaii

Associated Press

HONOLULU — Firefighters gained more control over a wildfire in Hawaii that forced thousands of people to evacuate over the weekend and destroyed at least two homes on the Big Island, but officials warned that strong winds will return on Tuesday, raising the danger again.

Authorities have lifted evacuation orders, but warned they could be reinstated at any time and that people should be ready to go.

Fires in Hawaii are unlike many of those burning in the U.S. West. They tend to break out in large grasslands on the dry sides of the islands and are generally much smaller than mainland fires.

Even though Hawaii has a wet, tropical climate that isn’t typically at risk from large fires, blazes could become more frequent as climate change-related weather patterns intensify.

The islands have seen a downward trend in overall rainfall in recent years. Drought conditions have re-

ached the most severe level in some parts of Hawaii in recent years, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. Drought that is tied to climate change has made wildfires harder to fight.

According to the National Weather Service, strong winds and generally dry conditions would continue throughout the islands Tuesday and ease only slightly on Wednesday.

Several wildfires also were burning in drought-stricken California and Oregon.

Containment on Monday reached 35% for California’s largest, the Dixie Fire, which covered about 388 square miles in mountains where 45 homes and other buildings have been destroyed.

In southern Oregon, lightning struck parched forests hundreds of times in 24 hours, igniting some 50 new wildfires as the nation’s largest blaze burned less than 100 miles away, officials said Monday.

The Bootleg Fire, the largest at 647 square miles, was 84% contained Monday, though it isn’t expected to be fully under control until Oct. 1.

Solo kids stopped at border likely hit record-high in July

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The number of children traveling alone who were picked up at the Mexican border by U.S. immigration authorities likely hit an all-time high in July, and the number of people who came in families likely reached its second-highest total on record, a U.S. official said Monday, citing preliminary government figures.

The sharp increases from June were striking because crossings usually slow during stifling summer heat.

U.S. authorities likely picked up more than 19,000 unaccompanied children in July, exceeding the previous high of 18,877 in March, according to David Shauhlian, assistant secretary for border and immigration policy at the Department of Homeland Security. The June total was 15,253.

Overall, U.S. authorities stopped migrants about 210,000 times at the border in July, up from 188,829 in June and the highest in more than 20 years. But the numbers aren’t directly comparable because many cross repeatedly under a coronavirus

pandemic-related ban that expels people from the country immediately without giving them a chance to seek asylum, but carries no legal consequences.

The activity was overwhelmingly concentrated in the Border Patrol’s Del Rio and Rio Grande Valley sectors in south Texas, accounting for more than seven of 10 people who came in families.

The government disclosures came in a court filing hours after immigrant advocacy groups resumed a legal battle to end the government’s authority to expel families at the border on grounds it prevents the spread of the coronavirus.

On Monday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention renewed those emergency powers, known as Title 42 and named for a 1944 public health law. The Homeland Security Department said it would continue to enforce the ban on asylum for single adults and families despite growing pressure from pro-immigration groups that it isn’t justified on public health grounds. Unaccompanied children are exempt.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: 'Ghost hunter' hurt in rail station fall

NY BUFFALO — Police in Buffalo said a woman looking for ghosts at the city's historic rail terminal has been injured in a fall.

First responders found the 35-year-old Kenmore woman who had fallen about 15 to 20 feet through a substation roof near the back of the property, according to police.

She was taken to a hospital and treated for multiple injuries. A man who was with her wasn't injured. Police said the duo was on the property without permission.

The 1920s-era Art Deco structure saw its last passenger train more than 40 years ago. It is a favorite haunt of ghost hunters and the site of authorized ghost tours, and once hosted an episode of the TV series "Ghost Hunters."

Surf teacher bitten by shark back in water

GA TYBEE ISLAND — A Georgia surf instructor is back in the water days after a shark bit him on the leg off Tybee Island.

Yamada Atsushi was teaching camp kids again, two days after the attack, the Savannah Morning News reported.

Atsushi said he had paddled to a student who had drifted out too far. The student rode a wave to shore, and Atsushi was bitten seconds later as he sat on his surfboard.

The island's lifeguards treated him before transferring him to an ambulance, which drove him to an emergency room. He

suffered bites on his shin and calf.

Injuries reported after rush to complex's exits

PA MANHEIM — Authorities said a number of people were injured at an indoor sports complex in Pennsylvania after some kind of incident triggered a crowd rush for the exits.

Diane Garber, emergency services coordinator for East Hempfield Township, said the incident at Spooky Nook Sports in Manheim apparently started as a fight during a basketball tournament, but there has been no confirmation of initial reports of a weapon being involved.

Garber said there were fewer than a dozen injuries, with six to eight people transported to hospitals, all with non-life-threatening injuries stemming from the rush by scores of people to get out of the facility.

Thief steals gold relics from history museum

CA SACRAMENTO — The Sacramento History Museum said a thief broke in and stole some of its gold artifacts.

Surveillance camera showed that someone broke into the main entrance of the museum and went straight for the gold artifacts in a display case, said Traci Rockefeller Cusack, a spokeswoman for the museum.

Delta Pick Mello, the executive director of the museum, told The Sacramento Bee that all alarm systems worked

properly, but the person was gone by the time police arrived.

Museum officials do not yet have an estimate for the value of the stolen items.

Historic schooner capsizes; all rescued

ME BATH — A historic schooner owned by the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath capsized on the Kennebec River. All 18 on board were rescued.

Coast Guard Sector Northern New England said it received a report that the schooner Mary E had capsized near Doubling Point.

The Coast Guard said it sent a boat crew to aid in the rescue. The Bath Fire Department and Sea Tow had arrived at the scene first and rescued all 18 people from the water and transported them to emergency medical services personnel, the Coast Guard said.

The partially submerged vessel was towed to shallow water near the Maine Maritime Museum. A "full and thorough investigation" would be conducted to figure out what caused the accident said Capt. Amy Florentine, Coast Guard Sector Northern New England Commander.

Child among 3 shot in road rage incident

NC OXFORD — A young girl was among three people injured by gunfire during a road rage incident that erupted into shooting between two motorists.

WRAL-TV reported that

both drivers have claimed self-defense. The gun violence occurred in Granville County.

Both cars were driven by men. They had girlfriends and daughters as passengers. According to the Raleigh station, the men exchanged heated words before opening fire on each other. The exact nature of the dispute is unclear.

The report said one driver was shot in the neck and his young daughter sustained a wound to a leg. The other motorist was shot in the hand. The medical status of the youngster and the two men was not immediately clear.

University flight school to open in fall semester

WV CHARLESTON — Marshall University's Bill Noe Flight School in West Virginia is opening for the fall semester, which begins in a few weeks.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony is planned for Aug. 10, while school starts Aug. 23. The new facility is located at Yeager Airport in Charleston.

Students will earn a bachelor of science degree with a major in commercial pilot-fixed wing, Marshall said in a news release. The flight school is expected to enroll more than 200 students when it's in full operation and produce about 50 commercial pilots each year.

Marshall has approval from the Federal Aviation Administration Part 141 pilot school. The United States is expected to have a significant need for commercial pilots during the next 20 years, the release said.

— From wire reports

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Back on beam, Biles wins bronze medal

Associated Press

TOKYO — Simone Biles isn't going home with a fistful of gold medals. A mental block — one brought on by exhaustion or stress or something the American gymnastics star still can't quite grasp — that forced her to pull out of four Olympic finals saw to that.

Yet standing on the podium Tuesday, a bronze medal hanging around her neck and tears in her eyes, the 24-year-old Biles may have claimed something far more valuable: a piece of herself back.

From the "twisties" that have haunted her for a week. From

the endless speculation about her state of mind. From the hype machine — one, admittedly, she fed into at times — that set expectations so high coming to Tokyo nothing short of the impossible would have been enough.

It all became too much. A week ago, her internal wires got crossed when she hopped on uneven bars during practice. Suddenly, she couldn't spin. She could barely move. She still doesn't quite know why. And if she's being honest, the wires still aren't reconnected. She's not sure when they will be.

"It was something that was so out of my control," Biles said. "But the outcome I had, at end of the day, my mental and physical health is better than any medal. So I couldn't be mad."

Biles and coach Cecile Landi adjusted her routine to ease her anxiety, switching out a dismount that required her to twist for one with two simpler backflips instead, a skill she hadn't done in competition in 12 years, half a lifetime ago. Even with the degree of difficulty lowered, she earned a 14.000, good enough for third behind Chinese teammates Guan Chenchen and Tang Xijing.

Afterward, she chatted with IOC President Thomas Bach then wiped away tears after accepting her seventh Olympic medal, tied with Shannon Miller for the most by an American gymnast. A wave of relief washed over her following a turbulent eight days that shifted the focus from the Tokyo Games to the mental health of the athletes who compete under the rings.

"We're not just entertainment, we're humans," Biles said. "And there are things going on behind the scenes that we're also trying to juggle with as well, on top of sports."

Games end for US military wrestlers

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

MAKUHARI, Japan — The Olympics are over for two U.S. soldiers and a Marine after they were defeated in Greco-Roman wrestling contests this week.

Marine Staff Sgt. John Stefanowicz, 29, of York County, Pa., lost a close match to 2017 Under-23 World silver medalist Ivan Huklek of Croatia in their 87 kg contest on Tuesday at Makuhari Messe Hall, a convention center in Chiba prefecture near Tokyo.

With other bouts going on beside them, the pair grappled on one of three mats surrounded by mostly empty stands, since only their fellow athletes, Olympic officials and volunteers and members of the press were allowed entry.

Down by five points in the waning minutes of the tussle, Stefanowicz, who was stationed on Okinawa from 2010 to 2012, narrowed the lead with a gut wrench turn but couldn't clinch victory.

Despite a frantic effort by the Marine in the last minute of the match, it ended in a 5-3 win for the Croatian.

Later in the day, Huklek won his quarterfinal bout against Rustam Assakalov of Uzbekistan, keeping Stefanowicz's chances for a bronze medal alive.

However, the Croatian's loss that evening to former world champion Zhan Beleniuk of Ukraine ended those hopes.

The games are also over for two U.S. Army wrestlers who lost on Monday and Tuesday.

Sgt. Ildar Hafizov, 33, a truck driver and member of the Army World Class Athlete Program who immigrated to the United States from Uzbekistan, lost to Russian Sergey Emelin on Monday to finish 12th in the 60 kg class.

Spc. Alejandro Sancho, 27, of Miami, a military policeman also in the World Class Athlete Program, lost to another Russian, 2018 World champion Artem Surkov, in their 67 kg clash on Tuesday morning.

Mensah-Stock wins gold, makes history

Associated Press

CHIBA, Japan — As Tamyra Mensah-Stock celebrated winning her Olympic gold medal, she hoped her victory would encourage Black girls in the United States to consider wrestling.

When she defeated Nigeria's Blessing Oborududu 4-1 in the women's 68-kilogram freestyle wrestling final on Tuesday, she became the first American Black woman to win Olympic gold in wrestling and the second American woman overall.

"These young women are going to see themselves in a number of ways and they're going to look up there and go, I can do that," she said. "I can see myself."

Helen Maroulis was the first American woman to earn Olympic gold in the sport when she upset Japan's Saori Yoshida to win the 53 kg class in 2016.

Black women have had their moments in U.S. women's wrestling. Toccara Montgomery won gold at the Pan-Am Games in 2003, Iris Smith won a world title in 2005 and Randi Miller earned bronze at the 2008

Olympics.

"They paved the way for me," Mensah-Stock said.

Oborududu made history also as the first Nigerian — male or female — to earn a wrestling medal at the Olympics.

"After wrestling to get into the final yesterday, I was having a lot of messages, a lot of calls," Oborududu said. "I locked down my phone, because I don't want to receive any calls, or anything that was really disturbing me. I switched off my phone so I was not in any kind of pressure. I know that I've created the record for my country."

Mensah-Stock, the No. 1 seed, blitzed through a formidable field. She defeated Japan's Sara Dosho — a 2016 Olympic gold medalist — 10-0 in the first round.

She beat China's Feng Zhao 10-0 in the quarterfinals, then beat Ukraine's Alla Cherkasova — a former world champion — 10-4 in the semifinal.

She finished the dominant run by defeating Oborududu, the No. 2 seed and a three-time Olympian, in the final.

Ross nears third beach volleyball medal

Associated Press

TOKYO — Three-time gold medalist Kerri Walsh Jennings missed out on her bid to qualify for a sixth trip to the Summer Games. Fortysomething four-time Olympians Phil Dalhausser and Jake Gibb both retired after getting knocked out in Tokyo.

Defending Olympic champion Laura Ludwig is heading back to Germany after losing to the U.S. in the quarterfinals on Tuesday.

April Ross just keeps on playing.

The 2012 silver and 2016 bronze medalist joined with Alix Klineman to beat Ludwig and Maggie Kozuch 21-19, 21-19 on Tuesday, leaving Ross as the last woman with an Olympic medal still standing at the Shiohaze Park beach volleyball venue.

"It's not like: 'Oh, I have a medal. So, you know, I know how to do it,'" Ross said. "We just have to fight really, really hard. ... So we're stoked to still be in, and to be in the semis is amazing."

A victory in the semifinals against Switzerland would clinch at worst a silver; a loss would put them in the third-place match. In the other semifinal match, Tina Graudina and Anastasija Kravcenoka of Latvia will face Mariafe Artacho and Taliqua Clancy of Australia after both beat Canadian teams in the quarterfinals.

The Australians knocked out the No. 1 seed in the tournament, Sarah Pavan and Melissa Humana-Paredes, 21-15, 19-21, 15-12.

"Staying motivated is really easy at this point, at this stage of the game," Klineman said. "I

mean, we can pretty much taste a medal."

A 41-year-old Californian who already has said she is eyeing the 2024 Paris Games, Ross inherited senior status on the U.S. beach volleyball team this week when first Dalhausser, then Gibb said after they were eliminated that they are going to retire.

But there's no reason for Ross to think about the future — at least not beyond Thursday's semifinal against Switzerland's Joana Heidrich and Anouk Verge-Depre, who beat Brazil's Rebecca and Ana Patricia 21-19, 18-21, 15-12 on Tuesday.

"I just have no answer to those questions," Ross said. "I'm here. I'm feeling good and ready to keep fighting."

And this time she has the 31-year-old Klineman to keep her young. She is Ross' third part-

ner in as many Olympics, and the first that is younger.

"I'm not surprised at her success," Klineman said. "I train with her every day, and I'm around her all the time. And I just see how motivated and driven she is in all aspects of her life."

Klineman said spending time with Ross has taught her what it takes to have sustained success — not just not during practice but also on the road, when Ross might be reading a book about improving one's mindset or a listening to a podcast about recovery after working out.

"She's taught me a lot in this journey. And so I'm really grateful to be by her side," Klineman said. "She was just always trying to be at her best. And so I don't think it's a coincidence that she's been here three times."

US women's water polo cruises into semifinals

Associated Press

TOKYO — Amanda Longan knows the deal. She is one of the world's best goalkeepers sitting behind the world's best goalkeeper in women's water polo.

So she waited patiently for an Olympic debut that she knew might never come. She was active for two U.S. games in group play, but didn't get in. Coach Adam Krikorian put her back on the roster for the quarterfinals, and this time, it worked out.

Longan relieved Ashleigh Johnson and played the fourth quarter as the U.S. rolled into the semifinals of the Tokyo Games with a convincing 16-5 victory over Canada. She finished with three saves on five shots and an experience that she will never forget.

"Honestly, I thought when I would get my chance I would be super, super nervous," Longan

said. "But honestly, today, I was just more happy and grateful to have that time than anything."

Maggie Steffens, Makenzie Fischer and Alys Williams each had three goals as the U.S. stayed in the hunt for its third consecutive gold medal. The Americans improved to 21-1 this year, with their lone loss coming against Hungary last week.

"I think it's been a different level after that Hungary game," Krikorian said. "This doesn't guarantee us anything, but it was a little bit of awakening for us and just got back to, again, the fundamentals and just playing the right way."

Spain, the Russian team and Hungary also won Tuesday.

Hungary will take on Spain in Thursday's semifinals, and the U.S. will face the Russian team.

Longan, 24, led Southern California to NCAA titles in 2016 and 2018.

Thompson-Herah speeds to second sprint victory

Associated Press

TOKYO — It was billed as a star-studded race that anyone could win.

As long as that person's name is Elaine.

The latest in the long list of speed stars from Usain Bolt's home country of Jamaica, Elaine Thompson-Herah blew away a much-decorated field in the 200 meters Tuesday night. She completed her second straight Olympic sprint sweep in 21.53 seconds, the second-fastest time in history.

It marked the second time in four nights that Thompson-Herah has won a sprint and recorded a time that fell short of only Florence Griffith Joyner's hallowed, 33-year-old world records. The 200 record is 21.34.

Four nights ago in the 100 meters, Thompson-Herah started pointing at the clock a few steps before the finish line and fin-

ished in 10.61, which was good for the Olympic record but not Flo Jo's overall mark of 10.49.

In the 200, Thompson-Herah ran hard all the way through and stuck out her tongue as she pushed her chest forward at the line. No question this time about what would've happened if she'd left it all on the track.

Both finishes, of course, equaled gold medals, and now Thompson-Herah will have at least four when she gets back to Jamaica. There's a chance for a fifth when she competes in the women's 4x100-meter relay this weekend.

She topped surprise second-place finisher Christine Mboma of Namibia by 0.48, while American Gabby Thomas took bronze.

Mboma broke the under-20 world record for the third time in a week, and looked stunned when she crossed the finish line.

Orioles overcome Yankees, loose cat

Associated Press

NEW YORK — In a game delayed for several minutes while a bevy of groundskeepers tried to corral a scaredy cat in the outfield, the Baltimore Orioles hit four solo homers off New York newcomer Andrew Heaney and beat the Yankees 7-1 Monday night.

The Orioles held a six-run lead in the eighth when the tabby emerged from the third base side as Yankees star Aaron Judge batted against Paul Fry.

The cat got on the warning track and dashed back and forth. The feline climbed up on the low padding along the wall and tried to scale the bullpen fence, but kept falling back down. Only after 3½ minutes did the cat leave the field, darting into an open gate near the seating area along the third base line.

Cedric Mullins and Austin

Hays hit back-to-back homers in the third off Heaney (6-8).

Mariners 8, Rays 2: Jake Fraley had a two-run single during a five-run third, Chris Flexen went 6⅓ solid innings, and Seattle won at AL East-leading Tampa Bay.

Fraley, who was activated before the game after being on the COVID-19 injured list since July 18, also made a diving catch in left field on Brandon Lowe's liner in the third. He went 2-for-4 with a walk and stole a base.

Brewers 6, Pirates 2: Eduardo Escobar hit a three-run homer and an RBI triple to back up Eric Lauer's five shutout innings in host Milwaukee's victory over Pittsburgh.

Escobar's two-out triple off Kyle Keller in the sixth extended the Brewers' lead to 2-0. He followed that up by sending a 421-foot drive to right against Nick Mears in the seventh. He

also walked twice to reach base on each of his four plate appearances.

Giants 11, Diamondbacks 8 (10): Buster Posey doubled in the go-ahead run in the 10th inning and San Francisco won at Arizona.

The Giants extended their NL West lead to 3½ games over the idle Los Angeles Dodgers.

Phillies 7, Nationals 5: J.T. Realmuto hit a go-ahead, two-run single to highlight a five-run rally in the ninth inning that carried Philadelphia to a win at Washington.

Trailing 3-2, the Phillies started the winning rally when Ronald Torreyes and Travis Janowski opened the ninth with singles off Gabe Klobosits (0-1). Jean Segura doubled off Wander Suero to tie the game and Realmuto singled to put the Phillies ahead.

Rangers 4, Angels 1: Dane

Dunning won consecutive starts for the first time this season for host Texas, and the team took the lead for good with a double steal in a win over Los Angeles.

Brock Holt scored the tie-breaking run with a headfirst slide into home on the back-end of a double steal in the fifth inning, the second time this season the Rangers stole home. Holt later added a sacrifice fly.

Marlins 6, Mets 3: Lewis Brinson connected for a first-inning grand slam for host Miami to back Jesús Luzardo in a win over NL East-leading New York.

Miguel Rojas had two hits and scored twice for the last-place Marlins.

Indians 5, Blue Jays 2 (10): Jose Ramirez homered to cap a three-run 10th inning and visiting Cleveland ended Toronto's four-game winning streak. Vladimir Guerrero Jr. hit his 34th home run for the Blue Jays.

Lowry, Paul go fast in free agency

Associated Press

Point guards got big money to open the NBA's free agency period.

Kyle Lowry is headed to the Miami Heat, Lonzo Ball is on his way to the Chicago Bulls, while Phoenix's Chris Paul and Utah's Mike Conley landed lucrative deals to remain with their current teams. The combined commitments to those four players alone: more than \$360 million.

Lowry and the agency that represents him, Priority Sports, said he was headed to the Heat. A person with knowledge of the deal said he would be signing a three-year contract worth nearly \$30 million annually in what will become a sign-and-trade that sends Goran Dragic and Precious Achiuwa from Miami to Toronto. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because nothing had yet been approved by the league.

"Miami Heat X Kyle Lowry Let's Goo!!" Lowry wrote on Twitter, followed by five fire emojis.

Paul agreed to a contract to remain with the Western Conference champion Phoenix Suns, another person with knowledge of

that deal said. It would be worth nearly \$120 million if all four years are completed and would push Paul's career earnings past the \$400 million mark. He turned down a \$44.2 million option for this coming season to negotiate a longer deal, and after the success the Suns had this season in their run to the NBA Finals, it seemed doubtful that he would look to play elsewhere.

Conley agreed to a \$73 million, four-year deal to remain with the Utah Jazz, the team that finished last season with the NBA's best regular-season record and expects to bring back most of the same core for another run this season. Conley confirmed the signing on Twitter; a person confirmed the terms to AP.

Another top point guard, Derrick Rose, was returning to the New York Knicks on a three-year, \$43 million deal, a person told AP.

The trend of big money for point guards on Monday continued even for players under contract for this coming season already. Atlanta's Trae Young agreed to a five-year, \$207 million extension that starts in 2022, Klutch Sports announced.

Durant lifts US past Spain, into the semifinals

Associated Press

SAITAMA, Japan — Back and forth they went, the three-time defending Olympic champions from the U.S. on one side, the reigning Basketball World Cup champions from Spain on the other.

The difference: The Americans had Kevin Durant.

He's never gone to the Olympics and not won gold — and clearly, doesn't plan on that changing. Durant scored 29 points to keep his quest for a third Olympic title alive, and the Americans are headed to the medal round after ousting Spain 95-81 on Tuesday in a quarterfinal matchup at the Tokyo Games.

"We've just got to finish it. Got to finish it," Durant said. "We're supposed to be here. For us, it's about getting the gold."

Jayson Tatum scored 13 and Jrue Holiday added 12 for the U.S., which will play Australia, a 97-59 winner over Argentina, in the semifinals on Thursday.