

US averaging 100K new virus cases a day

Associated Press

The U.S. is now averaging 100,000 new COVID-19 infections a day, returning to a milestone last seen during the winter surge in yet another bleak reminder of how quickly the delta variant has spread through the country.

The U.S. was averaging about 11,000 cases a day in late June. Now the number is 107,143.

It took the U.S. about nine months to cross the 100,000 average case number in November before peaking at about 250,000 in early January. Cases bottomed out in June but took about six weeks to go back above 100,000, despite a vaccine that has been given to more than 70% of the adult population.

The seven-day average for daily new deaths also increased, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. It rose over

the past two weeks from about 270 deaths per day to nearly 500 a day as of Friday.

The virus is spreading quickly through unvaccinated populations, especially in the South where hospitals have been overrun with patients.

Health officials are fearful that cases will continue to soar if more Americans don't embrace the vaccine.

"Our models show that if we don't (vaccinate people), we could be up to several hundred thousand cases a day, similar to our surge in early January," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director Rochelle Walensky said on CNN this week.

The number of Americans hospitalized with the virus has also skyrocketed and it has gotten so bad that many hospitals are scrambling to find beds for patients in far-off locations.

Houston officials say the latest wave of COVID-19 cases is pushing the local health care system to nearly "a breaking point," resulting in some patients having to be transferred out of the city to get medical care, including one who had to be taken to North Dakota.

Dr. David Persse, who is health authority for the Houston Health Department and EMS medical director, said some ambulances were waiting hours to offload patients at Houston area hospitals because no beds were available. Persse said he feared this would lead to prolonged respond times to 911 medical calls.

"The health care system right now is nearly at a breaking point ... For the next three weeks or so, I see no relief on what's happening in emergency departments," Persse said Thursday.

Taliban move in on another capital city in Afghanistan

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Taliban fighters entered the capital of northern Afghanistan's Jawzjan province Saturday, a provincial lawmaker said, after sweeping through nine of 10 districts in the province.

The government did not deny lawmaker Mohammad Karim Jawzjani's claim that Taliban fighters had entered Sheberghan, but said the city had not fallen. If the city falls, it will be the second provincial capital in as many days to succumb to the Taliban. Several other of the country's 34 provincial capitals are threatened.

On Friday, the Taliban took control of the southwestern Nimroz provincial capital of Zaranj, where the government says it is still battling insurgents inside the capital.

Sheberghan is particularly strategic because it is the stronghold of U.S.-allied Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum, whose militias are among those resurrected to aid the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces.

Heavy airstrikes were reported by residents of Sheberghan who also said the Taliban had freed prisoners from the city jail. They requested to remain anonymous fearing retaliation from both sides.

Taliban fighters have swept through

large swathes of Afghanistan at surprising speed, initially taking districts, many in remote areas. In recent weeks they have laid siege to several provincial capitals across the country as the last U.S. and NATO troops leave the country. The U.S. Central Command says the withdrawal is more than 95% complete and will be finished by Aug. 31.

The U.S. Air Force continues to aid the Afghan air force's bombing of Taliban targets in southern Helmand and Kandahar provinces as Afghan security forces try to prevent a Taliban takeover.

On Saturday, the U.S. and British embassies in Kabul repeated a warning to its citizens still there to leave "immediately" as the security situation deteriorated.

The U.S. Embassy in Kabul also issued a statement Saturday condemning the Taliban's military onslaught saying it was contrary to the insurgent group's claim to support a negotiated peace settlement.

The statement called for an immediate end to fighting and a start to "negotiations to end the suffering of the Afghan people and pave the way for an inclusive political settlement that benefits all Afghans and ensures that Afghanistan does not again serve

as a safe haven for terrorists."

On Friday, Taliban fighters assassinated Dawa Khan Menapal, the chief of the Afghan government's press operations for local and foreign media. It came just days after a coordinated attempt was made to kill acting defense chief Bismillah Khan Mohammadi in a posh and deeply secure neighborhood of the capital.

In a report to the U.N. Security Council on Friday the U.N. envoy for Afghanistan urged the council to demand the Taliban immediately stop attacking cities in their offensive to take more territory.

Deborah Lyons also called on the international community to urge both sides to stop fighting and negotiate to prevent a "catastrophe" in the war-torn country.

In Afghanistan's Helmand and Kandahar provinces in the south of the country thousands of Afghans were displaced by the fighting and living in miserable conditions.

In Helmand's provincial capital of Lashkar Gah, Afghanistan's elite commando forces aided by regular troops were trying to dislodge the Taliban but with little success, said Nafeeza Faiez, a provincial council member. Taliban are in control of nine of the city's 10 police districts.

Calif. wildfires spark weekend of fear

Associated Press

GREENVILLE, Calif. — People living in the scenic forestlands of Northern California found themselves facing a weekend of fear as wildfires threatened to reduce thousands of homes to ashes.

The Dixie Fire that incinerated much of the gold rush-era town of Greenville threatened more than 10,000 buildings in the northern Sierra Nevada. It had engulfed an area larger than the size of New York City.

It was the largest current wildland blaze in the nation and the third-largest in recorded California history, according to the state Department of Fire and Forestry Protec-

tion.

Wind-driven flames destroyed dozens of homes and most of Greenville's downtown on Wednesday and Thursday, and also heavily damaged Canyon Dam, a hamlet with a population of about three dozen people.

The fire reached Chester but crews managed to protect homes and businesses there, officials said.

The Dixie Fire, named for the road where it started, now spans an area of 679 square miles and was just 21% contained.

Near Klamath National Forest, firefighters kept an eye on small communities that

were ordered evacuated in the path of the Antelope Fire. It was just 20% contained.

Further northwest, some 500 homes scattered in and around Shasta-Trinity National Forest remained threatened by the Monument Fire and others by the McFarland Fire.

About a two-hour drive south from the Dixie Fire, crews had surrounded about a third of the River Fire that broke out Wednesday near the town of Colfax and destroyed nearly 90 homes and other buildings. Evacuations for thousands of people in Nevada and Placer counties were lifted Friday.

Colo. mudslides wreak havoc on transportation

Associated Press

DENVER — As ominous storm clouds gathered in western Colorado over a large area blackened by a recent wildfire, torrential rain fell and the charred land stripped of vegetation gave way, sending a rush of mud and boulders tumbling down steep canyon walls and onto a major highway.

The July 29 mudslides stranded more than 100 people in their vehicles overnight and caused extensive damage that closed Interstate 70, capping several weeks of perilous conditions in a scenic canyon carved through the mountains by the Colorado River.

It marked the latest in a string of closures over the past two years for an area that also

serves as a key transportation corridor between the Rocky Mountains and the West Coast.

Each forced long detours for semitrailers that deliver fuel and food, and inflicted economic pain on businesses that cater to tourists in the popular summer destination of Glenwood Springs.

The closures illustrate the kind of damage scientists have long warned can follow wildfires made worse by climate change: dangerous mudslides caused by rain in burn-scarred terrain.

Though no injuries were reported, such slides have caused deaths and destruction in recent years in California and other parts of the U.S. West.

Those who live and work in the Glenwood Canyon area have been adjusting to the inconveniences of closures for years, but mudslides have become more frequent and intense since the Grizzly Creek Fire scorched about 50 square miles last summer.

Transportation officials have closed a 46-mile stretch of the interstate and are telling motorists traveling between Denver and Glenwood Springs, on the west end of the canyon, to take another route that adds about 250 miles to the trip.

Meanwhile, long-haul truckers have been advised to detour north onto Interstate 80 through Wyoming until the canyon is reopened, which could take weeks.

IG: VA continues to wrongfully deny sexual trauma claims

By NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Veterans suffering from military sexual trauma were still unfairly denied benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs years after problems first came to light with the agency's handling of claims, a federal watchdog reported Thursday.

The VA Office of Inspector General investigated denied claims of military sexual trauma and found VA processors didn't always follow the policies and procedures for them. Leaders of the Veterans Benefits Ad-

ministration didn't monitor compliance, and there were ongoing "failures in governance," the report states.

The inspector general's office investigated the claims as a follow-up to a 2018 review, during which inspectors found about 49% of rejected claims for military sexual trauma between April 1 and Sept. 30, 2017, were denied without the processors performing their due diligence.

Inspectors conducted a second review to see how the department improved since the 2018 report. Instead, they discovered the situation had gotten worse. The office found

57% of rejected claims for military sexual trauma in the last quarter of 2019 were incorrectly denied.

The VA had not corrected the problems found in 2018, the new report found.

In a written response to the report, Thomas Murphy, the VA's acting undersecretary for benefits, said the department has improved its handling of military sexual trauma claims in fiscal 2021. From Oct. 1, 2020, the start of the fiscal year, through June 1, the VA granted 72% of military sexual trauma claims, Murphy wrote. That's up from 57% in 2017.

Disputes escalate over school masks

The Washington Post

Disputes over whether schools should be allowed to require face masks escalated in two states Friday, with the ideological battle over public health and personal choice showing little sign of abating on the eve of the new school year.

In Arkansas, a judge temporarily blocked a state law that prevents schools and other government agencies from mandating masks. But in Florida, the state school board boosted the governor's opposition to mandates, extending eligibility for a taxpayer-funded school voucher program to students who face mask requirements.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recommended universal masking in all schools, saying it is among the best strategies available to mitigate spread of the coronavirus. But Florida and Arkansas are among about a half-dozen states have banned their school districts from imposing requirements.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, R, has threatened to withhold funding from districts that don't comply, arguing that masks

should be a personal choice. But a few Florida districts are set to defy those orders, arguing that masks are needed to protect students at a time when the delta variant of the disease is surging.

"If a parent wants their child to wear a mask, they should have that right," state school board vice chair Ben Gibson said. "If a parent doesn't want their child to wear a mask in school, they should have that right."

In Arkansas, Gov. Asa Hutchinson, R, had signed the ban against mask mandates in April but later supported rolling it back for schools. He argued that allowing individual school districts to make this decision was a conservative approach that boosted local control.

Hutchinson called the legislature back from a special session to reconsider the law, but lawmakers declined to make changes. The governor told reporters Friday that he was disappointed in the legislature and criticized some who he described as having a "casual if not cavalier attitude toward this public health emergency and toward this remedy that I suggested to them."

Shots give COVID-19 survivors big immune boost, studies show

Associated Press

Even people who have recovered from COVID-19 are urged to get vaccinated, especially as the extra-contagious delta variant surges.

Friday's report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention adds to growing laboratory evidence that people who had one bout of COVID-19 get a dramatic boost in virus-fighting immune cells — and a bonus of broader protection against new mutants — when they're vaccinated.

"If you have had COVID-19 before, please still get vaccinated," said CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky. "Getting the vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and others around you, especially as the more contagious delta variant spreads around the country."

According to a new Gallup survey, one of the main reasons Americans cite for not planning to get vaccinated is the belief that they're protected since they already had COVID-19. From the beginning health authorities have urged survivors to get the broader protection vaccination promises. While the shots aren't perfect, they are providing

strong protection against hospitalization and death even from the delta mutant.

Scientists say infection does generally leave survivors protected against a serious reinfection at least with a similar version of the virus, but blood tests have signaled that protection drops against worrisome variants.

Researchers studied Kentucky residents with a lab-confirmed coronavirus infection in 2020, the vast majority of them between October and December. They compared 246 people who got reinfected in May or June of this year with 492 similar survivors who stayed healthy. The survivors who never got vaccinated had a significantly higher risk of reinfection than those who were fully vaccinated, even though most had their first bout of COVID-19 just six to nine months ago.

There's little information yet on reinfections with the newer delta variant. But U.S. health officials point to early data from Britain that the reinfection risk appears greater with delta than with the once-common alpha variant, once people are six months past their prior infection.

Senate edges toward vote on \$1T infrastructure bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Edging toward a vote, senators are convening for a rare weekend session on the bipartisan infrastructure bill, which could wrap up swiftly with passage of the \$1 trillion package or drag out for days by opponents trying to slow President Joe Biden's big priority.

The president nudged senators along from the White House, praising their work so far as a potentially "historic investment" — on par with the building of the transcontinental railroad or interstate highway system — that will bring jobs and modernization to millions of Americans.

Senators appear on track to approve the bill, despite days of fits and starts.

"It's a bill that would end years of gridlock in Washington and create millions of good-paying jobs, put America on a new path to win the race for the economy in the 21st century," Biden said Friday.

Saturday's session was to launch with a crucial 60-vote hurdle at midday that would determine if the bipartisan alliance between Republicans and Democrats holds on the public works package. Ten Republicans would be needed to join all Democrats to advance it past a filibuster; more votes would follow.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell has so far allowed the bill to progress, and his vote will be one to watch. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., has vowed to keep senators in session until they finish.

Called the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the thick bill is a first part of Biden's infrastructure agenda. It would inject \$550 billion of new spending over the next five years on roads, bridges, waterworks, broadband and other projects to virtually every corner of the nation. If approved by the Senate, it would next go to the House.

Student loan payment pause extended

Associated Press

The Biden administration on Friday issued what it says will be the final extension to a student loan moratorium that has allowed millions of Americans to put off debt payments during the pandemic.

Under the action, payments on federal student loans will remain paused through Jan. 31, 2022. Interest rates will remain at 0% during that period, and debt collection efforts will be suspended. Those measures have been in place since early in the pandemic but were set to expire Sept. 30.

In announcing the decision, President Joe Biden said the economy is recovering “at a record rate.” But he said the road to recovery will be longer for some Americans, especially

those with student loans.

“This will give the Department of Education and borrowers more time and more certainty as they prepare to restart student loan payments,” Biden said in a statement. “It will also ensure a smoother transition that minimizes loan defaults and delinquencies that hurt families and undermine our economic recovery.”

The policy applies to more than 36 million Americans who have student loans that are held by the federal government. Their collective debt totals more than \$1.3 trillion, according to the latest Education Department data.

Questions about the moratorium had been swirling in recent weeks as its expiration date approached. Even as the economy improves,

there have been concerns that borrowers are not ready to start payments again. Once the moratorium ends, those who were already behind on payments could have wages and benefits taken away as part of debt collection efforts.

Several Democrats, including Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, N.Y., and Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Mass., urged Biden to extend the moratorium through at least March 2022. In a June letter, they said restarting payments now would “drag down the pace of our economic recovery.” Schumer, Warren and Rep. Ayanna Pressley, D-Mass., applauded the extension in a joint statement Friday, saying it provides relief to millions of borrowers facing a “disastrous financial cliff.”

Apply now to pretend to live on Mars

Associated Press

Want to find your inner Matt Damon and spend a year pretending you are isolated on Mars? NASA has a job for you.

To prepare for eventually sending astronauts to Mars, NASA began taking applications Friday for four people to live for a year in Mars Dune Alpha. That's a 1,700-square-foot Martian habitat, created by a 3D-printer, inside a building at Johnson Space Center in Houston.

The paid volunteers will work a simulated Martian ex-

ploration mission complete with spacewalks, limited communications back home, restricted food and resources and equipment failures.

NASA is planning three of these experiments with the first one starting in the fall next year. Food will all be ready-to-eat space food and at the moment there are no windows planned.

Some plants will be grown, but not potatoes like in the movie “The Martian.” Damon played stranded astronaut Mark Watney, who survived on

spuds.

“We want to understand how humans perform in them,” said lead scientist Grace Douglas. “We are looking at Mars realistic situations.”

The application process opened Friday and they're not seeking just anybody.

The requirements are strict, including a master's degree in a science, engineering or math field or pilot experience.

Only American citizens or permanent U.S. residents are eligible. Applicants have to be between 30 and 55, in good

physical health with no dietary issues and not prone to motion sickness.

That shows NASA is looking for people who are close to astronauts, said former Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield.

And, he said, that's a good thing because it is a better experiment if the participants are more similar to the people who will really go to Mars.

Past Russian efforts at a pretend Mars mission called Mars 500 didn't end well partly because the people were too much like everyday people, he said.

2 Capitol rioters enter guilty pleas to assaulting police

Associated Press

A New Jersey gym owner and a Washington state man on Friday became the first people charged in the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol to plead guilty to assaulting a law enforcement officer during the deadly siege.

The pair of plea deals with federal prosecutors could be a benchmark for dozens of other cases in which Capitol rioters are charged with attacking police as part of an effort to halt the certification of President Joe Biden's election victory. Both defendants face more than three years in prison if a judge adheres to estimated sentencing gui-

delines spelled out in the plea agreements.

The estimated sentencing guidelines for Scott Kevin Fairlamb range from about 3½ to 4¼ years in prison. But the judge isn't bound by that recommendation when he sentences Fairlamb, a 44-year-old former mixed martial arts fighter who owned Fairlamb Fit gym in Pompton Lakes, N.J. Fairlamb's lawyer and prosecutors can seek a sentence above or below those guidelines.

The sentencing guidelines in Devlyn Thompson's plea deal recommend a slightly higher sentence than for Fairlamb, ranging from less than four years to 4¾ years in pris-

on. After Fairlamb's hearing, Thompson, 28, of Puyallup, Wash., pleaded guilty to assaulting a police officer with a dangerous weapon, a baton.

The same judge who accepted Fairlamb's guilty plea ordered Thompson to be jailed in Seattle. Thompson had been free since his participation in the Capitol riot.

The pleas come less than two weeks after a group of police officers testified at a congressional hearing about their harrowing confrontations with the mob of insurrectionists. Five officers who were at the Capitol that day have died, four of them by suicide.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Prosecutors: Suspect lived with dead girlfriend

MI CLINTON TOWNSHIP — A 37-year-old suburban Detroit man who lived with his girlfriend's mutilated corpse for more than seven months was charged in her slaying, prosecutors said.

Matthew Lewinski was jailed on charges including first-degree murder, disinterment and mutilation of a body, and concealing the death of an individual, the Macomb County prosecutor's office said in a news release.

The Macomb Daily of Mount Clemens identified the victim as Jerri Winters.

The woman's body was discovered in the basement of the home in Clinton Township. Prosecutors said she was killed at the house in December.

Coast Guard offloads \$1.4B in drugs at port

FL FORT LAUDERDALE — The United States Coast Guard offloaded drugs worth more than \$1.4 billion at Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale.

The agency announced that the crew of the Cutter James offloaded about 59,700 pounds of cocaine and approximately 1,430 pounds of marijuana.

Coast Guard officials said it was the largest offload in the vessel's history.

After flight cut, woman bought \$1M lottery ticket

FL TALLAHASSEE — Having just had her flight canceled, a Missouri woman's luck quickly changed

when she won \$1 million from a Florida Lottery scratch-off ticket.

Angela Caravella, 51, of Kansas City, Mo., claimed a \$1 million top prize from The Fastest Road to \$1,000,000 scratch-off game, according to a Florida Lottery news release. She chose to receive her winnings as a one-time, lump-sum payment of \$790,000.

Man sentenced in fake autograph scheme

AL BIRMINGHAM — A Georgia man who created websites to sell memorabilia bearing fake autographs was sentenced to more than three years in prison after pleading guilty to federal charges in Alabama, prosecutors said.

Douglas Duren, 38, of Atlanta pleaded guilty to fraud and identity theft and was sentenced to 40 months in prison.

For nine years ending in 2019, Duren sold counterfeit items and memorabilia with fake autographs on a trio of websites, prosecutors said. He would get retail sports equipment, movie posters, books and photos and then forge the autographs of famous people, a statement said.

Youth coach charged with child sexual abuse

MD WESTMINSTER — A youth sports coach who has worked at multiple programs in Maryland and Pennsylvania was charged with child sexual assault.

The Carroll County Sheriff's Office announced the arrest of Michael Bonczewski, 38, for abuse they said happened a decade ago, news outlets report.

In January, a man reported that he had been the victim of sexual abuse that occurred 150 to 200 times from 2010 to 2012, according to charging documents.

The sheriff's office said Bonczewski was involved with a number of youth organizations in Baltimore and Carroll counties in Maryland and York County, Pennsylvania, and detectives are concerned there may be more victims.

Administrators remove students' diversity mural

NY NEW YORK — A Brooklyn school administration's decision to remove a mural that a group of sixth-graders had painted at their school to capture its diversity has faced criticism from parents and is being investigated by the city Department of Education.

The administration at Park Slope Public School 295 deemed the mural to be too divisive, the New York Daily News reported.

The artwork was a collaboration between the school and the community art organization Groundswell.

It featured images of Black girls wearing crowns alongside messages like, "Your silence will not protect you," and, "What else is possible?" Painted in-between the girls is two multi-racial hands clasped together, under a sun, building, and a gathering of people holding signs that read "BLM," and, "LGBTQ+," among other phrases.

District Superintendent Anita Skop, and other school administrators, objected to parts of the mural, and had it taken

down five days after it went up.

She said the students will be included in the process of designing a new mural.

Boa constrictor found after accidentally freed

UT TOOEELE — A boa constrictor accidentally freed from its container in Utah has been found a month after it went missing.

The snake's owner contacted police and said the 8-foot-long reptile was found near a deep freezer in his home, KSL TV reported.

The owner told officers he believed the snake may have been there for a while, according to Tooele Police Detective Colbey Bentley.

Animal control officers were called to the home after contractors who were removing old windows in the home knocked over the reptile's container.

Girl, 12, injured in suspected shark attack

MD OCEAN CITY — A 12-year-old Pennsylvania girl suffered injuries after a suspected shark attack in Maryland that left her with 42 stitches for 20 cuts, family members said.

Jordan Prushinski and her family told WBRE-TV that they were on vacation at the beach in Ocean City when Jordan went into knee-deep water. She was swimming with her family when she limped out of the water bleeding from the leg.

Her mother, Melissa Prushinski, said other beachgoers, including an EMT and a nurse, helped give Jordan first aid.

— From wire reports

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US men claim gold medal in basketball

Associated Press

SAITAMA, Japan — Nothing about the summer was easy for the U.S. men's basketball team, and neither was the gold-medal game.

The Americans expected nothing less.

And in the end, their Olympic reign lives on.

Kevin Durant scored 29 points and joined Carmelo Anthony as the only three-time men's gold medalists in Olympic history and the U.S. held off France 87-82 on Saturday to win the title at the Tokyo Games — ending a summer that started with sputters but closed with celebration.

"Every championship is special, and the group you're with is special, but I can be honest and say this is the most responsibility I've ever felt,"

said U.S. coach Gregg Popovich, who adds this gold to five NBA titles he's won as coach in San Antonio. "You're playing for so many people that are watching, and for a country, and other countries involved. The responsibility was awesome. I felt it every day for several years now. I'm feeling pretty light now and looking forward to getting back to the hotel."

Wine was awaiting, and so was a hero's welcome from the U.S. women's team — which plays for gold of its own Sunday — when the men returned to the team hotel. Later Saturday night, after Australia defeated Slovenia for the bronze, Popovich and the team returned to the arena for their gold medals. One player would drape the prize over another's

neck, then they watched the U.S. flag get raised and "The Star-Spangled Banner" blare for them one more time.

"Everybody was questioning us," U.S. forward Draymond Green. "This is special."

Durant sealed the win with two free throws with 8.8 seconds left, making the outcome academic. The lead was five, France's final possession was irrelevant, and it was over. The U.S. players gathered for a hug at midcourt, Durant, Green and Bam Adebayo wrapped themselves in American flags, Popovich had a long hug with his assistants and the journey was complete.

"I'm so happy for Pop, the staff, the players, the country," said a teary-eyed USA Basketball managing director Jerry Colangelo, who was oversee-

ing the men's program for a fourth and final Olympics and won gold in each one. "It's a great way to finish."

Jayson Tatum added 19 points, Damian Lillard and Jrue Holiday each scored 11 for the U.S. — which knew nothing but gold would make this trip a success.

"I think it's more joy than relief, but definitely some relief," Lillard said. "Because of the expectations that get placed on Team USA, obviously it's going to be some relief."

Evan Fournier and Rudy Gobert each scored 16 for France, which now has three silver medals — all coming after gold-medal-game losses to the U.S. Guerschon Yabusele scored 13, Nando de Colo had 12 and Timothe Luwawu-Cabarrot scored 11 for France.

Japan forces US to settle for silver in baseball final

Associated Press

YOKOHAMA, Japan — Japan's players sprinted onto the mound and the collection of All-Stars hoisted their manager up and down as if on a trampoline.

They beamed when hanging shiny gold medals around each other's necks, fulfilling a national mission with the first Olympic baseball title in their history.

American players didn't seem overly upset. The released veterans, prospects and career minor leaguers thought they had given their best.

"I really feel like we left it all out there," pitcher Nick Martinez said after Japan eeked out enough runs to win Saturday night's gold-medal game 2-0.

Munetaka Murakami, at 21 the youngest player in Japan's starting lineup, hit an opposite-field homer over the 16-foot wall in left-center on a 2-2 pitch from Martinez (1-1) in the third. Martinez winced as the ball landed in

the fourth row of the empty blue seats.

"I thought we had him set up nice for a changeup there," Martinez said. "Just a nice piece of hitting."

Japan added an unearned run in the eighth when Tetsuto Yamada singled off reliever Scott McGough leading off, Hayato Sakamoto sacrificed, Masataka Yoshida singled and center fielder Jack López heaved the ball past the plate for a run-scoring error.

Masato Morishita (2-0), a 23-year-old right-hander, gave up three hits over five innings, struck out five and walked none.

Kodai Senga, Hiromi Itoh, Suguru Iwazaki and Ryoji Kuriyashiki finished a six-hitter, and the Japanese men (5-0) matched the accomplishment of the women's softball team, which upended the Americans by the same score for their second straight gold medal.

Seidel earns surprising bronze medal in marathon

Associated Press

SAPPORO, Japan — Maybe the person most surprised by the bronze medal in the women's Olympic marathon was the bronze medalist herself, Molly Seidel.

Even if a medal was something she did set as a goal all the way back in fourth grade.

For a class project, Seidel scribbled in black ink on the back of a decorated card: "I wish I will make it into the Olympics and win a gold medal."

Recalling that moment, she laughed and said: "I was little bit off but still got the medal. I'm pumped for the bronze."

Seidel finished behind Kenyan marathoners Peres Jepchirchir and Brigid Kosgei on a sweltering Saturday run through the streets of Sapporo at the Tokyo Games.

This was only her third marathon — ever.

"I was a little bit star-struck," said Seidel, who finished second at the U.S. Olympic marathon trials in February 2019 to earn a spot for Tokyo. "Being able to run with them, a lot of it is just staying calm, and not trying to think, 'Oh my gosh, you're running with the fastest women in the world.' It's just trying to be like, 'OK, focus on your race, focus and what you need to do, and stay in it.'"

So that's what she did.

She hung with the lead pack. Then, world champion Ruth Chepngetich dropped out on a hot day that led the race to be moved up an hour (Seidel found out night the night before at dinner and went straight to bed). It was down to four at one point with about four kilometers remaining when Lonah Salpeter suddenly stopped and walked to the side of the road (she finished).

Felix secures record 11th track medal

Associated Press

TOKYO — Allyson Felix knows the way to the Olympic medals stand better than any runner alive.

She made her record-setting 11th trip there Saturday, after starring as the headliner on a 4x400 relay win that featured a who's-who of American running.

With the gold medal dangling from her neck and the "Star-Spangled Banner" playing in the near-empty stadium, "I took a moment just to close my eyes and take it in one last time," Felix said.

After the final race of the final Games of the 35-year-old sprinter's career, Felix leaves the stage having won the most medals of any track athlete in U.S. history. It's some list. She

passed Carl Lewis, and now she only trails one person in the Olympic record book — Paavo Nurmi — the Finnish distance runner who won 12 between 1920 and 1928.

Felix, who a day earlier took bronze in the 400 meters to become the most-decorated woman in Olympic track, has no plans to go any further. In her mind, as a sprinter at least, she also has nothing left to prove.

"I feel at peace," she said. "I went out, had all the confidence in these amazing women. I wanted to take it all in one last time around, and it was special."

She still plans to sound an active voice for women, and especially for mothers who too often hear what she heard when she got pregnant with her now 2-year-old daughter, Cammy:

That once women start having babies, their best athletic days are behind them.

But if she had any concerns about the future of her sport on the track, the 3 minute, 16.85-second jaunt she was part of in her last Olympic race — good for a 3.68-second romp over Poland — certainly put those to rest.

It was a 19-year-old, Athing Mu, who ran the anchor leg to secure Felix's medal — the seventh gold in her collection of 11.

Sydney McLaughlin, the 400-meter hurdles world-record holder, celebrated her 22nd birthday by running the opening lap. She handed to Felix, who handed to another hurdler, Dalilah Muhammad, who is 31.

They had two things in common:

■ All won medals in their in-

dividual races over the nine days in Tokyo.

■ Also, not a single one is a 400-meter specialist.

McLaughlin and Muhammad are friendly rivals in the hurdles, where they went gold-silver. Mu won gold in the 800. Felix has always considered herself more of a 200 runner. Three of her 11 medals have come at that distance. Six of the medals have come in relays. All of those have been gold.

Also in celebration mode was the U.S. men's relay team. The combo of Michael Cherry, Michael Norman, Bryce Deadmon and hurdler Rai Benjamin combined to win America's first and only gold medal for the men's runners on the track. The U.S. closed out action at the stadium with seven golds and 26 overall medals.

US whips Spain for gold in women's water polo

Associated Press

TOKYO — Maddie Musselman held her phone out, and the U.S. women's water polo team gathered for a picture on the top step of the podium.

It was a familiar scene. The dynasty is alive and well.

Musselman scored three times, Ashleigh Johnson made 11 saves and the U.S. won its third consecutive gold medal on Saturday, routing Spain 14-5 in the final at the Tokyo Olympics.

"We're having fun out there, and I think you could see that today," Musselman said. "Everyone brought their best when their best was needed."

Aria Fischer, Kaleigh Gilchrist and Alys Williams had two goals apiece as the U.S. improved to 134-4 since it won gold at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games. It broke its own records for most goals and biggest margin in the final.

Maggie Steffens and Melissa Seidemann became the first

women to win three gold medals in water polo. Musselman was named MVP, and Johnson was selected as the top goalkeeper of the tournament.

The day belonged to the U.S. — again.

"In the moments where you want to be at your best, it's like it's just magic when it happens," Johnson said. "But ... we're putting in the work every day."

After falling 10-9 to Hungary in group play in its first loss at the Olympics since the 2008 final, the U.S. ripped off four straight wins by a combined score of 63-26.

"I think this team loves competition, so we want the hardest games and the hardest moments," Gilchrist said.

The U.S. joins the men's teams from Britain (1908-1920) and Hungary (2000-2008) as the only countries to win at least three straight water polo titles at the Olympics.

Korda finishes sweep of golf for United States

Associated Press

KAWAGOE, Japan — Her parents used to call her a lion when Nelly Korda was young because she was relentless in everything she played, from gymnastics to ice skating to golf.

"I've always been super determined and super focused on what I want," Korda said.

Now she is more than she ever imagined: major champion, No. 1 in the world and Olympic gold medalist, all of this happening in the last two months.

What a summer.

"Honestly, it's crazy," she said.

Korda gave the Americans a sweep of gold medals in golf on Saturday, breaking away from the pack with three straight birdies around the turn and holding her nerve during a chaotic chase for medals and a one-hour storm delay at the end.

Xander Schauffele won the Olympic men's competition last

Sunday.

Korda tapped in for par and a 2-under 69 for a one-shot victory. Moments later, her 28-year-old sister, Jessica, joined her on the green for a hug and a shimmy. Jessica had finished earlier with a 64 to tie for 15th and looked forward to little sister's big moment.

"This is just kind of like almost legend status as a golfer, period, male or female," Jessica said. "It's tough to win out here and she makes it look easy, but those girls are good. So for her to be doing what she's doing, it's insane to me. This is like total GOAT (Greatest Of All Time) status to me. To win three times in a season, be world No. 1, going for gold."

"You guys write for a living. This is exactly what you want to write about."

Mone Inami of Japan delivered the golf-loving host nation a silver medal.

Injured Leonard set to re-sign with Clippers

Wire reports

LOS ANGELES — Kawhi Leonard will re-sign with the Los Angeles Clippers, even though he might miss most of the upcoming season due to a knee injury.

A person with knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press on Friday that the two sides are still finalizing terms of the contract. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the deal has not been officially announced.

The Clippers, who reached the Western Conference finals last season, have also agreed to re-sign guard Reggie Jackson and have signed Justise Winslow.

Durant agrees to 4-year extension with Nets

NEW YORK — Kevin Durant is staying with the Brooklyn Nets for the long term.

Durant agreed to a four-year, \$198 million contract extension

Friday, business partner Rich Kleiman announced on Boar-droom, their sports business media network.

Durant just finished his first season playing for the Nets after sitting out the 2019-20 season recovering from surgery to repair a ruptured Achilles tendon. He averaged 26.9 points, 7.1 rebounds and 5.6 assists, showing he had shaken off the injury to regain the form that made him the 2014 NBA MVP and a four-time scoring champion.

Curry finalizes \$215M extension with Warriors

SAN FRANCISCO — Stephen Curry finalized his \$215 million, four-year contract extension Friday as the Golden State Warriors began building the roster around the longtime face of the franchise at the start of free agency.

This marks the second \$200 million-plus contract of Curry's decorated career that includes

three championships. He will earn \$48 million for the 2022-23 season, then \$51.9 million in '23-'24, \$55.7 million in '24-'25 and \$59.6 million in the final year of the deal.

Earlier in the day, Golden State signed free agent forward Nemanja Bjelica to a one-year contract that will pay him the league minimum and added free agent forward Otto Porter Jr., also on a veteran minimum contract for next season.

According to a league source, Andre Iguodala, 37, is also set to return to the Warriors on a one-year, minimum contract. Iguodala spent six seasons with Golden State, winning three NBA championships and claiming the 2015 NBA Finals MVP.

Also:

■ The Dallas Mavericks signed free agent Reggie Bullock on Friday, another back-court addition for star point guard Luka Dončić with the club set to re-sign Tim Hardaway Jr.

■ The Bucks announced Friday the signings of George Hill, guard/forward Rodney Hood and forward Semi Ojeleye. The Bucks also officially announced they had re-signed forward Bobby Portis.

■ The Atlanta Hawks re-signed point guard Lou Williams to a \$5 million, one-year contract, securing a backup to All-Star Trae Young, who agreed to a five-year, \$207 million extension that starts in 2022. The team confirmed each deal on Friday.

The Hawks also re-signed power forward John Collins to a five-year, \$125 million contract.

■ The Cavs signed Jarrett Allen to a five-year, \$100 million contract on Friday, securing the 23-year-old center as one of their foundational players. Allen, who came over from Brooklyn in a midseason deal, was a restricted free agent before coming to terms with Cleveland earlier this week.

Goodwin's HR in 10th lifts White Sox

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Brian Goodwin led off the 10th inning with a two-run homer and the Chicago White Sox regrouped to beat the Cubs 8-6 on Friday at Wrigley Field after Craig Kimbrel blew a three-run lead against his former team.

Yankees 3, Mariners 2 (11): Brett Gardner singled home the winning run with two outs in the 11th inning and surging New York beat visiting Seattle.

Angels 4, Dodgers 3 (10): At Anaheim, Calif., José Iglesias' double in the 10th inning drove in the go-ahead run as the Angels rallied to beat the Dodgers.

Indians 6, Tigers 1: Cal Quantrill kept Miguel Cabrera in the ballpark and shut down the rest of Detroit's lineup for seven innings, leading host Cleveland.

Phillies 4, Mets 2: Philadelphia beat visiting New York to win its sixth straight game to take over first place in the NL East.

Reds 10, Pirates 0: Mike Moustakas went 3-for-4 with three doubles and two RBIs in his return from the injured list to help host Cincinnati rout Pittsburgh.

Brewers 2, Giants 1 (10): Rowdy Tellez singled home Avisail García in the 10th to

lift Milwaukee past visiting San Francisco.

Braves 8, Nationals 4: Adam Duvall drove in three runs with two hits and host Atlanta beat Washington.

Twins 5, Astros 4 (11): Josh Donaldson had an RBI single in the 11th inning in visiting Minnesota's victory over Houston.

Rays 10, Orioles 6: Nelson Cruz homered and drove in five runs to help Tampa Bay beat host Baltimore.

Blue Jays 12, Red Sox 4: Host Toronto used a nine-run fifth inning to hand Boston its seventh loss in eight games.

Cardinals 4, Royals 2: Tyler O'Neill had a career-high four hits and Adam Wainwright threw seven effective innings as St. Louis beat visiting Kansas City.

Rockies 14, Marlins 2: C.J. Cron hit two home runs, including a three-run drive in his team's nine-run fourth inning, and host Colorado routed Miami.

Athletics 4, Rangers 1 (11): Starling Marte hit a three-run homer in the bottom of the 11th to lift host Oakland over Texas.

Diamondbacks 8, Padres 5: Nick Ahmed's two-run single capped a six-run fourth inning for visiting Arizona, which rallied from a 5-0 deficit to stun San Diego.

A's Laureano gets 80-game doping ban

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Oakland Athletics center fielder Ramón Laureano was suspended for 80 games without pay by the commissioner's office Friday after testing positive for a performance-enhancing substance.

The commissioner's office said Laureano tested positive for Nandrolone in violation of Major League Baseball's Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program. The suspension is effective immediately.

"I would never knowingly ingest any banned substance and put the game that I've loved all my life at risk. When I found out that I tested positive for Nandrolone, I was shocked," Laureano said in a statement released by the players' union. "I take great care of my body and have an extremely regimented diet. Based on the minuscule amount that was briefly in my body, I've learned that it is likely that it was contamination of something I ingested."

The 27-year-old, from the Dominican Republic, is hitting .246 with 14 homers and 39 RBIs in 88 games this season.