

Death toll from Maui blaze continues rising

Associated Press

LAHAINA, Hawaii — As the death toll from a wildfire that razed a historic Maui town climbed to 93, authorities warned that the effort to find and identify the dead was still in its early stages. The blaze is already the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century.

Crews with cadaver dogs have covered just 3% of the search area, Maui Police Chief John Pelletier said Saturday.

“We’ve got an area that we have to contain that is at least 5 square miles, and it is full of our loved ones,” he said, noting that the number of dead is likely to grow and “none of us really know the size of it yet.”

He spoke as federal emergency workers picked through the ashen moonscape left by the fire that razed the centuries-old town of Lahaina. Teams marked the ruins of homes with a bright orange “X” to indicate an initial

search, and “HR” when they found human remains.

Pelletier said identifying the dead is challenging because “we pick up the remains and they fall apart.” The remains have been through “a fire that melted metal.” Only two people have been identified so far, he said.

During the search efforts, the barks of cadaver dogs alerting their handlers to potential remains echoed over the hot, colorless landscape.

“It will certainly be the worst natural disaster that Hawaii ever faced,” Gov. Josh Green said as he toured the devastation on historic Front Street. “We can only wait and support those who are living. Our focus now is to reunite people when we can and get them housing and get them health care, and then turn to rebuilding.”

At least 2,200 buildings were damaged or destroyed in West

Maui, Green said, nearly all of them residential. Across the island, damage was estimated at close to \$6 billion.

The Upcountry fire affected 544 structures, most of them homes, Green said.

As many as 4,500 people are in need of shelter, county officials said on Facebook, citing figures from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Pacific Disaster Center.

Pelletier encouraged people with missing family members to go to a family assistance center to take a DNA test.

The latest death toll surpassed that of the 2018 Camp Fire in northern California, which left 85 dead and destroyed the town of Paradise. A century earlier, the 1918 Cloquet Fire broke out in drought-stricken northern Minnesota and raced through rural communities, destroying thousands of homes and killing hundreds.

The wildfires are the Hawaii’s deadliest natural disaster in decades, surpassing a 1960 tsunami that killed 61 people. An even deadlier tsunami in 1946, which killed more than 150 on the Big Island, prompted development of a territory-wide emergency alert system with sirens that are tested monthly.

The most serious blaze swept into Lahaina on Tuesday and destroyed nearly every building in the town of 13,000, leaving a grid of gray rubble wedged between the blue ocean and lush green slopes.

Maui water officials warned Lahaina and Kula residents not to drink running water, which may be contaminated even after boiling, and to only take short, lukewarm showers in well-ventilated rooms to avoid possible chemical vapor exposure.

Maui’s firefighting efforts may have been hampered by limited staff and equipment.

Shippers warned to steer clear of Iranian waters

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Western-backed maritime forces in the Middle East on Saturday warned shippers traveling through the strategic Strait of Hormuz to stay as far away from Iranian territorial waters as possible to avoid being seized, a stark advisory amid heightened tensions between Iran and the United States.

A similar warning went out to shippers earlier this year ahead of Iran seizing two tankers traveling near the strait, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which 20% of the world’s oil passes.

While Iran and the U.S. now near an apparent deal that would see billions of Iranian assets held in South Korea unfrozen in exchange for the release of five Iranian-Americans detained in Tehran, the warning shows that the tensions remain high at sea. Already, the U.S. is exploring plans to put armed troops on commercial ships in the strait to deter Iran amid a buildup of troops, ships and aircraft in the region.

U.S. Navy Cmdr. Timothy Hawkins, a spokesman for the Mideast-based 5th Fleet, acknowledged the warning had been given, but declined to dis-

cuss specifics about it.

A U.S.-backed maritime group called the International Maritime Security Construct “is notifying regional mariners of appropriate precautions to minimize the risk of seizure based on current regional tensions, which we seek to de-escalate,” Hawkins said. “Vessels are being advised to transit as far away from Iranian territorial waters as possible.”

Separately, a European Union-led maritime organization watching shipping in the strait has “warned of a possibility of an attack on a merchant vessel of unknown flag in the

Strait of Hormuz in the next 12 to 72 hours,” said private intelligence firm Ambrey.

“Previously, after a similar warning was issued, a merchant vessel was seized by Iranian authorities under a false pretext,” the firm warned.

The EU-led mission, called the European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz, did not respond to a request for comment.

Hours later, the British military’s United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, which also provides warnings to sailors in the Persian Gulf, issued its own alert.

Kyiv claims ‘partial success’ in key area

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian artillery shelled Ukrainian settlements Sunday as Kyiv claimed “partial success” in its counteroffensive in the southern Zaporizhzhia region.

Russian artillery killed seven people — including a 23-day-old baby girl — in Ukraine’s southern Kherson region on Sunday, the country’s Internal Affairs Ministry said.

Shelling in the village of Shiroka Balka, on the banks of the Dnieper River, killed a family — a husband, wife, 12-year-old boy and 23-day-old girl — and another resident. Two men were killed in the neighboring village of Stanislav, where a woman was also wounded.

Kherson regional Gov. Oleksandr Proku-

din said Sunday that three people had been wounded in Russian attacks on the province on Saturday.

Ukrainian military officials said Saturday evening that Kyiv’s forces had made progress in the south, claiming some success near a key village in the southern Zaporizhzhia region and capturing other unspecified territories.

Ukraine’s General Staff said they had “partial success” around the tactically important Robotyne area in the Zaporizhzhia region, a key Russian strongpoint that Ukraine needs to retake in order to continue pushing south toward Melitopol.

“There are liberated territories. The defense forces are working,” Gen. Oleksandr Tarnavskiy, commander of Ukraine’s

southern forces, said of the southern front.

Battles in recent weeks have taken place on multiple points along the front line, which stretches over 600-mile, as Ukraine wages a counteroffensive with Western-supplied weapons and Western-trained troops against Russian forces who invaded nearly 18 months ago.

Meanwhile, a Russian warship on Sunday fired warning shots at a Palau-flagged cargo ship in the southwestern Black Sea, the first time Russia has fired on a merchant ship beyond Ukraine since exiting a landmark United Nations-brokered grain deal last month.

According to Russia’s Defense Ministry, the Sukru Okan was heading northward to the Ukrainian Danube River port of Izmail.

National Guard removes general after sexism probe

By MATTHEW ADAMS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Army National Guard’s top personnel officer, who oversaw sexual assault prevention and equal opportunity programs, was fired following a service investigation into complaints of sexism.

Maj. Gen. Eric Little was fired as commander of the National Guard Bureau’s manpower and personnel directorate, a job he held since October 2020.

Little’s dismissal followed an investigation by the Army inspector general into allegations he led an office that was the center of “a toxic cacophony of misconduct,” according to a news report by USA Today. The general was removed from his job after the inspector general substantiated allegations that included “outright sexism” that dates back to Little’s previous job as a senior officer in the Guard’s budget office, according to the news report.

“The United States Army inspector general agency has concluded its investigations into al-

legations against Maj. Gen. Eric K. Little with several substantiated findings,” service spokeswoman Cynthia O. Smith said in a prepared statement. “Maj. Gen. Little received appropriate administrative action and is now currently serving as the special assistant to the chief, National Guard Bureau. We consider this matter closed.”

Smith declined to say when Little was fired. She also did not provide the findings from the investigation or the administrative actions that the Army took against him. General officers who lose their jobs are often placed in special assistant positions until their retirement.

One of the complaints against Little was filed just days before he was promoted to two-star general, according to USA Today.

Little began his military career in August 1992 with the Illinois National Guard. He later deployed to Iraq from December 2003 to January 2005 and Afghanistan from September 2008 to September 2009.

Hawaii Marines recognized for first aid to Filipino driver

By MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

The 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment plans to recognize two of its Marines for rendering first aid to a Filipino driver during an exercise in the Philippines in July, according to a regimental spokeswoman.

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Michael Garza, 34, of Texas, and Staff Sgt. Kyle Bougeno, 28, of Missouri, both assigned to Marine Corps Base Hawaii, helped to quickly resuscitate their driver, who stopped breathing during a seizure, according to a Marine news release July 24.

Garza said he and a Filipino woman provided lifesaving CPR that stabilized Salvador, a middle-aged father of five, until he reached a local clinic.

The regiment plans to nominate the Marines for awards but no specifics were immediately available, spokeswoman 1st Lt. Annie Pentaleri said by email Aug. 4.

“I couldn’t be more proud

of these Marines,” regimental commander Col. John Lehane said by email Aug. 3. Marines and sailors are willing to step forward “when a bad situation presents itself,” he said.

The Marines arrived on Luzon, the Philippines’ northernmost island, in early July for Marine Aviation Support Activity 23, an aviation exercise with Philippine forces, according to the release.

Several local drivers ferried the Marines daily from place to place, Garza, a communications officer, said by phone Aug. 4 from Hawaii.

Salvador stood out due to his pleasant demeanor and sharp sense of humor.

Salvador remained hospitalized for two days, with his wife by his side, and made a full recovery, Garza said. The Marines stayed in the Philippines another week before returning to Hawaii.

“It feels good knowing that I was able to do something to send somebody back to their family,” Garza said.

Trump's Iowa fair visit has a Florida feel, a dig at DeSantis

Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — Gone was the helicopter, but Donald Trump on Saturday renewed his reputation for defying norms and creating a mega-celebrity's spectacle at the Iowa State Fair.

Trump, in fewer than two hours on the steaming fairgrounds in Des Moines, attracted thousands of sweating, chanting supporters to his stops at the Iowa Pork Producers tent, a baby farm animal exhibit and a popular Grand Concourse pub.

All the while, Trump not-so-subtly tried to set himself apart from Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, Trump's main rival with more than five months until Iowa's leadoff caucuses and who was on the fairgrounds at the same time.

Just as DeSantis and his family were wrapping up their day at the fair, meeting with Iowa Republican leaders and activists, Trump descended into the huge scrum of backers accompanied by about a dozen Florida U.S. House members, a shot at DeSantis who is making an aggressive pitch to Iowa Republicans.

Trump spoke little to the public in his short time at the fair, except to talk individually to some fairgoers. However, he repeated during remarks to hundreds crammed into the fair favorite "Steer and Stein" the disproven claim that the 2020 election was "rigged," and that "we got mil-

lions and millions more votes."

Instead, while most candidates seeking caucus support tout Iowa political endorsements, Trump spent most of his public remarks introducing Florida lawmakers who traveled with him to Iowa. The effort, Trump aides said, demonstrates feelings of those who know DeSantis best, but also clearly stoke outrage among those who feel the former president has been persecuted with the two federal indictments he now faces.

Before taking his three children to ride bumper cars and the Ferris wheel, DeSantis boasted about the delegation of state lawmakers in Iowa that flanked him when reporters asked about the Florida representatives surrounding Trump.

"I think it's fine to bring folks in from Washington, but I think Iowans really are more concerned about the people in their communities," he said.

DeSantis and other candidates at the fair called out Trump for his criticism of Gov. Kim Reynolds.

Trump sought to soothe the tension between him and Reynolds on Saturday even though he didn't appear with her. But Trump repeated his claim that he was responsible for her election. Trump campaigned with Reynolds during her 2018 bid, which she won narrowly. She won reelection by a much larger margin in 2022.

Special counsel named in Hunter Biden probe

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Attorney General Merrick Garland appointed a special counsel Friday in the Hunter Biden probe, a surprise move that intensifies the investigation into the president's son ahead of the 2024 election.

Garland noted the "extraordinary circumstances" of the matter as he named David Weiss, the U.S. attorney in Delaware who had already been probing Hunter Biden's financial dealings, as special counsel after plea deal talks in the case broke down.

The sudden turn of events raises fresh questions about the case against Hunter Biden on tax evasion and a gun charge, deepening an investigation that was close to resolution just weeks ago. Weiss had asked to be named special counsel, gaining broad authority to investigate and report out his findings.

It comes as the Justice Department has taken the unprecedented step of indicting former President Donald Trump, who's President Joe Biden's chief rival in next year's election, in two separate cases. It also puts questions about Biden's family at the forefront of the 2024 presidential election.

Speaking at the Justice Department, Garland said he expects the

special counsel to work expeditiously in an "even-handed and urgent" manner.

Garland said Weiss, who had been appointed by Trump as U.S. attorney, told him last week the investigation had reached a stage in which he should continue as special counsel.

"Upon considering his request, as well as the extraordinary circumstances relating to this matter, I have concluded it is in the public interest to appoint him as special counsel," Garland said.

The announcement of a special counsel is a significant development from the typically cautious Garland and provides Weiss with independence, authority and budget to pursue the investigation.

It's not fully clear why the attorney general took the step in appointing a special counsel for the Hunter Biden case, but prosecutors in Delaware also announced Friday that plea deal talks Weiss was pursuing in the tax evasion case had hit an impasse.

Nevertheless, the announcement ensures the Justice Department's probes of Trump, and now of Biden's youngest son, who used drugs and whose personal entanglements have trailed his father's political career, will carry into election season.

Suicides in US hit all-time high last year at nearly 50K

Associated Press

NEW YORK — About 49,500 people took their own lives last year in the United States, the highest number ever, according to new government data posted Thursday.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which posted the numbers, has not yet calculated a suicide rate for the year, but available data suggests suicides are more common in the U.S. than at any time

since the dawn of World War II.

"There's something wrong. The number should not be going up," said Christina Wilbur, a 45-year-old Florida woman whose son shot himself to death last year.

"My son should not have died," she said. "I know it's complicated, I really do. But we have to be able to do something. Something that we're not doing. Because whatever we're doing right now is not helping."

Experts have cautioned that suicide is complicated, and that recent increases might be driven by a range of factors, including higher rates of depression and limited availability of mental health services.

But a main driver is the growing availability of guns, said Jill Harkavy-Friedman, senior vice president of research at the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

Suicide attempts involving

guns end in death far more often than those with other means, and gun sales have boomed — placing firearms in more and more homes.

A recent Johns Hopkins University analysis used preliminary 2022 data to calculate that the nation's overall gun suicide rate rose last year to an all-time high.

"I don't know if you can talk about suicide without talking about firearms," Harkavy-Friedman said.

Niger's nascent junta still has upper hand

Associated Press

NIAMEY, Niger — One week after a deadline passed for mutinous soldiers in Niger to reinstate the country's ousted president or face military intervention, the junta has not acquiesced. No military action has been taken and the coup leaders appear to have gained the upper hand over the regional group that issued the threat, analysts have said.

The West African regional bloc ECOWAS had given the soldiers that overthrew Niger's democratically elected Presi-

dent Mohamed Bazoum until Aug. 6 to release and reinstate him or they threatened military action. On Thursday, the bloc ordered the deployment of a "standby" force to restore constitutional rule in Niger, with Nigeria, Benin, Senegal and Ivory Coast saying they would contribute troops.

But it's unclear when, how or if the troops will deploy. The move could take weeks or months to set into motion, and while the bloc decides what to do the junta is gaining power, some have said.

"It looks the putschists have

won and will stay. ... The putschists are holding all the cards and have cemented their rule," said Ulf Laessing, head of the Sahel program at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

ECOWAS is unlikely to intervene militarily and risk dragging Niger into civil war, he said, adding that ECOWAS and Western countries would instead likely press the junta to agree to a short transition period.

Europe and the United States will have little choice but to recognize the junta in order to continue the security cooperation in

the region, Laessing said.

The July 26 coup is seen as a major blow to many Western nations, which saw Niger as one of the last partners in the conflict-riddled Sahel region south of the Sahara Desert that they could work with to beat back a growing jihadi insurgency linked to al-Qaida and Islamic State. The U.S. and France have more than 2,500 military personnel in the region and together with other European countries have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in military assistance and training Niger's forces.

Public sessions on Guam defense project leave gaps

By ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

Public meetings in early August to give Guam residents information about an advanced, 360-degree missile defense project on the U.S. island territory left many unanswered questions, according to two who attended.

The Missile Defense Agency, a branch of the Pentagon, held three scoping meetings in Hagat, Dededo and Tumon Bay. Agency representatives made presentations and took questions on the Enhanced Integrated Air and Missile Defense System first announced in March.

The agency describes the project as a "comprehensive, persistent, 360-degree" defense of the island against ballistic, cruise and hypersonic missiles. The plan calls for 20 rotating sites and cutting-edge technology such as the SM-3 Block IIA missile that's still under development.

Robert Underwood, chairman of Guam-based think tank Pacific Center for Island Security, was concerned about the technology.

"You're not making me feel better by telling me you're giving me the most sophisticated equipment and sophisticated technical expertise when there's open

questions about the efficacy of the system that you're advocating for," he said Tuesday.

Rear Adm. Douglas Williams, director of testing for the Missile Defense Agency, expects to test SM-3 Block IIA missiles for the first time with the Aegis Weapon System sometime in December 2024, online news site Breaking Defense reported Wednesday.

Underwood, once Guam's delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives, asked whether the project would make Guam a bigger target. The 210-square-mile island is already home to strategically important bases.

"We're spending this much money on an anti-missile defense system, are you spending any money on preparing people for an attack — like bunkers and things like that?" he said.

Guam Sen. Chris Barnett said he has only more questions.

"Of course, everyone wants 'Defense of Guam' but that has to be more than a slogan or blind trust," Barnett said Friday by email to Stars and Stripes. "Given the lack of real information the military has shared, it's hard to see how anyone could just say, 'I support the MDA's missile defense proposal.'"

US probes fatal crash with possible automatic Tesla

Associated Press

DETROIT — U.S. auto safety regulators have sent a team to investigate a fatal crash in Virginia involving a Tesla suspected of running on a partially automated driving system.

The latest crash, which occurred in July, brings to 35 the number of Tesla crashes under investigation by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration since June of 2016. In all the cases, the agency suspects the Teslas were operating on a partially automated driving system such as Autopilot. At least 17 people have died.

The safety agency said in documents Thursday that the Tesla ran beneath a heavy truck, but gave no further details.

The Fauquier County Sheriff's office in Virginia said in a statement that on July 19, a Tesla ran underneath the side of a tractor-trailer pulling out of a truck stop, killing the Tesla driver. The department says the truck driver was charged with reckless driving.

Sheriff's office spokesman Jeffrey Long said the possible role of automated driving systems in the crash is under investigation. The sheriff's office "is

investigating the crash to determine the cause and any potential culpability," Long said in an email. "The NHTSA is also involved and will contribute their expertise toward any investigative conclusion."

Recent crashes NHTSA is investigating include a July 5 head-on collision between a Tesla Model 3 and Subaru Impreza in South Lake Tahoe, Calif. The driver of the Subaru and an infant traveling in the Tesla were killed.

NHTSA also sent investigators to a March 15 crash in Halifax County, N.C., that injured a 17-year-old student. The State Highway Patrol said at the time that the driver of the 2022 Tesla Model Y, a 51-year-old man, failed to stop for the bus, which was displaying all of its activated warning devices.

The U.S. safety agency has been looking into a string of crashes involving Teslas that are suspected of operating on partially automated systems such as Autopilot and "Full Self-Driving." Neither system can drive itself despite the names. Tesla says on its website that drivers must be ready to intervene at any time.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

2 robotaxi services win approval in San Francisco

CA SAN FRANCISCO — California regulators on Thursday approved an expansion that will allow two rival robotaxi services to operate throughout San Francisco at all hours, despite safety worries spurred by recurring problems with unexpected stops and other erratic behavior that resulted in unmanned vehicles blocking traffic, including emergency vehicles.

The state's Public Utilities Commission voted on Thursday to approve rival services from Cruise and Waymo to operate around-the-clock service.

It will make San Francisco the first major U.S. city with two fleets of driverless vehicles competing for passengers against ride-hailing and taxi services dependent on humans to operate the cars.

It is a distinction that San Francisco officials didn't want, largely because of the headaches that Cruise and Waymo have been causing in the city while testing their robotaxis on a restricted basis during the past year.

Roller coaster reopens after large crack fixed

NC CHARLOTTE — A towering North Carolina roller coaster that shut down in June because of a large crack in its support column reopened last week after a month of repairs and testing, the park announced on its website.

Carowinds amusement park came under investigation by the North Carolina Department of

Labor after a video surfaced online of an operational roller coaster with a large crack in one of its columns. The footage of Fury 325, known as a "giga coaster" due to its dramatic height of 325 feet, showed a support beam bending with the top visibly detached as cars packed with passengers whirled by at speeds of up to 95 mph.

Park staff closed Fury 325 on June 30 after a visitor reported the crack. North Carolina Labor Commissioner Josh Dobson said last month that the crack had been visible for at least a week before the ride was shut down.

Death penalty not sought for suspected daughter

PA NORRISTOWN — A suburban Philadelphia woman accused of fatally shooting her parents and dismembering their bodies with a chainsaw in the home they shared will not face a death sentence, prosecutors said Thursday.

The announcement came during an arraignment hearing for Verity Beck, 44, of Abington, who pleaded not guilty to two counts each of first- and third-degree murder, corpse abuse, and possessing instruments of crime — a firearm and a chainsaw. Her trial was scheduled for February, and she will remain jailed without bail.

Samantha Cauffman, an assistant prosecutor in Montgomery County, told the judge her office would not seek the death penalty because "the required legal factors are not present in this case."

A motive for the slayings has

not been disclosed.

The bodies of Reid Beck, 73, and Miriam Beck, 72, were found Jan. 17 after their son told Abington police he had gone to his parents' home to check on them because he hadn't spoken to them by phone since Jan. 7. He saw a body on a floor, covered with a bloody sheet, and a chainsaw nearby.

Thousands rally in support of food workers

NV LAS VEGAS — Thousands of hospitality workers rallied Thursday evening beneath the glittery lights of the Las Vegas Strip to call attention to ongoing union contract negotiations for higher pay and better benefits for food service workers at one of the largest arenas on the famed tourist corridor.

The Culinary Workers Union said in a statement ahead of the rally that servers, dishwashers, cooks and bartenders who work at T-Mobile Arena have been locked in contract negotiations for nearly a year with their employer, Levy Premium Food Service. The workers say they want a fair contract that will ensure "one job is enough to provide for their families."

School district lost more than \$6M in cyber attack

CT NEW HAVEN — The city of New Haven lost more than \$6 million in cyberattacks on its public school district earlier this summer and has so far managed to recoup about half of the money, officials said.

The thefts, which occurred in

June and involved hackers impersonating the city's chief operating officer and private vendors in emails, came to light after a Connecticut school bus company raised questions about why it hadn't yet been paid.

Mayor Justin Elicker said the FBI initially asked New Haven officials not to speak publicly about the hacking in order to protect its investigation. So far, \$3.6 million has been recouped and the FBI has frozen additional funds, he said. No arrests have been made.

Snake discovered in homeowner's toilet

AZ TUCSON — Michelle Lespron returned to her Tucson home to find a snake had set up camp in her toilet.

"I'd been gone for four days and was looking forward to using my own restroom in peace. I lifted up the lid and he or she was curled up," Lespron said. "Thank God the lid was closed."

The encounter happened July 15. But Lespron has been getting messages from family, friends and even people she went to high school with since Rattlesnake Solutions, a Phoenix-based company that removed the snake, recently posted an employee's video.

The 20-second video shows the snake being pulled out of the toilet bowl and then hissing straight at the camera. It took the handler three tries to get the black and pink coachwhip snake firmly in his grasp. He was able to wrestle the snake with one hand while capturing it all on his cellphone with the other.

— From wire reports

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No previous champion among final four

Associated Press

AUCKLAND, New Zealand — There will be a first-time winner of the Women's World Cup this year, and maybe, just maybe, it will be host country Australia.

The Matildas, serving as co-hosts of the tournament with New Zealand, became the first home team since the United States in 1999 to win a quarterfinal in nine Women's World Cups. Australia has reached its first semifinal in team history and faces England on Wednesday for a chance to play for the title.

"I genuinely really believe that this team can do great history in so many ways," Australia coach Tony Gustavsson said, "not just winning football games, but the way that they can inspire the next generation, how they can unite the nation, how they can leave a legacy that is much bigger than football."

England, the European champion, advanced with a 2-1 victory over upstart Colombia. England also reached the semifinals in 2015 and 2019, only to finish third and fourth and never reach the Women's World Cup final.

But before the Australia and England showdown, first-time semifinalist Spain takes on powerhouse Sweden on Tuesday in Auckland.

Aside from a 4-0 loss to Japan in group play, Spain has been a force throughout the tournament. It even tuned out an earthquake roughly an hour before its quarterfinal win over 2019 runner-up Netherlands.

The earthquake Friday in New Zealand's capital of Wellington measured 5.6 on the Richter scale and created minor shaking in and around the stadium.

"We were so concentrated on the game that we didn't feel it, although we felt some shakes at the hotel the day before," Spain coach Jorge Vilda said. "The victory of Spain was the earthquake."

Sweden, meanwhile, is the

highest-ranked team still in the tournament at second in the world, according to FIFA. The Swedes got into the semifinals by knocking off previously undefeated Japan, the 2011 winner and last remaining champion in the tournament after so many early eliminations of the best teams in women's soccer.

"I think we have the team to go all the way," left back Jonna Andersson said, "and now we are one step closer."

Australia

The Matildas advanced after a tense — and electric — penalty shootout 7-6 over France in front of a sold-out crowd in Brisbane, Australia.

It took 20 penalties to decide the winner in the longest shootout in the history of the tournament. It was the game of a lifetime for goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold, who stepped up to take a penalty with the score at 3-3 but hit the post.

Arnold then managed to twice save shots from French midfielder Kenza Dali, the first being waved off after Arnold was ruled to have come off her line for the first save. Arnold said she was "incredibly disappointed" to have missed her shot on goal and thanked her teammates for keeping the Matildas in the game.

Australia, at 12th in the world, is the lowest-ranked team remaining in the tournament.

Sam Kerr, the injured superstar who missed all of group play, came off the bench against France but ended up playing nearly a full game when the match went to extra time. Kerr converted her penalty kick. And the Australians have also been boosted by the play of 20-year-old Mary Fowler, who has stepped in to fill Kerr's void.

Arnold said the Matildas need a day to regroup before focusing on England.

"I don't want to ever get ahead of myself, and we're all the same in that aspect," she said. "We

just take one game at a time, one half at a time, whatever that is, and we just keep getting to the next step every time. So now that we've made the semifinal for the first time, we'll take a moment to process what we've actually done."

England

England very much wants to add a World Cup title to last year's European championship, and coach Sarina Wiegman understands the Lionesses will have their hands full in a semifinal that will be a home game for Australia.

Wiegman's only loss as England manager in 37 matches was a 2-0 loss to Australia in a friendly four months ago. Now in the semifinals for a third consecutive World Cup, England must beat the home team to advance to its first final.

"It's going to be really big," Wiegman said of the semifinal. "It's probably going to be bigger than I imagined now. I'll talk to my players and staff and see what that rivalry is. We've had such a warm welcome and we've really enjoyed our time here in Australia. I really like the people here but that doesn't mean there's no rivalry. So we'll see that Wednesday."

England already has won in front of a hostile crowd — the 75,784 in attendance for its quarterfinal win over Colombia were mostly clad in Colombian colors — and Wiegman said "we expect a similar crowd for Australia."

"We are really looking forward to it. We know that it's an away game," she said.

England star Lauren James will miss her second consecutive game because of a suspension for receiving a red card in the quarterfinals.

Sweden

Sweden's current team has been labeled the "Golden Generation" of its nation's history of women's soccer, but the Swedes have yet to live up to that billing

on an international stage.

Now it has knocked off both the United States and Japan to reach the semifinals and a Tuesday match against Spain in Auckland. Sweden nearly won an Olympic gold medal in Tokyo two years ago but lost to Canada in the final, and in the World Cup, the Swedes were runners-up in 2003 and three-time third-place finishers.

A highlight of each Sweden win has been the playing of Swedish band ABBA's songs in the stadiums after the victories, and striker Kosovare Asllani has a request for Tuesday: "I love 'Lay Your Love on Me,'" she said.

"It's so nice when you hear the ABBA songs after the game. You can't help but smile," she said. "I'm just very proud of the team performance but we're not satisfied here. Obviously want to go all the way."

Spain

Spain was the first team to secure a spot in the semifinals with a 2-1 win over 2019 runner-up Netherlands in extra time of the quarterfinals.

Just making it to the quarterfinals was a boost for Spain, which is ranked seventh in the world but had not advanced that far in its two previous World Cup appearances. But in their third tournament, La Roja have been fantastic.

Spain blew through its first two games of group play before suffering a humiliating 4-0 loss to Japan in the finale. Vilda made a batch of lineup changes for the knockout round, which led to a 5-1 win over Switzerland, and then the quarterfinal upset of the Dutch.

"We've reached somewhere we've never reached before, and done it playing a good game as well, with a team that is convinced that we can go even further," Vilda said. "The rival that we meet and face in the semifinals, it will be one of the best teams in the world."

Who will be No. 1 in preseason Top 25?

Associated Press

The last time Alabama was ranked lower than No. 3 in the preseason AP Top 25, Nick Saban had not yet won a national championship with the Crimson Tide.

There is a very real possibility that when the new preseason AP Top 25 is unveiled on Monday at noon Eastern, 'Bama could be squeezed out of the top three. After all, the Tide went 11-2 and didn't make the College Football Playoff in 2022 and then said goodbye to Heisman Trophy winner Bryce Young and two-time national defensive player of the year Will Anderson Jr.

Not exactly cause for alarm in Tuscaloosa, but for a program with six national titles in the last 14 years — and five of the last seven preseason No. 1 rankings — there are more unknowns than there have been in a while.

"Our team seems to be pretty hungry this year and motivated," coach Nick Saban said during SEC media days. "Like all

teams, we probably have some issues that are created by graduations and people leaving the program. Obviously, the No. 1 thing that people are most interested in is the quarterback."

Everybody should be so lucky to have the Tide's uncertainty as Saban tries to sort through another roster filled with former blue-chip recruits to unearth the next wave of All-Americans. The last time Alabama began a season ranked outside the top three was 2009, when the Crimson Tide were No. 5 — and went on to win their first national title under Saban.

There is plenty to ponder as the unofficial start of the season nears with the release of AP Top 25.

Who's No. 1?

Georgia has won two straight national championships, but hasn't been preseason No. 1 since 2008 — the Bulldogs' one and only time starting the preseason on top of the AP poll.

After ending a four-decade ti-

tle drought in 2021, Georgia had a record number of players drafted. That created just enough doubt about the Bulldogs going into last year to be ranked No. 3 in the preseason.

Even with more significant turnover, Georgia is the odds-on favorite to be preseason No. 1. Michigan, coming off consecutive CFP appearances — but no playoff victories — looks like the most likely alternative.

The Wolverines have a load of experience and talent returning, including quarterback J.J. McCarthy and All-America running back Blake Corum, and a two-game winning streak against rival Ohio State.

TCU's follow-up

The Horned Frogs became the first true Cinderella team in the College Football Playoff era, getting to the championship game the year after having a losing season and with a first-year coach.

Sonny Dykes' crew was unranked heading into the season

and not even considered a threat to win the Big 12. The Frogs then proceeded to win eight regular-season games by 10 points or fewer and then upset Michigan in the CFP semifinals.

Gone from that surprising team is Heisman runner-up Max Duggan, first-round draft pick Quentin Johnston and a slew of productive veterans who spurred last season's magical run.

So what will voters do with TCU this year?

The lowest preseason ranking for a team that reached the CFP the previous season was given to Cincinnati at No. 23 last year. The Bearcats became the first team from outside a Power Five conference to reach the playoff in 2021, and then lost just about all their star players to the NFL Draft.

The lowest-ranked Power Five team in the preseason poll the season after making the playoff was Michigan State at No. 12 in 2016. That team finished 3-9.

International flavor at Basketball HoF inductions

Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. — Fans waved a German flag and chanted Dirk Nowitzki's name when he walked the red carpet into Symphony Hall on Saturday night for the Basketball Hall of Fame enshrinement ceremony. In his acceptance speech, the former Dallas big man told his parents, "Danke."

Tony Parker's fans whooped it up when he took the stage to lead off the proceedings. "There are a lot of French people in town. Sorry," the San Antonio Spurs point guard said.

Spain was well-represented, too, with Pau Gasol shouting out his national team — "mi familia" — before joining what may be the greatest international class of inductees in the Springfield shrine's history.

"I want to give a special mention to those first Europeans, who came here, across the ocean, who took a chance," said Gasol, who fell in love with the sport when the 1992 Olympics were held in his hometown, Bar-

celona. "I was 12. It changed my life. The Dream Team showed us how basketball could be played."

The Class of 2023 brought a distinctly international flavor to the basketball hall.

Nowitzki was the first European-born player to win the NBA MVP award, in 2007. Parker's NBA Finals MVP award that year was the first for a European. In 2002, Gasol was the NBA's first international rookie of the year.

The Spurs were well represented, too, led by longtime coach and five-time NBA champion Gregg Popovich, and Parker, the point guard on four of those title-winning teams. Becky Hammon, who after a career in the WNBA joined the Spurs as the first woman to serve as a full-time NBA assistant coach, was also honored. Gasol played his last two healthy seasons with the Spurs.

Others enshrined include Dwyane Wade — a key piece of three NBA championship teams in Miami. He was greeted with

chants of "Let's go, Heat!" before asking the crowd to pipe down because Popovich had taken up too much time.

He concluded by inviting his father — Dwyane Wade Sr. — onto the stage. "We're in the Hall of Fame, Pop," he said before one final hug.

Former North Carolina State coach Jim Valvano, who led the Wolfpack to the 1983 NCAA title and went on to be a broadcaster and advocate for cancer research, was inducted posthumously.

Rounding out the class were the silver medal-winning 1976 U.S. Olympic women's basketball team; former Purdue coach Gene Keady, a seven-time Big Ten coach of the year; former Texas A&M women's coach Gary Blair, who took two teams to the Final Four; longtime coach at Amherst and two-time Division III national champion David Hixon; and Gene Bess — who won 1,300 games as a junior college coach at Three Rivers Community College in Poplar Bluff, Mo.

Morel rallies Cubs over Jays in ninth

Associated Press

TORONTO — Christopher Morel hit a tiebreaking double in the ninth inning and the Chicago Cubs beat the Toronto Blue Jays 5-4 on Saturday afternoon.

Dansby Swanson added a three-run home run as the Cubs (61-56) improved to 8-3 in August and won for the 18th time in 24 games.

Whit Merrifield hit a two-run home run, but Toronto (65-54) lost for the fourth time in five games after winning its previous four.

Chicago's Cody Bellinger doubled off right-hander Jordan Hicks (1-7) to begin the ninth and came around to score what turned out to be the winning run on Morel's one-out double to left field.

"Belli has been our most valuable player," Cubs manager David Ross said. "That leadoff double was huge."

Morel leads the Cubs with eight RBI in the ninth inning this season.

Bellinger went 2-for-4 with an RBI for the Cubs, who have won six of their past eight meetings with Toronto. Chicago is 9-5 against AL East opponents.

Braves 21-6, Mets 3-0: Spencer Strider pitched seven scoreless innings and Ozzie Albies homered as visiting Atlanta completed a doubleheader sweep over New York.

The Braves routed the Mets in the opener when Albies homered and drove in six runs and Nicky Lopez added four hits — including his first homer since Sept. 9, 2021 — and five RBIs before tossing a scoreless ninth inning.

Orioles 1, Mariners 0 (10): Ryan Mountcastle's one-out single in the top of the 10th inning scored Cedric Mullins, and visiting Baltimore snapped Seattle's eight-game win streak.

Dodgers 4, Rockies 1: Will Smith, James Outman and Amed Rosario homered and Tony Gonsolin worked six solid innings after allowing a home

run on his first pitch in host Los Angeles' win over Colorado.

Rangers 9, Giants 3: Corey Seager homered and singled in a run, Mitch Garver had three RBIs and visiting Texas beat a stumbling San Francisco.

Rays 6, Guardians 5: Randy Arozarena lined an RBI single to right center to complete a three-run ninth inning off Cleveland closer Emmanuel Clase as host Tampa Bay rallied to beat the Guardians.

Astros 11, Angels 3: Kyle Tucker hit a three-run homer and RBI single to lead host Houston to its fifth win in six games and second straight rout of Los Angeles.

Twins 8, Phillies 1: Joey Gallo had two homers among his four hits and drove in four runs, Pablo López struck out seven in six shut-out innings and visiting Minnesota snapped a four-game losing streak.

Brewers 3, White Sox 2: William Contreras capped a three-run seventh with the winning RBI and visiting Milwau-

kee earned its second straight comeback victory.

Tigers 6, Red Sox 2: Kerry Carpenter hit two solo homers and visiting Detroit cleared Fenway Park's Green Monster four times in a win over Boston.

Marlins 3, Yankees 1: Sandy Alcantara threw a complete-game, five-hitter and Luis Arraez hit his fourth homer of the season in host Miami's win over New York.

Diamondbacks 3, Padres 0: Christian Walker hit a two-run homer, Zac Gallen pitched six strong innings and host Arizona snapped a nine-game losing streak by beating San Diego.

Cardinals 5, Royals 4: Tommy Edman hit two home runs to lead visiting St. Louis past Kansas City in front of the second-largest crowd of the season at Kauffman Stadium.

Nationals 3, Athletics 2: Keibert Ruiz hit the first pitch of the ninth inning into the right-field bullpen to give host Washington its second walk-off homer of the season.

Dixon holds off Rahal to win Indianapolis Grand Prix

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The Iceman became the Ironman of IndyCar on Saturday. Capped it off with a win, too.

Scott Dixon kept his cool after getting spun around on the opening lap of the Indianapolis Grand Prix, used Graham Rahal's late pit stop to take the lead and then held off the hard-charging pole winner for his first victory of the season by 0.4779 seconds.

Dixon's 54th career win, second in series history, was part of another milestone day. He has won at least one race in 19 consecutive IndyCar seasons, extending his own record, and it came on the day he also broke Tony Kanaan's previous series mark with his 319th consecutive start.

"Crazy day for me. I thought I had a fantastic start, picked up about five spots and then got to (turn) seven and there was a bit of a backup there and just got spun around," said Dixon, who had his 200th podium finish. "So now I can say a spin and win and

which is pretty cool."

It's another remarkable chapter in Dixon's incredible career.

Only A.J. Foyt has won more races (67) or more series crowns (seven) than Dixon, who has done it all with Chip Ganassi Racing over 22 seasons — the longest-tenured driver in team history. And while the trips to victory lane rarely come easily for the six-time IndyCar champ, Dixon always seems to find a creative way to stay in contention.

It happened again Saturday after an early collision that sent Dixon to pit road on Lap 5. He spent the rest of the race running a different strategy than the other cars, a move that eventually helped him stay in contention after qualifying 15th.

"We're going against the best ever, right? I mean it's what 20 straight seasons or 19?" said Rahal, who ended a six-year pole drought Friday but failed to snap his six-year victory drought. "It's ridiculous. It's absolutely insane."

Clearly, Rahal posed the biggest obstacle after he pitted with 23 laps to go, and Dixon took the lead. The 34-year-old Ohioan spent the rest of the race chasing Dixon, steadily cutting the gap. With 10 laps remaining, Rahal trailed by 2.9084 seconds. With five to go, it was down to 1.5078 and with two left, Rahal was within 0.2687 seconds. Then Rahal ran into trouble.

"On the second-to-last lap, I wasn't gaining ground, I was just pulling dead even, and I couldn't make the lunge," he said.

That was the opening Dixon needed and he managed to prevent Rahal from ever getting a chance to pass. The victory moved Dixon ahead of two-time series champ Josef Newgarden into second place behind Alex Palou, who extended his lead to 101 points with a seventh-place finish.

Pato O'Ward, Christian Lundgaard, Rahal's teammate, and 2016 Indianapolis 500 winner Alexander Rossi closed out the top five.