

US, Japan, S. Korea meet to boost security

Associated Press

CAMP DAVID, Md. — President Joe Biden opened a summit with Japan and South Korea on Friday focused on strengthening security and economic ties at a time of increasing concerns about North Korea's persistent nuclear threats and China's provocations in the Pacific.

"Our countries are stronger and the world will be safer as we stand together. And I know this is a belief that all three share," Biden declared at the start of the meeting with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at the Camp David presidential retreat in Maryland.

Addressing his fellow leaders at what he called the first stand-alone summit of the three nations, the American president said, "I want to thank you both for your political courage that brought you here."

Yoon said as the three appeared before reporters that "today will be remembered as a

historic day, where we established a firm institutional basis and commitments to the trilateral partnership."

And Kishida said before the private talks that "the fact that we, the three leaders, have got together in this way, I believe means that we are indeed making a new history as of today. The international community is at a turning point in history."

The U.S., Japan and South Korea have agreed to a new security pledge committing the three countries to consult with each other in the event of a security crisis or threat in the Pacific. Details about the new "duty to consult" commitment emerged as the summit got underway.

Before the three-way talks, Biden met separately with Yoon and then Kishida in mid-morning. The visitors' remarks were translated into English as they spoke to reporters.

The agreement is one of several joint efforts that the leaders were expected to announce at the daylong summit.

"Suffice it to say, this is a big deal," Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters on Friday shortly before the start of the summit. "It is a historic event, and it sets the conditions for a more peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific, and a stronger and more secure United States of America,"

Even before the summit began, it drew harsh public criticism from the Chinese government.

"The international community has its own judgment as to who is creating contradictions and increasing tensions," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told reporters Friday.

"Attempts to form various exclusive groups and cliques and to bring bloc confrontation into the Asia-Pacific region are unpopular and will definitely spark vigilance and opposition in the countries of the region," Wang said.

Sullivan pushed back against the Chinese concerns.

"It's explicitly not a NATO

for the Pacific," Sullivan said. "This partnership is not against anyone, it is for something. It is for a vision of the Indo-Pacific that is free, open, secure and prosperous."

The "duty to consult" pledge is intended to acknowledge that the three countries share "fundamentally interlinked security environments" and that a threat to one of the nations is "a threat to all," according to a senior Biden administration official. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to preview the coming announcement.

Under the pledge, the three countries agree to consult, share information and align their messaging with each other in the face of a threat or crisis, the official said.

The summit is the first Biden has held during his presidency at the storied Camp David. The three leaders were scheduled to hold a news conference later. Biden was hoping to use much of the day with the two leaders as a more informal opportunity to tighten their bond.

US readying plans to evacuate drone bases in Niger

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. is making precautionary plans to evacuate two key drone and counter-terror bases in Niger if that becomes necessary under the West African nation's new ruling junta, the Air Force commander for Africa said Friday.

That planning includes looking for U.S.-allied nations in the Saharan and Sahel regions, some of the world's most active areas for al-Qaida- and Islamic State-allied extremist groups, "that we could maybe partner

up with, and then move our assets there," Air Force Gen. James Hecker told reporters in Washington.

Hecker stressed that there had been no decision from the Biden administration regarding whether the Niger military's July 26 overthrow of the country's democratically elected president would compel U.S. diplomats or security forces to leave the country.

U.S. bases there have been vital counter-terror posts in an unstable region that is seeing an

increasing number of coups as well as encroachment by Russia's Wagner mercenary group. The U.S. presence includes air bases in Niamey, the capital, and in the remote city of Agadez on the edge of the Sahara.

If U.S. forces do leave, either following a decision by the Biden administration that it cannot work with the mutinous soldiers now leading the country or because the junta orders them out, "it obviously will have an effect" on U.S. intelligence and counterterrorism efforts, Heck-

er said.

"But of course what we hope for is that we have a peaceful diplomatic solution to this and we don't have to" leave, he said.

Hecker said he believed it would be "weeks or much longer" before U.S. officials would announce any kind of decision to evacuate, if it does come to that.

Hecker gave no details on what countries the U.S. was considering as an alternate West Africa counter-terror post, if Niger became unworkable.

Ukraine to get F-16s from Dutch, Danes

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — The United States has given its approval for the Netherlands and Denmark to deliver F-16s to Ukraine, officials in Washington and Europe said Friday, in a major gain for Kyiv even though the fighter jets won't have an impact any time soon on the almost 18-month war.

It was not immediately clear when the first F-16s might enter the conflict, but Ukrainian pilots will first have to undertake at least six months' training on the aircraft, according to officials.

Ukraine has long pleaded for the sophisticated fighter to give it a combat edge. It recently launched a long-anticipated counteroffensive against the Kremlin's forces without air cover, placing its troops at the mercy of Russian aviation and artillery.

Even so, Air Force Gen. James Hecker, commander of U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Africa, told reporters in Washington he didn't expect the F-16s to be a game-changer for Ukraine. Getting F-16 squadrons ready for battle could take "four or five years," he said.

But in eastern Ukraine, attack helicopter pilots welcomed the

news. They said Russia has a clear advantage in the skies, but the introduction of modern fighter jets could dramatically shift the balance of power Kyiv's way.

Ukrainian forces supporting infantry are using decades-old Soviet-era models, which are vulnerable to air-to-air missile attacks from Russian fighter jets, Capt. Yevgen Rakita, a spokesman for the 18th Army Aviation Brigade, told The Associated Press.

"A modern war cannot be won without aviation," Rakita said.

In making the decision on F-16 deliveries, Washington aims to ensure warplanes can be provided to Ukraine as soon as its pilots complete their training, according to a U.S. administration official who was not authorized to comment and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan said U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken sent a letter to his Dutch and Danish counterparts earlier this week, offering formal assurance that the U.S. would fast-track approval of all requests from third parties to transfer F-16s to Ukraine.

Danish Defense Minister Jakob Ellemann-Jensen said Friday the training of Ukrainian pilots is starting this month.

A coalition of 11 Western countries — the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden and the United Kingdom — pledged in July to train Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16s.

Officials have previously said that Ukrainian pilots will need six to eight months of training.

Denmark will hand over some of its F-16s only after receiving its new F-35 jet fighters. The first four F-35s are due to be delivered on Oct. 1.

Washington's blessing for the plane donations to other countries is needed because the aircraft are made in the United States.

President Joe Biden's authorization last May for allies to train Ukrainian forces on how to operate the warplanes, and eventually to provide the aircraft themselves, was preceded by months of debate in Washington and quiet talks with allies, officials said.

The administration had concerns that the move might escalate tensions with Russia. Also, U.S. officials argued that learn-

ing to fly and logistically support the advanced F-16 would be difficult. Eventually, the go-ahead came because the F-16s are required for Ukraine's long-term security needs.

Though delivery is likely months away, Washington says the F-16s — like the advanced U.S. Abrams tanks — will be crucial in the long term as Kyiv faces down Russia.

Ukraine has been relying on older aircraft, such as Russian-made MiG29 and Sukhoi jets. F-16s have newer technology and targeting capabilities. They are also more versatile, experts say.

In other developments:

■ Russian air defenses stopped drone attacks on central Moscow and on the country's ships in the Black Sea, officials said Friday, blaming the attempted strikes on Ukraine. The claims couldn't be verified.

■ A Hong Kong-flagged cargo ship that this week set sail along a Black Sea temporary corridor established by Ukraine for merchant shipping safely reached the coast of Istanbul on Friday. The voyage was closely watched to see whether the Russian navy would allow the Joseph Schulte container vessel to pass unmolested.

Defense: Marine believed girl in barracks was older

The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — A Camp Pendleton Marine accused of having sex with a missing 14-year-old girl found in his barracks believed she was in her early 20s, his defense attorneys argued Thursday.

An attorney for Pfc. Avery Rosario said during a brief preliminary hearing in a military courtroom at Camp Pendleton that the Marine met the girl on Tinder, a dating app for adults,

where her profile said she was 21 years old.

The argument by the defense capped a brief hearing in which no witnesses were called, and much of the evidence — which includes conversations on Tinder and Instagram — was not shown. The evidence was filed directly with the Marine colonel tasked with recommending whether Rosario should face court-martial for allegations of sex with a minor.

No decision was made Thursday. The prosecution and defense will each file further arguments in writing, with the last due Aug. 25.

Rosario is charged with three counts of sexual assault and two charges of violating liberty restrictions — leaving base without permission — according to charges base officials. The charges indicate the incidents happened June 27.

The next day, military police

at Camp Pendleton found the girl in a barracks. The military notified the county Sheriff's Department, and the girl was reunited with her family.

The Sheriff's Department said the teen's grandmother said the girl ran away from home June 9. She had run away on previous occasions, but quickly returned. With the teen still unaccounted for on June 13, the grandmother reported her missing.

Emergency official in Maui resigns in wake of wildfire

Associated Press

LAHAINA, Hawaii — Outdoor alert sirens on Maui stayed silent as a ferocious fire devastated the seaside community of Lahaina last week. The head of the Maui Emergency Management Agency said he had no regrets about not deploying the system as a warning to people on the island.

A day after making that statement, Administrator Herman Andaya resigned Thursday. Andaya had said he feared blaring the sirens during the blaze could have caused people to go “mauka,” using a navigational term that can mean toward the mountains or inland in Hawaiian.

“If that was the case, then they would have gone into the fire,” Andaya explained.

But the decision not use the sirens, coupled with water shortages that hampered firefighters and an escape route clogged with vehicles that were overrun by flames, has brought intense criticism from many residents following the deadliest wildfire

in the U.S. in more than a century. At least 111 people were killed.

Mayor Richard Bissen accepted Andaya’s resignation effective immediately, the County of Maui announced on Facebook. Andaya cited unspecified health reasons for leaving his post, with no further details provided.

“Given the gravity of the crisis we are facing, my team and I will be placing someone in this key position as quickly as possible and I look forward to making that announcement soon,” Bissen said in the statement.

The lack of sirens has emerged as a potential misstep. The Associated Press reported it was part of a series of communication issues that added to the chaos. Hawaii has what it touts as the largest system of outdoor alert sirens in the world.

The siren system was created after a 1946 tsunami that killed more than 150 on the Big Island, and its website says it may be used to alert for fires.

Andaya was to take part in a

meeting of Maui’s fire and public safety commission on Thursday morning, but it was canceled. On Wednesday he vigorously defended his qualifications for the job, which he had held since 2017. He said he was not appointed but had been vetted, took a civil service exam and was interviewed by seasoned emergency managers.

Andaya said he had previously been deputy director of the Maui County Department of Housing and Human Concerns and chief of staff for former Maui County Mayor Alan Arakawa for 11 years. During that time, he said, he often reported to “emergency operations centers” and participated in numerous trainings.

“So to say that I’m not qualified I think is incorrect,” he said.

Arakawa, who noted Andaya was scrutinized for the job by the county’s personnel service, said he was disappointed by the resignation “because now we’re out one person who is really qualified.”

Hurricane Hilary gains strength off Mexico coast

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — Hurricane Hilary grew rapidly to Category 4 strength off Mexico’s Pacific coast on Friday and could reach Southern California as the first tropical storm there in 84 years, causing “significant and rare impacts” including extensive flooding.

The U.S. National Hurricane Center said Hilary had sustained winds near 145 mph at 6 a.m. and was expected to continue its rapid intensification through Friday before starting to weaken.

It will nevertheless still be a hurricane when it approaches Mexico’s Baja California peninsula on Saturday night, and will approach Southern California on Sunday as a tropical storm.

No tropical storm has made landfall in Southern California since Sept. 25, 1939, according to the National Weather Service.

Early Friday, Hilary was centered about 400 miles south of Los Cabos on the southern tip of the Baja peninsula. It was moving west-northwest at 13 mph, but was expected to turn gradually toward the north through Saturday.

The Mexican government extended its hurricane watch and tropical storm warning northward for parts of Baja California Sur state, and also issued a tropical storm watch for parts of mainland Mexico.

“Heavy rainfall in association with Hilary is expected to impact the Southwestern United States through next Wednesday, peaking on Sunday and Monday,” the hurricane center said. It said there was a substantial danger of flash flooding in an area stretching from San Diego to Las Vegas.

Average long-term US mortgage rate hits highest level in more than 20 years

Associated Press

The average long-term U.S. mortgage rate climbed this week to its highest level in more than 20 years, grim news for would-be homebuyers already challenged by a housing market that remains competitive due to a dearth of homes for sale.

Mortgage buyer Freddie Mac said Thursday that the average rate on the benchmark 30-year home loan rose to 7.09% from 6.96% last week. A year ago, the rate averaged 5.13%.

It’s the fourth consecutive weekly increase for the average

rate and the highest since early April 2002, when it averaged 7.13%. The last time the average rate was above 7% was last November, when it stood at 7.08%.

High rates can add hundreds of dollars a month in costs for borrowers, limiting how much they can afford in a market already unaffordable to many Americans.

“With prices even higher than they were a year ago in many markets, crossing the 7% mortgage rate threshold again could be what sets in motion a major contraction in the housing mar-

ket this fall,” said Lisa Sturtevant, chief economist for Bright MLS.

The latest increase in rates follows a sharp uptick in the 10-year Treasury yield, which has been above 4% this month and climbing. The yield, which lenders use to price rates on mortgages and other loans, touched its highest level since October on Thursday morning, and it’s close to where it was in 2007.

The yield has been rising as bond traders react to more reports showing the U.S. economy remains remarkably resilient.

GOP hopefuls converge on Atlanta

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Several Republican White House hopefuls are set to greet a conservative conference with hopes of making up ground against Donald Trump. But his shadow may be especially difficult to escape in the city where he was most recently indicted.

Trump won't speak at The Gathering, an Atlanta event by syndicated radio host Erick Erickson taking place Friday and Saturday about 10 miles from the jail where the former president has to surrender before next Friday on a rack-

teering indictment related to the 2020 election. Six of his 2024 rivals, meanwhile, are scheduled for onstage interviews with Erickson, an influential conservative who has been critical of the former president.

The timing sets up one more example of the struggle Trump's GOP opponents face: He dominates the primary polls and media attention — especially on cable news and talk radio — even as he faces multiple criminal indictments for alleged actions before, during and after his presidency.

While they carry immense legal jeopardy, the four indictments seem to have hardened Trump's support among core GOP voters, even as a majority of Americans disapprove of him. And many party loyalists who say they are open to alternatives still don't want to hear criticisms of Trump.

"It's hard for anybody to get any oxygen in the room with President Trump," said Terry Lathan, a former Alabama Republican Party chairwoman who has previously backed Trump but now supports Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis for the

2024 nomination.

"Donald Trump can be exhausting," Lathan said. "But people will walk on broken glass to vote for the guy."

DeSantis, former Vice President Mike Pence, South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott and former United Nations ambassador Nikki Haley are set to appear Friday in the Atlanta neighborhood of Buckhead, a Republican-leaning enclave in an otherwise Democratic-dominated city. Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and businessman Vivek Ramaswamy will speak Saturday.

Trump cancels press conference on claims of fraud

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Former President Donald Trump now says he won't be holding a news conference next week to unveil what he claims is new "evidence" of fraud in Georgia's 2020 presidential election — even though no fraud has ever been substantiated — citing the advice of lawyers as he prepares to face trial in two criminal cases that stem from his election lies.

No compelling evidence of the wide-scale fraud Trump al-

leges has emerged in the two-and-a-half years since the election in Georgia or elsewhere, despite Trump's baseless claims. Republican officials in the state have long said he lost fairly and three recounts there confirmed President Joe Biden's win.

"Rather than releasing the Report on the Rigged & Stolen Georgia 2020 Presidential Election on Monday, my lawyers would prefer putting this, I believe, Irrefutable & Overwhelming evidence of Election

Fraud & Irregularities in formal Legal Filings as we fight to dismiss this disgraceful Indictment," Trump wrote on his social media site Thursday in announcing his reversal.

Trump had announced that he would be holding the event hours after a Georgia grand jury voted to charge him and others late Monday in what they allege was a sweeping conspiracy to illegally overturn the results of the 2020 election and stop the peaceful transition of power.

He had said he would use the "major News Conference" at his Bedminster, N.J., golf club Monday morning to release what he claimed was an "almost complete" report that would exonerate him.

Federal and state election officials and Trump's own attorney general have said there is no credible evidence that the election was tainted. The former president's allegations of fraud were also roundly rejected by courts, including by judges Trump appointed.

Justice Department seeks 33 years in prison for Tarrío

Associated Press

The Justice Department is seeking 33 years in prison for Enrique Tarrío, the former Proud Boys leader convicted of seditious conspiracy in one of the most serious cases to emerge from the attack on the U.S. Capitol, according to court documents.

The sentence, if imposed, would be by far the longest punishment that has been handed down in the massive prosecution of the riot on Jan. 6, 2021. Oath

Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes, who was convicted of seditious conspiracy in a separate case, has received the longest sentence to date — 18 years.

Tarrío, who once served as national chairman of the far-right extremist group, and three lieutenants were convicted by a Washington jury in May of conspiring to block the transfer of presidential power in the hopes of keeping Donald Trump in the White House after the Republican president lost the 2020 election.

Tarrío, who was not at the Capitol riot itself, was a top target of what has become the largest Justice Department investigation in American history. He led the neo-fascist group — known for street fights with left-wing activists — when Trump famously told the Proud Boys to "stand back and stand by" during his first debate with Democrat Joe Biden.

During the monthslong trial, prosecutors argued that the Proud Boys viewed themselves as foot soldiers fighting for

Trump as the Republican spread lies that Democrats stole the election from him, and were prepared to go to war to keep their preferred leader in power.

"They unleashed a force on the Capitol that was calculated to exert their political will on elected officials by force and to undo the results of a democratic election," prosecutors wrote in their filing Thursday. "The foot soldiers of the right aimed to keep their leader in power. They failed. They are not heroes; they are criminals."

Canada residents flee wildfire

Associated Press

YELLOWKNIFE, Northwest Territories — Residents in the capital of Canada's Northwest Territories rushed to beat a noon Friday deadline to evacuate their homes as one of hundreds of wildfires raging in the territories moved closer to the city of 20,000.

Thousands have fled, driving hundreds of miles to safety or waiting in long lines for emergency flights, as the worst fire season on record in Canada showed no signs of easing.

The fire was within 10 miles of Yellowknife's northern edge Thursday, and officials worried that strong northern winds could push the flames toward the only highway leading away from the fire, which was choked with long caravans of cars.

Still, there remained plenty of time to leave by road or air,

Shane Thompson, a government minister for the Territories, told a news conference. He said that without rain the fire might reach the city's outskirts by the weekend.

"We're all tired of the word unprecedented, yet there is no other way to describe this situation in the Northwest Territories," Premier Caroline Cochrane posted on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Canada has seen a record number of wildfires this year — contributing to choking smoke in parts of the U.S. — with more than 5,700 fires burning more than 53,000 square miles from one end of Canada to the other, according to the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre.

As of Thursday evening, more than 1,000 wildfires were burning across the country, over half of them out of control. Hundreds

of miles to the south of Yellowknife, hundreds of properties were ordered to evacuate because of the threat from a wildfire near West Kelowna, British Columbia.

The evacuation of Yellowknife was by far the largest this year, said Ken McMullen, president of the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs and fire chief in Red Deer, Alberta.

"It's one of those events where you need to get people out sooner rather than later" because fire could block the only escape route before ever reaching the community.

Ten planes left Yellowknife with 1,500 passengers on Thursday, said Jennifer Young, director of corporate affairs for the Northwest Territories' Department of Municipal and Community Affairs.

Japanese panel finds harassment in military

Associated Press

TOKYO — A panel of experts that investigated harassment cases in Japan's military and Defense Ministry said Friday it found widespread cover-ups and reluctance among supervisors to deal with cases, and recommended fundamental improvements.

The investigation was commissioned by the ministry after a high-profile sexual assault case was brought by a former soldier.

The panel said about 80% of the reported cases involved abuse of power and that sexual harassment accounted for about 12%.

It said in a report that more than 60% of the victims in 1,325 cases reported to the panel never sought help from counselors in the military or ministry due to a lack of trust in the system or a fear of retribution.

The panel said many of the 400 people it interviewed who had sought help from supervisors or counselors said they did not receive appropriate help and faced cover-ups, pressure to drop cases, broken confidentiality or a lack of understanding.

The report urged the ministry and the military to raise awareness about harassment and introduce an appraisal system for those in supervisory positions that includes their handling of harassment cases, such as ensuring protection for victims and witnesses from retribution.

Taliban official says women lose value if their faces are visible to men in public

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Women lose value if men can see their uncovered faces in public, a spokesman for a key ministry of Afghanistan's Taliban government said Thursday, adding that religious scholars in the country agree that a woman must keep her face covered when outside the home.

The Taliban, who took over the country in August of 2021, have cited the failure of women to observe the proper way to wear the hijab, or Islamic headscarf, as a reason for barring them from most public spaces, including parks, jobs and university.

Molvi Mohammad Sadiq Akif, the spokesman for the Taliban's Ministry of Vice and Virtue, said in an interview Thursday with The Associated Press that if women's faces are visible in public there is a possibility of fitna, or falling into sin.

"It is very bad to see women (without the hijab) in some areas (big cities), and our scholars also agree that women's faces should be hidden," Akif said. "It's not that her face will be harmed or damaged. A woman has her own value and that value decreases by men looking at her. Allah gives respect to females in hijab and there is value in this."

Tim Winter, who is the Shaykh Zayed Lecturer in Islamic Studies at the Faculty of Divinity at Cambridge University, said there was no scriptural mandate in Islam for face coverings and the Taliban would struggle to find anything in Islamic scripture that backed their interpretation of hijab rules.

"Their name implies they are not senior religious experts," he told AP. "The word Taliban means students."

The Taliban's restrictions on girls and women have caused global outrage, including from some Muslim-majority countries.

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Messi says he's enjoying life in Miami

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Fans line up outside Inter Miami's practice facility to watch Lionel Messi's car drive away after training sessions. Players from opposing teams wait after matches to get his signature or just a simple handshake. His No. 10 jersey is everywhere in South Florida.

For Messi, these are reminders that he made the right choice. He could have continued his acclaimed career with another stint in Barcelona, where he rose to stardom. He could have signed a lucrative deal to play for Al-Hilal in Saudi Arabia. He chose the unfamiliar — to travel stateside and play soccer in the United States — and he's glad about it.

"From the beginning, from my arrival, it's been an impressive welcome that we've received," Messi said through an interpreter. He spoke publicly Thursday for the first time since

announcing on June 7 that he'd join Inter Miami of the MLS.

"Today I can tell you that I am very happy with the decision we made," Messi said at Miami's DRV PNK Stadium in a room so full of reporters that some sat on the floor.

The 36-year-old said he's still adapting to his new surroundings. His family is in a temporary place in South Florida while they search for a permanent home. His three sons will start school soon.

He's still getting used to "hot and humid" Florida, but overall, the transition has been "much easier than expected" compared to his move from Barcelona to Paris Saint-Germain, where he played for two years.

"Me going to Paris was neither planned nor desired," Messi said. "I did not want to leave Barcelona, and it became difficult. But it is the opposite of what is happening to me now, thanks to God."

Since Messi's announcement, Inter Miami hired former Barcelona and Argentina national team coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino and signed former Barcelona captain Sergio Busquets and veteran defender Jordi Alba.

The club's rise since has been meteoric.

Messi has scored nine goals in six matches with his new club, which is in last place in the MLS Eastern Conference with a record of 5-14-3. Now on a six-match winning streak, Inter Miami will compete for its first title Saturday against Nashville in the Leagues Cup final.

"Ever since the competition started, we knew that we would be starting from scratch because there was a new coach with the team and other new players," Messi said. "From the very beginning, we've done very well thanks to all the new teammates that are here. This was a nice opportunity to start to

change and to set hard goals for us, but goals that we were prepared to achieve."

Miami defeated Philadelphia — a top-three team in the Eastern Conference — in the semi-final round on Tuesday. Messi ripped a shot from 30 yards past three Philadelphia defenders in the 20th minute of the 4-1 victory.

In his debut on July 21, the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner sent a free kick into the upper left corner of the net in the 94th minute to give Inter Miami a 2-1 win over Mexican club Cruz Azul in the Leagues Cup opener.

He followed it with a two-goal performance in another Leagues Cup game against Atlanta a few days later.

In his first road game, a Leagues Cup elimination match against FC Dallas, Messi's free kick again snuck past the goalkeeper into the upper corner of the net for a tying tally that led to a victory on penalty kicks.

Stanford still holding out hope for an ACC invitation

Associated Press

Stanford has not given up on getting an invitation to join the Atlantic Coast Conference as its fellow Pac-4 members in the Pacific Northwest hope to rebuild their plundered league and wait to find out if the Cardinal are in.

Leaders from Stanford, California, Oregon State and Washington State spoke Thursday, and Stanford told its colleagues it had informed the ACC that it would be open to joining the conference at greatly reduced or even no media rights payout for several years, a person familiar with the discussions told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the schools were not making their internal discussions public.

Whether getting Stanford —

and Northern California rival Cal — at a cut rate will be enough to convince the necessary 12 of 15 ACC schools to vote to expand remains unknown.

The future of the Pac-12 appears to hinge upon Stanford's next move. Eight members of the more-than-100-year-old conference will be leaving after the 2023-24 school year.

Stanford, which has a \$36.2 billion endowment, and Cal have been searching for another Power Five landing spot for two weeks since the Pac-12 was picked apart by the Big 12 and Big Ten.

The only possibility appears to be in the ACC, which is made up entirely of schools in the Eastern time zone.

ACC leaders held three days of talks last week to consider westward expansion that also

included possibly bringing in SMU, the Dallas-based school from the American Athletic Conference.

The presidents never took an official vote, knowing the 12 votes needed to approve expansion was going to be difficult to get. But that didn't settle the issue.

Several ACC members, most vocally Florida State, have been pushing for the conference to change its current equal revenue distribution model.

The conference did announce earlier this year approval of a distribution model that rewards performance bonuses to schools from College Football Playoff and NCAA men's basketball tournament revenue. Details of that model have still not been revealed by the ACC.

If Stanford and Cal agreed to

join the conference at drastically reduced shares, the conference could redirect the increased revenue from its contract with ESPN toward existing members.

But how and how much is a sticking point within the ACC.

Meanwhile, Oregon State and Washington State are in limbo.

Oregon State athletic director Scott Barnes reiterated the statement university president Jayathi Murthy made late last week, telling The Oregonian on Wednesday the school is committed to rebuilding the Pac-12.

"Nothing's easy, given the circumstances, but I think it's our best path forward," Barnes told the newspaper. "It is a solid option in terms of building back. All the more need to have the four of us as the foundation of what we build."

Rodriguez powers Mariners past Royals

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Julio Rodriguez had a career-high five hits to go with five RBIs, including a go-ahead three-run homer in the eighth inning, and the Seattle Mariners escaped Kansas City with a 6-4 victory over the Royals on Thursday.

Rodriguez, who had four hits a night earlier, had three singles and a triple to go with his home run while joining Alex Rodriguez, Mike Cameron and Rupert Jones in select company. The homer was the 20th of the season for Rodriguez, who already had stolen 30 bases, making the 22-year-old phenom just the fourth Mariners player in the 20-30 club.

Cal Raleigh added a homer in the ninth inning. Isaiah Campbell (3-0) earned the win for the Mariners with a scoreless seventh inning. Trent Thornton tossed a perfect eighth and Matt Brash picked up his fourth save.

Carlos Hernandez (1-8) took the loss. Nelson Velazquez homered for the fourth time in seven games for Kansas City, and MJ Melendez, Michael Massey and Freddy Fermin also drove in runs.

Dodgers 1, Brewers 0: Austin Barnes hit a solo homer in the eighth inning, helping host

Los Angeles beat Milwaukee for its 11th in a row.

The NL West-leading Dodgers swept the NL Central leaders, outscoring them 14-3 in three games. The Dodgers had their 12th shutout of the season.

Lance Lynn dueled 2021 Cy Young Award winner Corbin Burnes, who retired 10 in a row, including six on strikeouts, although neither figured in the decision. Lynn allowed four hits in seven innings, struck out three and walked one. Burnes gave up two hits in seven innings. The right-hander struck out nine and walked two.

Caleb Ferguson (7-3) got the win with an inning of relief. Evan Phillips pitched the ninth for his 18th save.

Nationals 10, Red Sox 7: Chris Sale failed to get through the fifth inning in his second start back from a shoulder injury, and Boston suffered another blow to its playoff hopes in a loss to host Washington.

Luis Urias hit his first grand slam in the seventh as Boston tried to rally from eight runs down. Rafael Devers added a two-run homer later in the inning, getting the Red Sox to 9-7, but the rally failed as Kyle Fennegan earned his 19th save in 26 chances.

Sale (5-3) was lifted with one out in the fifth. Josh Winckowski entered and gave up a tie-breaking two-run double to Joey Meneses, the first of four straight hits by the Nationals, who scored five times in the inning.

Meneses drove in five runs and Patrick Corbin (8-11) pitched six sharp innings for rebuilding Washington. Keibert Ruiz went 3 for 3.

Rookie Triston Casas hit his 20th homer of the season for the Red Sox, who slipped 3½ games behind AL East rival Toronto for the final wild-card spot and are fourth in the AL East.

Mets 4, Cardinals 2: Pete Alonso hit a two-run homer. José Quintana won for the first time this season and visiting New York opened its four-game series against St. Louis with its fourth win in five games.

Quintana (1-4) beat his former team by pitching into the seventh inning. He gave up three hits, including a homer in the seventh to Tyler O'Neill, and two runs. Trevor Gott pitched the ninth for his first save.

Tim Lincecum led off the ninth with a pinch-hit home run, his first this season for New York. It was the third one of his career.

The loss denied Adam Wainwright (3-8) a chance to pick up

career win No. 199. He allowed three runs on four hits in his third-longest outing this season.

Diamondbacks 3, Padres 1: Top NL Cy Young Award contender Zac Gallen beat San Diego for the second straight start and Tommy Pham and Gabriel Moreno homered for visiting Arizona in the opener of a four-game series between teams trying to keep their wild-card hopes from slipping away.

Each team had just three hits. The Diamondbacks won a third straight and the Padres lost for the eighth time in 11 games.

Gallen (13-5) held the Padres to one run and three hits in 6½ innings while striking out three and walking one.

Rookie reliever Justin Martinez, pitching in just his fifth game, earned a four-out save, his first. He walked two in the ninth before punching out Jake Cronenworth to end it.

Rich Hill (7-13), a 34-year-old lefty acquired from Pittsburgh at the trade deadline, lost his third straight start for the Padres. He retired the first 10 Diamondbacks batters before walking Corbin Carroll with one out in the fourth. Pham then drove the next pitch to center field, his 12th homer.

McIlroy and Harman share BMW Championship lead

Associated Press

OLYMPIA FIELDS, Ill. — Rory McIlroy didn't mind being in the rough at rain-soaked Olympia Fields, except for having trees and a bunker between him and the 17th green. And even that didn't matter Thursday in the BMW Championship.

McIlroy found the short grass only six times with 18 tee shots — three of them on par 3s — and no one would have guessed that looking at his card. He played bogey-free for a 5-under 65, giving him a share of the lead with British Open champion Brian

Harman in the second FedEx Cup playoff event.

"Only hitting three fairways today and coming up with 65 is a bit of a bonus," McIlroy said.

The greens were so soft from a two-hour rain delay in the morning that McIlroy realized trying to get at pins was easier coming from the rough, because the ball wouldn't have as much spin.

"I'm not saying I was trying to aim for the rough," he said with a smile.

And certainly the spot he found himself in at the par-4

17th wasn't ideal. He only had 116 yards left on the 456-yard hole, but he had a stand of trees blocking his path to the green, a big bunker in front of the putting surface.

He punched 7-iron through a gap in the branches, just over the bunker, just over the green and then chipped in for birdie. It was that kind of day.

"There was a couple of branches above the window I was looking at, and I was like, 'If it hits those, it's just going to drop down near that front left bunker and I'll have a decent an-

gle down the green and have a 10-footer or less to save par," he said. "It was a bit of a hit-and-a-hope."

Harman, who returned from his British Open title last week at the FedEx Cup playoff opener with some rust, delivered his excitement toward the end of the round. He holed a 40-foot birdie putt on the par-3 16th, and then chipped in for birdie on the 17th.

They were one shot clear of a large group at 66 that included Scottie Scheffler, Matt Fitzpatrick, Sahith Theegala and Rickie Fowler.

NBA releases schedule for coming season

Associated Press

Maximizing player rest and limiting travel demands were again part of the NBA's formula for the upcoming regular season, the league indicated Thursday when announcing the schedule for 2023-24.

Teams have an average of 14 instances of back-to-back games this season, up slightly from last year's rate of 13.3 per team. But back-to-backs involving travel are down to 9.0 on average; the rate of those last season was 9.6 per team.

No team will play the day before or after high-profile national television games, such as Christmas matchups and all ABC weekend matchups. No In-Season Tournament games will be on the second night of a back-to-back, either.

Teams have gotten an 80-game schedule for the coming season for now. The other two games will be based on how they fare in the new tournament that starts Nov. 3.

■ **Ring night:** Denver will commemorate its championship and get a visit from Commissioner Adam Silver on opening night, Oct. 24, when it hosts

the Los Angeles Lakers in the first of 1,230 regular-season games.

The second game of the opening-night doubleheader is Phoenix at Golden State, meaning Chris Paul's former team will play his new team.

Assuming Paul appears in that game, it'll be the 1,215th regular-season game and 1,364th game overall of his career — and he's never come off the bench. The last time Paul didn't start a game that counted was Dec. 13, 2004, when he was late for the team bus and benched for the first 4 minutes of Wake Forest's game against Temple.

■ **Wemby's debut:** The debut of No. 1 overall pick Victor Wembanyama comes on the second night of the season, when San Antonio hosts Dallas on Oct. 25.

■ **Christmas day:** Christmas in New York remains an NBA tradition. The Knicks will play on Dec. 25 for the 56th time, and they will open the traditional Christmas quintupleheader by hosting the Milwaukee Bucks in the noon slot.

The rest of the Christmas

games: Golden State at Denver (2:30 p.m. Eastern), Boston at the Los Angeles Lakers (5 p.m. Eastern), Philadelphia at Miami (8 p.m. Eastern) and Dallas at Phoenix (10:30 p.m. Eastern).

The Lakers' LeBron James will get another chance to become the Christmas all-time wins leader among players; he's played in 17 games and his teams have gone 10-7. The only other player with 10 wins on Christmas is newly enshrined Hall of Famer Dwyane Wade, whose teams went 10-3 on the holiday.

Miami coach Erik Spoelstra puts his perfect record on the line; he's 8-0 as a head coach on Dec. 25. Only Jack Ramsay (11-3), Phil Jackson (11-7), Gene Shue (9-4) and Red Auerbach (9-6) have more Christmas wins than Spoelstra.

■ **MLK Day:** There are 11 games set for Jan. 15, the annual celebration of the life of Martin Luther King Jr. — including the traditional NBA games on that holiday in Atlanta and Memphis.

San Antonio visits the Hawks that day, while Golden State visits the Grizzlies.

The other games: Houston at Philadelphia, New Orleans at Dallas, Orlando at New York, Detroit at Washington, Chicago at Cleveland, Miami at Brooklyn, Boston at Toronto, Indiana at Utah and Oklahoma City at the Los Angeles Lakers.

■ **Rivals week:** NBA Rivals Week returns with 11 nationally televised games across four networks from Jan. 23-Jan. 27.

Those matchups:

Jan. 23: New York at Brooklyn, LA Lakers at LA Clippers (TNT)

Jan. 24: Oklahoma City at San Antonio, Phoenix at Dallas (ESPN)

Jan. 25: Boston at Miami, Sacramento at Golden State (TNT)

Jan. 26: Dallas at Atlanta, Portland at San Antonio (NBA TV)

Jan. 27: Miami at New York, Philadelphia at Denver, LA Lakers at Golden State (ABC)

■ **All-Star break:** There are no games between Feb. 16 and Feb. 21 because of the All-Star break. This season's All-Star Game is in Indianapolis. There are two games on Feb. 15, and 12 games when play resumes on Feb. 22.

NFL teams carrying 90-man rosters during preseason

Associated Press

More NFL hopefuls are getting an opportunity to stick around a little longer to showcase their skills this summer.

When the league eliminated the first two rounds of roster cuts in March, it allowed teams to carry 90 players throughout the preseason. Rosters have to be trimmed to 53 by Aug. 29. Last year, rosters were cut to 85 after the first preseason game, to 80 after the second and then 53.

"I think all coaches like that," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said about one cut. "You get an opportunity to coach the guys all the way through and that last

game, they get a lot of reps. Even when we were doing four games, that last game they got a ton of reps. I just think that's a positive thing for the guys to have an opportunity to make a living at this thing — you know, shine."

Jets coach Robert Saleh especially likes the change because "there's so many guys who are making late surges where you're just not sure and you just say: 'God, if I could just have one more week with this guy,' and sometimes you have to let those guys go."

It also gives coaches more available players for practices and preseason games. More

starters are playing less, if at all, in exhibition games.

"Just having the bodies so you're not wearing down these last two weeks of camp, where you can hold practices," Saleh said. "There's still a lot of guys battling for those back-end roster spots and special teams, and every year, it feels like it's the same case where you're just begging to have a few more days with certain young men, and sometimes you can't."

Texans rookie wide receiver Xavier Hutchinson, a sixth-round pick out of Iowa State, is among the players fighting to earn a roster spot. He's learning to play special teams for the first

time to give him an advantage because versatility helps.

"I'm learning something very new to myself," Hutchinson said. "I'm excited to see what I can do on (special teams), and excited to see if that can be a part of me helping the team out."

One cutdown deadline will make things more difficult for personnel staffs because 1,184 players become available at the same time on Aug. 29. Teams are relying on their scouting evaluations to be prepared to scoop up talented players who get cut. Plus, they'll be busy assembling a 16-man practice squad, so it will be hectic.