

Debby makes 2nd landfall, spawns tornadoes

Associated Press

LUCAMA, N.C. — Tornadoes spawned by Tropical Storm Debby leveled homes, damaged a school and killed one person early Thursday, as the system dropped heavy rain and flooded communities across North and South Carolina.

It only took 15 seconds for a tornado to devastate Genesis Cooper's home in Lucama, a small town about 40 miles east of Raleigh. The 51-year-old, his wife and their 20-year-old son huddled in the home's middle bathroom with blankets. They felt vibrations and heard glass shattering before hearing a sudden boom.

"I can't even describe it. It's like, suction, that's what it felt like," Cooper said. "Like something is squeezing, like your ears are popping."

The tornado was one of at least three reported overnight in North Carolina, and perhaps the most devastating. One person was found dead in a home damaged by the Lucama tornado, Wilson County spokesman

Stephen Mann said in an email. No further details on the person were immediately provided.

Cooper said parts of the home's roof and walls were torn off, causing water to leak inside. The side windows were busted out, and the pool deck in the back was in shambles. Despite it all, Cooper seemed to be calm, saying that he knew they were in God's hands.

"This is just stuff. It can be replaced," Cooper said.

The superintendent of Wilson County Schools confirmed damage at Springfield Middle School, where sections of the walls and roof of the sixth and seventh grade halls are gone or compromised.

"It was heartbreaking to see the school right after the event," Superintendent Lane Mills said in a statement.

North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper said at a briefing Thursday that the state has activated more National Guard troops and added additional vehicles that can rescue people in floods as rains from Debby keep

drenching the state.

Meanwhile, about 100 miles south of Lucama, deputies in Bladenboro posted photos of a patrol car damaged by a tree, as well as roads that had been washed out. Standing water a few feet deep covered parts of the tiny North Carolina town.

Many townspeople helped fill sandbags on Wednesday before up to 3 feet of floodwaters backed into the downtown overnight. When the sun came up, water could still be seen bubbling out of manhole covers.

The National Hurricane Center said Debby made a second landfall early Thursday near Bulls Bay, S.C. — about 30 miles northeast of Charleston. Debby first made landfall as a Category 1 hurricane early Monday on the Gulf Coast of Florida.

More flooding was expected in parts of eastern South Carolina and southeast North Carolina, where an additional 3 to 9 inches of rain is possible as the storm moves north. That raised concerns that flash floods could strike mountainous areas of

Virginia and West Virginia.

Debby also could bring more tornadoes Thursday in parts of North Carolina and Virginia, forecasters said. The storm was expected to churn up the East Coast, where residents as far north as Vermont could get several inches of flooding rain this weekend.

Meanwhile, floodwaters haven't even fully drained out of some homes in South Carolina.

Robert Chesnut stood in nearly a foot of water inside his Isle of Palms home Thursday morning with a rented industrial pump that looked like a fire hose. After more than three hours, only about an inch of water had been pulled out of his house on the barrier island near Charleston.

And once the water is gone, there is still a lot of work to do.

"This is contaminated water," Chesnut said. "These houses are on septic tanks. I hate to say it, but that's fecal matter. You have to disinfect everything."

Officials: Foiled plot targeted Swift shows in Vienna

Associated Press

VIENNA — Both suspects in a foiled plot to attack Taylor Swift shows in Vienna appeared to be inspired by Islamic State and al-Qaida, Austrian authorities said Thursday, and investigators found bomb-making materials at one of their homes. Officials said one of the two confessed to planning to "kill as many people as possible outside the concert venue."

Three sold-out concerts were canceled a day earlier because of the plot, devastating Swifties. Many of them spent thousands of

euros (dollars) on travel and lodging in Austria's expensive capital city to attend the Eras Tour shows at Ernst Happel Stadium, which sat empty Thursday morning as media filmed outside.

Concert organizers said they stood behind their decision, saying they expected up to 65,000 fans inside the stadium at each concert and as many as 30,000 onlookers outside, where authorities said the suspects planned to strike.

Officials told reporters that the main suspect, a 19-year-old Austrian, began working on his attack

plans in July, and just a few weeks ago uploaded to the internet an oath of allegiance to the current leader of ISIS. He planned to use knives or homemade explosives.

"He wanted to carry out an attack in the area outside the stadium, killing as many people as possible using the knives or even using the explosive devices he had made," said Omar Haijawi-Pirchner, the head of the Directorate of State Security and Intelligence, citing the 19-year-old's confession.

He was "clearly radicalized in the direction of the Islamic State

and thinks it is right to kill infidels," Haijawi-Pirchner added.

The 19-year-old quit his job on July 25 and made the statement "that he still had big plans."

The foiled attack was planned for Thursday or Friday, according to Austria's interior minister, Gerhard Karner.

During a raid of the main suspect's home in Ternitz, investigators found chemical substances and technical devices that indicated "concrete preparatory acts," said Franz Ruf, director general for public security at the Ministry of the Interior.

Walz's military record receives new scrutiny

The Washington Post

Tim Walz was weighing a life-altering decision when he stepped into a supply room at the National Guard Armory in New Ulm, Minn., nearly two decades ago. He closed the door behind him, recalled a colleague, Al Bonnifield, and confided he was considering whether to leave their unit even though it was preparing to go to war so he could run for Congress.

"It was a very long conversation behind closed doors," said Bonnifield. "He was trying to decide where he could do better for soldiers, for veterans, for the country. He weighed that for a long time."

Walz, 60, ultimately chose to leave the Guard in 2005 and went on to win a House seat the following year, unseating a Republican incumbent as a populist wave of opposition to the Iraq War lifted Democrats to a majority of both chambers of Congress. That jump-started a political career that saw him elected governor of Minnesota in 2018 and, this week, selected as Vice President Kamala Harris' running mate in a heated race for the White House.

But while Walz and his political allies have cited his 24 years of military experience as an asset, the circumstances of his departure from the National Guard and his characterization of his service already have come under attack. At least three former Guard colleagues have publicly voiced bitterness at Walz's decision to leave their unit at such a consequential moment. It's not clear how widespread that feeling was, but the Trump campaign has moved quickly to capitalize on the issue.

"Nobody wants to go to war. I didn't want to go, but I went," Doug Julin, a retired National

Guard soldier who worked with Walz, said in an interview. "The big frustration was that he let his troops down."

The Harris campaign did not address criticisms from fellow soldiers that he retired to avoid going to war. Instead, the campaign said that while in Congress he was a "tireless advocate for our men and women in uniform." As vice president, the campaign said in a statement to *The Washington Post*, "he will continue to be a relentless champion for our veterans and military families."

Walz, a native of West Point, Neb., enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard at age 17. His father served during the Korean War era, and urged both him and his sister to enlist, Walz said during a 2009 interview for an oral history project by the Library of Congress. Walz shifted to the Minnesota Army National Guard in 1996 after relocating with his wife, Gwen. He was activated for a variety of missions, including responses to forest fires, tornadoes and flooding.

On Wednesday, Walz also came under scrutiny for saying during a gubernatorial campaign event in 2018 that "we can make sure those weapons of war that I carried in war" are not on America's streets. Walz did not serve in combat, according to the Minnesota Army National Guard, and his Republican counterpart jumped on those comments.

"He said we shouldn't allow weapons that I used in war to be on America's streets," JD Vance, the Republican vice-presidential candidate, said during a campaign event in Michigan. "Well, I wonder. Tim Walz, when were you ever in war?"

The Harris campaign, in response to those comments, said

in its statement to *The Post* that Walz carried, fired and trained others how to use "weapons of war innumerable times." It declined to address why Walz claimed incorrectly to have done so in war.

"Governor Walz would never insult or undermine any American's service to this country — in fact, he thanks Senator Vance for putting his life on the line for our country," the statement said. Vance, a Marine Corps veteran, served in Iraq in a noncombat role for six months beginning in fall 2005.

Walz and his political allies also have inaccurately described him as a retired command sergeant major, one rank higher than he holds in retirement. Walz himself did so in a video clip from 2006 that was surfaced by C-SPAN on Tuesday and in a 2018 clip posted on his own YouTube account.

"I'm a retired sergeant major in the Army and the Army National Guard," he told a group of voters in the latter video.

Though Walz did achieve the rank of command sergeant major, it was a provisional rank until he completed required coursework for senior leaders, National Guard officials said. He did not do so by the time he departed the military and his retirement rank reverted to master sergeant on May 15, 2005, officials said. Walz retired the next day.

The Harris campaign declined to address why Walz has inaccurately said he retired as one. He has sometimes called himself a "former command sergeant major," which is accurate.

Joe Eustice, who served in the National Guard with Walz for at least a decade, said he vehemently disagrees with Walz's politics but described

him as a good soldier. In an interview, he rejected assertions that Walz avoided combat duty. In late spring 2005, when Walz said he wanted to pursue politics and decided to retire, there was only speculation of a combat deployment on the horizon, Eustice said.

"Other than having a rumor, we were not notified that we were going to be deployed," Eustice said.

The unit received an official alert order two months after Walz had retired, the Minnesota National Guard said, which helped the unit prepare for mobilization later in the fall.

Walz, when asked by the Library of Congress historian about his retirement, said that he did so to run for Congress, adding that he was concerned about trying to serve in the military and run for office simultaneously. He also cited worries about the Hatch Act, which restricts partisan political activity by federal employees.

Julin, who oversaw Walz as a more senior command sergeant major, said that Walz approached him in 2005 and said he was prepared to go on their upcoming deployment to Iraq, but also was interested in running for Congress. Julin said he thought "no big deal" because other members of Congress had deployed.

But a couple of months later, Julin learned from another member of the Guard that Walz had retired. Julin was frustrated, he said, because Walz had arranged his retirement with two officers who outranked Julin.

"I would have analyzed it and challenged him," Julin said. "It would have been a different discussion, but he went to the higher ranks. He knew I would have told him, 'Suck it up, we're going.'"

Prosecutors allege Hunter Biden Romanian dealings

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hunter Biden was hired by a Romanian businessman accused of corruption who was trying to “influence U.S. government policy” during Joe Biden’s term as vice president, prosecutors said in court papers Wednesday.

Special counsel David Weiss’ team said Hunter Biden’s business associate will testify at the upcoming federal tax trial of the president’s son about the arrangement with the executive, Gabriel Popoviciu, who was facing criminal investigation at the time in Romania.

The allegations are likely to bring a fresh wave of criticism of Hunter Biden’s foreign business dealings, which have been the center of Republicans’ investigations into the president’s family. Hunter Biden has blasted Republican inquiries into his family’s business affairs as politically motivated, and has in-

sisted he never involved his father in his business.

An attorney for Hunter Biden didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment Wednesday.

Prosecutors plan to introduce evidence that Hunter Biden and his business associate “received compensation from a foreign principal who was attempting to influence U.S. policy and public opinion,” according to the filing. Popoviciu wanted U.S. government agencies to probe the Romanian bribery investigation he was facing in the hopes that would end his legal trouble, according to prosecutors.

Popoviciu is identified only in court papers as G.P., but the details line up with information released in the congressional investigation and media reporting about Hunter Biden’s legal work in Romania.

Popoviciu was sentenced to seven years in prison in 2017 af-

ter being convicted of real estate fraud. He denied any wrongdoing. An attorney who previously represented Popoviciu didn’t immediately respond to a phone message Wednesday.

Prosecutors say Hunter Biden agreed with his business associate to help Popoviciu fight the criminal charges against him. But prosecutors say they were concerned that “lobbying work might cause political ramifications” for Joe Biden, so the arrangement was structured in a way that “concealed the true nature of the work” for Popoviciu, prosecutors allege.

Hunter Biden’s business associate and Popoviciu signed an agreement to make it look like Popoviciu’s payments were for “management services to real estate prosperities in Romania.”

However, prosecutors said, “That was not actually what G.P. was paying for.”

JD Vance attacks Harris on immigration

The Detroit News

SHELBY TOWNSHIP, Mich. — JD Vance, the Republican nominee for vice president, called Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris a “chameleon” whose words “can’t be trusted” and vowed that GOP efforts to combat illegal immigration would improve lives during a campaign stop Wednesday in Michigan.

Standing in front of law enforcement officials, Vance spoke briefly at a press conference outside the Shelby Township Police Department. Then, he took questions from members of the media.

Asked about Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump suggesting last week that Harris only recently wanted to “be known as Black,” Vance, a U.S. senator from Ohio with biracial children, said the remark was “totally inoffensive” and an attack on Harris being a “chameleon” on policy. Harris’ mother was Indian and her father was Jamaican.

“She pretends to be one thing when she’s in front of one audience,” Vance said. “She pretends to be something else when she’s in front of another audience.”

Most of Vance’s comments Wednesday focused on illegal immigration. If federal officials do more to deport those in the U.S. without documentation and secure the southern border, U.S. residents’ wages, ability to afford housing and security would all improve, Vance contended.

“I do believe in my heart that legal immigration can enrich this country,” Vance said. “But not illegal immigration, which is what Kamala Harris has done. All over this country, it’s made us less safe, it’s driven down wages for working Americans, and it’s made our communities less prosperous.”

“We’ve got to stop this craziness.”

Harris, Walz say they’re ‘joyful warriors’ against GOP ticket

Associated Press

ROMULUS, Mich. — Vice President Kamala Harris declared herself and her new running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, “joyful warriors” against Donald Trump on Wednesday as they spent their first full day campaigning together across the Midwest. They got an unusual glimpse of how hotly contested the region would be when they overlapped on a Wisconsin tarmac with Republican vice presidential nominee JD Vance.

The Democrats visited Wisconsin and Michigan, hoping to shore up support among the younger, diverse, labor-friendly

voters who were instrumental in helping President Joe Biden win the 2020 election.

Harris told the day’s first rally in Eau Claire, Wis., “As Tim Walz likes to point out, we are joyful warriors.” Contributing to that feeling, the Harris campaign said it had raised \$36 million in the first 24 hours after she announced Walz as her running mate.

The vice president said the pair looks at the future with optimism, unlike Trump, the former president and Republican White House nominee, whom she accused of being stuck in the past and preferring a con-

frontational style of politics — even as she criticized her opponent herself.

“Someone who suggests we should terminate the Constitution of the United States should never again have the chance to sit behind the seal of the United States,” Harris said, her voice rising.

Dan Miller, from Pelican Lake, Wis., who was among 12,000-plus Eau Claire rally attendees, said Biden “has been an incredible president, but he just isn’t the same messenger.”

“And sometimes you need a better messenger,” Miller said. “And that’s Kamala.”

Russia still fighting Ukrainian incursion

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — A top official in the Kursk region of Russia that borders Ukraine said Thursday that fighting is continuing in an area where Ukrainian forces made a significant incursion this week.

Ukrainian officials haven't commented on the scope of the operation around the town of Sudzha. But Kursk's acting deputy governor, Andrei Belostotsky, said that Russian forces are fighting to prevent Ukrainians from advancing further into the region.

"The enemy has not advanced a single meter, on the contrary, it is retreating. The enemy's equipment and combat forces are being actively destroyed. We hope that in the near future ... the enemy will be stopped," Belostotsky said, according to state news agency RIA-Novosti.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday described the incursion as a "large-scale provocation."

Putin met with his top defense and security officials to discuss what he called the "indiscriminate shelling of civilian build-

ings, residential houses, ambulances with different types of weapons." He instructed the Cabinet to coordinate assistance to the Kursk region. The fighting is about 320 miles from Moscow.

Army chief of staff Valery Gerasimov told Putin at the meeting via video link that about 100 Ukrainian soldiers had been killed in the battle and more than 200 others were wounded, Russian news agencies reported.

The Ukrainian shelling, meanwhile, killed at least two people — a paramedic and an ambulance driver — and

wounded 24 others, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said in a statement Wednesday.

It wasn't possible to independently verify the Russian claims. Disinformation and propaganda have played a central role in the war, now in its third year. John Kirby, the White House's national security spokesman, declined to comment on the operation and said the Biden administration has reached out to the Ukrainians to better understand what happened.

NASA: Astronauts may use SpaceX to now get home

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — What should have been a quick trip to the International Space Station may turn into an eight-month stay for two NASA astronauts if they have to switch from Boeing to SpaceX for a ride home.

There's lingering uncertainty over the safety of Boeing's new Starliner capsule, NASA officials said Wednesday, and the space agency is split over the risk. As a result, chances are increasing that test pilots Butch

Wilmore and Suni Williams may have to watch from the space station as their Starliner is cut loose to return to Earth empty.

If that happens, NASA would leave behind two of four astronauts from the next SpaceX taxi flight in late September, with the vacant seats set aside for Wilmore and Williams on the return trip next February. The pair expected to be gone just a week or two when they launched June 5 as Starliner's first crew.

NASA is bringing in additional experts to analyze the thruster

failures experienced by Starliner before it docked. At the same time, NASA is looking more closely at SpaceX as a backup,

At this point, "we could take either path," said Ken Bowersox, NASA's space operations mission chief.

During a recent meeting, "We heard from a lot of folks that had concern, and the decision was not clear," he said. A final decision is expected by mid-August.

Boeing issued a brief statement following NASA's news

update, repeating its position that the capsule could still safely bring the astronauts home.

"We still believe in Starliner's capability and its flight rationale," the company said.

Boeing will need to modify the capsule's software in case Starliner ends up returning without a crew.

No serious consideration was given to launching a separate SpaceX flight just to retrieve Wilmore and Williams, according to commercial crew program manager Steve Stich.

Lawsuit: Titan sub crew knew they were going to die

Associated Press

The family of a French explorer who died in a submersible implosion has filed a more than \$50 million lawsuit, saying the crew experienced "terror and mental anguish" before the disaster and accusing the sub's operator of gross negligence.

Paul-Henri Nargeolet was among five people who died when the Titan submersible imploded during a voyage to the famed Titanic wreck site in the North Atlantic in June 2023. No one survived the trip aboard the experimental submersible

owned by OceanGate, a company in Washington state that has since suspended operations.

Known as "Mr. Titanic," Nargeolet participated in 37 dives to the Titanic site, the most of any diver in the world, according to the lawsuit.

He was regarded as one of the world's most knowledgeable people about the famous wreck. Attorneys for his estate said in an emailed statement that the "doomed submersible" had a "troubled history," and that OceanGate failed to disclose key facts about the vessel and its

durability.

According to the lawsuit, the Titan "dropped weights" about 90 minutes into its dive, indicating the team had aborted or attempted to abort the dive.

"While the exact cause of failure may never be determined, experts agree that the Titan's crew would have realized exactly what was happening," the lawsuit states. "Common sense dictates that the crew were well aware they were going to die, before dying."

The lawsuit goes on to say: "The crew may well have heard

the carbon fiber's crackling noise grow more intense as the weight of the water pressed on Titan's hull. The crew lost communications and perhaps power as well.

By experts' reckoning, they would have continued to descend, in full knowledge of the vessel's irreversible failures, experiencing terror and mental anguish prior to the Titan ultimately imploding."

A spokesperson for OceanGate declined to comment on the lawsuit, which was filed Tuesday in King County, Wash.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Drones' Spanish warning of storms draws scorn

NY NEW YORK — New York City emergency management officials have apologized for a hard-to-understand flood warning issued in Spanish by drones flying overhead in some neighborhoods.

City officials had touted the high-tech message-delivery devices ahead of expected flash flooding Tuesday. But when video of a drone delivering the warning in English and Spanish was shared widely on social media, users mocked the pronunciation of the Spanish version delivered to a city where roughly a quarter of residents speak the language at home.

"How is THAT the Spanish version? It's almost incomprehensible," one user posted on X. "Any Spanish speaking NYer would do better."

Zach Iscol, the city's emergency management commissioner, acknowledged the problem on X and promised that officials were working to "make sure it doesn't happen again." He later provided the text of the message as written in Spanish and explained the problem was in the recording of the message, not the translation.

Judge dismisses much of student's hairstyle suit

TX HOUSTON — A federal judge on Tuesday dismissed most of the claims in a lawsuit filed by a Black high school student who alleged that school officials committed racial and gender discrimination when they punished him for refusing to change his hairstyle.

The ruling was a victory for

the Barbers Hill school district near Houston, which has said its policy restricting hair length for male students instills discipline while teaching grooming and respect for authority.

Darryl George, 18, was kept out of his regular high school classes for most of the 2023-24 school year, when he was a junior, because the school district said his hair length violated its dress code. George either served in-school suspension at Barbers Hill High School or spent time at an off-site disciplinary program.

The district has argued that George's long hair, which he wears to school in tied and twisted locs on top of his head, violates its policy because it would fall below his shirt collar, eyebrows or earlobes if let down. The district has said other students with locs comply with the length policy.

Congress mulls fund to aid stranded sea turtles

ME PORTLAND — Sea turtle strandings have ticked up at an alarming rate in New England, but now the reptiles are close to receiving a lifeline from Congress to help them stay in the water.

Congress is nearing passage of the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance and Rehabilitation Act, which would create a new \$33 million federal grant program to fund institutions around the country that rescue, rehabilitate and research stranded turtles. The aid would arrive as scientists and federal authorities are sounding the alarm that an increasing number of cold-stunned turtles are washing up on Cape Cod, Mass., likely as a result of climate change.

Less than 50 sea turtles were found stranded on Cape Cod in 2000, but by 2022 that number ballooned to 866, said Democratic Sen. Ed Markey of Massachusetts. Quick action is needed to help the turtles because all six species of sea turtle found in the U.S. are threatened or endangered, Markey said.

Turtles face "extinction and environmental wipeout" without assistance, said Markey, the sponsor of the turtle act.

A similar measure, introduced by Democratic Rep. Bill Keating of Massachusetts, passed the House of Representatives earlier in the year.

Judge blocks portions of law on carrying guns

MD BALTIMORE — A federal judge blocked portions of a 2023 Maryland law that would have prohibited licensed gun owners from carrying firearms in bars and restaurants and in private buildings without the owner's permission.

Chief U.S. District Judge George L. Russell III also invalidated a separate Maryland regulation banning guns near public demonstrations.

The judge, however, upheld other gun restrictions in the new state law facing legal challenges, including bans on carrying firearms in health care facilities, schools, government buildings, mass transit facilities, amusement parks, race tracks, casinos, museums, state parks and stadiums.

The decision reaffirms what Russell ruled in September, when he issued a preliminary injunction blocking portions of the Gun Safety Act of 2023. Maryland lawmakers passed

the bill in response to the U.S. Supreme Court's Bruen decision, which changed the legal framework used in Second Amendment cases and rendered concealed-carry policies in New York, Maryland and five other states unconstitutional.

The law restricts the locations where people with licenses from the Maryland State Police could carry their firearms in public.

Glacier releases water, damaging nearby homes

AK JUNEAU — An outburst of flooding from a lake dammed by Juneau's Mendenhall Glacier damaged at least an estimated 100 homes in what has become a perennial hazard for nearby neighborhoods.

The lake formed in a basin that was left behind when a nearby glacier retreated. It fills with rainwater and snowmelt during the spring and summer and eventually builds enough pressure to force its way out through channels it carves beneath Mendenhall Glacier. Since 2011, the phenomenon has at times caused flooding of streets or homes near Mendenhall Lake and Mendenhall River.

Last year, a two-story home was swept away by raging floodwaters that also undermined a condo building, prompting some residents to reinforce the riverbank near their properties. Monday night's damage was less dramatic but more widespread: Local leaders adopted an emergency resolution saying hundreds of homes were affected, including some outside expected flood areas.

— From wire reports

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US women will play for volleyball gold

Associated Press

PARIS — Karch Kiraly made one request when the decisive fifth set began: Win or lose, make sure to enjoy the moment.

The coach asked the American women to take in the atmosphere, one of the best for women's volleyball, with mighty Brazil on the opposite side of the net.

Now, Kiraly's U.S. women's volleyball team will get another shot under the bright Olympic lights — a shot to repeat as gold medalists. And it took every extra hustle play by every American on the floor against the experienced Brazilians.

"It's kind of sad that either team has to lose a match like that," Kiraly said, "because both programs are legendary in terms of consistently high level of play in good tournaments like the Olympics and world championships."

As Brazil's fans waved flags,

chanted and sang from every corner of South Paris Arena, the U.S. women edged their fellow world powerhouse in a five-set thriller on Thursday, a compelling rematch of their Tokyo final won in straight sets by the United States.

That was the Americans' first Olympic title, and now they can make it two in a row.

Brazil got within 12-10 in the fifth before the U.S. held on for the victory, 25-23, 18-25, 25-15, 23-25, 15-11.

When Kathryn Plummer's winning spike for her match-high 26th point closed it out, the Americans huddled together in a huge group hug and bounced on the court in celebration.

They will play in Sunday's Olympic final while Brazil will go for bronze Saturday against the loser of the late match between top-ranked Italy and No. 3 Turkey.

The Brazilians haven't won

gold since the London Games 12 years ago.

Brazil led 5-3 and was 10 points from taking the first-to-15 fifth when the Americans rallied to tie it at 6-all and momentarily went ahead on Jordan Thompson's spike.

"We just told ourselves to let it rip, have confidence, be fearless, it's a quick game to 15," Plummer said. "That's what you have to do, you don't really have time to fix things or make adjustments very quickly, so it was just play the game you know how to play and go rip it."

Both teams pulled off incredible saves close to the floor or even well out of bounds near their own benches to keep long points alive — and one fifth-set rally lasted more than 30 seconds.

The stands shook all afternoon with chants of "Bra-zil!" and "Monster Block!"

Brazil, ranked second in the

world, two spots above the Americans, now has one last opportunity to reach the podium.

"They stuck with us all the way three years since the last Olympics. Everyone is just giving us so much energy. Definitely they're a part of this whole journey," Brazil outside hitter Julia Bergmann said of the enormous support. "We're going to get a medal for them, too."

Many of these women have been battling it out under the lights of the big world stage for more than a decade now.

Brazil middle blocker Thaísa is 37, and she was the second-oldest on the court behind four-time U.S. Olympian Jordan Larson, who will be 38 in October.

"We fought. It was a really good fight. They played really well. It was five sets. I don't even know what to say, it's an emotional time for us now," Bergmann said. "We have to refocus, regroup and go for the bronze."

Hall reels in three, wins gold in 400 by .04 seconds

Associated Press

SAINT-DENIS, France — As the flash of red, white and blue streaked past one sprinter — then the next, then the next — the American man delivering the latest out-of-nowhere comeback on the track said he had one thing going through his mind: "Get home, son! Get home, son!"

Quincy Hall got home in first, then fell to the ground and did snow angels.

Just another routine day in a come-from-behind kind of Olympics for the United States.

Hall reeled in three runners down the stretch of the 400-meter final Wednesday to deliver another heart-stopping win for his country at the Stade de France. He finished in 43.40 seconds, beating Britain's Matthew Hudson-Smith by .04 seconds; they are now the fourth-

and fifth-fastest men in history at the distance.

Hall's late push came the evening after American Cole Hocker rocked his sport by coming from way back to beat the favorites in a memorable men's 1500.

Add in Noah Lyles, whose only lead in his 100-meter thriller Sunday came at the exact point he crossed the finish line, and it's easy to see a pattern.

"I've got determination," Hall said. "That's what got me to that line. A lot of hurt, a lot of pain."

Things looked bad for Hall, a 26-year-old who starred at South Carolina and who breeds dogs, as the eight sprinters approached the final curve.

He was 5 or so meters behind Hudson-Smith and 2012 champion Kirani James, both to his left, and as they rounded the

bend, Hall was making up ground on Jareem Richards to his outside. It looked to be shaping up as a good battle for bronze.

With his arms pumping low and wide and his head bobbing, Hall passed them all, then thrust his chest out to beat the Brit. Hall fell to the ground and scissored his arms and legs back and forth — snow angels in 80-degree weather on the bright purple track.

"I just wanted to keep doing what my coach told me to do, just keep driving and keep driving and get home," Hall said.

Lost in that chaos was Samukonga, the Zambian, who also came from nowhere to take third.

Hall is the first American since LaShawn Merritt in 2008 to capture gold in the one-lap race the country dominated for

decades before then. He joins the likes of Michael Johnson, Jeremy Wariner and Lee Evans among the champions the U.S. has produced in the most tactical sprint on the track program.

"I knew these guys would get out try to see who they could throw off their race," he said.

Turns out, not him.

Silver in steeplechase

Morocco's Soufiane El Bakkali defended his title in men's steeplechase, finishing in 8 minutes, 6.05 seconds for a .36-second win over America's Kenneth Rooks.

Rooks had the lead heading into the homestretch, but El Bakkali overtook him.

Rooks still beat his personal best by almost 9 seconds to capture the second silver over three Olympics in the event for America.

Hildebrandt gets wrestling gold after odd day

Associated Press

PARIS — The most unusual day of Sarah Hildebrandt's wrestling career ended with her earning an Olympic gold medal.

The American won the 50-kilogram women's category Wednesday, defeating Yusneylis Guzman Lopez of Cuba 3-0 in the championship match to become the fourth U.S. woman to win a gold medal.

For a while, she thought she wouldn't even have a final match.

Vinesh Phogat of India appeared to reach the final of the 50-kilogram category after three wins Tuesday. But United World Wrestling, the sport's governing body, disqualified her after she barely missed weight Wednesday morning.

Measures such as cutting Phogat's hair weren't enough to shed the necessary weight. Team India said Phogat was 100 grams — about a fifth of a pound — over the weight limit.

Hildebrandt originally thought she had won gold by forfeit. Instead, Guzman Lopez, who had lost to Phogat in a semi-final, was moved up from a third-place match.

"There was a lot of celebrating," the 30-year-old Hildebrandt said. "It was very strange. 'Oh my God, I just won the Olympics.' And then an hour later, it was like, psych, you did not win the Olympics."

Phogat, who stunned four-time world and defending Olympic champion Yui Susaki of Ja-

pan in the first of her three matches Tuesday, would have been the first women's wrestler from India to compete for a gold medal.

"As a big weight cutter myself, yeah, I feel for her," Hildebrandt said. "She had an amazing day yesterday, did an insane feat and, you know, I don't think she saw that happening, ending her Olympics like that."

United World Wrestling's decision brought calls to add weight classes and shined a light on the dangers of weight-cutting.

Dinshaw Pardiwala, chief medical officer for India's team, said in a statement that wrestlers usually participate in a weight category below their natural weight because it gives them the

advantage of facing opponents who are naturally smaller. Wrestlers often regain weight quickly after weigh-ins.

One reason weight-cutting for the Olympics is extra difficult is that there are just six weight classes as opposed to 10 for other international competitions. With the wider gap in weights, that often leads to more extreme measures being taken.

American Jordan Burroughs, a six-time world champion who won Olympic gold in 2012, lashed out against Olympic organizers on social media.

"Maybe stories like this will wake up the IOC (International Olympic Committee)," Burroughs said, "Wrestling needs MORE than six weight classes!"

Dygert's bumpy road finally leads to cycling gold

Associated Press

MONTIGNY-LE-BRETONNEUX, France — The scars from the career-threatening injury to her thigh were covered by the blue warmup she wore onto the medal stand inside the Olympic velodrome, though the bandage covering the three stitches on Chloe Dygert's chin — courtesy of her crash during the road race at the Paris Games — were very much visible.

Both evidence of the long and often painful journey she had taken to the gold medal.

A longtime stalwart of the U.S. women's pursuit squad, Dygert teamed with newly minted Olympic road race champion Kristen Faulkner, Jennifer Valente and Lily Williams to beat New Zealand in the finals Wednesday night. And in doing so, Dygert was able to finally hear her nation's anthem while standing on the top step of the podium.

"I'm going to cherish this," Dygert said, before pausing for the slightest of moments. "It doesn't stop here. We keep going."

Of course, because it is exactly that — the stubborn refusal of the 27-year-old from Brownsburg, Ind., to ever stop, despite the crashes and injuries and bitter disappointments — that made her Olympic dream possible.

Dygert had been tapped for stardom even before the 2016 Games in Rio de Janeiro, where she helped the Americans win the silver medal in the team pursuit. She was

coached by Kristin Armstrong, the three-time Olympic time trial champion, and Dygert was supposed to pick up the mantle for the United States in the race against the clock as soon as Armstrong retired.

Dygert was on her way to the Tokyo Olympics, and making good on that promise, when disaster struck at the time trial world championships on a sharp, right-hand bend on a winding road in the Italian countryside. She hit the guardrail, sailed to the bottom of a ravine and looked down to see a gruesome gash across her thigh going down to the bone.

It took nine months before Dygert could even ride a bike again.

She was still not fully recovered by the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Games, though she helped the women's pursuit squad win the bronze medal. And Dygert's recovery continued to be derailed by things beyond her control: the Epstein-Barr virus, which left her fighting extreme fatigue, and heart surgery two years ago for supraventricular tachycardia, an irregularly fast heartbeat that can be especially dangerous for a cyclist putting her body through the ringer every day.

Throw in some challenges in her personal life, and it left Dygert in a what she called "a dark place," acknowledging in an interview with The Associated Press last year that there were times when she wondered whether she wanted to press ahead, both in her cycling career and her life.

"What I physically had to go through for the injury itself, then mentally what I had to go through — all the personal things I won't go into — my life at times did not matter to me," Dygert told the AP. "I didn't care if I was alive. I did not care about things."

"People don't see and understand," she continued in a moment of raw honesty, "and I can say the same thing: I see people with injuries and things going on, and I can't understand what they're going through."

Dygert spent time racing in Belgium earlier this year with her professional team, but her primary focus had been the Paris Games. She continued to target the time trial, where she was among the favorites for gold, before she would take part in the road race and turn her attention to the pursuit at the Vélodrome National de Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines.

Those time trial aspirations took a hit when, on slick roads in driving rain, Dygert hit the deck going through a turn. She was able to remount quickly, but any hope of gold was gone, and with blood dripping down her chin, she hung on to win the bronze medal.

In the road race, it was Faulkner who brought back a breakaway in the closing miles, then audaciously attacked on a stretch along the River Seine. She went solo to the finish line to win the first American gold medal in an Olympic road race in 40 years, and Dygert soon joined her in the celebration, helping Faulkner to hold aloft the Stars and Stripes.

US women reach basketball semifinal

Associated Press

PARIS — The United States made a change in its starting lineup, inserting Jackie Young for Diana Taurasi, to try to get off to a better start.

It paid immediate dividends as the Americans started strong and beat Nigeria 88-74 on Wednesday night in the quarterfinals of the Paris Games, extending their winning streak to 59 consecutive Olympic games.

Taurasi said coach Cheryl Reeve told her Tuesday of the lineup change.

"I think it's the first game I've ever come off the bench since '04," the six-time Olympian said.

It was indeed the first time Taurasi hadn't started an Olympic contest since the 2004 Athens Games. The WNBA's all-time leading scorer said winning gold was all that mattered to her.

"I mean, that's really the only thing that's important, you know?" Taurasi said. "And you know, this team's just evolving and today was good in certain

spots. And there's still things we'll get better at for the next game."

Reeve said the staff has been evaluating the roster since the WNBA All-Star Game last month in Phoenix.

"Just accumulate information about our roster, you know, gave opportunities in different places," she said of the lineup change. "Then when we got to the medal rounds that we will be locking in on a solid rotation."

Up next is a familiar opponent, Australia, in the semifinals on Friday night. The Opals routed Serbia 85-67. The other medal-round game will feature host France playing Belgium. The Americans haven't lost since the 1992 Barcelona Games and are two victories away from an unprecedented eighth consecutive gold medal.

Young made the most of the start, scoring 15 points, and was also a defensive stopper.

"I know that's kind of my role in the team. You know, come in and be aggressive on the defensive end," she said. "Be physi-

cal, get stops. And you know that kind of gets us playing in transition on the offensive end."

A'ja Wilson scored 20 points and Breanna Stewart added 13 for the Americans, who led 26-17 after the first quarter — the first time they had a lead after one quarter since the opening win over Japan.

"Our starts have to be great because the team on the other end is trying to take our head off," Wilson said. "They want something. They're greedy for it. So we knew that coming in. We had to have a great start and punch first because in this time it's kind of like March Madness. You never know what happens. And you kind of have to always keep your guard up."

Young had five points early before tweaking her ankle when she landed on a Nigeria player's foot while shooting a jumper. Taurasi subbed in and hit her first shot — a 3-pointer from the top of the key — that made it 24-12 late in the first.

Nigeria hung around and was down only 31-27 before Wilson,

Young and Kelsey Plum took over. The Las Vegas Aces trio scored the first 15 points, including eight by Wilson, during a 21-6 run to close the half that gave the Americans a 52-33 halftime cushion.

The U.S. kept the spurt going in the third quarter, scoring the first 10 points to give the Nigerians no hopes of a comeback.

Promise Amukamara scored 19 to lead Nigeria. Amy Okonkwo added 17, and Ezinne Kalu had 16.

The loss ended a historic run by Nigeria, which became the first African country to qualify for the Olympic basketball quarterfinals.

"It's been everything. It's a movement, man, for Nigeria and for Africa," Nigeria coach Rena Wakama said. "I've been saying all this whole time we have so much talent. And I hope the world can see what we're capable of doing if we invest in ourselves, invest in the youth in Africa, invest in sports we're capable of being at the highest level."

After end of record losing streak, White Sox fire Grifol

Associated Press

CHICAGO — The Chicago White Sox fired manager Pedro Grifol on Thursday, two days after the team ended a 21-game losing streak that tied the American League record.

Chicago began the day 28-89, on pace to finish 39-122, which would be the worst major league record since the National League's Cleveland Spiders were 20-134 in 1899.

The White Sox ended the losing streak with a 5-1 victory at Oakland on Tuesday night, then wasted a two-run lead in a 3-2 loss on Wednesday. The 21 losses tied the mark set when the 1988 Baltimore Orioles started 0-21.

"Our team's performance this season has been disappointing on many levels," White Sox general manager Chris Getz said in a statement. "Despite the on-field struggles and lack of success, we appreciate the effort and professionalism Pedro and the staff

brought to the ballpark every day. These two seasons have been very challenging. Unfortunately, the results were not there, and a change is necessary as we look to our future and the development of a new energy around the team."

Grifol was in the middle of his second season as a major league manager after a long career in the game, logging an 89-190 record.

He was the first manager fired this season.

Chicago said a replacement likely will be hired after the season. Bench coach Charlie Montoyo was a possibility to take over as interim manager. He managed Toronto from 2019-22.

The White Sox had a 14-game losing streak from May 22-June 6, setting a team season record that lasted only until the skid that followed the All-Star break.

"My mentality and the way I look at things is we're all in this thing together, and I'm the first one to take blame for anything that happens on this team. I'm the manager, right?

And I've done that since day one. I did it last year. I'll do it again this year," Grifol said on July 30. "I don't hide away from blame. Blame is what it is. I've got the position, the office, that's the chair. I would never blame our players for this season. That's not my makeup."

The 54-year-old Grifol presented a positive outlook in spring training after the White Sox went 61-101 in his first season for their worst finish since going 56-106 in 1970. The optimism quickly evaporated, though. The White Sox hit .192 and scored just 56 runs while dropping 22 of their first 25 games. They started August with the second-worst team ERA and the worst team batting average in Major League Baseball.

The White Sox made the playoffs in 2020 and won the AL Central in 2021, but they've stumbled hard since. Hall of Fame manager Tony La Russa stepped down late in the 81-81 season in 2022, and Grifol was hired to replace him.