

## Trump OKs Europe peace force for Ukraine

*Associated Press*

BRUSSELS—The greenlight given by President Donald Trump on U.S. backup for a European-led force to police any future peace agreement in Ukraine ahead of his summit with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on Friday vastly improves the likelihood it might succeed.

The effectiveness of the operation, drawn up by the so-called coalition of the willing of around 30 countries supporting Ukraine, hinges on U.S. backup with airpower or other military equipment that European armed forces do not have, or only in short supply.

EU leaders regularly have underlined how the United States is “crucial” to the success of the security operation dubbed Multinational Force

Ukraine. But the Trump administration has long refused to commit, perhaps keeping its participation on hold as leverage in talks with Russia.

After a meeting Wednesday between Trump and European leaders, European Council President Antonio Costa welcomed “the readiness of the United States to share with Europe the efforts to reinforce security conditions once we obtain a durable and just peace for Ukraine.”

French President Emmanuel Macron said Trump had insisted NATO must not be part of these security guarantees, but the U.S. leader agreed “the United States and all the (other) parties involved should take part.”

“It’s a very important clarification,” Macron said.

Trump did not publicly confirm he would allow U.S. backup, and no details of possible U.S. support were made public, but U.S. Vice President JD Vance sat in on the coalition meeting for the first time.

More than 200 military planners have worked for months on ways to ensure a future peace should the war, now in its fourth year, finally halt. Ukraine’s armed forces also have been involved, and British personnel have led reconnaissance work inside Ukraine.

The exact size of the force has not been made public, although Britain has said it could number 10,000 to 30,000 troops. It must be enough to deter Russian forces, but also of a realistic size for nations that shrank their militaries after the Cold War and are now rearming.

The “reassurance” force’s mission “will be to strengthen Ukraine’s defenses on the land, at sea, and in the air because the Ukrainian Armed Forces are the best deterrent against future Russian aggression,” U.K. Defence Secretary John Healey told lawmakers last month.

“It will secure Ukraine’s skies by using aircraft,” Healey said, “and it will support safer seas by bolstering the Black Sea Task Force with additional specialist teams.”

Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey launched that naval force a year ago to deal with mines in Black Sea waters.

The force initially will have its headquarters in Paris before moving to London next year. A coordination headquarters in Kyiv will be involved once hostilities cease and it deploys.

## Federal agents, National Guardsmen hit DC streets

*The Washington Post*

A split screen emerged in the first days of President Donald Trump’s deployment of federal law enforcement and the National Guard onto D.C. streets: rhetoric from the president painting the city as a crime-adled wasteland, which D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser, a democrat, condemned, and, on the ground, a surge in federal resources bolstering D.C. police — which she and the police chief welcomed.

The impact of Trump’s federal actions came into view Tuesday night, with National Guard troops on the ground and agents from numerous federal agencies roaming D.C. streets from the National Mall to busy corridors in Columbia Heights. At a

Wednesday evening checkpoint in Northwest Washington, local and federal officers, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents, pulled over drivers for seat belt violations or broken taillights, as protesters shouted at them.

The White House said the overnight operation would soon become a 24/7 affair, with a significantly greater National Guard presence — and Trump said he intended to ask Congress to extend the emergency allowing him to federalize D.C. police beyond 30 days.

“We’re going to be asking for extensions on that — long-term extensions, because you can’t have 30 days,” Trump said Wednesday, adding that his administration would be pushing a

crime bill to use the city as “a very positive example.”

Spokespeople for Bowser and Attorney General Brian Schwalb, a Democrat, declined to comment.

Trump’s executive action represents the most extraordinary federal intervention into the city’s home rule in decades, coming as violent crime is at 30-year lows following a historic spike in 2023, according to D.C. police data.

So far, top D.C. officials said, the order was playing out as more of a collaborative partnership, even as they feared that Trump’s repeated denigrations of the nation’s capital as a dirty city unsafe for residents and visitors could do permanent damage to its image on the na-

tional stage.

Bowser encapsulated the parallel reactions as she deployed dual messaging in two public appearances over the course of 15 hours between Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning.

Speaking to community leaders on Zoom on Tuesday night, Bowser called Trump’s actions an “authoritarian push” in her firmest condemnation yet, as she began to more forcefully dispute the disparaging characterization of the District that Trump has repeatedly painted.

But appearing on FOX5 on Wednesday morning, a more tempered Bowser said a boost in law enforcement efforts from federal partners could help the city further drive down crime and get more guns off the street.

# US denies China's shoal incident claims

By ALEX WILSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet rejected as “false” a claim by China this week that its forces drove a U.S. destroyer away from a contested atoll in the South China Sea.

China's Southern Theater Command on Wednesday said it ordered its forces to “track, monitor, warn and expel” the guided-missile destroyer USS Higgins from waters near Scarborough Shoal, a feature claimed by China, Taiwan and the Philippines.

“The US military's actions seriously violated China's sovereignty and security, seriously undermined peace and stability

in the South China Sea and violated international law and basic norms governing international relations,” wrote spokesman Senior Capt. He Tiecheng on the command's Weibo social media page.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet, based at Yokosuka Naval Base, said the Higgins conducted a freedom of navigation operation near the shoal and left the area on its own accord.

Fleet spokeswoman Lt. Sarah Merrill called Beijing's claim “false” and said that the Higgins operated within international legal standards, she told Stars and Stripes by email Thursday.

“The United States is defending its right to fly, sail and operate wherever international law

allows, as USS Higgins did here,” Merrill wrote. “Nothing China says otherwise will deter us.”

The Higgins went within 13 miles of the shoal, close to the edge of territorial waters, she said.

Scarborough Shoal, known in China as Huangyan Island, is claimed by China, Taiwan and the Philippines.

Monday, a Chinese warship collided with a Chinese coast guard vessel in pursuit of Philippine coast guard and fishing vessels in the same area, The Associated Press reported Tuesday.

The littoral combat ship USS Cincinnati and the Higgins were briefly deployed Wednesday to

Scarborough Shoal, according to a post that day on social media platform X by Philippine coast guard Commodore Jay Tarriela.

Tarriela cited U.S. officials and a Philippine surveillance flight.

The U.S. regularly conducts freedom of navigation patrols in the South China Sea, where several countries ringing the sea have overlapping claims to maritime features.

The patrols are typically a challenge to what the U.S. Navy describes as “unlawful restrictions” on innocent passage.

The U.S. often cites the convention as the legal basis for its actions in the South China Sea, but it is one of the few U.N. member states that has not ratified it.

## Chinese vessels prolong their presence near Senkakus

By BRIAN McELHINEY  
AND KEISHI KOJA  
*Stars and Stripes*

ABOARD THE PS MIZUKI, Okinawa — China and Japan remain locked in a game of cat-and-mouse near the Senkaku Islands, with China this year setting another record for the number of consecutive days its vessels have sailed near the disputed islets in the East China Sea.

As of Thursday, Chinese vessels have been spotted on 269 consecutive days within the Senkakus' contiguous zone, a 24-mile-wide band beyond the 12-mile territorial limit, a coast guard spokesman said by phone that day.

The chain of five islets and three rocky protrusions are administered by Japan but also claimed by China and Taiwan. They are a flashpoint between Japan and China.

China's vessels have started

to become more aggressive, but Japan's coast guard has not escalated its approach to deterring vessels that enter its territorial waters, Naha Coast Guard Office director Momotoshi Saisho said.

During an Aug. 8 media tour aboard the PS Mizuki at Naha New Port, Saisho touched on the coast guard response to those incursions. Japan accused the fishermen of intentionally causing the collision.

The Mizuki is usually dispatched to meet Chinese fishing vessels, Saisho said. The coast guard will always dispatch a “larger number” of ships than the intruding force.

However, the coast guard has “never fired warning shots or shot water cannons at Chinese vessels around the Senkakus,” the spokesman said Thursday.

Some Japanese government officials may speak to the press only on condition of anonymity.

## US, Philippines discuss more missile system deployments

*Associated Press*

MANILA, Philippines — The United States is discussing the possible deployment of more missile launchers to the Philippines to strengthen deterrence against aggression in the disputed South China Sea and other Asian security hotspots, but no final decision has been reached by both sides, Manila's ambassador to Washington said Thursday.

The U.S. military delivered a mid-range missile system called the Typhon, a land-based weapon that can fire the Standard Missile-6 and the Tomahawk Land Attack Missile, to the northern Philippines as part of joint combat exercises in April last year.

That was followed by the transport by the U.S. military of an anti-ship missile launcher in April this year to the northernmost Philippine province of Batanes, just a sea border away from Taiwan.

Beijing strongly protested the

installation of the U.S. missile systems, saying they were aimed at containing China's rise and warning that these would threaten regional stability. China has asked the Philippines to withdraw the missile launchers from its territory, but officials led by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. had rejected the demand.

Ambassador Jose Manuel Romualdez said without elaborating that the possible deployment by the U.S. of more Navy Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System or NMESIS missile launchers “was being discussed for consideration by both sides.”

The anti-ship missile systems could be installed along Philippine coastal regions facing the South China Sea and outlying regions to beef up deterrence against aggression, he said.

“This is part of the strong U.S. and Philippines defense partnership,” Romualdez said.

# Smithsonian to review exhibits, policies

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The White House is ordering a wide-ranging review of the Smithsonian museums and exhibitions ahead of the country's 250th birthday with a goal of aligning the institution's content with President Donald Trump's interpretation of American history.

In a letter sent Tuesday to Smithsonian Institution Secretary Lonnie Bunch III, the White House laid out in detail the steps it expects the organization to take as part of the announced review. The examination will look at all public-facing content, such as social media, exhibition text and educational materials, to "assess tone, historical framing, and alignment with American ideals," according to the letter.

"This initiative aims to ensure alignment with the President's directive to celebrate American ex-

ceptionalism, remove divisive or partisan narratives, and restore confidence in our shared cultural institutions," the letter said.

The Smithsonian said it remained committed to "scholarly excellence, rigorous research, and the accurate, factual presentation of history."

"We are reviewing the letter with this commitment in mind and will continue to collaborate constructively with the White House, Congress, and our governing Board of Regents," it said in a statement.

The review, first reported by The Wall Street Journal, is the latest attempt by the president to bring the country's cultural institutions in line with his vision. In March, Trump signed an executive order titled "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History," which accused the Smithsonian of coming under the influence of a

"divisive, race-centered ideology" and called upon it to "remove improper ideology" from the institution's museums.

In February, Trump removed the Kennedy Center's Board of Trustees, replaced them with his supporters and named himself chairman. He vowed to end events featuring performers in drag, indicating he would take on a larger role in dictating the institution's programming schedule.

The review of the Smithsonian will initially focus on the National Museum of American History, the National Museum of Natural History, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the National Museum of the American Indian, the National Air and Space Museum, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the National Portrait Gallery and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.

The letter said additional museums would be reviewed in subsequent phases.

Civil rights leaders have criticized the administration's particular focus on the National Museum of African American History and Culture as efforts to minimize Black Americans' contributions to the country and to recast the obstacles they faced.

The Smithsonian has repeatedly denied allegations that it has changed or removed exhibit details in response to pressure from the administration. Recently, the institution removed references to Trump's two impeachments from an exhibit on the American presidency. A spokesman for the museum said the references, which were added in 2021, were intended to be a temporary measure and said a future exhibit would include details on all presidential impeachments.

## Veterans' medical records breached in DaVita hack

BY LINDA F. HERSEY

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — A national dialysis center that contracts with the Department of Veterans Affairs was the target of a ransomware attack breaching veterans' medical records containing Social Security numbers, test results and insurance information.

DaVita — a provider of care for patients with kidney disease — disclosed approximately 1 million medical records were exposed in the cyberattack, including the health information of veterans receiving VA-covered dialysis and lab services in their communities.

DaVita provided details about patient information potentially compromised in notifications to attorneys general in several states, according to HIPAA Journal, which posts regulatory updates on the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.

For the first quarter of 2025, the VA paid \$206 million to DaVita to provide dialysis and lab testing services, according to USASpending.gov, a government website on federal spending, including contracts, grants and loans.

The cyberattack hit DaVita's internal systems, exposing some sensitive information from VA patient records, the VA said.

Patient names, images of checks and tax identification numbers might have been exposed in some of the patient files, DaVita said in an announcement.

"Throughout our response to this matter, patient care delivery has continued. At this time, all major network servers and systems that were impacted have been restored in a secure manner," the company said.

Neither the VA nor DaVita would discuss the scope of the cyberattack or the number of veterans' records accessed.

## US producer prices surge in July amid Trump tariffs

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — U.S. wholesale inflation surged unexpectedly last month, signaling that President Donald Trump's sweeping taxes on imports are pushing costs up and that higher prices for consumers may be on the way.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that its producer price index — which measures inflation before it hits consumers — rose 0.9% last month from June, the biggest jump in more than three years.

Compared with a year earlier, wholesale prices rose 3.3%.

The numbers were much higher than economists had expected.

Prices rose faster for producers than consumers last month, suggesting that U.S. importers may, for now, be eating the cost of Trump's tariffs rather than passing them on to customers.

That may not last.

"It will only be a matter of time

before producers pass their higher tariff-related costs onto the backs of inflation-weary consumers," wrote Christopher Rupkey, chief economist at fwdbonds, a financial markets research firm.

Excluding volatile food and energy prices, so-called core producer prices rose 0.9% from June, the biggest month-over-month jump since March 2022.

Compared with a year ago, core wholesale prices rose 3.7% after posting a 2.6% year-over-year jump in June.

But some aspects of Thursday's producer price report were puzzling, including a big jump in profit margins at retailers and wholesalers.

Economist Stephen Brown at Capital Economics found the increase "to put it lightly, counterintuitive given the anecdotal evidence that firms are absorbing the lion's share of tariff increases in margins."

# Appeals court rules foreign aid can be ended

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A divided panel of appeals court judges ruled Wednesday that the Trump administration can suspend or terminate billions of dollars of congressionally appropriated funding for foreign aid.

Two of three judges from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit concluded that grant recipients challenging the freeze did not meet the requirements for a preliminary injunction restoring the flow of money.

In January, on the first day of his second term in the White House, Republican President Donald Trump issued an executive order directing the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development to freeze spending on foreign aid.

After groups of grant recipients sued to challenge that order, U.S. District Judge Amir Ali ordered the administration to release the full amount of foreign assistance that Congress had appropriated for the 2024 budget year.

The appeal court's majority partially vacated Ali's order. Judges Karen LeCraft Henderson and Gregory Katsas concluded that the plaintiffs did not have a valid legal basis for the court to hear their claims. The ruling was not on the merits of

whether the government unconstitutionally infringed on Congress' spending powers.

"The parties also dispute the scope of the district court's remedy but we need not resolve it ... because the grantees have failed to satisfy the requirements for a preliminary injunction in any event," Henderson wrote.

Judge Florence Pan, who dissented, said the Supreme Court has held "in no uncertain terms" that the president does not have the authority to disobey laws for policy reasons.

"Yet that is what the majority enables today," Pan wrote. "The majority opinion thus misconstrues the separation-of-powers

claim brought by the grantees, misapplies precedent, and allows Executive Branch officials to evade judicial review of constitutionally impermissible actions."

The money at issue includes nearly \$4 billion for USAID to spend on global health programs and more than \$6 billion for HIV and AIDS programs.

Trump has portrayed the foreign aid as wasteful spending that does not align with his foreign policy goals.

Henderson was nominated to the court by Republican President George H.W. Bush. Katsas was nominated by Trump. Pan was nominated by Democratic President Joe Biden.

## 'Frankenstein bunnies' with 'horns' spotted in Colorado

Associated Press

DENVER — A group of rabbits in Colorado with grotesque, hornlike growths may seem straight out of a low-budget horror film, but scientists say there's no reason to be spooked — the furry creatures merely have a relatively common virus.

The cottontails recently spotted in Fort Collins are infected with the mostly harmless Shope papillomavirus, which causes wart-like growths that protrude from their faces like metastasizing horns.

ing horns.

Viral photos have inspired a flurry of unflattering nicknames, including "Frankenstein bunnies," "demon rabbits" and "zombie rabbits." But their affliction is nothing new, with the virus inspiring ancient folklore and fueling scientific research nearly 100 years ago.

The virus likely influenced the centuries-old jackalope myth in North America, which told of a rabbit with antlers or horns, among other animal variations. The disease in rabbits also contributed to scientists' knowledge about the connection between viruses and cancer, such as the human papillomavirus that causes cervical cancer.

The virus in rabbits was named after Dr. Richard E. Shope, a professor at The Rockefeller University who discovered the disease in cottontails in the 1930s.

Kara Van Hoose, a spokesperson for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, told The Associated Press on Wednesday that the agency has been getting calls about the rabbits seen in Fort Collins.

The growths resemble warts but can look like horns if they grow longer, Van Hoose said. The growths don't harm rabbits unless they grow on their eyes or mouths and interfere with eating. Rabbits' immune systems are able to fight the virus and, once they do, the growths will disappear, she said.

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## Radioactive wasp nests spark questions in S. Carolina

The (Columbia, S.C.) State

COLUMBIA, S.C. — As word spreads about the discovery of radioactive wasp nests at a South Carolina nuclear weapons complex, some researchers and environmental activists are urging the government to provide details about the finding.

So far, officials with the Savannah River Site have issued a basic statement saying that four different wasp nests were found on a post near a highly contaminated section of the property last month. But they have said there is no threat to the public.

They've said wasps were lightly contaminated and were unlikely to spread toxins off the 310-square mile site.

Still, plenty of questions remain, including the types of radioactive material found, University of South Carolina biologist Tim Mousseau said.

"There's insufficient information to really kind of determine the risks and the hazards," said Mousseau, who has extensive experience studying the effects of radioactivity on plants and animals around the world.

Based on the SRS answers, for instance, it's not clear whether the wasp nests were contaminated by a new leak at the weapons complex, he said.

A new leak could indicate emerging contamination threats that need to be addressed. The nests were found

in an area where large tanks store toxic nuclear material.

"If this reflects new leakage or new releases of pollutants that haven't been documented, then this is a sentinel of potential issues related to the long-term storage of this nuclear waste, which is an ongoing issue at all ... sites that were involved in and continue to be involved in the processing of materials mostly for national security purposes," Mousseau said.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Police find \$30K worth of stolen Labubu dolls**

**CA** CHINO — A police department in Southern California recovered about \$30,000 worth of Labubu dolls that were stolen from a warehouse, the agency announced.

The collectible items have recently surged in popularity. The Labubus were stolen in a series of trips that spanned multiple days, the Chino Police Department said in a social media post. Two suspects, both minors, were later identified as workers at the warehouse, the department said.

Law enforcement found the items at a home in Upland, a city in the state's Inland Empire.

The announcement comes as authorities in Los Angeles County investigate a separate incident in which thieves stole about \$7,000 worth of the toothy little monsters from a store in La Puente.

**Rapper takes 10-hour Uber ride to concert**

**MD** BALTIMORE — Atlanta-based rapper Jeezy would have missed his Baltimore concert at The Lyric if not for an Uber driver willing to drive him 10 hours to Charm City.

According to an Instagram post, Jeezy woke up before his Baltimore show on Aug. 1 to find that all flights to Baltimore and D.C. had been canceled due to weather.

His team arranged for a driver, but two hours into the trip, the driver hit an object on the highway in South Carolina, causing his gas tank to leak and forcing him to pull over at a

nearby gas station.

Running out of options, Jeezy said he tried to arrange a jet from South Carolina, but the cancellations were still in effect.

An Uber driver, 28-year-old Tanner Donahoo, picked him up from the gas station to take him to the airport. Jeezy asked how much he would charge to drive him to Baltimore.

Donahoo told The Baltimore Sun that the 10-hour drive to Baltimore was the first ride he accepted on his shift that day.

He wouldn't disclose how much Jeezy paid him for the ride, but he did receive a backstage pass to the show, free merchandise and a paid-for stay at a hotel with the rest of his touring crew.

Jeezy even brought Donahoo onstage, where he was met with cheers from the crowd.

**State senator tapped for lieutenant governor post**

**FL** TALLAHASSEE — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has tapped Republican state Sen. Jay Collins to be his next lieutenant governor. It's a closely watched appointment by the two-term governor, who can't run for reelection in 2026 and has been working to cement his legacy as his time leading the state winds down.

If Collins, an Army combat veteran and nonprofit executive, decides to launch a bid to succeed DeSantis, the move could tee up another proxy fight between the popular GOP governor and President Donald Trump, who has already endorsed Republican U.S. Rep. Byron Donalds for the job.

In Florida, the lieutenant governor position is largely ceremonial with few official respon-

sibilities, apart from taking over if the governor cannot serve.

Collins was first elected to Florida's Republican-dominated state Senate in 2022 and has been seen as one of DeSantis' key allies in the Legislature.

Born in Montana, Collins has talked openly about personal challenges he has overcome, including experiencing homelessness while in high school. He went on to join the Army Special Forces and ultimately lost a leg, but continued to serve five more years as a Green Beret post-amputation, according to a campaign biography.

**Manatee sighted in cold New England waters**

**MA** BOSTON — A manatee was recently spotted off the coast of Massachusetts for the first time in almost a decade and scientists want to monitor its condition to see if a rescue is necessary before it succumbs to the cold water or lack of food, they said Friday.

The threatened species, which makes its habitat in warmer southern Gulf waters in places like Florida, was first seen July 26 off the southwestern coast of Cape Cod in the area of Nantucket Sound.

A few days later, the animal was seen stranded on the tidal flats in Mattapoisett. Bystanders who found the manatee beached on the flats around sunrise pushed it back into the water, said Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries Protected Species Program Manager Erin Burke.

It hasn't been spotted since, Burke said, but a team with the International Fund for Animal

Welfare is standing by to rescue the animal if it becomes necessary.

**Spirit Airlines struggles to stay in business**

**NY** NEW YORK — Just five months after emerging from Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, Spirit Airlines is warning about its future ability to stay in business.

Spirit Aviation Holdings, the budget carrier's parent company, says it has "substantial doubt" about its ability to continue as a going concern over the next year — which is accounting-speak for running out of money. In a quarterly report issued Monday, Spirit pointed to "adverse market conditions" that it's continued to face after a recent restructuring and other efforts to revive its business.

Despite cost-cutting efforts, Spirit on Monday stressed that it needs more cash. As a result, the company said it may also sell certain aircraft and real estate.

**35 Union Pacific train cars derail, no injuries**

**TX** GORDON — Thirty-five cars of a Union Pacific train derailed Tuesday afternoon near a small Texas town, officials said.

No injuries were reported and no evacuations have been ordered following the afternoon derailment, Union Pacific spokeswoman Robynn Tysver said.

The emergency services district said the derailment was being treated as a hazardous material situation. But it was not immediately known what the derailed train cars were carrying.

— From wire reports

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Reporting  
World, National  
and Military News

# Ohtani can't keep Angels from a sweep

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Shohei Ohtani racked up seven strikeouts and pitched into the fifth inning. He tripled, scored and reached base twice at the plate.

The two-way superstar still couldn't stop his team from falling deeper into a losing streak in Anaheim. Sound familiar?

Angels fans know this melancholy story all too well — and now Dodgers fans have experienced it, too.

Ohtani stepped back in time in more ways than one when he returned to the Angel Stadium mound Wednesday night for the first time since he switched teams in Los Angeles' cross-town rivalry.

For six seasons, the three-time MVP couldn't make the Angels into winners with his unprecedented talents. This summer, his defending champion Dodgers are in an increasingly ugly slump — and Ohtani couldn't save them Wednesday, neither on the hill nor at the plate.

Ohtani tripled and scored the Dodgers' first run, and he eventually left his longest start of the season with a 5-4 lead. The Angels still rallied for a 6-5 victory, sweeping the six-game Freeway Series and sending the Dodgers to their fourth consecutive loss overall.

The Dodgers also fell a game behind the Padres in the NL West standings with streaking San Diego on Friday night. The Dodgers led the division by nine games on July 3, and they've gone 12-21 since.

"Obviously, it doesn't feel good to fall into second place and to lose a lot of these games," Ohtani said through his interpreter. "We're doing everything in our power, having meetings, doing everything that we can to try to right the ship. We just have to do a better job."

Ohtani pitched  $4\frac{2}{3}$  innings of five-hit, four-run ball against the Angels. He gave up a homer to Taylor Ward and a two-run double to Zach Neto, but he also fanned Mike Trout

twice, getting his friend and fellow MVP the second time with his fastest pitch of the night — a 101 mph fastball in the fourth. But the Angels got three straight hits to chase him, capped by Neto's double.

"I just couldn't finish off hitters in the fifth," Ohtani said. "They did a good job putting balls in play, and that's what happens. Next time I've got to do a better job."

The Dodgers' beleaguered bullpen again failed while missing five high-leverage arms on the injured list, but their expensive lineup also didn't score after the fourth inning.

Logan O'Hoppe delivered a bases-loaded, two-run single in the eighth, and longtime Dodgers closer Kenley Jansen coolly pitched the ninth. Ohtani struck out in his final two at-bats.

"Doesn't feel good to lose close games," Ohtani said. "It's tough mentally, but we have an off day tomorrow, so the plan is to regroup, refresh and get ready for the weekend."

Ohtani is still beloved in Anaheim by fans who mostly couldn't blame him for leaving a team that could never assemble a winning lineup around him and Trout during six consecutive losing seasons.

All fans were locked in on the main event in this showdown.

After Trout and Ohtani acknowledged each other with slight nods and smirks, Ohtani finished his 1-2-3 first inning by throwing five straight fastballs to Trout before striking him out looking with a sweeper. Ohtani was even meaner to Trout in their second meeting, starting him out with a 73 mph curve before eventually fanning him with that blazing fastball in the low outside corner.

Outside of Trout, Ohtani saw plenty of familiar faces Wednesday: Seven of the nine hitters in the Angels' starting lineup played with him in Anaheim.

Ward blasted a 97-mph fastball from Ohtani to right for his 29th homer, just the second allowed by Ohtani this season.

## Padres take NL West lead ahead of series in Los Angeles

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — At the outset of play on July 4, the San Diego Padres were coming off a 2-4 trip through Cincinnati and Philadelphia and trailed the Los Angeles Dodgers by nine games in the National League West.

On Friday night, the Padres open a three-game series at Los Angeles with San Diego atop the division.

The Padres completed a three-game sweep of the host San Francisco Giants on Wednesday with an 11-1 romp that extended their winning streak to five games. The Padres (69-52) also have won five straight series and are 23-12.

"We've played a lot of really good baseball," Padres manag-

er Mike Shildt said. "Pitching's been good, defense, baserunning. I've been really pleased the last week or so about the offense dictating the game."

San Diego took control Wednesday with a seven-run second inning. Fernando Tatis Jr. contributed a two-run single.

"We're going out there confident every single day, playing good baseball, clean baseball — and that's what we're capable of doing," said Tatis, who had two hits, two walks and drove in three runs.

The Padres and Dodgers have met in the NL Division Series three times in the past five seasons. Considering that history, Tatis said it's hard to overstate the importance of this

weekend's series, even if it is only mid-August.

"It's huge. That's what we're playing for," Tatis said. "It's in our hands, how much we want it."

Barely more than a month ago, the Padres weren't concerned with the division race.

"We played some bad baseball around that time, so we weren't really looking up at that point," third baseman Manny Machado said. "We were just trying to get back in the win column."

The Padres revamped their roster at the trade deadline, adding — most notably — outfielder Ramón Laureano and All-Star designated hitter Ryan O'Hearn from the Orioles,

catcher Freddy Fermin from the Royals, left-hander Nestor Cortes from the Brewers and reliever Mason Miller from the Athletics.

"Every player that has come in has contributed in a really big (way). They're a really big part of this team," Tatis said.

Laureano went 3 for 4 with a two-run homer Wednesday. He has gone 15 for 45 (.333) with San Diego. Fermin is 11 for 31 (.355) with the Padres. This weekend, the Padres take on their rivals with first place in the NL West at stake.

"Clearly, it's a series people are going to be paying attention to," Shildt said, "and we're just going to play good, clean, fundamental Padre baseball."

# Rookie Melton allows 1 hit, Tigers top White Sox

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Rookie Troy Melton allowed one hit in five innings and three Detroit Tigers relievers maintained a shutout of the Chicago White Sox in a 1-0 win on Wednesday.

It was a series-clinching win for the Tigers, who advanced to 70-52 and extended their lead over the Cleveland Guardians in the AL Central to 6½ games.

Melton (3-1) threw 56 pitches over five innings. The 24-year-old struck out six batters.

Luis Robert Jr. hit a leadoff double in the fifth inning, but Melton responded with three consecutive swinging strikeouts to end his day. Since giving up six earned runs to the Pittsburgh Pirates in his July 23 debut, Melton has been responsible for just one run in four appearances.

Wenceel Pérez hit a bases-loaded sacrifice fly in the sixth inning off Martín Pérez (1-2), who surrendered three hits and two walks over 3⅓ innings.

**Braves 11, Mets 6:** Michael Harris II hit a grand slam Wednesday night to cap Atlanta's biggest inning in almost five years — a nine-run outburst in the fourth that propelled the visiting Braves to a comeback win over slumping New York.

Atlanta fell behind 6-0 in a game delayed 95 minutes by rain before storming back against David Peterson and Reed Garrett (3-5). Peterson issued four free passes in the fourth, including a bases-loaded walk of Nick Allen, and gave up Jurickson Profar's three-run double before Marcell Ozuna greeted Garrett with an RBI single before Harris' homer.

The nine-run inning was the biggest for the Braves since Sept. 9, 2020, when they scored 11 times in the second inning of a 29-9 win over the Miami Marlins.

**Angels 6, Dodgers 5:** Shohei Ohtani yielded four runs on five hits while pitching a season-high 4⅓ innings, but Logan O'Hoppe delivered a two-run single in the eighth inning and the host Angels swept the season Freeway Series

with a victory over the Dodgers.

Ohtani fanned Mike Trout twice among his seven strikeouts. He also tripled and scored in the first inning, but struck out in his final three at-bats.

The sub-.500 Angels improbably swept both three-game series against the Dodgers this season. They've won a franchise-record seven straight over their cross-town rivals.

**Padres 11, Giants 1:** Nick Pi-vetta allowed one run in 6⅓ innings and Ramón Laureano had three of San Diego's 14 hits as the visiting Padres completed a three-game sweep of San Francisco with a rout.

San Diego extended its winning streak to five games and moved a half-game ahead of the Los Angeles Dodgers in the National League West, which later became a full game after the Dodgers were swept by the Angels.

The Giants have lost five straight games — all at home — in which they were outscored 32-5.

**Reds 8, Phillies 0:** Miguel Andujar hit a grand slam and Hunter Greene pitched six sharp innings to help host Cincinnati beat Philadelphia.

Noelvi Marte had two hits and two RBIs for the Reds in the rubber game of the three-game series. Elly De La Cruz had two hits and scored two runs.

Greene (5-3) allowed three hits, struck out six and walked none in his first big-league start since June 3. The ace right-hander had been sidelined by a groin injury.

**Orioles 4, Mariners 3:** Jackson Holliday hit a game-ending double, and host Baltimore snapped Seattle's eight-game win streak with a victory.

Dylan Carlson set up Holliday's winning hit with a two-out single off Matt Brash (1-1). A hustling Carlson scored all the way from first on Holliday's liner into the corner in right field.

It was the first walk-off win for the Orioles since Sept. 19, 2024. They were the only big league

team without a walk-off victory this season.

**Cubs 4, Blue Jays 1:** Rookie right-hander Cade Horton struck out a career-high eight in 5⅓ sharp innings to win his fourth straight start, Michael Busch and Matt Shaw homered and visiting Chicago beat Toronto.

Cubs catcher Miguel Amaya was carted off the field after injuring his left ankle landing on first base in the eighth inning.

Horton (7-3) didn't allow a hit until Andrés Giménez lined a single to center with one out in the sixth.

**Diamondbacks 6, Rangers 4:** James McCann and Ketel Marte homered with two outs in a four-run ninth inning for visiting Arizona to beat Texas in a game that began with the Diamondbacks facing former teammate Merrill Kelly.

Phil Maton (2-4), like Kelly a trade deadline acquisition two weeks ago, struck out the first three batters he faced after taking over with two outs in the eighth.

Shortstop Geraldo Perdomo hit a solo homer in the fifth inning of the series finale, two innings after scoring on one of Marte's three singles off Kelly, who exited after six innings with a 3-2 lead.

**Brewers 12, Pirates 5:** William Contreras drove in four runs, Christian Yelich drove in three and host Milwaukee beat Pittsburgh to extend its winning streak to 12 games.

The Brewers scored double-digit runs for the second straight game and the fourth time this month. Milwaukee belted out 12 hits but only two — back-to-back fourth-inning doubles by Sal Frelick and Isaac Collins — were for extra bases.

**Astros 4, Red Sox 1:** Hunter Brown allowed only a run in 6⅓ innings for his 10th victory, Jeremy Peña and Yainer Diaz homered and host Houston beat Boston.

Brown (10-5) allowed six hits and three walks and held the Red Sox to 1 for 6 with runners in scor-

ing position. The Astros moved a game ahead of the Seattle Mariners for the AL West lead.

**Nationals 8, Royals 7:** Daylen Lile's two-out, ninth-inning single boosted visiting Washington over Kansas City.

After the Royals tied the game in the eighth, Luis García Jr. doubled, then scored on Lile's single to right for the lead.

**Rockies 6, Cardinals 5:** Pinch-hitter Hunter Goodman hit a two-run homer in the ninth inning, rallying visiting Colorado to a victory over St. Louis.

With one out, Goodman connected on a 3-2 sinker from JoJo Romero (4-4) and sent it 432 feet over the center field fence to score Kyle Karros, who led off with a walk. Goodman, who leads the Rockies with 24 homers, also hit a 436-foot blast in Colorado's 3-0 win on Tuesday.

**Marlins 13, Guardians 4:** Jakob Marsee hit two home runs, doubled and drove in seven runs, Graham Pauley and Xavier Edwards also homered and visiting Miami beat Cleveland to snap a four-game skid.

Marsee went 4 of 5 with a double and each of his RBIs came with two outs. The rookie hit a three-run shot in the first inning and a two-run homer off Guardians reliever Kolby Allard (2-2) that made it 6-4 in the fifth.

**Twins 4, Yankees 1:** Joe Ryan allowed a run and four hits in 6⅓ innings and visiting Minnesota beat New York, breaking a nine-game losing streak to the Yankees.

Ryan (12-5) allowed only a homer to Cody Bellinger in the game that was delayed at the start for 1 hour, 52 minutes because of rain.

**Rays 8, Athletics 2:** Brandon Lowe and Junior Caminero hit two-run home runs, Drew Rasmussen (10-5) threw six innings and visiting Tampa Bay beat the Athletics.

Lowe's second-inning home run off J.T. Ginn (2-5) — his 24th of the season — made it 6-0. Caminero homered in the ninth.

# AP picks its all-time All-American team

Associated Press

Ohio State and Pittsburgh each placed three players on The Associated Press All-Time All-America team announced Thursday as part of the news organization's celebration of the 100th anniversary of the storied honor for the top players in college football.

Since 1925, nearly 2,000 men have been named AP first-team All-Americans, one of the most prestigious honors in the sport.

The Big Ten led all conferences with seven selections, two more than the Southeastern Conference.

Of the 25 players on the first team, five won the Heisman Trophy and 21 are in the College Football Hall of Fame, two are nominated for induction in 2026 and two are not eligible because they are not yet 10 years removed from their college careers.

A panel of 12 AP sports writers who cover college football selected the all-time team. It

won't be, and shouldn't be, considered definitive. There have been far more great players over the last century than spots available.

For a player to qualify, he must have been an AP first-team All-American at least once. His professional career, if any, was not to be considered.

Many fans might say Anthony Munoz and Ray Guy, among others, are glaring omissions. Neither qualified for consideration.

Munoz, who played at Southern California from 1976-79, is considered one of the greatest offensive linemen of all time, college or pro. He's in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Alas, he was never a first-team AP All-American.

Guy, who played at Southern Mississippi from 1970-72, remains the only punter selected in the first round of an NFL draft. But punters were not included on AP All-America teams until 1981.

Also, a member of the all-time

team could only be listed on the side of the ball where he was named first-team All-America. All-purpose players could come from any position.

Voters were cautioned against recency bias, but it is notable that only three of the first-team selections played before 1970.

Florida's Tim Tebow edged Texas' Vince Young (2005) for all-time first-team quarterback. Tebow won the Heisman and made the AP All-America team as a sophomore in 2007.

Oklahoma State's Barry Sanders (1988) and Georgia's Herschel Walker (1980-81-82), both Heisman winners, are the running backs. Marshall's Randy Moss (1997) and Pittsburgh's Larry Fitzgerald (2003) are the wide receivers.

The offensive line is made up of Ohio State's Orlando Pace (1995-96) and Pitt's Bill Fralic (1982-83-84) at tackle, Alabama's John Hannah (1972) and Ohio State's Jim Parker (1956)

at guard and Penn's Chuck Bednarik (1947-48) at center. The tight end is Georgia's Brock Bowers (2023).

The all-purpose player is Heisman winner Johnny Rodgers of Nebraska (1972).

On defense, Pitt's Hugh Green (1978-79-80) and Maryland's Randy White (1974) are the ends and Nebraska's Ndumukong Suh (2009) and Minnesota's Bronko Nagurski (1929) are the tackles. The linebackers are Illinois' Dick Butkus (1964), Alabama's Derrick Thomas (1988) and Ohio State's Chris Spielman (1986-87).

The secondary is made up of Heisman winner Charles Woodson of Michigan (1996-97) and Florida State's Deion Sanders (1987-88) at cornerback and Southern California's Ronnie Lott (1980) and Miami's Ed Reed (2000-01) at safety.

The specialists are Florida State kicker Sebastian Janikowski (1998-99) and Iowa punter Tory Taylor (2023).

## Venezuela team at home once on Little League field

Associated Press

SOUTH WILLIAMSPORT, Pa. — Hitting with the bases loaded at the Little League World Series, Samuel Castillo found the gap between left and center field. Two runs scored and Venezuela's lead over Puerto Rico grew to 3-0.

Above the team dugout, spectators in a fan section that barely filled three rows raised one of the few Venezuelan flags in Volunteer Stadium.

It took a lot for Venezuela to get here, but on Wednesday, its team made the playing baseball part of the journey look easy. Cardenas Little League from Barquisimeto went on to shut out Puerto Rico 5-0.

Cardenas won all five of its regional tournament games, outscoring opponents 46-6 to become the Latin America rep-

resentative to the LLWS. But in the wake of President Donald Trump's travel bans and restrictions affecting 19 countries, the team needed a special exemption from the U.S. State Department and a sign-off from Secretary of State Marco Rubio after visas were initially denied.

Venezuela's senior team, with players who are up to 16 years old, was supposed to compete in Easley, S.C., last month but was unable to get the exemption and was denied entry to the United States.

"They were working their way through applying for the exemption," Little League President and CEO Patrick Wilson said in a news conference before Wednesday's game. "We ran out of time, just candidly."

Wilson said there were close to 10 days for Venezuela's Wil-

liamsport team to get approved, which was "more lead time" than the senior team. They were notified of the approval last Thursday.

This isn't the first time visa snarls have been an issue at the tournament. In 2011, Uganda's visa applications were denied and Saudi Arabia, the regional runner-up, played instead.

"We'll do our best to have conversations with the great folks at the State Department that help us out in an effort to, whether we have to adjust lead times or whatever we can do, to ensure that all teams can participate and enjoy the Little League experience, whether that's at the Little League level, junior, senior, softball, whatever it takes," Wilson said.

Venezuelan players traveled to the U.S. without their families

— parents couldn't get visas — but the coaches of last year's team that made it to the international final were among the few fans from back home sitting proudly in the stands above the dugout. Euclides and Ender Rivero only had to renew their visas which was a much easier process.

Maria Lewis sat just a few seats away from the Riveros holding one of the country's flags and wearing the Latin America team shirt. She's Venezuelan and lives only an hour away from Williamsport.

"I've been praying for them to come," Lewis said. "I'm very pleased that (their visas were) granted, because these are 12-year-olds that deserve to play their game."

On Friday, Venezuela will play Canada.