

Ukrainian leader calls on Putin to meet

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, facing a spike in violence in and around territory held by Russia-backed rebels and increasingly dire warnings that Russia plans to invade, called Saturday for Russian President Vladimir Putin to meet him and seek resolution to the crisis.

“I don’t know what the president of the Russian Federation wants, so I am proposing a meeting,” Zelenskyy said at the Munich Security Conference, where he also met with U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris. Zelenskyy said Russia could pick the location for the talks.

“Ukraine will continue to follow only the diplomatic path for the sake of a peaceful settlement.”

There was no immediate response from the Kremlin.

Zelenskyy spoke hours after separatist leaders in eastern Ukraine ordered a full military mobilization on Saturday while Western leaders made increasingly dire warnings that a Russian invasion of its neighbor appeared imminent.

In new signs of fears that a war could start within days, Germany and Austria told their citizens to leave Ukraine. German air carrier Lufthansa canceled flights to the capital, Kyiv, and to Odessa, a Black Sea port that could be a

key target in an invasion.

NATO’s liaison office in Kyiv said it was relocating staff to Brussels and to the western Ukraine city of Lviv. Meanwhile, top Ukrainian military officials came under a shelling attack during a tour of the front of the nearly eight-year separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine.

The officials fled to a bomb shelter before hustling from the area, according to an Associated Press journalist who was on the tour.

Violence in eastern Ukraine has spiked in recent days as Ukraine and the two regions held by the rebels each accused the other of escalation. Russia on Saturday said at least two shells fired from a government-held part of eastern Ukraine landed across the border, but Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba dismissed that claim as “a fake statement.”

Sporadic violence has broken out for years along the line separating Ukrainian forces from the Russia-backed rebels, but the recent shelling and bombing spike could set off a full-scale war.

The United States and many European countries have alleged for months that Russia, which has moved about 150,000 troops near the Ukrainian border, is trying to create pretexts to invade.

“They are uncoiling and are now poised to strike,” U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin

said Saturday during a visit to Lithuania.

Harris opened her meeting with Zelenskyy by saying the world was at “a decisive moment in history.”

Earlier Saturday, Denis Pushilin, the head of the pro-Russia separatist government in Ukraine’s Donetsk region, cited an “immediate threat of aggression” from Ukrainian forces in his announcement. Ukrainian officials vehemently denied having plans to take rebel-controlled areas by force.

“I appeal to all the men in the republic who can hold weapons to defend their families, their children, wives, mothers,” Pushilin said. “Together we will achieve the coveted victory that we all need.”

A similar statement followed from his counterpart in the Luhansk region. On Friday, the rebels began evacuating civilians to Russia with an announcement that appeared to be part of their and Moscow’s efforts to paint Ukraine as the aggressor.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said the evacuation orders could be a tactic to provide the spark for a broader attack.

“To say it very clearly, Ukraine did not give any grounds for the evacuation that was ordered yesterday,” she said. “Those are the facts on the ground. We must not allow supposed reasons for war to be constructed out of hot air.”

Calls for more US troops grow on Austin’s Baltic visit

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Saturday the U.S. is still examining whether to add forces in the Baltic region, where allies have stepped up calls that NATO send more reinforcements amid fears Moscow will launch a new invasion into Ukraine.

The U.S. already has added additional troops in Poland and Romania to assure allies nervous about potential Russian aggression in the region.

But to date, no new U.S. troops have been sent to the Baltics. Allies in the region are now directly urging top U.S. officials to bring in more troops, ideally on a permanent basis.

Austin, who was in Lithuania for meetings with defense officials from all three Baltic states, said he had no new announcements on whether the U.S. would add new forces.

“There are things we continue to assess,” Austin told reporters in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius.

The heads of the three Baltic states met Friday with Vice President Kamala Harris in Munich and all delivered the same message: They need more U.S. troops.

“We welcome the decisions already made by the U.S. administration to deploy additional forces in Europe. And we also hope that you increase the presence in the Baltic countries,” Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas told Harris during talks at the Munich Security Conference, where global lead-

ers met over the weekend.

Austin heard the same requests during his visit to Lithuania for defense talks.

“I think we are already at the point where we have to tell the adversary that we are reinforcing the Baltic countries,” said acting defense minister Gabrielius Landsbergis, who noted that after Russia’s initial intervention in 2014 in Ukraine, Baltic states were among the first to be reinforced by allies.

Unable to make new troop commitments during his visit, Austin sought to reassure Lithuanian officials that the U.S. was nonetheless committed to the defense of the Baltic states.

“Any attack against Lithuania is an attack against us all” within NATO, Austin said.

Biden signs legislation that will halt shutdown

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

President Joe Biden on Friday signed into law a stopgap funding bill to avert a federal shutdown that also provides the Pentagon some \$350 million to bolster its response to a contaminated drinking water emergency at a military installation in Hawaii.

The White House announced Biden had signed the short-term funding bill — known as a continuing resolution — Friday afternoon, one day after the Senate passed the legislation by a 65-27 vote. House lawmakers passed the measure Feb. 8.

Biden's signature ensured the government will remain funded through March 11, just hours before the last temporary spending measure that he signed into law Dec. 2 was set to expire. The new law provides funding largely at fiscal year 2021 spending levels, but lawmakers also included the new money to address the contamination crisis at the Navy's Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility at Joint Base Pearl-Harbor-Hickam.

Officials in November discovered a petroleum leak from the World War II-era fuel storage facility into the drinking water supply for some on-post housing after some residents complained their water smelled foul. Some 6,000 people have been treated for health issues since the spill including nausea, headaches and rashes, military officials have said. Roughly 4,000 military families were displaced to hotels.

The new law provides some \$250 million to the Navy, Marine Corps, Army and Air Force to "cover expenses related to drinking water contamination," it reads.

The funding also provides the Pentagon another \$100 million to make emergency infrastructure improvements and remove fuel from the facilities, as ordered by Hawaii state health officials. Earlier this month, the Pentagon had appealed the Hawaii Department of Health order to drain fuel from Red Hill in state and federal court.

The funding provision would also require Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to submit a report to the House and Senate appropriations committees within 60 days detailing disbursements from the new funding. Similar updates would be required every 30 days after that initial report.

The latest continuing resolution comes more than five months into fiscal year 2022, which began Oct. 1. It will give appropriators another three weeks to hammer out a final yearly spending bill after a six-month delay.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said last week that top Senate and House appropriators had reached a "framework agreement that will allow us to negotiate an omnibus appropriations bill" to fund the government the rest of the fiscal year.

He warned against a full-year continuing resolution, which has been floated by some Republicans.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and other top defense officials also have warned lawmakers against such a funding measure, contending it would severely delay new defense programs, including upgraded weapons systems, stop troops from moving to new assignments, curb recruitment efforts and potentially harm national security.

Democrats request update on state of Maryland barracks

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Three lawmakers demanded Thursday that the Navy secretary immediately fix "poor and unsafe living conditions" at two barracks in Maryland that house junior enlisted service members.

Three Democratic members of Maryland's congressional delegation — Sen. Chris Van Hollen, Sen. Ben Cardin, and Rep. Jamie Raskin — wrote in a letter to Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro that there was a "troubling pattern" of neglected facilities at Naval Support Activity-Bethesda, which is the site of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

The lawmakers cited a report by Navy Times which found that two junior enlisted barracks — Comfort Hall and Sanctuary Hall — had been without hot water, air conditioning and other basic amenities. The poor conditions have persisted for years, despite complaints to leaders at the installation.

"We appreciate fully that military installations must often operate under budgetary constraints and with competing priorities, but these conditions are critical for the wellbeing of service members and pose an immediate threat to military readiness," the lawmakers wrote to Del Toro.

The Navy decided earlier this month to relocate more than 350 service members out of the barracks and into temporary lodging, according to its website. The service branch said it intends to repair components to restore hot

water in both buildings.

"These repairs will not be done overnight. It will take some time to do this right, but we will get there," Capt. Scott Switzer, commanding officer of NSA Bethesda, is quoted as saying in a Navy report. "Moving our effected population to suitable quarters will allow us to accelerate the repair process while ensuring our sailors and soldiers have adequate living conditions."

The lawmakers asked Del Toro to respond to their letter by Feb. 24 and detail the actions the Navy will take to ensure the barracks have functioning air conditioning and hot water.

They also want to know how the Navy will fix an apparently broken system of handling "trouble tickets," which service members can submit when something in their unit breaks. According to the Navy Times report, trouble tickets had been improperly handled, leading to delays.

In addition to the barracks, the lawmakers asked about the firehouse at the base, which they said is in a state of "dangerous disrepair" that requires immediate attention. The firehouse was long plagued by issues, such as mold, asbestos, roof leaks and electrical issues, before a fire in 2019 rendered half the building uninhabitable, the lawmakers wrote.

"We owe it to the men and women entrusted to the care of this installation that NSA-Bethesda and Walter Reed are home to world-class facilities and management," the lawmakers wrote.

Judge rejects Trump bids to dismiss Jan. 6 lawsuits

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal judge has rejected efforts by former President Donald Trump to toss out conspiracy lawsuits filed by lawmakers and two Capitol police officers, saying in his ruling that the former president's words "plausibly" led to the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection.

U.S. District Court Judge Amit Mehta said in his Friday ruling that Trump's words during a rally before the violent storming of the U.S. Capitol were likely "words of incitement not protected by the First Amendment."

"Only in the most extraordinary circumstances could a court not recognize that the First Amendment protects a President's speech," Mehta wrote. "But the court believes this is that case."

The order is the latest example of growing legal peril for the former president. Just hours earlier, the National Archives said records found at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort contained classified information and that it had notified the Justice Department.

On Thursday, a judge in New York ruled that Trump and two of his children must answer questions under oath in New York state's civil investigation into his business practices. Another judge ordered that his company's financial chief be subjected to questioning in another probe by the District of Columbia attorney general's office. And earlier in the week, the firm that prepared

Trump's annual financial statements said the documents, used to secure lucrative loans and burnish Trump's image as a wealthy businessman, "should no longer be relied upon."

During a planned rally on the Ellipse just hours before Congress was to certify the results of the 2020 presidential election, Trump told his supporters to "Fight like hell and if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore." He said, "(We're) going to try to and give (weak Republicans) the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country," and then told the crowd to "walk down Pennsylvania Avenue."

Mehta said Trump's speech could have directed people to break the law. But the judge dismissed similar charges made against Trump's son Donald Trump Jr. and lawyer Rudy Giuliani, saying their speech was protected by the First Amendment. Mehta did not yet rule on another motion to dismiss from Alabama Republican Rep. Mo Brooks, also named in the suits.

The lawsuits, filed by Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-Calif., officers James Blassingame and Sidney Hemby and initially by Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., argued that Trump, Trump Jr., Giuliani and Brooks made "false and incendiary allegations of fraud and theft, and in direct response to the Defendant's express calls for violence at the rally, a violent mob attacked the U.S. Capitol."

Testimony ends in hate crimes trial over Arbery

Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. — Witness testimony concluded Friday in the hate crimes trial of three men convicted of murdering Ahmaud Arbery with final prosecution witnesses saying they heard two of the defendants make racist statements, including crude sexual remarks directed at a woman who had dated a Black man.

After federal prosecutors rested their case, defense attorneys followed suit after calling a single witness: a neighbor of the accused men whose testimony suggested that a man two of the defendants reported to police as suspicious in 2019 was likely white.

U.S. District Court Judge Lisa Godbey Wood excused the jury for the weekend and scheduled closing arguments for Monday, which will mark one week since the trial began.

Father and son Greg and Travis McMichael armed themselves and chased Arbery in a pickup truck two years ago after spotting the 25-year-old Black man running in their coastal Georgia subdivision. A neighbor, William "Roddie" Bryan, recorded cellphone video of Travis McMichael blasting Arbery with a shotgun.

All three men were convicted of murder last fall in a Georgia state court. They're now standing trial in a separate case in federal court, charged with violating Arbery's civil rights and targeting him because he was Black. The McMichaels and Bryan have pleaded not guilty.

A woman who served under Travis McMichael in the U.S. Coast Guard a decade ago testified Friday that he made crass jokes mocking "that I had been sexually active with an African American man" when he learned that she had previously dated a Black man.

"He called me an N-word lover," Kristie Ronquille told the jury, saying she found his comments "infuriating and disrespectful."

Also on the witness stand Friday, Kim Ballesteros testified that Greg McMichael once mocked a Black woman he rented a home to. Ballesteros and her husband lived across the street from the McMichaels roughly three years ago and were talking about their experiences as landlords.

Ballesteros said Greg Michael told her that he nicknamed his former Black tenant "the Walrus" because of her skin color and her size. He said he once disconnected her home air-conditioner during the summer when she was late paying rent.

More than 1,000 rodents found at Family Dollar facility in Arkansas

Associated Press

WEST MEMPHIS, Ark. — More than 1,000 rodents were found inside a Family Dollar distribution facility in Arkansas, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced Friday as the chain issued a voluntary recall affecting items purchased from hundreds of stores in the South.

A consumer complaint prompted officials to inspect the West Memphis, Ark., facility in January, the FDA said in a news release. Inside the building, inspectors said they found live rodents, dead rodents in "various states of decay," rodent feces, dead birds and bird droppings.

After fumigating the facility, more than 1,100 dead rodents were recovered, officials said.

The FDA said it is working with Family Dollar to begin a voluntary recall of affected products. Those products include human food, pet food, dietary supplements, cosmetics, medical devices and over-the-counter medications that were purchased in January or February from Family Dollar stores in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri or Tennessee.

The company said it "is not aware of any consumer complaints or reports of illness related to this recall."

Surgeon general, family, get COVID-19

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Surgeon General Vivek Murthy announced Friday that he and his family have COVID-19 despite their best efforts to avoid infection by getting vaccinated and taking other precautions.

Writing on Twitter, he said, “When you’ve been as safe as you can, getting COVID-19 can be frustrating and disappointing. I’ve felt that. It can also be a source of shame. Many people assume you must have been careless to get sick. Our safety measures reduce risk but they can’t eliminate risk. Nothing can.”

As new cases and hospitalizations plummet, and deaths have finally started to decline, the Murthy family’s bout with

COVID-19 calls attention to the real risks of a virus that many people assume is finally on the way out.

Murthy, a regular participant at White House COVID-19 task force briefings, said he and his wife, physician and political activist Dr. Alice Chen, have mild symptoms. She has a headache and fatigue, and he said he was dealing with muscle aches, chills and a sore throat. “Our breathing is fine, thankfully,” he wrote.

Murthy, his wife and their son, 5, are vaccinated and boosted. Their daughter, 4, is too young to be eligible for vaccination. The kids are coping, Murthy wrote.

His daughter, “who tested positive first, is doing ok,” he said. “Fever is starting to

improve. She’s still congested and is now hoarse from all the coughing, but thankfully she’s still smiling and enjoying her arts and crafts.”

“Our son has a runny nose and low-grade fever but is otherwise eating, drinking, playing with his sister, and watching his favorite cartoons,” Murthy added.

Murthy said his confidence in vaccines remains unshaken: “One major source of peace of mind for us: we and our son are vaxed/boosted,” he wrote. “Vaccines are very effective at saving our lives and keeping us out of the hospital. As parents, I can’t tell you how reassuring it is to know we’ll be able to care for our kids even if we get infected.”

46% of bald eagles in US exposed to lead

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — America’s national bird is more beleaguered than previously believed, with nearly half of bald eagles tested across the U.S. showing signs of chronic lead exposure, according to a study published Thursday.

While the bald eagle population has rebounded from the brink of extinction since the U.S. banned the pesticide DDT in 1972, harmful levels of toxic lead were found in the bones of 46% of bald eagles sampled in 38 states from California to Florida, researchers reported in the journal *Science*.

Similar rates of lead exposure were found in golden eagles, which scientists say means the raptors likely consumed carrion or prey contaminated by lead from ammunition or

fishing tackle.

The blood, bones, feathers and liver tissue of 1,210 eagles sampled from 2010 to 2018 were examined to assess chronic and acute lead exposure.

“This is the first time for any wildlife species that we’ve been able to evaluate lead exposure and population level consequences at a continental scale,” said study co-author Todd Katzner, a wildlife biologist at the U.S. Geological Survey in Boise, Idaho. “It’s sort of stunning that nearly 50% of them are getting repeatedly exposed to lead.”

Lead is a neurotoxin that even in low doses impairs an eagle’s balance and stamina, reducing its ability to fly, hunt and reproduce. In high doses, lead causes seizures, breathing difficulty and death.

The study estimated that lead exposure reduced the annual population growth of bald eagles by 4% and golden eagles by 1%.

Previous studies have shown high lead exposure in specific regions, but not across the country. The blood samples from live eagles in the new study were taken from birds trapped and studied for other reasons; the bone, feather and liver samples came from eagles killed by collisions with vehicles or power lines, or other misfortunes.

“Lead is present on the landscape and available to these birds more than we previously thought,” said co-author Vince Slabe, a research wildlife biologist at the nonprofit Conservation Science Global. “A lead fragment the size of the end of a pin is large enough to cause mortality in an eagle.”

Thousands of VW Group cars on burning ship

Bloomberg News

The *Felicity Ace*, a massive cargo ship carrying thousands of Volkswagen Group vehicles, caught fire near the Azores islands in the Atlantic Ocean Wednesday afternoon.

The Panama-flagged ship’s 22 crew members were evacuated and taken to a local hotel by the Portuguese navy and air force, who were deployed to help with the rescue effort, according to a statement from the navy. The

ship itself was left unmanned and adrift.

An internal email from Volkswagen AG’s U.S. operations revealed there were 3,965 vehicles aboard the ship. Headquartered in Wolfsburg, Germany, the group manufactures cars under brands including VW, Porsche, Audi and Lamborghini — all of which were in tow when the vessel set ablaze.

More than 100 of those cars were headed for the Port of Hous-

ton in Texas, with VW GTI, Golf R, and ID.4 models deemed to be at risk, according to the email. The auto industry is already struggling with supply issues, including pandemic-related staffing woes and the global chip shortage.

Luke Vandezande, a spokesperson for Porsche, said the company estimates around 1,100 of its vehicles were among those on board *Felicity Ace* at the time of the fire. He said customers affect-

ed by the incident are being contacted by their dealers. “Our immediate thoughts are of relief that the 22 crew of the merchant ship *Felicity Ace* are safe and well,” Vandezande said.

A spokesperson for Lamborghini’s U.S. operation declined to comment on the number of cars the company had on board or which models were affected, but said that they are in contact with the shipping company to get more information about the incident.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Raccoon falls through ceiling into dining hall

LA BATON ROUGE — A raccoon fell through the ceiling into a packed dining hall at Louisiana State University as students screamed and a cook tried to catch it in a basket.

“I went and still got my food because I thought that it was fake,” freshman Danielle Gipson told The Reveille student newspaper. “The raccoon then ran underneath my table and I immediately got on top of the chair.”

One video posted with the article showed the raccoon running between tables, then climbing onto a chair and looking around. Another shows people chasing it with a broom and a stick or perhaps two brooms. Screams are all that can be heard on either.

It was eventually caught.

DOT hard hat found 3,300 miles away

ME AUGUSTA — A man in Norway discovered a Maine Department of Transportation hard hat more than 3,300 miles away from its home.

Sigbjørn Eide said he was collecting trash along Norway’s coast when he came across the white hard hat buried in seaweed. Eide spotted an American flag and a MaineDOT logo on the hard hat, The Boston Globe reported.

When he got home later that day, Eide said he found out the hat belonged to the Maine Department of Transportation and reached out to the department through social media.

MaineDOT posted on

Facebook that Eide had found the hat miles away from Maine: “We’re not quite sure how this happened, but we’re glad we have a new pen pal!”

A spokesperson said MaineDOT is planning to send him some items from the state.

2 injured in collapse of drugstore’s wall

MS MACON — Two people have been taken to the hospital after a building collapsed in Mississippi, authorities said.

Macon Police Chief Davine Beck said the people were in a drugstore when the wall caved in, WCBI-TV reported. Their conditions are currently unknown. Neither of the people injured were identified.

Beck said it is possible the remaining parts of a building next door that was demolished a few days earlier fell leading to the collapse of the drugstore. The incident is under investigation.

DNA helps ID skeletal remains found in 2020

AL BIRMINGHAM — Birmingham authorities have finally identified skeletal remains found behind a shopping center in 2020, but the coroner’s office has not been able to locate the dead man’s family.

The Jefferson County Coroner’s Office identified the man as Wesley Howard Kitchens, 61. He’s described as a transient man who stayed in the Roebuck area, Al.com reported.

DNA was used to identify Kitchens, Deputy Coroner Bill Yates said.

Kitchens’ remains were

found July 6, 2020 atop a sleeping bag inside a makeshift tent in woods behind the Roebuck Shopping Center. There was no evidence of foul play.

1 killed, 2 hurt in crash of stolen Amazon truck

CA LOS ANGELES — A stolen Amazon delivery truck barreled into a building in South Los Angeles, killing a street vendor and injuring two other people, police said.

The truck apparently was stolen during a delivery and driven away before crashing into a parked car about a half-mile away and ending up on a sidewalk, police said.

The street vendor died when he was pinned between the truck and the building while two other people standing nearby received minor injuries, police told KTLA-TV.

The driver fled but a witness followed him and called 911, leading to an arrest, police said.

Fire destroys iconic clubhouse at golf club

MI BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP — A devastating fire swept through the century-old clubhouse at Oakland Hills Country Club, a suburban Detroit course, which housed artifacts of some of golf’s biggest stars and the championships they won there.

Flames ripped through the roof at the sprawling, multi-story clubhouse. It was built in 1922 and housed irreplaceable memorabilia and art from the nine major championships and the Ryder Cup that Oakland Hills has hosted over nearly a century. Club President Rick

Palmer thanked firefighters who saved some priceless memorabilia during a “gut-wrenching day.”

No injuries were reported. The cause of the fire wasn’t immediately known. Fire officials said the 110,000-square-foot clubhouse was among the largest wood structures in Michigan.

Oakland Hills opened in 1916 and has hosted six U.S. Opens — only two other courses have held it more times. The most famous was in 1951 when Ben Hogan won and later proclaimed, “I’m glad I brought this course, this monster, to its knees.” The “monster” became the moniker for Oakland Hills over the years.

Deadly CO levels found at truck show venue

IA WATERLOO — Firefighters found deadly levels of carbon monoxide inside a Waterloo event complex that was hosting a monster truck rally where dozens of people were sickened over the weekend, officials said.

Levels of more than 300 parts per million were detected inside the National Cattle Congress grounds’ Hippodrome, The Courier reported. Waterloo Fire Rescue Battalion Chief Bill Beck said levels higher than 50 ppm would warrant an evacuation.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission says sustained exposure to levels over 200 ppm could cause death.

Local hospitals contacted by television station KWWL reported that 77 people from the event were treated in their emergency rooms.

— From Associated Press

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US takes silver, bronze in men's halfpipe

Associated Press

ZHANGJIAKOU, China — The gold medalist, Nico Porteous, had blood caked to his ear.

The silver medalist, David Wise, was tired — as much from skiing as from running halfway up the Olympic halfpipe to check on a teammate after a nasty fall.

One of bronze medalist Alex Ferreira's biggest takeaways on a day made for hand warmers, hot chocolate and a warm fire: "I mean, I'm alive."

Mother Nature saved the worst for last on Saturday — the final day of flips and spins at the Olympic action park. With wind chills dipping to minus 26 degrees, and with snow pellets and clouds sporadically infiltrating the halfpipe itself, the day of the men's halfpipe final was a day for die-hards only.

"Pretty gnarly," said Gus Kenworthy, the 2014 silver medalist, who finished eighth.

The medalists — Porteous from New Zealand and Wise

and Ferreira from the United States — were the same three, ordered differently, who landed on the podium four years ago at the Pyeongchang Games.

Their victories this time were a testament to their experience. Also, a show of sheer guts. It was hard, frankly, to call anyone a runner-up in this one, especially because everyone skied off in one piece. It was a contest, some skiers suggested, that would have been called off had it not been put at the tail-end of the Olympic schedule, with no backup days available.

"My goal was to get the gold," Ferreira said. "But being on the podium in such tough conditions, I honestly feel like I got the gold."

All three medal runs came on the skiers' first trips down the halfpipe, while the adrenaline was still pumping and before the permafrost took hold.

In all, the 12 finalists took three runs each down the frozen expanse. Of their 36 total

runs, only 18 were completed without a fall.

Kenworthy took one of the grizzliest hits.

Blown practically out of the halfpipe early in his second run, his back slammed hard into the deck and he went ricocheting down to the bottom of the pipe. He came back 30 minutes later and landed a full run — the last run of his career.

"Even when the wind wasn't blowing people onto the deck, it was really killing amplitude," said Kenworthy, an American who competed for his mother's home country of Britain. "The guys who are in the top three, they still had incredible runs, but those were not the runs they wanted to do."

Wise admitted as much.

"I had so much prepared," he said. "It's like I cooked a meal for everybody and I didn't get to share it."

And so the skier who had set the standard for this sport over the previous two Olympic cy-

cles added a silver medal to his collection.

Wise famously won his gold in South Korea after ratcheting his bindings so tightly that there was practically no way his skis would release if they got twisted in a fall. In China, he took a tumble on his second run and part of his binding snapped off.

"When it's cold, and I'm 195 pounds ... I'm a little bit harder on my equipment," Wise said.

Later in the contest, Wise was standing on the bottom when the day's final competitor, American Aaron Blunck, landed on his head while trying to execute a double cork on his third jump. Wise ran up to the middle of the pipe to check on his buddy.

"I just don't like when people hit their heads," Wise said.

Blunck skied off under his own power and team officials said he was evaluated by the medical team and was resting in the Olympic village.

Meyers Taylor wins adds fifth career bobsled medal

Associated Press

BEIJING — Laura Nolte and Mariama Jamanka added to Germany's record haul of Olympic medals.

Elana Meyers Taylor extended her medal record, too.

The German sliding domination of the Beijing Games continued Saturday, with Nolte driving to gold and Jamanka winning the silver in the women's bobsled competition — and Meyers Taylor, in possibly her last race, grabbed the bronze for the fifth medal of her Olympic career.

That's more than any Black athlete in Winter Olympic history, the most by any women's bobsledder at the Olympics and two more than any other Olympic bobsledder, male or female, has won for the United States.

"That is overwhelming,"

Meyers Taylor said. "It's so crazy to hear that stat and know that I'm part of a legacy that's bigger than me."

Nolte and Deborah Levi won with ease, finishing four runs in 4 minutes, 3.96 seconds. Jamanka, the 2018 Olympic champion, and Alexandra Burghardt were second in 4:04.73. Meyers Taylor and Olympic rookie Sylvia Hoffman were third in 4:05.48.

"I can't believe it," Nolte said. "It's what we've wanted all along. This was our dream. Winning Olympic gold was our dream."

Gold was Meyers Taylor's dream, too.

But a fifth medal — clearly, she wasn't disappointed whatsoever.

Meyers Taylor smacked the top of her sled in celebration as she crossed the line knowing

that the medal was clinched, hopped out and gave Hoffman a hug before throwing her fists into the air.

"I went with the fastest woman out here, because I'm the fastest brakewoman out here," said Hoffman, who wants to start driving.

Germany's Kim Kalicki moved up to fourth in 4:06.28, Canada's Christine de Bruin was fifth in 4:06.37, Switzerland's Melanie Hasler drove to sixth in 4:06.83 and the U.S. team of monobob gold medalist Kaillie Humphries — battling a right leg injury that adversely impacted her start times — and Olympic rookie Kaysha Love fell to seventh in 4:07.04.

"It hurts, I won't lie," Humphries said. "I gave every ounce of everything I had to the last two days and it wasn't there. I'm

proud of the work that we put in and what we put into it. It sucks and it's infuriating to know that it wasn't good enough, but at the end of the day, that's racing. We can't be fearful of not being the best. Both Kaysha and I had giant targets on our back coming in and I'm so proud of what we did together."

Humphries plans on missing the next one or two seasons to start a family. She insisted Saturday night that she will race at one final Olympics in 2026.

"At the end of the day, my body just gave up," Humphries said. "My calf did, anyway. And I think my mind, a little bit, too. I just hit a wall and didn't have it."

Said Love, who wants to learn to drive: "I'm so proud of us. The experience that she's given me at my first Olympic Games, it's unmatched."

Pistons' Cunningham MVP of Rising Stars

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — The No. 1 overall pick came out on top again.

Detroit rookie Cade Cunningham, being counted on to bring the Pistons back to relevancy, was named MVP of the NBA's All-Star Rising Stars on Friday night while leading Team Barry to a 25-20 win over Team Isiah.

Cunningham, who scored 13 points with six assists and five rebounds in the night's first game, had only 5 points in the finale but made several big plays down the stretch, including a clutch three.

Cunningham also made a nifty pass inside to set up Orlando's Franz Wagner, whose free throw sealed Team Barry's victory.

When he was handed the

MVP trophy at mid-court, Cunningham was playfully booed by the Cleveland crowd, which was pulling for Cavs rookie Evan Mobley to win the honor. Mobley was instrumental in Team Barry's victory, scoring 18 points — 12 on dunks — in the two games.

Don't tell Cunningham these games didn't mean anything. He came into the Rising Stars with one goal.

"To win," he said. "I felt like we had the team to do it, so we had to come out and prove ourselves and get the chip. So glad we did it."

Hall of Famer Rick Barry beamed about his young team's effort.

"I'm proud of these guys because every one of them did a great job," Barry said. "So it was great to see them playing

basketball and they really went out and played the way the game should be played."

One of the All-Star Weekend's staple events, the format for Rising Stars, matching the league's top rookies against second-year players, was changed this year to a mini-tournament with three games between four teams.

The "semifinals" were played to a target score of 50, and the final to 25 — a nod to the NBA's 75th anniversary. The teams were coached by Barry and former All-Stars Isiah Thomas, James Worthy and Gary Payton.

In the first matchup, Memphis guard Desmond Bane made two free throws to secure a 50-49 win for Team Isaiah over Team Worthy.

The second game also went

down to the wire with Houston's Jae'Sean Tate dropping an acrobatic layup, pushing Team Barry past Team Payton 50-48.

With defense almost nonexistent, there was no shortage of soaring dunks, spin moves and crossovers to keep the sellout crowd entertained.

One of the top highlights came in the first matchup between Team Isaiah and Team Worthy when Orlando rookie Jalen Suggs passed up an uncontested layup and bounced a pass off the backboard to Magic teammate Cole Anthony for a dunk.

Moments after his dunk, Anthony did a cartwheel as Suggs shot what would have been a game-clinching free throw only to have it bounce off the rim.

NASCAR revs up season with big show at Daytona

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Brad Keselowski knew his father was losing his battle with cancer when he promised him he'd win last year's Daytona 500.

His effort ended in a fireball when Keselowski was involved in a last-lap crash while racing for the victory.

"I knew he was pretty sick and his prognosis was he wasn't going to make it through the summer. I said, 'Dad, we're going to win the Daytona 500,'" Keselowski said. "It's bitter-sweet that it didn't happen while he was still alive."

Bob Keselowski died in December, and his son is back at Daytona International Speedway still trying to fulfill his promise. Keselowski will try to snap an 0-for-12 streak in NASCAR's season-opening race with his new team.

He left Team Penske a month before his father died to join the ownership group of Jack

Roush's organization. The rebranded RFK Racing team swept both Daytona 500 qualifying races to put Keselowski next to teammate Chris Buescher in the second row for Sunday's start. The wins Thursday night were the first in any race since 2017 for a Roush organization in need of Keselowski's engagement to return to the ranks of NASCAR's elite.

And, after a Hendrick Motorsports rout in Daytona 500 time trials, the Ford fleet has shown to be race ready. Ford drivers swept the first four spots in Thursday night's first qualifying race, then swept the top three in the second race.

"I'm excited internally for us, what we believe we have, the capability we have and the opportunity ahead of us for the rest of the weekend and the rest of the year," Buescher said after Keselowski visited him in Daytona's victory lane.

The Ford camp absolutely has its strategy figured out for

Sunday, when all its drivers are expected to work together to ensure a blue oval makes it to victory lane. That's proven to be the most effective approach among the manufacturers, but it's more important than ever this year as Sunday marks the official debut of NASCAR's new Next Gen car.

The car is designed to cut costs, help the smaller teams compete with NASCAR's powerhouse organizations, improve the on-track product and give the manufacturers more brand identity. But the Next Gen also provides an affordable entry-way for potential new owners — two of whom will be part of the Daytona 500 for the first time:

■ Floyd Mayweather Jr. is expected to be at the track when the boxer's No. 50 Chevrolet for The Money Team Racing makes its debut with Kaz Grala.

■ Jacques Villeneuve, the former Formula One champion and Indianapolis 500 winner, will make his first Daytona 500

start for European startup Team Hezeberg.

■ And businessman John Cohen got into the race with Greg Biffle, who, at 52, will be the oldest driver in the field when he makes the start for NY Racing.

Cohen and Mayweather are both Black and representative of NASCAR's push to increase diversity. Michael Jordan last year formed a team with driver Bubba Wallace, Pitbull joined an ownership group, and Cohen now has a partnership with the competition arm of NASCAR's Drive for Diversity Program. NY Racing is hoping to build a full-time program around an up-and-coming Black driver.

FanDuel lists both three-time Daytona 500 winner Denny Hamlin and reigning NASCAR champion Kyle Larson as the 19-2 race favorites. Larson, powered by Hendrick engines, will lead the field to the green flag following his pole-winning run on Wednesday.

MLB cancels first week of spring games

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Major League Baseball canceled the first week of spring training games through March 4 in the first public acknowledgement of the disruption caused by the lockout.

The announcement Friday came with the work stoppage in its 79th day, and a day after talks on economics between management and the Major League Baseball Players Association lasted just 15 minutes.

Negotiators are set to resume bargaining on core economics on Monday in Jupiter, Fla., and MLB said members of the owners' negotiating committee will attend the session, just the seventh on the central issues of the dispute since the lockout began Dec. 2.

Spring training was to have started this week, and the exhibition schedule on Feb. 26. There were 16 games set for that day, including the World Series champion Atlanta Braves playing Boston in Florida and the renamed Cleveland Guardians taking on Cincinnati in Arizona.

"We regret that, without a collective bargaining agreement in place, we must postpone the start of spring training games until no earlier than Saturday, March 5," MLB

said in a statement. "All 30 clubs are unified in their strong desire to bring players back to the field and fans back to the stands."

MLB told the union it thinks Feb. 28 is the last possible date to reach an agreement that would allow a timely start to the season. The union didn't respond to MLB on whether it agrees with that date or thinks there is additional time.

Players issued a statement criticizing management for the stoppage.

"Nothing requires the league to delay the start of spring training, much like nothing required the league's decision to implement the lockout in the first place," the union said. "Despite the decisions by the league, players remain committed to the negotiating process."

Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred has said the lockout decision was made to control timing and prevent a late-season strike in the absence of a labor contract, such as the August 1994 lockout that led to the first cancellation of the World Series in nine decades.

This is the third straight disrupted spring training, damaging local tourism economies in Florida and Arizona.

Games were cut short on March 12, 2020, because of the coronavirus pandemic, leading to opening day being pushed back from March 26 to July 23 and each team's schedule cut from 162 games to 60.

While spring training started on time last year, pandemic restrictions led to capacity limits that depressed attendance.

Negotiations had been taking place at the offices of MLB and the union in New York. The switch in venue for next week was to accommodate players who are in Florida.

For the most part, owners and players have joined the bargaining by Zoom. Colorado Rockies CEO Dick Monfort, chairman of the owners' labor policy committee, and free-agent reliever Andrew Miller both attended the Jan. 24 session, the first in-person bargaining during the lockout.

"We are committed to reaching an agreement that is fair to each side," MLB said. "On Monday, members of the owners' bargaining committee will join an in-person meeting with the players' association and remain every day next week to negotiate and work hard towards starting the season on time."

Peterson, Stars top Blackhawks in shootout

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Jacob Peterson scored the deciding goal in the sixth round of the shootout, leading the Dallas Stars to a 1-0 victory over the Chicago Blackhawks on Friday night.

Chicago's Alex DeBrincat and Dallas' Jason Robertson scored in the first shootout round. After that, goaltenders Marc-Andre Fleury and Jake Oettinger each stopped four shots. Oettinger stopped a fifth, by Jake McCabe, before Peterson faked Fleury and beat him between the legs for the victory.

Dallas won its second straight game and fourth in the last five. The Blackhawks dropped their second straight.

Oettinger made 34 saves in regulation and earned his eighth career shootout, and first this season.

The 37-year-old Fleury made a handful of impressive saves

among his 27 stops in regulation, getting credit for his 71st career shutout and fourth of the season.

Hurricanes 5, Predators 3:

Andrei Svechnikov had two goals and an assist as host Carolina beat Nashville.

Brady Skjei and Jaccob Slavin each had a goal and an assist, and Jesperi Kotkaniemi also scored for the Hurricanes, who improved to 2-2-2 since the All-Star break. Martin Necas and Sebastian Aho added two assists apiece. Frederik Andersen made 28 saves.

Luke Kunin and Filip Forsberg scored for the Predators, who are 0-4-0 since the break. Roman Josi had three assists and Juuse Saros stopped 25 shots.

Kings 4, Golden Knights 3

(OT): Adrian Kempe scored his second goal in overtime and visiting Los Angeles beat Vegas.

Andreas Athanasiou and Phillip Danault also scored for Los Angeles. Jonathan Quick had 21 saves to improve to 5-8-1 in his career against Vegas.

Max Pacioretty had two goals and Reilly Smith also scored for the Golden Knights. Laurent Brossoit, appearing in his 100th career game, made 27 saves.

With the win, Los Angeles moved into a tie for third place with Edmonton (57 points) in the Pacific Division. Vegas is alone in second with 60 points.

Panthers 6, Wild 2: Mason Marchment scored three goals for his first career hat trick, leading visiting Florida over Minnesota.

Anthony Duclair and Aaron Ekblad each had a goal and an assist, and Sergei Bobrovsky made 24 saves for his fifth straight win. Florida has won back-to-back games after a 15-day break and is 16-3-1 since

Dec. 29.

Kirill Kaprizov and Mats Zuccarello scored for Minnesota, which had won six straight at home. The Wild lost in regulation at the Xcel Energy Center for the first time in 15 games dating to Nov. 18. Cam Talbot had 28 saves.

Florida leads the league in scoring at 4.14 goals per game, scoring 203 goals in 49 games, including shootout-deciding goals. The last two teams to require less than 50 games in a season to reach that mark were the 2005-06 Senators (48 games) and 1995-96 Penguins (41 games).

Jonathan Huberdeau has set up plenty of those tallies. With two helpers, he has 51 on the season to become the first player in franchise history to register three seasons with 50-plus assists.