

Russia evacuating embassy in Ukraine

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia began evacuating its embassy in Kyiv, and Ukraine urged its citizens to leave Russia on Wednesday as the region braced for further confrontation after President Vladimir Putin received authorization to use military force outside his country and the West responded with sanctions.

Hopes for a diplomatic way out of a new, potentially devastating war in Europe appeared all but sunk as the U.S. and key European allies accused Moscow of crossing a red line Tuesday in rolling over Ukraine's border into separatist regions in Ukraine's east called Donbas, with some calling it an invasion.

Russia emptied its diplomatic posts in Ukraine, state news agency Tass reported, a day after the Foreign Ministry announced a plan to evacuate, citing threats. By Wednesday afternoon, the Russian flag no longer flew over the Kyiv embassy, and police surrounded the building.

After weeks of trying to project calm, Ukrainian authorities signaled increasing concern. The Foreign Ministry advised against travel to Russia and recommended anyone there leave immediately, saying Moscow's "aggression" could lead to a significant reduction in consular services.

Ukraine's National Security and Defense

Council chief Oleksiy Danilov called for a national state of emergency, subject to parliamentary approval. He said it will be up to regional authorities to determine which measures to apply, but they could include additional security at public facilities, traffic restrictions and additional transport and document checks.

A senior U.S. defense official in Washington said the Russian forces arrayed along Ukraine's borders are "as ready as they can be" for an invasion, with about 80% of them in what the U.S. considers "forward positions, ready to go" within 3 to 30 miles of the border.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive information, added that "we still cannot confirm that Russian forces have moved into the Donbas area."

The official said the U.S. has indications based on intelligence as well as visual evidence that the Russian forces "have advanced their readiness to a point where they are literally ready to go now, if they get the order to go."

Putin said Tuesday that he hadn't yet sent any Russian troops into the rebel regions contrary to Western claims, and Donetsk rebel leader Denis Pushilin insisted Wednesday there are no Russian troops in the region even though a local council mem-

ber claimed the previous day they had moved in.

Ukraine's Minister for Digital Transformation Mykhailo Fedorov said a wave of denial-of-service attacks targeted official websites and some banks Wednesday, affecting sites of the parliament, cabinet and Foreign Ministry offline and causing interruptions or delays to the sites of the defense and interior ministry, which controls the police.

Many of the same sites were similarly knocked offline in attacks last week that the U.S. and U.K. governments quickly blamed on Russia's GRU military intelligence agency. Such attacks barrage websites with junk traffic, rendering them unreachable. Wednesday's DDoS attacks appeared to have less impact than the earlier onslaught, with targeted sites soon reachable again — as emergency responders blunted them.

These were just the latest in a series of signs of escalating tensions. Kyiv recalled its ambassador to Russia and considered breaking all diplomatic ties with Moscow; dozens of nations further squeezed Russian oligarchs and banks out of international markets; Germany halted a lucrative pipeline deal; the U.S. repositioned additional troops to NATO's eastern flank bordering Russia; and the top U.S. diplomat canceled a meeting with his Russian counterpart.

Navy less active in annual NATO anti-submarine drill

By ALISON BATH

Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — An annual NATO anti-submarine exercise in the Mediterranean Sea got underway this week with less American participation than in recent years, as U.S. forces in the region turn their attention to the Russian military advance in Ukraine.

U.S. destroyers, submarines and maritime patrol planes have traditionally been frequent participants in Dynamic Manta. But the only U.S. vessel taking part in this year's iteration, which started Monday off the coast of Sicily, is the replenishment ship USNS Robert E. Peary. Naval Air Station Sigonella in Sicily also is offering support for patrol planes and helicop-

ters.

"Our participation in maritime exercises is balanced with operational commitments and real-world requirements of our forces," said Lt. Tyler Barker, a U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet spokesman.

Dynamic Manta includes Canada, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, Turkey, the U.K. and the U.S. It is one of two major anti-submarine warfare exercises led every year by NATO Maritime Command, an alliance statement said.

"We still have enough allied units in the exercise to achieve exercise objectives as planned," said NATO spokesman Cmdr. Erik Reynolds, adding that it isn't unusual for units to leave between the planning and the start of

an exercise.

It was unclear Wednesday how many U.S. ships or planes were scheduled to participate. The U.S. was actively involved in the exercise's planning phase, Barker said.

The downsizing of the U.S. contingent at Dynamic Manta comes as the Russian navy is out in force in the Mediterranean and Black seas. Some analysts see that as an indication that Russia may launch an amphibious assault on southern Ukraine.

At least six Russian amphibious assault ships and a Kilo-class submarine armed with Kalibr cruise missiles have passed through the Mediterranean and into the Black Sea in recent weeks.

Families file Red Hill water illness claims

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — More than a dozen people claiming they were injured by petroleum contamination in the Navy's water system in Hawaii filed claims with the service Tuesday seeking compensation, their attorneys said in a news release.

The claims by 15 individuals, who allege a host of health issues as a result of the contamination, are a prerequisite to filing a lawsuit under the Federal Tort Claims Act in federal court, according to the release by Just Well Law of Austin, Texas, and Hosoda Law Group, of Honolulu, the firms representing them.

The attorneys contend that military medical facilities denied even the most basic care to residents suffering from symptoms, failing to run standard toxicology lab tests to check, for example, liver and kidney function.

The crisis, now in its fourth month, has displaced thousands

of military families from their homes on and near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam. The Navy has said its Red Hill well is contaminated with jet fuel.

"My message to the Navy is, here are the first claims — we have hundreds more to come," attorney Kristina Baehr, of Just Well Law, told Stars and Stripes by phone on Tuesday.

"It's an opportunity for them to make it right," she said. "They have six months from the date of this filing to pay out on the claim."

During this six-month administrative process, the Navy and law firms will negotiate over an agreement on how much compensation would be adequate, Baehr said.

The Navy's chief of information, Rear Adm. Charlie Brown, said in a statement Tuesday that the Navy "has no comment regarding any potential future legal actions."

Many of those affected by the contamination "continue to suffer

a wide range of illnesses and are at risk for conditions such as acute leukemia, respiratory disorders, immune and hematological disorders, neurological effects, visual and hearing disorders, renal and hepatic diseases, cardiovascular conditions, gastrointestinal disorders, genotoxic and metabolic effects," the law firms' news release said.

In a letter to the Navy's judge advocate general, Vice Adm. Darse Crandall, that accompanied the filings, the attorneys wrote that they represent "hundreds of clients who were poisoned by the negligence of federal operators" of the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Facility, a World War II-era underground complex.

"On (at least) two occasions, May 6 and November 20, 2021, United States personnel at Red Hill Bulk Fuel Facility made negligent errors that released tens of thousands of gallons of jet fuel and other contaminants directly into our [clients'] drinking water," the

letter stated. "Because government personnel then failed to disclose those leaks, our clients ingested contaminated water and became sick."

The letter outlines the health issues experienced by several of the families. Two children in one family exhibited symptoms of "dehydration, projectile vomiting, abdominal pain and neurological disorders" but were "denied basic testing when they presented at Tripler Medical Center with acute reactions to the contamination," the letter said.

"One of the things that we're asking for is testing for all these families for just a basic toxicology blood lab," Baehr told Stars and Stripes. "The Navy and military facilities should be providing these labs as a matter of course."

Baehr maintains that Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro's statements that the Navy takes responsibility for the contaminated water should move the service ahead in compensating those affected.

Navy: 4 killed in contracted helo crash at Hawaii range

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

Four civilians were killed Tuesday when a military-contracted helicopter crashed at the Pacific Missile Range Facility on Kauai Island, Hawaii, the Navy said in a news release.

The Sikorsky S-61N went down in the northern area of the installation around 10 a.m., the Navy said. The names of the civilians had not been released as of Tuesday evening.

The National Transportation Safety Board said in a tweet Tuesday that it was investigating the crash.

The S-61N, a civil version of the military's Sea King medium-lift helicopter, is optimized for am-

phibious operations and can carry up to 15 passengers.

The helicopter, operated by Croman Corp., was supporting a training operation, the Navy said.

The helicopter had retrieved an object from the water and was attempting to drop it to the ground when it crashed, Brian Beattie, Croman director of operations, told Hawaii News Now.

The firm routinely provides support services to the facility.

The Navy touts Pacific Missile Range Facility Barking Sands as capable of supporting surface, subsurface, air and space operations simultaneously. The facility includes more than 42,000 square miles of controlled airspace.

Navy builds training area for Thai border patrol

By **ALEX WILSON**
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Navy has finished building a training facility for Thailand's Border Patrol Police, providing a venue for realistic training scenarios as the country combats a drug-trafficking surge.

The facility unveiled Jan. 28 in Mae Taeng features weapons ranges, a mock village, a three-story tactical training building and new equipment for the border patrol, according to a Feb. 11 news release from Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Pacific. It is 40 miles south of the border with Myanmar.

The \$600,000 project was funded through U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's Joint Interagency

Task Force West, an anti-trafficking organization composed of approximately 166 personnel representing the armed forces and federal and international law enforcement agencies.

The facility will enable the Border Patrol Police to train for real-world scenarios and operations, spokeswoman Krista Cummins of Naval Facilities Pacific told Stars and Stripes on Feb. 16.

"The longstanding U.S.-Thai cooperation to combat illicit trafficking is a cornerstone of our partnership," she said by email. "This training complex is a concrete example of the United States and Thailand's mutual commitment to leading that fight."

Domestic, foreign crises converge for Biden

Associated Press

On the same day that President Joe Biden called out Russia and issued harsh sanctions for its invasion of Ukraine, his only other public appearance was an event focused on the need to unkink the supply chain for minerals used in batteries, electronics and other technologies.

The back-to-back events on Tuesday highlighted the competing claims for Biden's attention entering the spring of a midterm election year: the prospect of a calamitous European land war that will only add to inflation and other problems at home while also managing a vexing set of domestic challenges and must-do tasks.

For Biden, the convergence of such urgent foreign and domestic issues puts to a test the often cavalier assertions of previous administrations that a president has to be able to "walk and chew gum" at

the same time.

Biden acknowledged the troubling overlap in remarks Tuesday as oil and gasoline prices have climbed on the grim headlines from Ukraine. He announced sanctions against Russian financial institutions, oligarchs and banks as well as Russia's sovereign debt, effectively cutting the country off from U.S. and European financial systems.

Yet Biden also said he wants to limit the "pain" to Americans because sanctions aimed at pressuring Russian President Vladimir Putin could also limit Russia's exports of oil and natural gas and cause global energy prices to soar.

His White House this week is also vetting nominees for a coming opening on the Supreme Court. Add that 40-year high inflation, a stalled domestic agenda, a slew of executive orders to en-

force, infrastructure dollars to spend and sagging approval ratings that could make implementation all the more difficult. And the impact of the COVID pandemic, while seeming to fade, is still being felt.

The start of a Russia invasion into Ukraine has spillover effects for Biden's previous plans. It takes time to barnstorm the country and rally support for Democrats as he said he would do to try to maintain control of Congress in the midterm elections and it gets tougher to defuse inflation as the U.S. and its European allies escalate sanctions against Russia.

"The fact that Putin is in control of when and how and to what degree he invades, really places Biden in a very difficult position," said Cal Jillson, a political scientist at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. "Putin looks like he is completely in charge."

All of this takes away from the problem that Americans previously said Biden must prioritize: inflation. A December poll from the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 68% of Americans deemed the economy to be a top priority, while 24% said the cost of living should be a top priority.

But how the unfolding crisis in Ukraine plays out and what it means for Biden's agenda is difficult to divine. The higher energy and commodity prices could be short-lived, or they could reflect the beginning of a prolonged disruption as sanctions to exclude Russia from the global economy wage a toll on oil, natural gas, aluminum and nickel supplies.

Biden could easily blame higher prices on Putin. But voters might be skeptical because the inflationary run-up predates the current tensions in Europe.

Jurors have the case of 3 charged in Floyd's death

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Jurors started deliberating Wednesday in the federal trial of three fired Minneapolis police officers charged with violating George Floyd's civil rights, after a judge gave them jury instructions.

J. Alexander Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao are charged with depriving Floyd of his right to medical care when fellow Officer Derek Chauvin pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for 9½ minutes as the 46-year-old Black man pleaded for air before going silent. Kueng and Thao are also charged with failing to intervene to stop Chauvin during the May 25, 2020, killing that was captured on bystander video and triggered protests worldwide and a reexamination of racism and policing.

Prosecutors and defense attorneys spent a full day Tuesday in closing arguments that re-

capped a month of testimony and sought to sway the jury toward their view of the case.

Prosecutors said the three officers "chose to do nothing" as Chauvin, squeezed the life out of Floyd. Defense attorneys countered that the officers were too inexperienced, weren't trained properly and did not willfully violate Floyd's rights.

Prosecutors sought to show during the monthlong trial that the officers violated their training, including when they failed to roll Floyd onto his side or give him CPR. Prosecutors have argued that Floyd's condition was so serious that even bystanders without basic medical training could see he needed help.

But the defense said the Minneapolis Police Department's training was inadequate and that the officers deferred to Chauvin as the senior officer at the scene.

House candidate sorry for intoxication at sleepover

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — A U.S. House candidate in Oklahoma has apologized after reports that she became intoxicated at a Valentine's Day weekend sleepover for middle-school-aged girls, berated several of the children and vomited in a hamper.

Democrat Abby Broyles, 32, told television station KFOR that she had an adverse reaction after drinking wine and taking sleep medication given to her by a friend.

"Instead of helping me sleep, I hallucinated," Broyles told the station in a televised interview. "And I don't remember anything until I woke up or came to, and I was throwing up in a hamper."

She said she was invited to the slumber party by a good friend from law school who was the mother of one of the girls.

Parents and at least one of the girls who were at the sleepover

told the online news outlet Non-Doc, which first reported the story, that Broyles used profanity and berated several of the 12- and 13-year-old girls at the party.

Broyles, who initially denied to NonDoc that she had attended the party, apologized last week during her interview with KFOR, a news channel for which she used to work as a journalist.

"I want to say sorry from the bottom of my heart, I apologize for any hurt or damage or trauma that my behavior, when I didn't know what I was doing, caused," Broyles said.

Broyles, an attorney who was the Democratic nominee for U.S. Senate from Oklahoma in 2020, announced last year she planned to run against Republican U.S. Rep. Stephanie Bice for the 5th Congressional District that includes Oklahoma City.

Biden interviews 3 Supreme Court candidates

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden has interviewed at least three candidates for the Supreme Court, according to a person familiar with the matter, and the White House is reiterating that he remains on track to make a final selection by Monday.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Tuesday that Biden has not made a decision on whom to nominate.

But the president has interviewed judges Ketanji Brown Jackson, J. Michelle Childs and Leondra Kruger, according to a person familiar with the matter.

A second person familiar said Biden had interviewed at least three candidates for the post. The people spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the internal process.

Biden has pledged to nominate the first Black woman to the high court by the end of the month to fill the vacancy being created by the retirement of Justice Stephen Breyer. It was not clear whether any additional candidates have been interviewed by the president.

Psaki declined to discuss whether Biden had conducted interviews but insisted the president was “on track” to make the selection despite rising tensions between Russia and Ukraine.

Jackson was nominated by President Barack Obama to be a district court judge. Biden elevated her to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Early in her career, she was also a law clerk for Breyer.

Childs, a federal judge in South Carolina, has been nominated but not yet confirmed to serve on the same circuit court. Her name has surfaced partly because she is a favorite among some high-profile lawmakers, including Rep. James Clyburn, D-S.C.

Kruger, a graduate of Harvard and Yale’s law school, was previously a Supreme Court clerk and has argued a dozen cases before the justices as a lawyer for the federal government before becoming a justice on the California Supreme Court.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell is signaling he wants a fair fight over Bi-

den’s pick, discouraging those within his GOP ranks who are eager to interject a broader debate over race into the confirmation process.

Speaking Tuesday in Kentucky, McConnell distanced himself from GOP senators and others who have criticized Biden for declaring his intent to nominate a Black woman.

“I heard a couple of people say they thought it was inappropriate for the president to announce he was going to put an African American woman on the court. Honestly, I did not think that was inappropriate,” McConnell said.

More to the point, Republicans are unable to stop Biden’s pick in the 50-50 Senate where Democrats have the majority with Vice President Kamala Harris’ tie-breaking vote.

They want to allow the confirmation process to unfold without self-inflicted political drama so they can resume challenging the president on their preferred topics of the economy and the administration’s handling of COVID-19.

ISIS claiming attacks on dozens of Nigerian soldiers

Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria — Dozens of Nigerian soldiers were killed and wounded in recent attacks in Nigeria’s insecure northeast region, according to a statement from Islamic State, which said its West Africa members carried out the assaults.

The attacks using explosives targeted soldiers on patrol at various checkpoints in Borno state, killing and wounding more than 30 soldiers, said the statement on the latest of the attacks released late Tuesday.

Islamic State in West Africa Province is a breakaway faction of the Boko Haram extre-

mist group that launched a rebel insurgency against the Nigerian government more than a decade ago.

Nigeria’s military did not immediately respond to an inquiry for comment to confirm the attacks, but also reported killing “several” extremists and recovering a “large cache of weapons” and vehicles from the militants during “clearance operations” on Monday in Borno state in a location different from where ISIS said its fighters attacked.

On Tuesday, ISIS militants targeted a Nigerian army patrol team with four explosive devices followed by mortar shells launched

at a military camp in the town of Mallam Fatori, a few miles away from Nigeria’s northern neighbor Niger, the group said in one statement.

An explosive device detonated during another ambush resulted in the death of three Nigerian soldiers in Mallam Fatori, it said, while “all those onboard” a military truck were either killed or wounded in yet another ambush on a Nigerian army convoy in Jiri town on the outskirts of Borno.

Three attacks on Sunday and Monday killed and wounded “several” Nigerian soldiers, ISIS said.

Police run over suspect as hostage flees Apple Store

Associated Press

AMSTERDAM — A gunman who held a hostage for hours in the Apple Store in Amsterdam demanded a ransom of more than \$226 million in cryptocurrencies before he was run over by police as he chased his hostage out of the shop, police and prosecutors said Wednesday.

The tense, five-hour standoff paralyzed one of Amsterdam’s most popular nightlife neighborhoods for hours Tuesday as scores

of heavily armed police surrounded the store, managing to free about 70 people from the building that houses the shop before the suspect was detained.

Police Chief Frank Paauw said the suspect, a 27-year-old man from Amsterdam armed with a handgun and an automatic weapon and wearing camouflaged clothing, was run over by police as he chased his fleeing hostage. The hostage was a Bulgarian man, police said.

“The hostage played a sort of hero’s role by, in that split second that he had, forcing a breakthrough in this situation,” Paauw said at a news conference in the early hours of the morning. “Otherwise it could have been a very long and unpleasant night and maybe longer.”

After the suspect was run over, a robot checked him for explosives as snipers in nearby buildings took aim. Earlier, the suspect had threatened to blow himself up.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Big treehouse creates a backyard battle

NH PORTSMOUTH — A treehouse is causing trouble on New Hampshire’s Seacoast.

The parents of an 8-year-old boy say they checked with neighbors before building a treehouse, and there were no objections.

But neighbors were shocked by the immense construction project: The treehouse is 25 feet long and 8 feet high, with a 168 square-foot platform, WGME-TV reported.

The Portsmouth Board of Adjustment ruled recently that the treehouse was more like a deck structure. As a result, they said it requires a 5-foot to 8-foot setback from the fence.

That means it has to be moved.

Police: Joyriding teen dies after forklift overturns

TN NASHVILLE — A Tennessee teenager was killed when a forklift he was operating at an equipment rental business overturned on top of him, police said.

Police said Jayden Dalton, 15, of Nashville, and another juvenile had started the engines to machinery on the lot. According to the statement, a witness reported Dalton doing doughnuts on the forklift when it overturned.

The business was closed at the time. Police have classified the death as accidental.

Officials: Progress made eliminating feral hogs

MO SPRINGFIELD — Missouri conservation officials say they are making progress eliminating feral hogs from the state.

Officials want to get rid of them because they can damage areas such as farmland, fragile glades and more by rooting for food.

The Springfield News-Leader reported that the Missouri Feral Hog Elimination Partnership killed 9,857 feral hogs in 2021, bringing the total number of hogs killed since 2016 to more than 54,000.

Man tries to enter zoo’s tiger cage, is arrested

MA BOSTON — A Worcester man was arrested for trying to enter a tiger enclosure after breaking into Boston’s Franklin Park Zoo.

Matthew Abraham, 24, allegedly climbed over a gate into the zoo, scaled several fences and ignored warning signs but was unable to gain access to the tiger enclosure, investigators said.

Zoo New England, which operates the 72-acre Boston zoo, said in a statement that the man was in an area behind the tiger exhibit it not meant for the public.

He was arrested and charged with trespassing and disorderly conduct.

Coast Guard rescues fisherman bitten by shark

FL MIAMI — A fisherman who was bitten by a shark near the Bahamas was pulled to safety by a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter crew after his mates tightened a tourniquet around his arm.

The crew from Air Station Miami lifted the man from a fishing boat near Bimini and took him to Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami, where he was in stable condition, a news release said.

The 51-year-old man’s mates

on the Shear Water fishing boat called the Coast Guard, saying he was losing blood so they placed a tourniquet around his arm.

Semi with load of hogs crashes in winter weather

ND THOMPSON — Blizzard conditions on Interstate 29 in North Dakota caused a semi driver with a load of hogs to roll the rig, according to the State Patrol.

The accident happened last weekend near Thompson. The patrol said whiteout conditions caused the driver to end up in the median and as he attempted to get back on the highway the load shifted and the trailer rolled over.

Patrol Sgt. Matt Johnson said many of the hogs were salvageable and alive following the crash.

Police: Mom left autistic son, 5, in another state

OH COLERAIN TOWNSHIP — A Shelbyville, Ind., mother who authorities said drove to Ohio and abandoned her 5-year-old autistic son on a street was captured in Kentucky when police there arrested her on an unrelated warrant.

The child was found unharmed about an hour after he was abandoned in Colerain Township, authorities said. The boy was spotted by passing motorists as he tried to wave down cars.

His mother was arrested at a gas station in Georgetown, Ky., on an unrelated warrant. Authorities later learned about the charges that had been filed in Ohio.

It’s not clear why the mother abandoned the boy or why she did it in Ohio, authorities said.

University removes ‘Dixie’ from alma mater

NC RALEIGH — The North Carolina State University Board of Trustees has decided to remove the word “Dixie” from its alma mater because of its Confederate connotation.

The board voted to change the wording of the first line of the song. “Where the winds of Dixie softly blow” will be replaced by “Where the Southern winds so softly blow.”

WNCN-TV reported that a letter from Chancellor Randy Woodson said the song was originally written in the 1920s and the word “Dixie” has been part of the song since 1925.

Steel mill to pay \$3M, improve waste system

IN PORTAGE — A steel company agreed to pay \$3 million and improve the wastewater system at an Indiana mill, more than two years after a discharge of ammonia and toxic chemicals killed fish and closed beaches, the federal government said.

The mill, owned at the time by ArcelorMittal USA, exceeded discharge limits and failed to properly report releases at Burns Harbor, the U.S. Justice Department said.

The agreement was made with the mill’s current owner, Cleveland-Cliffs.

Thousands of fish were killed in the East Branch of the Little Calumet River after the discharge of untreated water. At the time, Lake Michigan beaches were closed along the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.

— From wire reports



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Cavs' stars escaping LeBron's shadow

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — There were skeptics, and they included pretty much anyone who watched the Cavaliers struggle the past three years, who wondered about the team's "Let 'Em Know" theme heading into the 2021-22 season.

It hardly made sense.

After all, the Cavs had plummeted from elite status and back to irrelevancy after LeBron James left for the second time as a free agent following the 2018 season. With just 60 total wins since then, expectations were low.

Now, Cleveland's back in contention.

Thanks to a young nucleus led by All-Star guard Darius Garland and rookie sensation Evan Mobley, the acquisition of All-Star center Jarrett Allen and Kevin Love's rebirth as a reserve, the Cavaliers are among the Eastern Conference's elite teams.

Even long-time nemesis Draymond Green is impressed.

"The biggest surprise team to

me is Cleveland, for sure," the talkative Golden State forward said during All-Star weekend, when the entire league got a glimpse at the Cavs' talented core. "I don't think anyone expected them to be this good, and they're really putting it together.

"Obviously in finding a young star in Darius Garland, who is leading the charge. Evan Mobley. They have a great young group of guys. ... They're going to be good for years to come."

Yes, these Cavs appear to be built to last. They are young, hungry and determined to cut their own path. And they're certainly way ahead of schedule.

Cleveland hit the All-Star break at 35-23 and fourth in the East. However, the Cavs' record doesn't fully reflect what's been a challenging return to respectability.

Like every NBA team, they've dealt with their share of COVID-19 issues, injuries, scheduling quirks and the typical season grind.

However, the Cavs have persevered despite both leading scorer Collin Sexton and veteran guard Ricky Rubio suffering season-ending knee injuries — losses that threatened to derail this young team.

Instead, the adversity has only strengthened the Cavs. At the heart of their renaissance is a toughness and togetherness, values often preached and not always embraced.

More than any player, Garland's growth has driven the Cavs' stunning rise.

The baby-faced 22-year-old has developed into one of the league's best point guards, a combination scorer/playmaker capable of dissecting a defense with his dribble or spreading the floor by knocking down a three-pointer.

One of just four players averaging at least 20 points and eight assists, Garland's game took off this summer when he played for the USA Select Team and against the U.S. Olympic squad as it pre-

pared for the delayed Tokyo Games.

"When we scrimmaged against the main team, that's where you saw a different Darius," said Miami's Erik Spoelstra, who coached Garland. "He was playing extremely well, and everybody in the gym noticed it, to the point when they had injuries they selected him to continue on."

With Garland leading the way, the Cavs have finally crawled from the rubble left by James' departure. Cleveland is again a basketball city, and not just because it has one of the best players on the planet.

The Cavs are poised to make their first playoff appearance without James since 1998.

"Our guys want to make our own legacy," Garland said during All-Star weekend. "I mean, just putting Cleveland on the map without LeBron would mean a lot to all of us. A rebuild, rebirth in Cleveland. It's a new look, a new feel."

Cole helps rally No. 21 UConn past No. 8 Villanova

Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. — R.J. Cole hit a driving floater with 5.9 seconds left and then took a charge at the other end of the court to rally No. 21 UConn to a 71-69 win over No. 8 Villanova on Tuesday night.

Adama Sanogo scored 20 points and Tyler Polley drained a clutch three-pointer for the Huskies (20-7, 11-5 Big East), who beat the Wildcats for the first time since 2014 to secure their first 20-win season in six years.

Collin Gillespie had 17 points and Brandon Slater added 15 for Villanova (21-7, 14-4), which had won five in a row and eight of nine.

No. 5 Kansas 102, Kansas State 83: Ochai Agbaji scored 23 points and passed Wilt

Chamberlain on the program's career scoring list, leading the host Jayhawks over the rival Wildcats.

Agbaji, a 6-foot-5 senior, has 1,444 points in 110 games for 26th place in school history. Chamberlain had 1,433 points in 48 games.

No. 9 Texas Tech 66, Oklahoma 42: Davion Warren scored 16 points, Bryson Williams had 13 and the Red Raiders won their 20th consecutive home game while avenging their only loss this month with a victory over the Sooners.

Texas Tech (22-6, 11-4 Big 12), which never trailed, has won its last four games and seven of eight.

No. 17 Tennessee 80, Missouri 61: Kennedy Chandler scored 23 points to lead the vis-

iting Volunteers over the Tigers.

Chandler, a freshman guard averaging 13.2 points, eclipsed that mark with 14 points in the first half for Tennessee (20-7, 11-4 Southeastern Conference).

No. 18 Arkansas 82, Florida 74: JD Notae scored 22 points, including a huge three-pointer with a little more than a minute remaining, and the Razorbacks beat the Gators for their first win in Gainesville, Fla., since 1995.

Arkansas (22-6, 11-4 Southeastern Conference) won for the 12th time in 13 games.

No. 24 Alabama 74, Vanderbilt 72: Jahvon Quinerly scored 17 of his 19 points in the second half, helping the visiting Crimson Tide rally from a nine-point deficit in the first half to hold off

the Commodores.

Alabama (18-10, 8-7 Southeastern Conference) has won four of five.

No. 25 Iowa 86, Michigan State 60: Keegan Murray scored 28 points as the host Hawkeyes defeated the Spartans.

Kris Murray, Keegan's twin brother, and Jordan Bohannon each had 11 as Iowa (19-8, 9-7 Big Ten) continued its February run. The Hawkeyes lost three of their last four games to end January, but are 5-1 since.

Fresno State 65, Air Force 40: Orlando Robinson had 26 points as the visiting Bulldogs easily defeated the Falcons.

Jake Heidbreder had 14 points for Air Force (10-16, 3-12), whose losing streak stretched to eight games.

Lockout may cost MLB stars a lot of money

Associated Press

JUPITER, Fla. — Sometime soon, lockout costs become real: Max Scherzer would forfeit \$232,975 for each regular-season day lost, and Gerrit Cole \$193,548.

Based on last year's base salaries that totaled just over \$3.8 billion, major league players would combine to lose \$20.5 million for each day wiped off the 186-day regular-season schedule.

Major League Baseball has told the players' association a labor deal must be reached by Monday in order for opening day to come off as scheduled on March 31 and a 162-game season to remain intact. The union hasn't said whether it believes that deadline, and there likely is some leeway based on timing after the 1990 lockout, the 1994-95 strike and the 2020 pandemic delay.

Talks resumed this week in the second-longest work stoppage in baseball history, which started Dec. 2.

A player at management's proposed \$630,000 minimum would lose \$3,387 for each day he's not on a big league roster, the amount rising to \$4,167 under the union's offer of a \$775,000 minimum.

While medical insurance would expire after March 31 for

players in the major leagues when last season ended, the union would pay COBRA payments to continue their coverage and also will cover the subsidy usually paid for the medical coverage of former players.

It's harder to calculate what owners of the 30 teams would lose if games are lost, but a similar amount is likely. While players received about half of industry revenue that reached a high of \$9.7 billion in 2019 (a percentage that includes spending on draft picks and international amateurs), they are paid during the regular season, and teams receive a substantial percentage of revenue from the post-season.

For players, the cost is clear: Each earns 1/186th of his base salary each day.

Scherzer and Cole are on the union's eight-man executive subcommittee, which supervises the negotiations. Among others in the union's leadership group, the daily price comes to \$172,043 for Francisco Lindor, \$134,409 for Marcus Semien, \$75,269 for Zack Britton, \$32,258 for James Paxton and \$20,161 for Jason Castro. Andrew Miller, the other member, is among the hundreds of players who remained unsigned heading into the transaction freeze that began with the lock-

out.

Stoppage costs would compound in future seasons due to the major league service time that wouldn't be accrued. Once 15 days of the regular season are missed, the free-agent eligibility of some players would be delayed by one year unless management agrees to give credit in an eventual agreement, which it hasn't done in the past.

That would delay free-agent eligibility for Shohei Ohtani from 2023 to 2024, Pete Alonso from 2024 to 2025, Jake Cronenworth from 2025 to 2026 and Jonathan India from 2026 to 2027.

Others in danger of delayed free agency after 15 missed days — players currently with major league service ending in .000 days — include Tejay Antone, Jordan Hicks, Cristian Javier, Brad Keller, Isiah Kiner-Falefa, Chris Paddack, Brady Singer, Andrew Vaughn and Garrett Whitlock.

In Lindor's case, because of deferred compensation in his contract, he would lose money both this year and a decade from now. He would forfeit \$145,161 each day from the \$27 million he is owed this season and \$26,882 each day from the \$5 million due on July 1, 2032.

Players also may find it more difficult to reach provisions in their contracts to guarantee fu-

ture seasons triggered by statistics such as plate appearances, games and innings, but the sides have agreed to prorating those in past settlements.

Clubs would lose broadcast revenue and ticket money, though the impact is somewhat uneven. Some teams generate less revenue from April games than they produce in the summer, and there likely are different contractual arrangements regarding the flow of broadcast fees, credits, refunds and delayed/forfeited payments.

In addition, a large percentage of broadcast revenue is for the postseason. MLB gave the union a slide two years ago that contracts called for \$787 million in media money from the 2020 postseason: \$370 million from Fox, \$310 million from Turner, \$27 million from ESPN, \$30 million from MLB Network and \$50 million from international and other.

The prospect of an extended stoppage to some degree is likely to have depressed ticket sales among fans wary of purchasing tickets for games that may not be played.

And there is no public knowledge of debt financing among the clubs and how much liabilities increased during a pandemic that caused a huge revenue loss.

Locked-out players, owners to meet for 3rd straight day

Associated Press

JUPITER, Fla. — Locked-out baseball players and team owners agreed to meet for a third day in a row on Wednesday in an attempt to reach a deal that would salvage opening day on March 31.

Players made counteroffers on several topics during Tuesday's session. The talks on the 83rd day of the second-longest work stoppage in baseball history marked only the second time since the lockout began that bargaining on core economic issues has taken place on consecutive days.

The sides had met on consecutive days

just once before, on Jan. 24 and 25.

MLB has told the union an agreement is needed by Monday for the season to start on time. Players have not said whether they accept that as a deadline.

Negotiations were shifted this week from New York to Roger Dean Stadium, the spring training home of the Miami Marlins and St. Louis Cardinals.

On Monday, MLB increased its offer of a bonus pool for prearbitration players by \$5 million to \$20 million, upped its proposal from three to four for teams participating in an amateur draft lottery and dropped its request for flexibility to de-

crease domestic minor league contracts along with a plan to limit optional assignments to five per player each season.

The union wants a \$115 million bonus pool, eight teams in a draft lottery and a maximum four optional assignments.

The players and teams are far apart on luxury tax thresholds and rates. The teams have told the union they will not increase salary arbitration eligibility, will not decrease revenue sharing and will not add new methods for players to accrue service time, which players said are needed to prevent teams from holding players back to delay free agency.

Blue Jackets top Toronto on Laine OT goal

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio—Patrik Laine scored his second goal of the game 20 seconds into overtime to lift Columbus to a 4-3 victory over the Toronto Maple Leafs on Tuesday night, the Blue Jackets' third straight win.

Adam Boqvist and Brendan Gaunce also scored for Columbus, while Jean-Francois Berube stopped 39 shots and recorded his first NHL assist in his second straight win. The Blue Jackets have won eight of their last 10 games.

"They believe they can win and that goes a long way," Columbus coach Brad Larsen said. "There is not a magic formula. They are good players and they are dangerous."

Auston Matthews had a goal and two assists, Michael Bunting had a goal and an assist, and Jason Spezza added a goal for the Maple Leafs, who lost their third straight. Jack Campbell stopped 26 shots in the loss, which kept Toronto in third place in the Atlantic Division.

Bunting put the Leafs on the board at 12:50 of the first period, tapping in a feed from Mitch Marner after a Blue Jackets turnover.

Laine pulled Columbus even and extended his points streak to 10 games with a wristed off a drop pass from Boone Jenner that beat Campbell at 6:13 of the second.

"Right now there is a feeling we are going to get another chance, and there is a good chance it might go in," Laine said.

Matthews gave Toronto the lead again at 15:23 with his team-leading 34th goal and 61st point of the season, off a feed from David Kampf that caught a reaching Berube looking.

"We're leaving the rink a little bit sour,

but I thought we did a lot of good things tonight," Matthews said.

Boqvist made it 2-2 with a power-play goal at 1:05 of the third, taking a feed from Berube and skating through a pair of Maple Leafs defenders and giving Berube the first point of his NHL career.

Predators 6, Panthers 4: Mikael Granlund scored the go-ahead goal in the third period and visiting Nashville snapped a four-game losing streak.

Tanner Jeannot scored twice, Filip Forsberg had a goal and an assist, and Yakov Trenin and Roman Josi added scores for the Predators. Matt Duchene had two assists and David Rittich stopped 44 shots.

Granlund's power-play goal gave Nashville a 5-4 lead with 5:31 left in the third. Jeannot added an empty-netter with 1:32 left for the final margin.

Sam Reinhart had a goal and an assist, Radko Gudas scored his first of the season and Sam Bennett and Aaron Ekblad added goals for Florida. Jonathan Huberdeau had two assists and Sergei Bobrovsky made 27 saves as the Panthers lost at home for the first time in 10 games.

Blues 4, Flyers 1: Vladimir Tarasenko scored the go-ahead goal in the third period and Jordan Binnington made 25 saves to lead St. Louis to a win at Philadelphia.

Ivan Barbashev had a goal and an assist, and Brayden Schenn and Brandon Saad also scored for the Blues, who completed a 3-1 road trip. St. Louis has won two straight and four of five.

Oskar Lindblom scored for the Flyers, who lost their sixth in a row and 19th in the last 21.

Senators 4, Wild 3: Thomas Chabot

scored twice, including the winner late in the third period, and also picked up an assist to lead host Ottawa over Minnesota.

Chabot was back after missing four games and hit a career milestone playing in his 300th game. Brady Tkachuk and Tim Stutzle also scored, while Anton Forsberg stopped 40 shots.

Kevin Fiala, Jared Spurgeon and Jon Merrill scored for the Wild (31-14-3), who were playing the second of four games on a Canadian road trip. Cam Talbot made 30 saves.

Islanders 5, Kraken 2: Zach Parise scored twice and added an assist, Brock Nelson scored for the third straight game, and New York opened its road trip with a win at Seattle.

Kyle Palmeri scored his fourth goal in his last four games and Casey Cizikas added his fifth of the season as the Islanders built a 4-0 lead. Ilya Sorokin made 23 saves as New York won for just the second time in the last six games.

Yanni Gourde scored unassisted off a faceoff late in the second period for his 11th goal of the season, and Riley Sheahan scored early in the third for the Kraken, who dropped their fifth straight. Philipp Grubauer made 31 saves.

Ducks 4, Sharks 3 (SO): Rickard Rakell had two goals in regulation and scored the winner in a shootout to lead host Anaheim over skidding San Jose.

Trevor Zegras converted in the first round of the tiebreaker, and Ducks goalie Anthony Stolarz turned away Logan Couture and Tomas Hertl. Rakell went top shelf on James Reimer to give Anaheim its second straight win.

Mickelson apologizes for his controversial remarks

Associated Press

Phil Mickelson apologized Tuesday for comments about the Saudis and a proposed super league, damaging words he claims were off the record and not meant to be shared publicly.

"It was reckless, I offended people, and I am deeply sorry for my choice of words," he said.

The same time as Mickelson's statement, KPMG became the first of his corporate sponsors to announce an immediate end to their partnership, a decision

KPMG said was mutual.

"We wish him the best," KPMG said in a statement.

Mickelson said of his comments to author and golf writer Alan Shipnuck, "I'm beyond disappointed and will make every effort to self-reflect and learn from this."

In explosive remarks, Mickelson told Shipnuck the Saudis behind a proposed breakaway rival league were "scary mother (expletive)s to get involved with."

He also told Shipnuck, who is writing a biography on Mickelson due out in May, that it was worth getting in bed with the Saudis, despite their history of human rights abuses, if it meant a chance to change the PGA Tour.

"We know they killed (Washington Post columnist Jamal) Khashoggi and have a horrible record on human rights. They execute people over there for being gay," he said. "Knowing all of this, why would I even consider

it? Because this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reshape how the PGA Tour operates."

The interview took place in November.

Mickelson said he has always put the interests of golf first, "although it doesn't look this way now given my recent comments."

Shipnuck, who previously wrote for Sports Illustrated, tweeted Tuesday that Mickelson's claims he spoke off the record were "completely false."