

US: Ukraine must make big battlefield gains

The Washington Post

As the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine nears, U.S. officials are telling Ukrainian leaders they face a critical moment to change the trajectory of the war, raising the pressure on Kyiv to make significant gains on the battlefield while weapons and aid from the United States and its allies are surging.

Despite promises to back Ukraine "as long as it takes," Biden officials have said recent aid packages from Congress and America's allies represent Kyiv's best chance to decisively change the course of the war. Many conservatives in the Republican-led House have vowed to pull back support, and Europe's long-term appetite for funding the war effort remains unclear.

Several officials noted the strong bipartisan support that has accompanied every Ukraine package, adding that Congress gave the White House more than it asked for, but they acknowledged that was under a

Democrat-led House and Senate.

"We will continue to try to impress upon them that we can't do anything and everything forever," said one senior administration official, referring to Ukraine's leaders. The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomatic matters, added that it was the administration's "very strong view" that it will be hard to keep getting the same level of security and economic assistance from Congress.

"As long as it takes' pertains to the amount of conflict," the official added. "It doesn't pertain to the amount of assistance."

The war in recent months has become a slow grind in eastern Ukraine, with neither side gaining the upper hand. Biden officials believe the critical juncture will come this spring, when Russia is expected to launch an offensive and Ukraine mounts a counteroffensive in an effort to reclaim lost territory.

Underlining the importance of the moment for the adminis-

tration, Vice President Kamala Harris, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas headed to a major security summit in Germany this week and President Joe Biden is traveling to Poland next week for a speech and meetings on the first anniversary. The Biden administration is also working with Congress to approve another \$10 billion in direct budget assistance to Kyiv and is expected to announce another large military assistance package in the next week and the imposition of more sanctions on the Kremlin around the same time.

CIA Director William Burns traveled to the country one week ahead of those officials, where he briefed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on his expectations for what Russia is planning militarily in the coming months and emphasized the urgency of the moment.

At the same time, Biden and his aides are eager to avoid any sign of defection or weakening

resolve by Western allies ahead of the Feb. 24 anniversary, hoping to signal to Russian President Vladimir Putin that support for Ukraine is not waning.

But some analysts warned that neither Russia nor Ukraine is likely to seize a decisive military advantage in the foreseeable future.

"It feels like we are playing for a long war," said Andrea Kendall-Taylor, director of the Transatlantic Security Program at the Center for a New American Security. "I think it's at odds with what so many people would hope for, that we're actually trying to help Ukraine win militarily."

She added, "It feels like a moment of really high uncertainty."

Biden and his top aides have said they are determined to back Ukraine as long and as fully as possible. But they have warned the political path will get tougher once Ukraine has exhausted the current congressional package, which could happen as early as this summer.

New NATO talks sidestep sending F-16s to Ukraine

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

The big question for NATO of whether to send F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine went unanswered Tuesday in Brussels, where Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and other allied officials convened for high-level talks.

The latest two-day NATO gathering is centered on getting more weaponry to the front lines of the Russia-Ukraine war, which started a year ago this month.

The idea of delivering fighter jets to Ukraine has divided allies, even as Kyiv has said such air

power could be a game changer.

During a meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, a collection of about 50 countries, most of the focus was on ensuring that weapons already sent or on their way to Ukraine have the ammunition and support to keep firing.

Austin, when asked about discussions on fighter aircraft, said he didn't have any new announcements. Instead, he said allies were trying to address Ukraine's "most pressing needs" as the force contemplates a spring offensive. Those needs include en-

suring new tanks, armored fighting vehicles and other equipment arrive in time for the fight.

"It's a monumental task to bring all those systems together, get the troops trained on those platforms and make sure we have sustainment for that," Austin said.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg also downplayed the question of fighter jets.

"The issue of aircraft is not the most urgent issue now, but it is an ongoing discussion," Stoltenberg said as allies began arriving

Tuesday at NATO headquarters.

Austin, flanked by Ukraine Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov during discussions, said a focus will be getting sufficient amounts of ammunition into Ukraine.

Ammunition supplies have become a concern for NATO as Ukraine burns through allied stockpiles at a faster rate than industry can produce replacements. The alliance is evaluating multiple ways to ramp up production.

"We still have much more to do together, and we must intensify our focus," Austin said.

Rumors swirling about balloons, UFOs

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Maybe they came from China. Maybe from somewhere farther away. A lot farther away.

The downing of four aerial devices by U.S. warplanes has touched off rampant misinformation about the objects, their origin and their purpose, showing how complicated world events and a lack of information can quickly create the perfect conditions for unchecked conjecture and misinformation.

The presence of mysterious objects high in the sky doesn't help.

"There will be an investigation and we will learn more, but until then, this story has created a playground for people interested in speculating or stirring the pot for their own reasons," said Jim Ludes, a former national defense analyst who now leads the Pell Center for International Relations at Salve Regina University.

"In part," Ludes added, "because it feeds into so many narratives about government secrecy."

President Joe Biden and other top Washington officials have said little about the repeated shootdowns, which began with a suspected Chinese spy balloon earlier this month.

Three more unidentified devices have been shot down, with the latest Sunday over Lake Huron. Pentagon officials said they posed no security threats, but have not disclosed their origins or purpose.

On Monday, many social media sites in the United States lit up with theories that Biden had deployed the aerial devices as a way to distract Americans from other, more pressing issues. Those concerns included immigration, inflation, the war in Ukraine and Republican investigations into his son, Hunter.

While the concentration of claims was highest on fringe sites popular with far-right Americans, the unfounded rumors and conspiracy theories popped up on bigger platforms like Twitter and Facebook, too.

One of the most popular theories suggested the White House

and Pentagon are using the airborne devices to divert attention from a chemical spill earlier this month in Ohio.

That incident, caused by a train derailment, occurred several days before the most recent devices were shot down, and was covered extensively. Nonetheless, the spill remained the top subject searched on Google on Monday, showing continued public interest in the story.

Misleading claims about the airborne devices have also prompted violent threats, according to an analysis by the SITE Intelligence Group, a firm that tracks extremist rhetoric online.

After the White House said earlier surveillance flights went undetected during Donald Trump's presidency, an article circulated on far-right sites urging the execution of any Trump administration officials who may have withheld the information.

Trump administration officials have said they knew of no such surveillance craft.

Some commenters said Bi-

den's decision to wait until the balloon had reached the East Coast before shooting it down showed he was in league with China.

Others, meanwhile, chastised Biden for shooting down foreign aircraft that they imagined could be carrying bioweapons or nuclear weapons.

Alongside the political conspiracy theories were suggestions that the aerial objects were extraterrestrial in origin. Photos of alleged UFOs were shared online and web searches for the term "UFO" soared around the world Sunday, according to information from Google Trends.

The federal government must balance the public's desire to know the details with the need for secrecy regarding national security and defense, Ludes said. That's not likely to satisfy Biden's critics, Ludes said, or prevent misleading explanations from going viral.

High-profile news stories and events often precede a spike in false and misleading claims as people turn to the internet for explanations.

Polish officials observe training of Ukrainians

Associated Press

SWIETOSZOW, Poland — Poland's president and defense minister met Monday with Polish and foreign instructors intensively training Ukrainian troops to operate the German-made Leopard 2 tanks that some European countries and Canada have offered Kyiv to help fight the Russian invasion.

President Andrzej Duda and minister Mariusz Blaszczak also watched Leopard 2 training at a military base and test range in Swietoszow, in southwestern Poland. The training is part of the European Union's military assistance to Ukraine, but Canadian instructors also have a role, as do Norwegians.

Taking part are Ukrainian tank crews

from units fighting in the east of the country. The intensive training lasts up to 10 hours a day, including weekends, the Polish military said. Instruction is also being held in Germany.

Duda voiced hope the tanks would help Ukrainian forces "in a much more efficient way to defeat the enemy."

He said the Ukrainian trainees have come straight from the front line. "You can see in their faces that these people have gone through terrible things, but they are determined to defend their homeland," he said.

A Polish instructor, Senior Staff Warrant Officer Krzysztof Sieradzki, said the Ukrainians are so motivated to learn everything fast that the instructors "have to hold them

back and transfer knowledge to them in small batches."

The trainees' commander, Major Vadym Khodak, said they all have combat experience.

"They didn't come from the street, they've been fighting on our tanks for a long time, so I think learning how to operate these tanks will be a lot easier," said Khodak, who's from Dnipro in eastern Ukraine.

Khodak said the modern tanks would be a great help.

"If we learn how to use them, we will put them to test in combat conditions and it will give a great effect," he said.

Stationed in Swietoszow are Poland's 10th Armored Cavalry Brigade and a U.S. armored cavalry combat group.

Inflation slows to 6.4%, but prices still climbing

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The pace of consumer price increases eased again in January compared with a year earlier, the latest sign that the high inflation that has gripped Americans for nearly two years is slowing.

At the same time, Tuesday's consumer price report from the government showed that inflationary pressures in the U.S. economy remain stubborn and are likely to fuel price spikes well into this year.

Consumer prices rose 6.4% in January from 12 months earlier, down from 6.5% in December. It was the seventh straight year-over-year slowdown and well below a recent peak of 9.1% in June. Yet it remains far above the Federal Reserve's 2% annual inflation target.

And on a monthly basis, consumer prices increased 0.5% from December to January, much higher than the 0.1% rise from November to December. More expensive gas, food and clothing drove up inflation in January.

The Fed has aggressively raised its

benchmark interest rate in the past year to its highest level in 15 years in its drive to get rampaging inflation under control. The Fed's goal is to slow borrowing and spending, cool the pace of hiring and relieve the pressure many businesses feel to raise wages to find or keep workers. Businesses typically pass their higher labor costs on to their customers in the form of higher prices, thereby helping fuel inflation.

So far, most of the slowdown in inflation reflects freer-flowing supply chains and earlier declines in gas prices. But the Fed's rate hikes — eight since March of last year — have had no discernible effect on America's job market, which remains exceptionally strong.

The unemployment rate has dropped to 3.4%, the lowest level in 53 years, and job openings remain high. The strength of the job market has, in turn, helped support consumer spending, which underpins the bulk of the U.S. economy.

Yet the flip side of healthier spending is that inflation may become harder to tame.

Haley announces presidential run, taking on Trump

Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. — Nikki Haley, the former South Carolina governor and United Nations ambassador, announced her candidacy for president on Tuesday, becoming the first major challenger to former President Donald Trump for the 2024 Republican nomination.

The announcement, delivered in a tweet-ed video, marks an about-face for the ex-Trump Cabinet official, who said two years ago that she wouldn't challenge her former boss for the White House in 2024. But she changed her mind in recent months, citing, among other things, the country's economic troubles and the need for "generational change," a nod to the 76-year-old Trump's age.

"You should know this about me. I don't put up with bullies. And when you kick back, it hurts them more if you're wearing heels," Haley said. "I'm Nikki Haley, and I'm running for president."

Haley, 51, is the first in a long line of Republicans who are expected to launch 2024 campaigns in the coming months. Among them are Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former Vice President Mike Pence, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina.

President Joe Biden has said he intends to seek reelection in 2024, stalling any jostling for the Democratic nomination.

Haley has regularly boasted about her track record of defying political expectations, saying, "I've never lost an election, and I'm not going to start now."

If elected, Haley would be the nation's first female president and the first U.S. president of Indian descent.

The daughter of Indian immigrants, Haley grew up enduring racist taunts in a small South Carolina town and has long referenced that impact on her personal and political arc.

In the three-and-a-half minute video, Haley referenced that past, saying she grew up "not Black, not white — I was different."

Despite that, Haley insisted that America is not a racist country: "Nothing could be further from the truth." Playing in the background of her video were images of media reports related to The New York Times Magazine's Pulitzer Prize-winning "1619 Project" — which centered the country's history around slavery.

GOP launches investigation into COVID origins with letter to Fauci

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republicans kicked off an investigation Monday into the origins of COVID-19 by issuing a series of letters to current and former Biden administration officials for documents and testimony.

The Republican chairmen of the House Oversight Committee and the subcommittee on the coronavirus pandemic requested information from several people, including Dr. Anthony Fauci, surrounding the hypothesis that the coronavirus leaked accidentally from a Chinese lab.

"This investigation must begin with where and how this virus came about so that we can attempt to predict, prepare or prevent it from happening again," Rep. Brad Wenstrup, R-Ohio, chair of the virus subcommittee, said in a statement.

Rep. James Comer, R-Tenn., chairman of the oversight committee, added that Republicans will "follow the facts" and "hold

U.S. government officials that took part in any sort of cover-up accountable."

The letters to Fauci, National Intelligence Director Avril Haines, Health Secretary Xavier Becerra and others are the latest effort by the new Republican majority to make good on promises made during the 2022 midterms campaign.

Wenstrup, who is also a longtime member of the House Intelligence Committee, has accused U.S. intelligence of withholding key facts about its investigation into the coronavirus. Republicans on the committee last year issued a staff report arguing that there are "indications" that the virus may have been developed as a bioweapon inside China's Wuhan Institute of Virology.

That would contradict a U.S. intelligence community assessment released in unclassified form in August 2021 that said analysts do not believe the virus was a bioweapon, though it may have leaked in a lab accident.

Police seek motive of Michigan State gunman

Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. — The gunman who killed three students and wounded five at Michigan State University was a 43-year-old who fatally shot himself in a confrontation with police miles from campus, officials said Tuesday.

Investigators still were sorting out why Anthony McRae fired inside an academic building and the student union shortly before 8:30 p.m. Monday. The shootings led to a harrowing campus lockdown and a search for the gunman that ended roughly three hours later.

“We have absolutely no idea what the motive was,” said Chris Rozman, deputy chief of campus police, adding that McRae, of Lansing, was not a student or Michigan State employee.

The dead and injured in the gunfire at Berkeley Hall and the MSU Union, a popular place to eat and study, were all Michigan State students. Five remained in critical condition at Sparrow Hospital, said Dr. Denny Martin, who fought back tears during a news conference.

“This is still fluid,” Rozman said. “There are still crime scenes that are being pro-

essed, and we still are in the process of putting together the pieces to try to understand what happened.”

Two of the dead were graduates of separate high schools in the Grosse Pointe district in suburban Detroit. One was identified by Michigan State as Brian Fraser; the other was not publicly disclosed yet. Alexandria Verner, a graduate of Clawson High School in the Detroit area, also died.

The shootings took place in an area of older, stately buildings on the northern edge of the Michigan State campus. Just across busy Grand River Avenue lies East Lansing’s downtown, teeming with restaurants, bars and shops.

Michigan State has about 50,000 students, including 19,000 who live on campus. As hundreds of officers scoured the campus, about 90 miles northwest of Detroit, students hid where they could Monday night.

During that time, police released a photo of the suspect, and an “alert citizen” recognized him in the Lansing area, Rozman said.

“That was exactly what we were trying to achieve by releasing that picture. We had no idea where he was at that point,” the deputy

chief said.

Police confronted McRae about 5 miles from campus in an industrial area, where he killed himself, Rozman said.

McRae was on probation for 18 months until May 2021 for possessing a loaded gun in a vehicle, according to the state Corrections Department.

Students recalled the previous night’s terror. Dominik Molotky said he was learning about Cuban history around 8:15 p.m. when he and the other students heard a gunshot outside the classroom. He told ABC’s “Good Morning America” that a few seconds later, the gunman entered and fired three to four more rounds while the students took cover.

“I was ducking and covering, and the same with the rest of the students. He let off four more rounds and when it went silent for about 30 seconds to a minute, two of my classmates started breaking open a window, and that took about 30 seconds to happen. There was glass everywhere,” Molotky said.

“After that, we broke out the window and I climbed out of there, and then I booked it back to my apartment,” he said. He was unsure whether gunfire hit any of the students.

Rescue crews discover more survivors in Turkey

Associated Press

ANTAKYA, Turkey — Aid agencies and governments stepped up a scramble to send help to earthquake-hit parts of Turkey and Syria on Tuesday, as rescuers continued to pull survivors out of the rubble more than 200 hours after devastation swept the region.

Politics weighed on efforts to rush in aid, as many survivors still waiting for tents slept outside in freezing weather. Efforts to help survivors and count the dead and injured in Syria were marred by the continued divisions from 12 years of civil war.

On Tuesday, the United Nations announced a deal with Damascus to deliver U.N. aid through two more border crossings from Turkey to rebel-held areas of northwest Syria, which was likely to help in the

short term.

The death toll eclipsed 35,500 — nearly 32,000 of those in Turkey. In Syria, the toll in the northwestern rebel-held region reached 2,166, according to the rescue group known as the White Helmets.

The toll is nearly certain to rise as search teams turn up more bodies following the magnitude 7.8 and 7.5 quakes that struck nine hours apart on Feb. 6 in southeastern Turkey and northern Syria.

In Adiyaman province, rescuers reached 18-year-old Muhammed Cafer Cetin, and medics gave him an IV with fluids before attempting a dangerous extraction from a building that crumbled further as rescuers were working. Two others were rescued from a destroyed building in central Kahramanmaraş, near the epicenter.

Hackers target Bahrain sites to mark uprising anniversary

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Hackers said they had taken down the websites of Bahrain’s international airport, state news agency and chamber of commerce on Tuesday to mark the 12-year anniversary of an Arab Spring uprising in the small Gulf country.

A statement posted online by a group calling itself Al-Toufan, or “The Flood” in Arabic, claimed to have hacked the airport website, which was unavailable for at least a half hour in the middle of the day.

It also claimed to have taken down the websites of the state-run Bahrain News Agency, which was sporadically unavailable midday, and the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce, which was down in the afternoon.

The group posted images showing 504 Gateway Timeout

Errors, saying the hacking was “in support of the revolution of our oppressed people of Bahrain.”

The same group appears to have hacked and changed articles on the website of Akhbar Al Khaleej, a pro-government newspaper in Bahrain, hours earlier. The newspaper’s website was still down Tuesday.

Feb. 14, 2011, marked the first day of protests led by Bahrain’s Shiite majority against the Sunni monarchy. Bahrain quashed the pro-democracy uprising by force with the support of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, but has continued to see sporadic unrest over the years.

The same shadowy group of hackers targeted government websites during elections held in November that were boycotted by a banned Shiite opposition group and others.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman convicted in poison food ID theft bid

NY NEW YORK — A New York City woman accused of feeding poisoned cheesecake to her lookalike in a bid to steal the other woman's identity has been convicted of attempted murder, prosecutors said.

Viktoria Nasyrova, 47, was found guilty by a jury of trying to kill Olga Tsvyk, 35, with cheesecake laced with a powerful sedative and then stealing her passport and other valuables in August 2016, Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz said in a news release.

The two women resemble each other, with dark hair and similar skin tones, and Nasyrova hoped to impersonate Tsvyk after killing her, the district attorney said.

Nasyrova was convicted of charges including attempted murder, assault and unlawful imprisonment. She faces up to 25 years in prison when she is sentenced March 21.

Man pleads guilty to racial attack of neighbors

MA LEXINGTON — A Massachusetts man has pleaded guilty to repeatedly tossing banana peels onto his neighbors' property in what prosecutors said was a case of racial harassment, and to having more than 70 guns in his home that he was not legally allowed to possess.

Robert Ivarson, 55, of Lexington, was sentenced to up to nine years in prison after pleading guilty in Middlesex Superior Court to criminal harassment, a criminal civil rights vio-

lation and more than 100 weapons charges, District Attorney Marian Ryan said in a statement. He was also ordered to have no contact with the victims and undergo a mental health evaluation and any recommended treatment.

Ivarson was arrested in December 2016 after a Black family from Haiti in his neighborhood reported finding banana peels on their property on 30 to 40 occasions over several months, authorities said.

Goats let loose in protest of homeless sweep

OR PORTLAND — A herd of city goats well-known in Portland, Ore., were temporarily set free in what appeared to be an act of protest against a planned sweep of a nearby homeless encampment.

The fence of the goats' enclosure in north Portland was cut, allowing them to get out. The Oregonian/OregonLive reported that the co-owner of the Belmont Goats nonprofit, Robin Casey, found a note rolled up inside the fence.

"In what reality is the comfort of five goats valued over the shelter of more than fifteen people," the news outlet reported the letter as saying. "So, it's time for the Belmont Goats to enjoy a little walk in the park." It was signed by "some anarchists."

Casey said all the escaped goats have been retrieved and appear to be healthy.

Portland officials announced last year that they had selected the site where the goats currently live, on city-owned land, for tiny home village and affor-

dable housing projects. They agreed to relocate the goats to another area nearby. But the spot where the goats are supposed to be relocated to is home to an encampment where more than a dozen people live.

Mars Wrigley fined after workers fall into chocolate

PA ELIZABETHTOWN — Federal workplace safety authorities have fined a central Pennsylvania confectionary factory more than \$14,500 following an accident last year in which two workers fell into a vat of chocolate.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration cited Mars Wrigley in the June accident at the Elizabethtown M&M/Mars factory, saying the workers were not authorized to work in the tanks and weren't trained on the proper safety procedures for the equipment.

Officials said two workers employed by an outside contracting firm fell into the partially filled chocolate tank while doing maintenance work. Emergency responders were able to free the pair by cutting a hole in the bottom of the tank, officials said. Both were taken to hospitals.

Menstrual questions cut from athletic forms

FL ORLANDO — Questions about female athletes' menstrual history will no longer appear on the medical forms that Florida high school students have to fill out before participating in sports.

The Florida High School Athletic Association axed the questions after listening to a flood of

complaints contained in letters read aloud during an emergency meeting of the board.

Answering the questions was previously optional, but an association advisory committee recently recommended that it be mandatory, sparking the firestorm of criticism.

Some called the questions "humiliating" and "invasive," and others suggested they were connected to a recent bill barring transgender girls and women from playing on public school teams intended for student athletes identified as girls at birth.

Don't feed the bears! But birds OK, research shows

NV RENO — Don't feed the bears!

Wildlife biologists and forest rangers have preached the mantra for nearly a century at national parks like Yellowstone and Yosemite, and for decades in areas where urban development increasingly invaded native wildlife habitat.

But don't feed the birds? That may be a different story — at least for one bird species at Lake Tahoe.

Snowshoe and cross-country ski enthusiasts routinely feed the tiny mountain chickadees high above the north shore of the alpine lake on the California-Nevada border.

New research from University of Nevada scientists found that supplementing the chickadees' natural food sources with food provided in feeders or by hand did not negatively impact them, as long as proper food is used and certain rules are followed.

— From wire reports



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Bruins' Ullmark having breakout season

Associated Press

Linus Ullmark moved to the Boston area in the summer of 2021 with his wife, their two young children and their dogs after signing with the Bruins. Settling in with his new team didn't happen right away.

Fresh off signing a \$20 million, four-year contract, Ullmark shared the net with rookie Jeremy Swayman and then, briefly, with Tuukka Rask, the organization cornerstone who was trying to come back from hip surgery. Ullmark allowed eight goals in two playoff games before losing the starting job to Swayman and went into an offseason of change unsure what his role would be.

Turns out, it's a starring one as the best goaltender in the NHL.

Ullmark leads the league in wins, save percentage and goals-against average, and is one of the biggest reasons the Bruins are atop the standings and on pace for the best regular season in NHL history. Along with fellow All-Stars Stuart Skinner and Logan Thompson, who respectively have the Edmonton Oilers and

Vegas Golden Knights on track to make the playoffs, Ullmark tops the list of the biggest goalie surprises of the season.

"He's been standing on the head," Bruins leading scorer and fellow MVP candidate David Pastrnak said. "He's been playing unbelievable. It's just fun to watch him, honestly, this year. He's playing confident. He's big. He's very confident in the net, and he's having a special year."

Ullmark credits being more comfortable in his new surroundings and it has shown in his play: He already has tied his career high with 26 victories, his .937 save percentage is more than 10 points higher than the next-closest competitor and his 1.90 GAA would be the lowest by a goalie with 40 or more games since Hall of Famer Martin Brodeur in 1997-98.

The 29-year-old Swede has been thinking a lot about what changed in his game and finds it hard to pinpoint. Feeling more "at home" in Boston is one piece of many.

"I just think it's just small pieces here and there that are

just falling into place," Ullmark said. "We have a great team, as well, and it goes kind of hand in hand with my performance and also with Sway's performance. It's not just a one-man show. It's a team effort."

The Bruins lead Eastern Conference behind Pastrnak's 38 goals, captain Patrice Bergeron's two-way dominance at the age of 37 and the coaching of newcomer Jim Montgomery. But Bruce Cassidy, who was fired after coaching Boston to six playoff appearances, called Ullmark's emergence "the big one" when asked about his former team's consistency.

"He finished really well last year, and he's carried that into this year," Cassidy said. "Now you're creating competition with Swayman at that position. I think that's a great thing for Boston."

Cassidy, now behind the bench for the Golden Knights, has had Thompson on top of his game after Vegas learned late in the offseason Robin Lehner would be out for the season rehabbing from hip surgery.

Thrust into a leading role by

injuries last season, Thompson won 20 of his first 35 starts this season before getting sidelined himself last week. Before that, the undrafted late bloomer earned All-Star honors and put himself in the conversation for the Calder Trophy as rookie of the year.

"There was a lot of times when I was really close to just quitting and giving up," Thompson said. "That competitiveness in me never went away. That's the biggest thing is never stop working hard at what you want."

Oilers coach Jay Woodcroft saw similar tendencies in Skinner when they were together in the minors last year. Edmonton's American Hockey League affiliate in Bakersfield, Calif., was desperate for a starter one night; Skinner rushed to the rink after travel issues, getting there 5 minutes before warm-ups and then backstopping a win.

"He showed me something — he showed his teammates something in how serious he is about winning games," Woodcroft said. "He just kept getting better and better."

Lundell, Barkov lift Panthers over Wild in shootout

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Anton Lundell and Aleksander Barkov scored in the shootout to send the Florida Panthers to a 2-1 win against the Minnesota Wild on Monday night.

Eetu Luostarinen scored in regulation for Florida, which has won four of its past five games. Sergei Bobrovsky made 27 saves for the Panthers in a low-scoring game with plenty of scoring opportunities.

Bobrovsky stopped two of the three players he faced in the shootout.

Filip Gustavsson nearly matched Bobrovsky save for save, making 33 saves for Minnesota. Kirill Kaprizov scored in regulation for the Wild, who have lost four of five since the All-Star break.

Senators 4, Flames 3 (OT): Tim Stutzle had three assists in regulation and scored at 1:55 of overtime to cap host Ottawa's come-

back from two goals down.

Brady Tkachuk, Drake Batherson and Alex DeBrincat also scored for the Senators. Mads Sogaard, appearing in his fourth NHL game, made 34 saves.

Dillon Dube had two goals and Tyler Toffoli had a goal and an assist for Calgary.

Red Wings 6, Canucks 1: Dylan Larkin scored twice and visiting Detroit won its third straight.

Robby Fabbri and Gustav Lindstrom each had a goal and an assist, and Pius Suter and Jonatan Berggren also scored for the Red Wings. Michael Rasmussen had two assists and Ville Husso made 29 saves, including a late penalty shot.

Sheldon Dries scored for the Canucks.

Coyotes 4, Predators 2: Lawson Crouse scored two goals to help Arizona end a two-game road skid.

Nick Schmaltz and Christian Fischer also scored as the Coyotes capped their three-game road swing after back-to-back overtime losses. Matias Maccelli, J.J. Moser and Clayton Keller each had two assists. Karel Vejmelka had 29 saves for his first win against the team that drafted him in the fifth round in 2015.

Roman Josi and Colton Sissons scored for Nashville.

Kings 5, Sabres 2: Adrian Kempe scored for the third straight game, Viktor Arvidsson had a goal and two assists, and host Los Angeles won its second straight since the All-Star break and bye week.

Sean Walker and Matt Roy also scored and Phillip Danault had three assists for the Kings. Pheonix Copley made 27 saves.

Dylan Cozens and Peyton Krebs scored for the Sabres.

Ovechkin leaves Caps for family issue

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Va. — Alex Ovechkin will be away from the Washington Capitals to attend to a family matter and the health of a loved one and is expected to be gone for at least the rest of the week, if not longer.

General manager Brian MacLellan announced Ovechkin's absence before the team's morning skate Tuesday. No further details were released, though it appears Washington is preparing to be without its longtime captain for an extended period.

Coach Peter Laviolette said he doesn't envision Ovechkin will be back "in the foreseeable future."

"When it comes to your family and parents, that's what mat-

ters," Laviolette said. "He's going to deal with some things right now and we're going to be supportive."

Further complicating matters if Ovechkin needs to go home to Russia, where his parents and other family members live, are travel restrictions in place amid the country's war in Ukraine. There are no direct flights between North America and Moscow.

The Capitals play two home games this week before facing the Carolina Hurricanes in the NHL's Stadium Series outdoors in Raleigh on Saturday night.

"Sending positive thoughts on behalf of the organization," the Hurricanes posted on Twitter before the team played at the Capitals on Tuesday night.

"There is nothing more important than those we love. We are wishing the best for Alex and his family."

Ovechkin, 37, leads Washington with 32 goals and 54 points. He has missed only 48 games throughout his 18-year NHL career, and the Capitals have lost 25 of them.

"We've been playing without key guys all season and last year and the year before. We're going to miss him," center Lars Eller said. "We're a better team when he's in our lineup, but other guys will have to fill the gap in the meantime and we can do that."

"Obviously teams are used to seeing (Ovechkin in) his office, so we all know what he's capable of there, how he can score

from there," longtime teammate Nicklas Backstrom said. "Definitely going to miss him, but at the same time we have to find other ways to create chances and try to capitalize there."

The Capitals enter an important stretch in a precarious position: holding on to one of two wild-card spots in the Eastern Conference and in danger of falling out of playoff position by the end of the week. Even before Ovechkin's absence, they have averaged 2.27 goals over their past 14 games.

"You've got to score goals to win games," Backstrom said. "You're not going to win games with just one goal. I think we got to be a little more urgent out there we got to be a little more hungrier around the net."

Winter Olympics might have to resort to fixed hosts

Associated Press

MERIBEL, France — Considering the dearth of candidates to stage the Winter Olympics amid spiraling venue costs, the IOC may have to resort to lining up a list of fixed, rotating hosts.

A highly theoretical list could include Salt Lake City and Vancouver in North America, Pyeongchang in Asia and places like Switzerland, Italy and Scandinavia in Europe.

"There are talks. It is a challenge with climate change and also infrastructure to be able to find venues for the Winter Olympics," retired Olympic skiing champion Lindsey Vonn said in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

Vonn is on the bid committee for Salt Lake City's candidacy for the 2030 or 2034 Games.

Most of the rotating hosts would have hosted the Olympics previously, or have most of the venues already built.

"A rotating venue option is on the table in which certain altitude standards would be in

place and it would have to have mostly pre-existing structures and it would limit the cost for the venues and it would limit the chances of climate change affecting the competitions in a negative way," Vonn said.

"I know that's been discussed. How early that will happen, I don't know, but I don't think it would happen before 2034."

Sweden's Olympic leaders announced last week that they are weighing up whether to bid for 2030 while the International Olympic Committee has delayed the process to search for more contenders.

Sapporo, Japan was considered the favorite for 2030 before an ongoing bid-rigging scandal related to the Summer Olympics in Tokyo held in 2021. Salt Lake City is the only other known bidder that might consider taking 2030, though officials have said they favor a bid for 2034.

If a Stockholm-centered bid does go ahead, it currently

seems sure to win without opposition and get the IOC out of a hole less than seven years before the Games open.

After last year's Beijing Games were held almost entirely on artificial snow, the Milan-Cortina Games in 2026 will be held across a wide swath of northern Italy.

For 2022, Beijing beat Almaty, Kazakhstan — the only other candidate — for hosting rights after several other bids were scrapped by public referendums.

"There's a lot of events that are really difficult to run," said Canadian skier James Crawford, who won the super-G last week at the world championships. "I think there's a lot of places that can host the Winter Olympics ... but it's definitely hard for us when there's so few that want to."

Alexis Pinturault, the French skier who won gold in combined and bronze in super-G at the worlds, grew up utilizing the facilities built for the 1992 Albert-

ville Games.

"I also (tried) ski jumping here," he said in his hometown of Courchevel, where the ski jump is adjacent to the downhill course. "I also did cross country skiing. That was the thing with the Courchevel ski club: when you are young you can try many different sports. Then you can choose afterward. I chose Alpine skiing because that's the discipline that gave me the most pleasure."

Pinturault was born a year before the Albertville Games.

"There is still some infrastructure. That's why the Olympics are good in some (ways)," he said. "It's a big part of our history."

Italian veteran Christof Innerhofer added: "For 2026, a lot of venues will be renovated and that's the first step for developing young athletes. For us, the Milan-Cortina Games will be the start of a new cycle. Ten years later, those young athletes will be competing at the Olympics."

Timberwolves survive Mavericks' late push

Associated Press

DALLAS — Kyrie Irving was trying to get Luka Dončić a shot. The All-Star guard for the Dallas Mavericks was trying to do the same for his new teammate making his home debut.

Neither one of them got a shot off in the closing seconds, and the Mavs' big comeback attempt came up short against the Minnesota Timberwolves.

"Man. I'm still trying to emotionally recover ... still so raw," Irving said. "Oh, man. I would have liked to at least get a shot up."

Irving had the highest-scoring fourth quarter of his career, scoring 26 of his 36 points in the final 12 minutes Monday night. But he made a bad pass after stepping inside the three-point line on the final possession after Minnesota had thrown off the timing between him and Dončić by knocking the inbound pass into the backcourt. The Timberwolves nearly blew a 26-point lead, but held on to win 124-121.

After Dončić tracked down the tipped inbound pass, he passed to Irving before crossing midcourt. Irving pump-faked a three and passed back to Don-

cic, who almost immediately gave it back to him on a bounce pass before the final turnover.

"Great stop. Guys wanted to play it out. Trust the defense in that moment," Timberwolves coach Chris Finch said. "Did a really good job of kind of disrupting their play, pressuring and denying the catch. Forced it out. It became a broken play."

First-time All-Star guard Anthony Edwards scored 32 points and Rudy Gobert had 21 points and 14 rebounds for the Timberwolves, who had their biggest lead at 89-63 on a long step-back jumper by Edwards midway through the third quarter.

Nuggets 112, Heat 108: Nikola Jokić finished with 27 points, 12 rebounds and eight assists, and Denver snapped Miami's eight-game home winning streak.

Jokić made 12 of 14 shots, and Denver shot 58%.

Michael Porter Jr. scored 17, Bruce Brown added 16, Jeff Green scored 12 and three Nuggets — Vlatko Cancar, Christian Braun and Thomas Bryant — each finished with 10 points.

Knicks 124, Nets 106: Jalen Brunson scored 40 points, Josh

Hart added a season-high 27 in his second game with his new team and host New York snapped a nine-game losing streak against Brooklyn.

Julius Randle had 18 points and 10 rebounds for the Knicks, who beat the Nets for the first time in three years. Brooklyn never lost to the Knicks when Kevin Durant or Kyrie Irving played.

Warriors 135, Wizards 126: Andrew Wiggins had 29 points and seven rebounds, Klay Thompson scored 27 points and host Golden State beat Washington.

JaMychal Green went 4-for-4 from deep and made all five of his field goals for 14 points to go with five assists. Donte DiVincenzo added 17 points off the bench, while Kevon Looney contributed 13 points and 13 rebounds as the Warriors snapped a two-game skid.

Trail Blazers 127, Lakers 115: Damian Lillard had 40 points, including eight three-pointers, to lead host Portland past Los Angeles.

The Blazers led by as many as 27 points and made a season-best 23 three-pointers, includ-

ing a franchise-record 17 threes in the first half.

Hornets 144, Hawks 138: LaMelo Ball had 30 points and 15 assists, Terry Rozier added 29 points and host Charlotte held off Atlanta to snap a seven-game skid.

Cavaliers 117, Spurs 109: Donovan Mitchell scored 41 points and led host Cleveland to its seventh straight win as nose-diving San Antonio matched a team record with its 13th consecutive loss.

76ers 123, Rockets 104: James Harden had 29 points and 10 assists against his former team while Tyrese Maxey scored 26 off the bench as host Philadelphia beat Houston.

Pelicans 103, Thunder 100: Brandon Ingram scored 34 points and visiting New Orleans outlasted Oklahoma City.

Jazz 123, Pacers 117: Jordan Clarkson and Lauri Markkanen each scored 29 points and visiting Utah beat Indiana.

Magic 100, Bulls 91: Paolo Banchero scored 22 points, Franz Wagner and Markelle Fultz added 18 points apiece and visiting Orlando beat cold-shooting Chicago.

Texas Tech beats No. 6 Texas, 2nd ranked team in 3 days

Associated Press

LUBBOCK, Texas — De'vion Harmon scored 25 points and Kevin Obanor added 19 as Texas Tech defeated its second ranked opponent in three days, upending No. 6 Texas 74-67 on Monday night.

Fardaws Aimaq had a season-high 12 points for the Red Raiders, who led by 13 in the second half before fending off the Longhorns down the stretch.

Texas Tech (14-12, 3-10 Big 12) also topped No. 12 Kansas State on Saturday.

"Obviously I'm extremely excited for these guys," Red Raiders coach Mark Adams said. "It was a great team effort. That is a good basketball team that we beat. Texas plays hard. We matched their intensity and played, I thought, 40 minutes of great basketball."

Texas (20-6, 9-4) tied the game at 64 on a

three-pointer by Dylan Disu, but Tech responded by scoring the next six points as Obanor had two dunks and Aimaq converted a tip-in. Harmon added a driving basket with 35.1 seconds remaining, and the Red Raiders held on.

"Give them credit," Texas interim coach Rodney Terry said. "They made shots. Our guys had great effort. We just didn't do enough to put ourselves in position to win. In our league, anybody can beat anybody."

No. 9 Baylor 79, West Virginia 65: LJ Cryer scored 26 points to lead four players in double figures, and the host Bears won their fourth straight game.

Cryer was 8-for-11 from three-point range to lead Baylor (20-6, 9-4 Big 12), which has won 10 of its last 11 after an 0-3 start in the conference.

Adam Flagler added 13 points and Jalen

Bridges had 12 for Baylor, which shot 51% from the floor and was 14-for-27 from three-point range. Keyonte George led the Bears with nine rebounds and seven assists.

No. 15 Miami 80, North Carolina 72: Jordan Miller had 24 points and 11 rebounds as the visiting Hurricanes took over after halftime then had to hold off a late rally by the Tar Heels.

Nijel Pack added 23 points for Miami (21-5, 12-4 Atlantic Coast Conference), which led by just one at halftime but shot 52% after the break. The Hurricanes also locked down UNC's drivers, who had been getting to the rim in the first 20 minutes. The combination helped Miami stretch the lead to as many as 14 points, with Miller and Pack leading the way from either behind the arc or with nifty moves inside.