

Zelenskyy pushes for speedy support

Associated Press

MUNICH — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged Western allies Friday to quicken their military support for Ukraine, warning at a major international security conference that delays would play into Russia's hand as the invasion approaches its first anniversary.

"There is no alternative to speed, because it's speed that life depends on," Zelenskyy told the Munich Security Conference in Germany.

Ukraine depends on Western weapons to thwart Russian President Vladimir Putin's ambition to seize control of large areas of the country. The military aid has become a test of foreign governments' resolve amid increasing financial costs.

About 40 heads of state and government, as well as politicians and security experts from almost 100 countries are due to attend the three-day gathering amid fears that the fighting in Ukraine could invite a new Cold War.

In his plea for more Western weapons, Zelenskyy compared Ukraine's struggle against the Russian invasion to the biblical fight between David and Goliath, saying his country had David's courage but needed help getting

the sling.

Zelenskyy vowed that his country would ultimately prevail over Moscow's aggression — and even predicted that victory would happen this year. But he warned that Russia "can still destroy many lives."

"That is why we need to hurry up," Zelenskyy said. "We need the speed."

Zelenskyy portrays Ukraine as defending Western values of freedom and democracy against tyranny and argues that his country needs to be properly equipped to fend off Russia's much bigger force. Western countries have sided with him, but at times they have been slow to meet his requests.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who has been one of Ukraine's main backers, renewed pledges to help but also insisted that Kyiv's allies must not be hasty.

"For all the pressure to act that there doubtless is, in this decisive question, care must come before rushing, cohesion before solo performances," said Scholz, who has hesitated before taking new steps to help Ukraine.

Berlin agreed last month to deliver German-made Leopard battle tanks to Ukraine and to grant other countries permission to do the same. German officials, who faced heavy

pressure to send the Leopards, have since indicated that they are disappointed other countries have not offered more armor.

Scholz urged "all who can deliver such battle tanks" to do so. He said Germany will do what it can "to make this decision easier for our partners," for instance by training Ukrainian soldiers or helping with logistics.

The need to supply Ukraine with billions of dollars' worth of military aid has sometimes strained allied countries. After receiving Western pledges of tanks and more ammunition, Kyiv is now hoping for fighter jets, but some countries have balked at sending them.

French President Emmanuel Macron endorsed Zelenskyy's appeal.

"We must collectively be credible," Macron told the gathering, "because it's the only way to make Russia come back to the negotiating table in an acceptable manner and build a sustainable peace. That is: at a time and under conditions to be chosen by Ukrainians."

For the first time in two decades, conference organizers did not invite Russian officials to Munich. It was the latest snub as Western countries seek to isolate Russia diplomatically over the invasion that began on Feb. 24, 2022.

Military finishes recovering Chinese balloon debris

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. has finished efforts to recover the remnants of the large balloon that was shot down off the coast of South Carolina, and analysis of the debris so far reinforces conclusions that it was a Chinese spy balloon, U.S. officials said Friday.

Officials said the U.S. believes that Navy, Coast Guard and FBI personnel collected all of the balloon debris off the ocean floor, which included key equipment from the payload that could reveal what information it was able to monitor and collect.

U.S. Northern Command said in a statement that the recovery operations ended Thursday and the final pieces are on their way to the FBI lab in Virginia for analysis. It said air and maritime restrictions off South Carolina have been lifted.

The announcement capped three dramatic weeks that saw U.S. fighter jets shoot down four airborne objects — the large Chinese balloon on Feb. 4 and three much smaller objects about a week later over Canada, Alaska and Lake Huron. They are the first known peacetime shootdowns of unauthorized objects in U.S. airspace.

The officials also said the search for the small airborne object that was shot down over Lake Huron has stopped, and nothing has been recovered. U.S. officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military operations. The U.S. and Canada have also failed to recover any debris so far from the other two objects which were shot down over the Yukon and northern Alaska.

While the military is confident the balloon shot down off South Carolina was a surveil-

lance airship operated by China, the Biden administration has admitted that the three smaller objects were likely civilian-owned balloons that were targeted during the heightened response, after U.S. homeland defense radars were recalibrated to detect slower moving airborne items.

Due to their small size and the remote areas where they were shot down, officials acknowledge that recovering any debris is difficult and probably unlikely. Those last two searches, however, have not been formally called off.

Much of the Chinese balloon fell into about 50 feet of water, and the Navy was able to collect remnants floating on the surface, and divers and unmanned naval vessels pulled up the rest from the bottom of the ocean. Northern Command said Friday that all of the Navy and Coast Guard ships have left the area.

Planned drills prompt N. Korea threat

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea threatened Friday to take “unprecedentedly” strong action against its rivals, soon after South Korea announced a series of planned military drills with the United States to hone their joint response to the North’s increasing nuclear threats.

North Korea has halted weapons testing activities since its short-range missile firing on Jan. 1, though it launched more than 70 missiles in 2022 — a record number for a single year. Friday’s warning suggests the North’s testing could resume soon over its rivals’ military training, which it views as an invasion rehearsal.

“In case the U.S. and South Korea car-

ry into practice their already announced plan for military drills that (North Korea), with just apprehension and reason, regards as preparations for an aggression war, they will face unprecedentedly persistent and strong counteractions,” the North Korean Foreign Ministry said in a statement carried by state media.

The statement accused South Korea and the United States of planning more than 20 rounds of military drills, including their largest-ever field exercises. It called South Korea and the United States “the arch-criminals deliberately disrupting” regional peace and stability.

“This predicts that the situation in the Korean Peninsula and the region will be again plunged into the grave vortex of

escalating tension,” the statement said.

It didn’t specify which U.S.-South Korean military trainings it was referring to. But North Korea has typically slammed all major regular military drills between Washington and Seoul as a practice to launch an invasion and responded with its own weapons tests.

Some experts say North Korea has used various South Korea-U.S. drills as a chance to test and perfect its weapons systems. They say North Korea would eventually aim to use its enlarged nuclear arsenal to win international recognition as a legitimate nuclear state and win sanctions relief and other concessions.

Seoul and Washington have said their training is defensive in nature.

Hobby group wonders if F-22 shot down its balloon

New York Daily News

An Illinois hobby group is wondering if one of the unidentified flying objects shot out of the sky by a jet fighter’s sidewinder missile might have been their humble radio-equipped balloon.

The Northern Illinois Bottlecap Balloon Brigade declared one of its exploratory “pico balloons” missing Wednesday, according to Aviation Week.

The balloon’s last transmission reportedly came from 38,910 feet above the Alaskan coast on Feb. 10, headed toward the Yukon Territory. The next day, U.S. officials said an F-22 downed an object floating over that area at 40,000 feet.

Pico balloons seemingly bear a resemblance to the objects shot down over Alaska, Canada and the South Carolina coast in recent days. They can be as cheap as \$12, Aviation Week said.

The AIM-9x missiles being used to shoot down unmanned balloons in recent days are 10 feet long and cost upward of \$450,000.

Pico balloons are reportedly exempt from most Federal Aviation Administration airspace restrictions because they weigh fewer than six pounds.

“I’m guessing probably they were pico balloons,” hobbyist and Amateur Radio Roundtable host Tom Medlin told Aviation

Week when discussing the fighter jets’ targets.

He claims to have three balloons currently floating over two hemispheres.

Aviation Week unsuccessfully reached out to government agencies including North American Aerospace Defense Command to see if the objects shot down over the weekend may have been pico balloons and got no answers.

Concern about objects floating over U.S. airspace began earlier in the month when a 200-foot Chinese balloon U.S. officials said had surveillance capabilities was spotted near Montana military facilities. It was shot down over the Atlantic Ocean Feb. 4.

Taiwan reports Chinese balloon was found on island

Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan — Taiwan’s Defense Ministry says a Chinese weather balloon landed on one of its outlying islands, amid U.S. accusations that such craft have been dispatched worldwide to spy on Washington and its allies.

The ministry’s statement on Thursday said the balloon carried equipment registered to a state-owned electronics company in the northern city of Taiyuan.

The islet where it was found, Tungyin, is part of the Matsu island ground lying just off

the coast of China’s Fujian province.

Taiwan maintained control of the islands after the sides split in 1949 amid civil war and they are considered a first line of defense should China make good on its threats to bring Taiwan under its control by force if necessary.

Reached by phone, a publicity officer at the company, identified in the report as Taiyuan Wireless (Radio) First Factory Ltd., said it had provided electronics but had not built the balloon.

The spokesperson, who gave only his sur-

name, Liu, said Taiyuan was among a number of companies that provided equipment to the China Meteorological Administration.

The balloon was likely among those launched daily to monitor weather and was probably set off from the coastal city of Xiamen with no fixed course, he said.

Its deflation was likely a natural outcome of it having reached maximum altitude of around almost 100,000 feet, Liu said. Such balloons regularly fly over the Taiwan Strait but have only recently begun to draw attention, he said.

Senator enters hospital for depression

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Pennsylvania Democratic Sen. John Fetterman, still recovering from a stroke, has checked himself into Walter Reed National Military Medical Center to seek treatment for clinical depression, his office said Thursday.

Fetterman, who has struggled with the aftereffects of a stroke he suffered last May, checked himself in Wednesday night, it said.

“While John has experienced depression off and on throughout his life, it only became severe in recent weeks,” his chief of staff, Adam Jentleson, said in a statement.

Fetterman was evaluated Monday by the attending physician of Congress, Dr. Brian P. Monahan, who recommended inpatient care at Walter Reed, Jentleson said.

“John agreed, and he is receiving treatment on a voluntary basis,” Jentleson said. “Af-

ter examining John, the doctors at Walter Reed told us that John is getting the care he needs, and will soon be back to himself.”

Post-stroke depression is common, with one in three stroke patients suffering from it, and is treatable through antidepressant medication and counseling, doctors say.

Fetterman, 53, is in his first weeks as a U.S. senator after winning the seat held by now-retired Republican Pat Toomey in a hard-fought contest against GOP nominee Dr. Mehmet Oz. Fetterman, who was Pennsylvania’s lieutenant governor, defeated the celebrity heart surgeon by 5 percentage points, flipping a seat that was key to Democrats holding the Senate majority.

Fetterman’s wife, Gisele, said she was proud of Fetterman “for asking for help and getting the care he needs.”

“After what he’s been through in the past year, there’s

probably no one who wanted to talk about his own health less than John,” she wrote on Twitter.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said Fetterman “is getting the help he needs” and is expected to return soon, but declined to answer questions about Fetterman’s condition.

The Democratic caucus is “totally behind him,” Schumer said.

Fetterman suffered the stroke days before last May’s primary election and spent much of the summer recovering and off the campaign trail.

The stroke nearly killed him, he has said.

As a result of the stroke, Fetterman underwent surgery to implant a pacemaker with a defibrillator to manage two heart conditions, atrial fibrillation and cardiomyopathy.

He returned to campaigning in public in August, but refused

to release his medical records or allow his doctors to answer reporters’ questions. His health became a central issue in the campaign, as Oz questioned whether his opponent was honest about the effects of the stroke and whether Fetterman was fit to serve.

Fetterman’s campaign in October released a letter from a Pittsburgh-area physician who said he exhibited no effects on his “cognitive ability” or his ability to think and reason after the stroke, was recovering well and “can work full duty in public office.”

He continues to suffer aftereffects of the stroke, in particular auditory processing disorder, which can render someone unable to speak fluidly and quickly process spoken conversation into meaning. To manage it, Fetterman uses devices in conversations, meetings and hearings that transcribe spoken words in real time.

Tesla recalls cars to fix unsafe actions in ‘Full Self-Driving’

Associated Press

DETROIT — U.S. safety regulators have pressured Tesla into recalling nearly 363,000 vehicles with its “Full Self-Driving” system because it can misbehave around intersections and doesn’t always follow speed limits.

The recall, part of a larger investigation by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration into Tesla’s automated driving systems, is the most serious action taken yet against the electric vehicle maker.

It raises questions about CEO Elon Musk’s claims that he can prove to regulators that cars equipped with “Full Self-Driving” are safer than humans, and that humans almost never have to touch the controls.

Musk at one point had promised that a fleet of autonomous robotaxis would be in use in 2020. The latest action appears to push that development further into the fu-

ture.

The safety agency says in documents posted on its website Thursday that Tesla will fix the concerns with an online software update in the coming weeks. The documents say Tesla is doing the recall but does not agree with an agency analysis of the problem.

The system, which is being tested on public roads by as many as 400,000 Tesla owners, can make unsafe actions such as traveling straight through an intersection while in a turn-only lane, failing to come to a complete stop at stop signs, or going through an intersection during a yellow traffic light without proper caution, NHTSA said.

The problems happen in “certain rare circumstances,” the agency wrote.

In addition, the system may not adequately respond to changes in posted speed limits, or it may not account for the driver’s adjustments in speed, the documents said.

Power outage hits NYC airport

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A power outage in a terminal of New York’s John F. Kennedy International Airport stretched into a second day Friday after forcing some flights to be canceled or diverted, including one that was turned around and sent back to New Zealand after nearly making it to the U.S.

The airport operators said in a tweet late Thursday that Terminal 1, which handles some of the airport’s international flights, would remain closed Friday “due to electrical issues.”

The outage was caused by an electrical panel failure that led to a small fire, which was quickly extinguished, authorities said.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which runs New York’s major airports, said it was working to accommodate affected flights at JFK’s four other active terminals.

Some planes were forced to return to their points of origin.

5 Memphis officers plead not guilty in Nichols' death

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Five former Memphis police officers pleaded not guilty Friday to second-degree murder and other charges in the violent arrest and death of Tyre Nichols, with the judge urging patience in a case that could “take some time.”

Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Desmond Mills Jr., Emmitt Martin III and Justin Smith made their first court appearances with their lawyers before a judge in Shelby County Criminal Court. The officers were fired after an internal police investigation into the Jan. 7 arrest of Nichols, who died in a hospital three days later.

The officers pleaded not guilty to charges of second-de-

gree murder, aggravated assault, aggravated kidnapping, official misconduct and official oppression. They are all out on bond.

Their next hearing has been scheduled for May 1.

The police killing of Nichols is the latest to prompt nationwide protests and renew an intense public discussion about police brutality. Nichols, 29, was Black. All five officers charged in his death also are Black.

Addressing the courtroom, Judge James Jones Jr. asked for everyone’s “continued patience” and “continued civility,” stressing that “this case can take some time.”

“We understand that there

may be some high emotions in this case, but we ask that you continue to be patient with us,” Jones said. “Everyone involved wants this case to be concluded as quickly as possible. But it’s important for you all to understand that the state of Tennessee, as well as each one of these defendants, have an absolute right to a fair trial.”

Bean’s attorney, John Keith Perry, spoke with reporters afterward, saying Bean was doing his job at that time and “never touched” Nichols. That assertion is contradicted by video footage.

Protester Casio Montez talked over Perry, saying Nichols’ death was murder: “You represent a murderer, bro.”

Man pleads not guilty to killing 7 at Calif. farms

Associated Press

REDWOOD CITY, Calif. — A farmworker charged with killing seven people last month in back-to-back shootings at two Northern California mushroom farms pleaded not guilty Thursday.

Chunli Zhao, 66, is charged with seven counts of murder and one count of attempted murder.

Prosecutors said that on Jan. 23 he opened fire at the Half Moon Bay mushroom farm where he worked, killing four co-workers and wounding another one. They said he then drove to a mushroom farm he was fired from in 2015 and killed three former co-workers.

Zhao admitted to the shootings during a jailhouse media interview days after the shooting. Zhao told KNTV-TV he was bullied and worked long hours on the farms and that his complaints were ignored.

Dressed in a red jail uniform on Thursday, Zhao appeared behind a glass partition in the courtroom with his head bowed and spoke only when a Mandarin translator relayed questions from the judge, the Mercury News reported. At a hearing last week, Zhao sobbed so loudly that the judge called for a brief recess.

The judge last week issued a gag order prohibiting prosecuting and defense attorneys, as well as Zhao and the county sheriff’s office, from talking to reporters about the facts of the case or sharing opinions about what happened. They can still discuss rulings that were made in open court and the procedural status of upcoming hearings.

Earlier, the judge granted a request from defense attorneys to restrict remote access to court records.

EPA chief at train derailment site: ‘Trust the government’

Associated Press

EAST PALESTINE, Ohio — The head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency got a first-hand look Thursday at the toll left by a freight train derailment in Ohio, where toxic chemicals spilled or were burned off, leaving the stench of fresh paint nearly two weeks later.

EPA Administrator Michael Regan, who walked along a creek that still reeks of chemicals, sought to reassure skeptical residents that the water is fit to drink and the air safe to breathe around East Palestine, where just under 5,000 people live.

“I’m asking they trust the government. I know that’s hard. We know there’s a lack of trust,” Regan said. “We’re testing for everything that was on that

train.”

Since the derailment, residents have complained about headaches and irritated eyes and finding their cars and lawns covered in soot. The hazardous chemicals that spilled from the train killed thousands of fish, and residents have talked about finding dying or sick pets and wildlife.

Residents are frustrated by what they say is incomplete and vague information about the lasting effects from the disaster, which prompted evacuations.

“I have three grandbabies,” said Kathy Dyke, who came with hundreds of her neighbors to a public meeting Wednesday where representatives of railroad operator Norfolk Southern were conspicuously absent. “Are they going to grow up here in five years and have cancer?”

Regan said Thursday that anyone who is fearful of being in their home should seek testing from the government.

Those attending the previous night’s informational session had questions about health hazards and demanded more transparency from Norfolk Southern, which did not attend, citing concerns about its staff safety. Many who had waited in a long line snaking outside the high school gymnasium came away upset that they didn’t hear anything new. Some booed or laughed each time they heard the village mayor or state health director assure them that lingering odors aren’t dangerous.

“They just danced around the questions a lot,” said Danielle Deal, who lives a few miles from the derailment site. “Norfolk needed to be here.”

Quake victims sleep in trains, tents

Associated Press

SAMANDAG, Turkey — Nearly two weeks after a massive earthquake leveled tens of thousands of buildings and displaced millions of people in Turkey and Syria, many are still struggling to fulfill their basic needs and some are bedding down in tents, factories, train cars and greenhouses.

People pushed from their homes in the disaster zone described a wide range of conditions: Some were able to find regular hot showers, while others feared freezing to death.

The Turkish government and dozens of aid groups have launched a massive relief effort. The government said Wednesday that more than 5,400 shipping containers have been de-

ployed as shelters and over 200,000 tents dispatched.

But it's facing a massive disaster. The government says at least 84,000 buildings, containing more than 332,000 dwellings, were either destroyed by the Feb. 6 quake or too damaged to be used. There is no official figure for the number of people displaced in Turkey's side of the disaster region, which is home to some 14 million, or 16% of the country's population.

In the mountain villages of Kahramanmaraş province, locals battle to keep warm during the bitterly cold nights.

Buyuknacar, a village just a few miles from the epicenter of the 7.8 magnitude quake, was severely damaged and 158 were killed. Two days after the initial

tremor, a military helicopter brought supplies and on the fifth day the road was cleared.

Although the villagers have tents, they are too flimsy to keep out the cold. Villagers said they feared icy conditions in the mountains would lead to further deaths.

Umut Sital, 45, said: "Our basic need is, first, containers. Tents won't work here. ... People in tents will freeze to death."

On Tuesday, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said 2.2 million people had left the disaster zone. Of those, he said, the housing needs of 1.6 million had been fulfilled, including some 890,000 people placed in public facilities, such as student dormitories, and 50,000 in hotels.

The Transport Ministry said

Wednesday that the government had helped more than 272,000 to evacuate by air, sea and rail. However, many people prefer to remain close to their homes, either to protect their possessions, wait for relatives' bodies to be recovered or, in rural areas, care for their livestock.

Others seeking protection from winter temperatures have resorted to any structure that will keep out the elements.

Near the Mediterranean coast in Hatay, one of the hardest-hit provinces, farmers in Samandag district fled their homes to large greenhouses normally used for growing tomatoes, bringing with them whatever bedding and cooking utensils they could salvage.

Facebook ran ads in Moldova for oligarch

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Facebook allowed an exiled Moldovan oligarch with ties to the Kremlin to run ads calling for protests and uprisings against the pro-Western government, even though he and his political party were on U.S. sanctions lists.

The ads featuring politician and convicted fraudster Ilan Shor were ultimately removed by Facebook but not before they were seen millions of times in Moldova, a small nation of about 2.6 million sandwiched between Romania and war-torn Ukraine.

Seeking to exploit anger over inflation and rising fuel prices,

the paid posts from Shor's political party targeted the government of pro-Western President Maia Sandu, who earlier this week detailed what she said was a Russian plot to topple her government using external saboteurs.

The ads reveal how Russia and its allies have exploited lapses by social media platforms — like Facebook, many of them operated by U.S. companies — to spread propaganda and disinformation that weaponizes economic and social insecurity in an attempt to undermine governments in Eastern Europe.

Canada to deploy vessels to Haiti as violence grows

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Canada will send navy vessels to Haiti for intelligence-gathering as part of efforts to quell worsening gang violence in the Caribbean nation, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Thursday.

Trudeau made the announcement in the Bahamas at an annual meeting of Caribbean leaders where a key topic has been Haiti's surge in killings, rapes and kidnappings blamed on gangs emboldened since the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse.

Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry, also at the meet-

ing, has pleaded for a full-fledged international military intervention to stem the mayhem.

His country requested help from the U.N. Security Council in October, and has suggested the U.S. and Canada lead a force. No such intervention has come together, and neither country has offered to take the lead.

Canada's move to send ships, announced at the meeting of leaders of the 15-member Caricom trade bloc, comes shortly after the return of one of its surveillance planes on a similar mission to collect intelligence for Haitian police.

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MLB: Bally network troubles could mean end of blackouts

Associated Press

DUNEDIN, Fla. — As baseball prepares for a possible local broadcasting crisis, Commissioner Rob Manfred sees an opportunity.

Manfred said Thursday that Major League Baseball can produce games digitally in conjunction with MLB.TV if Bally Sports regional networks are no longer broadcasting them. In fact, he said this is a chance to address the game blackouts that inspire so much anger among fans.

Diamond Sports Group, the parent company of 19 Bally Sports networks, skipped about \$140 million in interest payments due Wednesday, starting a 30-day grace period that could be the prelude to a bankruptcy filing.

“I don’t relish any of this,” Manfred said at a spring training media day. “I think it’s necessary to have a centrally based solution to what’s a really seri-

ous problem and move us forward to our next stage of delivering games to fans, delivering them where they want to watch them, and without the kind of blackouts that we’ve had in the old model.”

Manfred acknowledged some teams could be at risk of losing revenue, depending on the status of their regional sports networks, and that MLB is prepared to help.

“You know, we have a pretty good balance sheet in central baseball,” he said. “I think it’s safe to assume that we will provide every support that we possibly can to those clubs that are at risk.”

Manfred said MLB’s willingness to step in aggressively if the Bally networks can no longer broadcast is driven partly by the fact that it would give baseball a chance to fix blackout issues. Currently, a game might be unavailable digitally in the market of the competing teams

if a RSN has exclusive rights in that area.

If a regional network like Bally is no longer broadcasting, Manfred said the games can be offered digitally or perhaps within a cable bundle.

“From a fan’s perspective, while it may not be whatever channel is your traditional RSN, if you think about it from a reach perspective, the games being available digitally, in-market is something fans have been screaming for for years,” he said.

“I hope we get to the point where on the digital side, when you go to MLB.TV, you can buy whatever the heck you want, right?” Manfred added. “I think what has happened among ownership is they have realized that as we go more digital, there is an opportunity for us to become a more national product. So that people aren’t so wedded to their individual local markets.”

Fans cheer as Durant joins Suns

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Kevin Durant watched the Phoenix Suns from afar over the past few years, admiring the budding nucleus of Devin Booker, Chris Paul and Deandre Ayton. Now he’s thrilled to be a part of it.

“We’ve got all the pieces to be successful,” Durant said.

The 13-time All-Star was introduced Thursday at Footprint Arena in front of about 3,000 fans, who showed up in the middle of the afternoon just to hear the veteran forward answer a few questions.

Many were already wearing his No. 35 jersey, which has been a hot seller since GM James Jones pulled the blockbuster trade with the Brooklyn Nets just before last week’s trade deadline.

Nearly every time Durant tried to speak on Thursday, he was interrupted by cheers from fans overjoyed by the biggest superstar arrival in Phoenix since the Suns traded for Charles Barkley in 1992.

The two-time Finals MVP soaked in the applause, but said he didn’t deserve it.

“I appreciate your warm welcome, but we’ve got work to do,” Durant said.

He later added: “I feel like I’ve still got to prove myself. I want to put good stuff on film every day. That’s the only thing I’m concerned with at this point in my life, is putting good stuff on film every night. I’m looking forward to doing that for Suns fans and hopefully they accept me after that.”

The 34-year-old Durant is still playing at an elite level, averaging nearly 30 points per game this season. He initially asked for a trade last summer and the Suns were interested before Durant patched things up with Brooklyn. They finally got him, just before the deadline.

Celtics name Joe Mazzulla head coach

Associated Press

BOSTON — Joe Mazzulla has been so steady guiding the Celtics through a franchise-shaking crisis that their turbulent offseason has taken a back seat to their championship aspirations.

The team rewarded him by turning a temporary opportunity of a lifetime into a permanent one.

Boston named Mazzulla its full-time head coach on Thursday, removing the interim tag he had held since stepping in for Ime Udoka in the preseason.

Udoka initially was given a yearlong suspension before training camp for having an inappropriate relationship with

a woman in the organization. The 34-year-old Mazzulla, previously an assistant under Udoka, will now replace his former boss, who is no longer with the team. Mazzulla is the NBA’s youngest head coach.

“Since I’ve been here I always knew where I stood,” Mazzulla said Thursday. “And even though it was an interim position ... I knew I was going to get a fair shake and get an opportunity. I knew I was going to be able to do it the way that I thought to give us the best chance to be successful without any pressure because of that.”

Terms of his new deal were not released, but the team said his promotion includes a con-

tract extension.

“I’ve always been surrounded by great people and great coaches,” Mazzulla said. “I just think I’m a byproduct of all the different environments I’ve been in.”

Mazzulla’s Celtics have the best record in the NBA (42-17) and led Milwaukee by one game in the Eastern Conference ahead of the Bucks’ game at Chicago on Thursday night. Boston won’t play again until after the All-Star break.

Mazzulla said he found out the process of making him the permanent coach was underway two days ago and that the deal was finalized after the Celtics’ 127-109 win over Detroit on Wednesday.

Giannis breaks Bucks' assists record

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Giannis Antetokounmpo broke Milwaukee's career assists record before leaving the game because of a sprained right wrist, and the Bucks won their 12th straight, beating the Chicago Bulls 112-100 on Thursday night.

Brook Lopez scored a season-high 33 points. Jevon Carter had 22, and Jrue Holiday added 15 points and nine assists.

The Bucks were never seriously threatened. But Antetokounmpo's injury early in the second quarter cast a cloud over a team that appeared to have so much going for it heading into the All-Star break.

The two-time MVP was hurt trying to block a finger roll attempt by Chicago's Coby White after the guard drove past him. He jammed his wrist against the stanchion and stayed down grimacing in pain.

Antetokounmpo finished with a season-low two points and three assists, giving him 3,274 over 10 seasons to break Paul Pressey's record of 3,272 from 1982 to 1990. He also had seven rebounds.

Antetokounmpo matched the assists mark when he fed Lopez for a 3-pointer two minutes into the game and broke it when he passed to Carter for another 3 that bumped Milwaukee's lead to 19-10 in the first quarter. He also is the Bucks' career leader in blocks, triple-doubles, free throws made, free throws attempted and minutes.

The Bulls lost their sixth in a row, their worst skid since dropping six straight in the 2020-21 season. Nikola Vucevic had 22 points and 16 rebounds.

Clippers 116, Suns 107: Paul George and Terance Mann each scored 26 points and Los Angeles beat Phoenix in the fi-

nal NBA game before the All-Star break.

Kawhi Leonard added 16 points, all in the second half, and nine rebounds. Ivica Zubac and Eric Gordon each scored 13 points and Zubac had 12 rebounds.

The Suns missed nine of their first 10 3-point attempts, with only Josh Okogie warming up later in the game. Okogie led Phoenix with 24 points. He was 6 of 12 from behind the arc, but the rest of the Suns made five combined.

Devin Booker had 19 points and nine assists for Phoenix. Deandre Ayton scored 18 points and newcomer Terrance Ross had 16 points. Booker was 1 of 6 from 3-point range, but tied Steve Nash's franchise record with 1,051 3s.

Wizards 114, Timberwolves 106: Bradley Beal had 13 of his 35 points over the final 4½ min-

utes and Washington overcame a 20-point deficit to beat Minnesota.

Kyle Kuzma — who had 16 points on just 6-for-21 shooting — swished a top-of-the-key fadeaway for a 107-106 lead that was Washington's first of the game with 1:14 to go.

Beal, who topped the 30-point mark for the third time in four games, followed with a 3-pointer with 37 seconds left — after a miss by Minnesota's Anthony Edwards — to make it 110-106.

Edwards had 18 of his 34 points in the first quarter to help the Timberwolves surge to a 30-10 lead. They were still ahead 99-92 with 4:38 left after three free throws by Kyle Anderson, before Beal hit a wide-open 3-pointer to spark his late surge.

Rudy Gobert had 17 points and 19 rebounds for the Timberwolves.

No. 2 Houston handles SMU, sets eyes on No. 1 rank

Associated Press

DALLAS — Marcus Sasser scored 20 points, freshman Jarace Walker added 14 and No. 2 Houston cruised to an 80-65 victory over SMU on Thursday night.

With a win at home Sunday over Memphis, the Cougars could be in line for their third stay atop The Associated Press Top 25 poll this season after losses by No. 1 Alabama and third-ranked Purdue.

Jamal Shead had 13 points and eight assists for the Cougars (24-2, 12-1 American Athletic Conference) in their sixth consecutive win.

Zhuric Phelps had 22 points, six rebounds and five assists to lead the Mustangs (9-18, 4-10), who lost by 34 at Houston last month and never gave the often-raucous Moody Coliseum crowd much chance to get loud a year after a two-point upset of

the Cougars at home.

Maryland 68, No. 3 Purdue 54: Jahmir Young scored 20 points and Maryland used a dominant stretch in the middle of the second half to rally past Purdue and deal the Boilermakers their second consecutive defeat.

The Terrapins (18-8, 9-6 Big Ten) trailed 37-29 before going on a 29-4 burst to take control.

Zach Edey and Braden Smith both scored 18 points for Purdue (23-4, 12-4), which has lost three of four — all on the road.

No. 4 UCLA 73, Stanford 64: Jaime Jaquez Jr. scored 26 points and UCLA rallied in the second half to beat Stanford and improve to 14-0 at home this season.

Jaylen Clark added 16 points for the first-place Bruins (22-4, 13-2 Pac-12), who have won five in a row overall. They have won 22 consecutive home games

dating to last season.

Michael Jones scored 15 points to lead Stanford (11-15, 5-10), and Harrison Ingram added 13.

No. 8 Arizona 88, Utah 62: Kerr Kriisa had 17 points and six assists, Courtney Ramey scored 13 and Arizona routed Utah.

Arizona (23-4, 12-4 Pac-12) bounced back from a defeat at Stanford last weekend and avenged a loss to the Utes in Salt Lake City on Dec. 1.

The Utes (17-10, 10-6) fell into a 20-point hole early in the second half and remained winless at McKale Center since 1986. Branden Carlson had 19 points to lead Utah, which shot 32% from the floor.

No. 13 Gonzaga 108, Loyola Marymount 65: Julian Strawther scored 28 points and Gonzaga avenged an earlier loss to Loyola Marymount this sea-

son.

Anton Watson had 16 points and Drew Timme scored 13 for Gonzaga (22-5, 11-2 WCC), which remained one game behind first-place Saint Mary's in the West Coast Conference.

Cam Shelton led Loyola Marymount (17-11, 7-7) with 15 points.

No. 17 Saint Mary's 62, San Diego 59: Mitchell Saxen had 17 points and 10 rebounds, and Aidan Mahaney added 13 points as Saint Mary's (23-5, 12-1 West Coast Conference) held off hobbled but determined San Diego (11-17, 4-10) for its 14th win in 15 games.

Middle Tennessee 74, No. 25 Florida Atlantic 70: Camryn Weston scored 16 points, Elias King added 15 and Middle Tennessee (16-11, 9-7 Conference USA) beat Florida Atlantic (24-3, 14-2) for its first win over a ranked opponent since 2016.

Staal, Panthers defeat Capitals 6-3

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Veteran defenseman Marc Staal ended a 75-game goal drought, captain Aleksander Barkov also scored and the Florida Panthers held on to beat the Washington Capitals 6-3 Thursday night in a big game in the Eastern Conference wild-card race.

Florida pulled even with Washington at 62 points. The Capitals are ahead in the standings because they've played one fewer game.

Along with Staal scoring for the first time since March 15, 2022, when he was with Detroit, fellow defenseman Gustav Forsling and Colin White beat Darcy Kuemper, who stopped 34 shots. Anton Lundell and Sam Reinhart each added an empty-netter to seal it. Sergei Bobrovsky had 29 saves.

Dylan Strome scored in the second period to get Washington on the board, and Nicklas Backstrom got one on the power play in the third. Evgeny Kuznetsov scored with 2:32 remaining in regulation with Kuemper pulled for an extra attacker.

Washington played without captain and leading goal-scorer Alex Ovechkin, who is away after the death of his father, Mikhail.

Bruins 5, Predators 0: Jeremy Swayman made 29 saves for his second shutout of the season and seventh of his career, Patrice Bergeron had a goal and an assist and Boston defeated

Nashville.

Brad Marchand, Craig Smith, Derek Forbort and Trent Frederic also scored for the Bruins, winners of three of four. Nick Foligno and Hampus Lindholm each had two assists.

Juuse Saros made 25 saves for Nashville. The Predators have dropped three of four coming out of the All-Star break. Nashville's hopes of getting back into contention for a playoff spot in the tough Western Conference are fading.

Red Wings 5, Flames 2: Dominik Kubalik scored twice, Tyler Bertuzzi had a goal and two assists and Detroit extended its winning streak to a season-best five games.

Robby Fabbri and Pius Suter also scored for Detroit (26-20-8). Dylan Larkin had three assists, extending his point streak to six games (six goals, six assists). Magnus Hellberg made 33 saves.

Elias Lindholm and Dillon Dube scored for Calgary (25-19-11). Dan Vladar stopped 19 of 24 shots.

Blues 4, Devils 2: Jordan Kyrou and Brayden Schenn each had a goal and an assist and St. Louis extended its winning streak to three games with a win over New Jersey.

Pavel Buchnevich and Alexey Toropchenko also scored for the Blues, who swept the two-game season series and won for the ninth time in 10 home games against the Devils. Robert Tho-

mas had a pair of assists. Jordan Binnington made 33 saves.

Dawson Mercer and Erik Haula scored for the Devils, who had their five-game point streak snapped (4-0-1). Mackenzie Blackwood made 32 saves.

Blue Jackets 3, Jets 1: Kent Johnson's third-period goal was the tiebreaker, Joonas Korpi-salo had 36 saves and Columbus rallied to beat Winnipeg.

The Blue Jackets overcame a terrible first period, tying a season low with just two shots on goal in the frame. They tied the game in the second period and moved ahead at 9:40 of the third with Johnson's shot through a screen seconds after a power play had ended.

Patrik Laine also scored for Columbus, and Boone Jenner scored into an empty net with 3 seconds left in the game.

Kyle Connor scored for the Jets, and David Rittich had 21 saves.

Hurricanes 6, Canadiens 2: Seth Jarvis had his first career hat trick and Carolina scored three times in the first five minutes of the third period in a win over Montreal.

Jarvis scored in the first and third periods for his first multi-goal game of the season and capped his night with a short-handed goal with 19.8 seconds left.

Jesperi Kotkaniemi, Sebastian Aho and Jordan Staal also scored for the Hurricanes, win-

ner of nine of their last 10 games. Antti Raanta made 20 saves.

Michael Pezzetta and Rafael Harvey-Pinard scored for the Canadiens, whose three-game winning streak ended in the opener of a four-game trip. Sam Montembeault stopped 20 shots.

Golden Knights 2, Sharks 1: William Carrier scored with 17.7 seconds left and Vegas extended its winning streak to four games by beating San Jose.

Paul Cotter also scored for Vegas, and Adin Hill made 26 saves.

San Jose's Kaapo Kahkonen stopped 36 shots. Alexander Barabanov scored off a rebound with 2:56 left in the period to give the Sharks an early lead.

Kraken 6, Flyers 2: Yanni Gourde had two goals and an assist and Seattle dealt Philadelphia its third straight loss.

Five Seattle players scored for the Kraken, who outshot Philadelphia 30-19, including 12-1 in the first period.

Jared McCann, Justin Schultz, Oliver Bjorkstrand and Matty Beniers also scored for Seattle. Philipp Grubauer had 17 saves.

Travis Konecny scored twice and Noah Cates had two assists for Philadelphia. Ivan Provorov also had an assist. Carter Hart (15 saves) allowed four goals on 19 shots before giving way to Samuel Ersson (nine saves) in the second period.

Tiger opens with 69 at Riviera, trails 2 leaders by 5

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The scene was similar to the last time Tiger Woods played against the world's best. Fans packed onto every balcony on every level of the Riviera clubhouse Thursday, all of them straining for a rare sight of golf's biggest star.

Woods had them cheering

even louder at the end.

He put on a show in his first competition in seven months, closing with three straight birdies and one big smile for a 2-under 69 in the Genesis Invitational, leaving him five shots behind Max Homa and Keith Mitchell.

Woods went bunker-to-fair-

way-to-bunker on the 10th hole and had to make an 8-footer to save bogey. He was wild off the tee for another bogey on the 12th, leaving him over par on a mild, breezy afternoon.

And then he looked like the Woods of old at the end — a tee shot to 5 feet on the par-3 16th, another birdie from 25 feet on

the par-5 17th and then a big drive — a few yards longer than Rory McIlroy — on the 18th that set up 9-iron to 7 feet.

Homa played in the morning and also finished with three straight birdies for a 64. Mitchell played in the afternoon and birdied the last two holes to join him.