

Biden calls nuke treaty halt ‘big mistake’

Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland — President Joe Biden said Wednesday that Russian President Vladimir Putin made a “big mistake” by suspending his country’s participation in the last remaining U.S.-Russia nuclear arms control treaty. The U.S. president was in Poland to reassure eastern flank NATO allies that the U.S. will remain by their sides amid the grinding Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In his first comments since Putin’s announcement Tuesday, Biden condemned the Russian decision to pull back from the treaty, known as New START. The move is expected to have an immediate impact on U.S. visibility into Russian nuclear activities, but the pact was already on life support following Moscow’s cancellation late last year of talks that had been intended to salvage an agreement that both sides have accused the other of violating.

“It’s a big mistake,” Biden said.

The president’s comments came as he wrapped up a whirlwind, four-day visit to Poland and Ukraine with talks with leaders from the Bucharest Nine, a collection of nations in the most eastern parts of the NATO alliance that came together in response to Putin’s 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. He departed Poland on Wednesday

evening to return to Washington ahead of Friday’s anniversary of the war’s breakout.

The Bucharest Nine countries’ anxieties have remained heightened as the Ukraine war drags on, with many worrying that Putin could move to take military action against them next if he’s successful in Ukraine. The alliance includes Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

“You’re the frontlines of our collective defense,” Biden said Wednesday of the group. “And you know, better than anyone, what’s at stake in this conflict? Not just for Ukraine, but for the freedom of democracies throughout Europe and around the world.”

He pledged that NATO’s mutual-defense pact is “sacred” and that “we will defend literally every inch of NATO.”

A day earlier at the foot of Warsaw’s Royal Castle to mark the somber milestone of the year-old Russian invasion, Biden warned that Russian aggression, if unchecked, wouldn’t stop at Ukraine’s borders.

“Appetites of the autocrat cannot be appeased,” he said. “They must be opposed.”

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, the right-wing populist leader who argued last week that the European Union is partly to blame for prolonging Russia’s war in Uk-

raine, has balked at sanctions on Moscow and arming Kyiv. Orban was skipping the meeting with Biden, and President Katalin Novák was attending in his stead.

Still, Klaus Iohannis, the president of Romania, insisted that “The B9 is stronger than ever.”

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, who was attending the meeting, said, “We don’t know when the war will end, but when it does, we need to ensure that history does not repeat itself.”

Pointing to past Russian actions in Georgia and Ukraine, he added, “We cannot allow Russia to continue to chip away at European security. We must break the cycle of Russian aggression.”

Biden met Tuesday in Warsaw with Moldovan President Maia Sandu, who last week claimed Moscow was behind a plot to overthrow her country’s government using external saboteurs.

One of Europe’s poorest countries, the Eastern European nation has had historic ties to Russia but wants to join the 27-nation European Union. Biden in his remarks endorsed Moldova’s bid to join the EU.

“I’m proud to stand with you and the freedom-loving people of Moldova,” Biden said of Sandu and her country in his Tuesday address.

Philippines talk South China Sea patrol expansion

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippines is in talks with the United States as well as Australia on future joint patrols in the South China Sea, where China’s increasingly aggressive actions in the disputed waters are causing concern, top defense officials in the three nations said Wednesday.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin called his Philippine counterpart, Carlito Galvez Jr., to reiterate Washington’s support and commitment to help defend its oldest treaty ally in

Asia after a Chinese coast guard aimed a military-grade laser at a Philippine patrol vessel near a disputed shoal.

The Feb. 6 incident off Second Thomas Shoal briefly blinded some of the Filipino crew and prompted Manila to file a diplomatic protest. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. also summoned China’s ambassador to express his concern.

“The two leaders discussed proposals to deepen operational cooperation and enhance the United States and the Philippines’ shared security, includ-

ing the recent decision to resume combined maritime activities in the South China Sea,” according to details of the phone conversation provided by Pentagon press secretary Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder.

During Austin’s visit to Manila this month, Galvez and U.S. officials had said the allies agreed to carry out joint patrols.

Separately, Galvez and visiting Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles said in a news conference on Wednesday that they were looking at Australian and Philippine forces

possibly carrying out their joint patrols in the busy waterway.

As countries asserting the rule of law, including the 1982 U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, in the South China Sea, where a bulk of Australia’s trade traverses, “we did talk today about the possibility of exploring joint patrols,” Marles said, without elaborating.

Australian and Philippine forces have undertaken joint patrols off the southern Philippines in the past to counter terrorist threats, Galvez said, and added, “We can do it again.”

Navy secretary: China seeks wider influence

By **DOUG G. WARE**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said Tuesday that the spy balloon shot down over U.S. waters and China's rapid expansion of its fleet are signs that the country's determined to extend its influence around the world.

Del Toro, who ascended to his post 18 months ago, said the Chinese military is aiming for a significant advantage by building warships at a pace quicker than the United States can match them.

"It's a real challenge, but capacity does matter," he said during a keynote address at the National Press Club in Washington. "We do need a larger Navy, we do need more ships in the future, more modern ships in the future that can meet that threat."

Del Toro said China can build

ships quicker because its government doesn't need to go through lawmakers for money as in the U.S. He also said Beijing uses slave labor to build its military vehicles.

"Unfortunately, China does have a significant advantage," he said. "They have 13 shipyards. One shipyard has more capacity than all our shipyards combined. That presents a real threat."

But the U.S. Navy can counter China's ship advantage by making certain that American sailors are thoroughly educated and well-trained, Del Toro said.

"The advantage that we have ... is our people," he said. "Our shipbuilders are better shipbuilders. That's why we have a more modern, more capable, more lethal Navy than they do."

"They script their people to fight. We actually train our people to think," he added. "That gives us

an inherent advantage over anything the Chinese can put up."

President Joe Biden and the Pentagon have identified China as the top "pacing challenge" for the U.S. For years, Washington has been concerned about growing influence from Beijing, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region and how it relates to Taiwan, which China claims as a breakaway territory.

Those concerns rose dramatically a few weeks ago when the U.S. military spotted a Chinese surveillance balloon carrying a large payload as it hovered over the western U.S. For several days, the self-propelled balloon took a path across the U.S. at about 60,000 feet above U.S. territory. A U.S. fighter jet shot it down as soon as it reached the Atlantic Ocean off the South Carolina coast. Officials later said similar Chinese balloons had floated over

U.S. soil on at least four other occasions in recent years.

"Only a few weeks ago, it's fair to say most Americans were not sufficiently aware of the threat posed by [China]," Del Toro said. "Because of the incursion of a Chinese balloon into our airspace, most Americans' alarm bells have now gone off. It is no secret that the People's Republic of China seeks to upend our dominance on the oceans across the globe."

In January, Del Toro caused some alarm when he suggested the Navy could possibly run out of weapons if the U.S. kept sending them to Ukraine to defend against Russian forces. He later clarified the remarks to say he's confident the Pentagon and industry partners would not allow that to happen — that they would ramp up production and ensure the military has what it needs.

Navy probes recent reported suicide tries on USS Reagan

By **ALEX WILSON**
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Three sailors aboard the USS Ronald Reagan attempted suicide over a three-month period last year, according to a Navy spokesman.

A spokesman for the carrier confirmed some of what an enlisted sailor raised during a Feb. 10 meeting at Yokosuka, the 7th Fleet's headquarters south of Tokyo and the Ronald Reagan's homeport. The sailor, who identified herself as a hospital corpsman first class aboard the carrier, asked the Navy's senior enlisted leader, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy James Honea, why the Navy did not investigate five suicide attempts, "all from the same department and division," aboard the carrier.

"That strikes me as something

isn't right," she said during Honea's all-hands call at the Fleet Theater. "I work in a pretty tough division, but I'm pretty supported by my department. So, I'm just a little confused as to why there wasn't an investigation if there were five suicide attempts in three months."

Honea said he was unaware of the situation and promised the corpsman he would "look into it."

The Ronald Reagan's spokesman, Lt. Cmdr. Phillip Chitty, said three sailors assigned to the carrier attempted suicide between September and November. All worked in the same department, but not in the same division, he said in an email to Stars and Stripes on Feb. 15.

On Wednesday, 7th Fleet spokeswoman Lt. Kristina Wiedemann said the Ronald Reagan investigated the attempts.

First female aircraft carrier commander set to be 1-star

By **ALISON BATH**
Stars and Stripes

The first woman ever to command a U.S. aircraft carrier is slated to become a one-star admiral, the Navy recently announced.

Capt. Amy Bauernschmidt, commander of USS Abraham Lincoln, has been nominated for the rank of rear admiral, the service said in a statement Friday.

Two other women, Capt. Julie Treanor and Capt. Dianna Wolfson, are also on the promotion list.

Treanor is the chief of staff for the director of supply, ordnance and logistics operations in the office of the chief of naval operations. Wolfson is commander of Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth, Va. They will join about 21 other female sailors, including a four-star admiral, who are among the service's most senior

officers, according to data on the Navy's website.

Women make up about 6.8% of active-duty officers in the Navy's highest ranks, according to the Defense Department's 2021 annual demographics report.

About one-fifth of all active-duty sailors are women, according to the report, which was released in December.

Bauernschmidt took command of Abraham Lincoln in August 2021 after previously serving as its chief executive officer. A 1994 graduate of the Naval Academy, she earned a master's degree from the Naval War College and was designated a pilot in 1996.

Other nominees for promotion to admiral include at least one other aircraft carrier commander, Capt. Paul Lanzilotta of the USS Gerald R. Ford.

McCarthy lets Carlson access 1/6 Capitol video

Associated Press

WASHINGTON—Thousands of hours of surveillance footage from the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol are being made available to Fox News host Tucker Carlson, a stunning level of access granted by House Speaker Kevin McCarthy that Democrats swiftly condemned as a “grave” breach of security with potentially far-reaching consequences.

The hard-right political commentator said his team is spending the week at the Capitol pouring through the video and preparing to reveal their findings to his viewers. But granting exclusive access to sensitive Jan. 6 security footage to such a deeply partisan figure is a highly unusual move, seen by some critics

as essentially outsourcing House oversight to a TV personality who has promoted conspiracy theories about the attack.

“It’s a shocking development that brings in both political concerns but even more importantly, security concerns,” said Rep. Dan Goldman, D-N.Y., who was a chief counsel during President Donald Trump’s first impeachment trial.

Many critics have warned that Capitol security could be endangered if Carlson airs security footage that details how the rioters accessed the building and the routes lawmakers used to flee to safety. And a sharply partisan retelling of the Capitol attack could accelerate a dangerous rewriting of the history of what happened Jan. 6, when

Trump encouraged a mob of supporters to head to the Capitol to overturn Joe Biden’s election.

“It is not lost on anyone that the one person that the speaker decides to give hours and hours of sensitive secret surveillance footage is the person who peddled a bogus documentary trying to debunk responsibility for the Jan. 6 riot from Donald Trump onto others,” Goldman said.

“Kevin McCarthy has turned over the security of the Capitol to Tucker Carlson and that’s a scary thought,” he added.

Gripping images and videos from the Capitol attack by Trump supporters have been widely circulated by documentarians, news organizations and even the rioters themselves. But officials have held back much of

the surveillance video from hundreds of security cameras stationed in and around the Capitol that offer a detailed view of the grisly scene and the brutal beatings of police as they tried to stop the rioters.

The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack went through a painstaking process to work closely with the U.S. Capitol Police to review and ultimately release approved segments of the surveillance footage as part of its public hearings last year.

The chief of the U.S. Capitol Police, Tom Manger, issued a terse statement when asked about the new release of footage: “When Congressional Leadership or Congressional Oversight Committees ask for things like this, we must give it to them.”

High court weighs tech giants’ liability

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court is weighing Wednesday whether Facebook, Twitter and YouTube can be sued over a 2017 Islamic State attack on a Turkish nightclub based on the argument the platforms assisted in fueling the growth of the terrorist group.

What the justices decide to do in this case and a related one it heard Tuesday is important particularly because the companies have so far been shielded from liability on the internet, allowing them to grow into the giants they are today.

On the first day of arguments, the justices suggested they had little appetite for a far-reaching ruling that would upend the internet. Wednesday’s case about the nightclub attack in which 39 people died could provide an off-ramp for the justices if they want to limit the impact of what they do.

At the heart of the cases be-

fore the justices are two federal laws. The first is Section 230 of the federal Communications Decency Act, which protects tech companies from being sued over material put on their sites by users. The second is the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, which allows Americans injured by a terrorist attack abroad to sue for money damages in federal court.

In Wednesday’s case, the family of a man killed in the Reina nightclub attack in Istanbul sued Twitter, Facebook and YouTube parent Google under the terrorism law. Nawras Alasaf’s family members, who are U.S. citizens, have said the companies aided and abetted the attack because they assisted in the growth of the Islamic State group, which claimed responsibility for the attack.

The platforms have argued they can’t be sued because they did not knowingly or substantially assist in the Reina attack.

EPA orders Norfolk Southern to pay for derailment cleanup

Associated Press

EAST PALESTINE, Ohio — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ordered Norfolk Southern on Tuesday to pay for the cleanup of the East Palestine, Ohio, train wreck and chemical release as federal regulators took charge of long-term recovery efforts and promised worried residents they won’t be forgotten.

Speaking to reporters near the derailment site, Norfolk Southern’s CEO promised to undertake necessary steps to ensure the long-term health of the community and become a “safer railroad.”

EPA used its authority under the federal Superfund law to order Norfolk Southern to take all available measures to clean up contaminated air and water. It also said the company would be required to reimburse the federal government for a new program to provide cleaning services for impacted residents and busi-

nesses.

“Norfolk Southern will pay for cleaning up the mess that they created and the trauma that they inflicted on this community,” EPA Administrator Michael Regan vowed at a news conference in East Palestine. “I know this order cannot undo the nightmare that families in this town have been living with, but it will begin to deliver much-needed justice for the pain that Norfolk Southern has caused.”

He warned that if Norfolk Southern fails to comply, the agency will perform the work itself and seek triple damages from the company.

EPA planned to release more details on the cleanup service for residents and businesses, which it said would “provide an additional layer of reassurance.”

The agency said its order marked the end of the “emergency” phase of the Feb. 3 derailment and the start of long-term remediation.

US says no to migrants who don't first try other country

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration said Tuesday that it will generally deny asylum to migrants who show up at the U.S. southern border without first seeking protection in a country they passed through, mirroring an attempt by the Trump administration that never took effect because it was blocked in court.

The measure, while stopping short of a total ban, imposes severe limitations on asylum for any nationality except Mexicans, who don't have to travel through a third country to reach the U.S.

The measure is almost certain to face legal challenges. President Donald Trump pursued a similar ban in 2019 but a federal appeals court prevented it from taking effect.

The Biden administration rule proposed Tuesday has to first go through a 30-day public comment period before it can be formally adopted. If adopted it would remain in place for two years.

Administration officials expect the rule will take effect when a pandemic-era rule that denies asylum on grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19 ends. That rule, known as Title 42 authority, is set to expire

May 11 but has been delayed twice by legal challenges from Republican-led states.

The Homeland Security and Justice Departments argued that surging numbers of migrants left them little choice. They anticipate illegal crossings to climb to between 11,000 and 13,000 a day if no action is taken after Title 42 ends; that's even higher than the 8,600 daily crossings in mid-December as anticipation spread among migrants and smugglers that Title 42 was about to end. At the last minute the Supreme Court kept it in place.

The proposed rule establishes "a rebuttable presumption of asylum ineligibility" for anyone who passes through another country to reach the U.S. border with Mexico without first seeking protection there, according to a notice in the Federal Register. Exceptions will be made for people with an "acute medical emergency," "imminent and extreme threat" of violent crimes such as murder, rape or kidnapping, being a victim of human trafficking or "other extremely compelling circumstances." Children traveling alone will also be exempted, according to the rule.

The rule largely calls on prospective migrants to follow le-

gal pathways to apply for asylum such as using the CBP One app, through which prospective migrants can schedule an appointment to apply to appear at a border entry point to apply for asylum.

The administration portrayed these efforts as a way to protect migrants from the dangerous journeys as they travel north to the U.S. and allow the U.S. border entry points to manage the migrant flows in a "safe and efficient manner."

U.S. officials insist the measure proposed Tuesday is different from Trump's, largely because there is room for exemptions and because the Biden administration has made other legal pathways available, particularly humanitarian parole for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, Venezuelans and Ukrainians.

"We are a nation of immigrants, and we are a nation of laws. We are strengthening the availability of legal, orderly pathways for migrants to come to the United States, at the same time proposing new consequences on those who fail to use processes made available to them by the United States and its regional partners," said Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

Big winter storm shuts down parts of north US

Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. — Brutal winter weather hammered the northern U.S. on Wednesday with "whiteout" snow, dangerous wind gusts and bitter cold, shutting down roadways, closing schools and businesses and prompting dire warnings for people to stay home.

The massive storm with blizzardlike conditions to the north was part of a wild weather day across the U.S. Strong winds knocked out power for tens of thousands in California. Wind gusts, combined with snow and rain, forced closure of a long stretch of interstate highway in the Southwest.

Meanwhile, the mid-Atlantic down to Florida will see record high temperatures — in some cases up to 40 degrees above normal.

Schools throughout the Dakotas, Minnesota and Wisconsin were called off Wednesday. Offices closed, and so did the Minnesota Legislature. South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem shut down state executive branch offices in several parts of the state, and employees worked remotely.

In Wyoming, virtually every road was affected.

Weather problems contributed to more than 1,200 canceled flights across the country by midmorning, according to tracking service FlightAware. About one third of those canceled flights — roughly 400 — were due to arrive or depart from the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

Powerful winds were the biggest problem in California, toppling trees and power lines. By Wednesday morning, more than 109,000 customers were without electricity, according to PowerOutage.us.

Calif. beach city OKs balloon ban

Associated Press

Environmental advocates are celebrating in Laguna Beach — but it won't be with balloons.

The hilly seaside city known for stunning ocean views and rolling bluffs is banning the sale and public use of balloons to curtail the risk of devastating wildfires and eliminate a major source of trash floating near the community's scenic shores.

The Laguna Beach City Council voted Tuesday

night to ban in public the popular mainstay of birthday and graduation parties, whether inflated with helium or not.

Beginning in 2024, the balloons cannot be used on public property or at city events.

The move in the community of 23,000 people 50 miles southeast of Los Angeles comes as several California beach cities have limited balloons and the state enacted a law to regulate the types made of foil.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

1 person dead following drag racing accident

OR PORTLAND — The drivers of two vehicles drag racing in Portland over the weekend lost control and crashed, killing one of the drivers, authorities said Monday.

Portland police responded late Saturday to the two-vehicle crash. One vehicle caught fire. Investigators determined the drivers were drag racing, police said.

“Both vehicles were traveling at a very high rate of speed when they lost control and crashed, injuring the two drivers and one passenger,” police said. All three people were taken to local hospitals with life-threatening injuries. One of the drivers died of their injuries, police said.

Alligator kills woman while she walked dog

FL FORT PIERCE — An 85-year-old woman was killed by an alligator while walking her dog in a senior living community on Florida’s Atlantic Coast, officials said.

The woman was walking her dog on Monday afternoon beside a canal in Spanish Lakes Fairway near Fort Pierce when the nearly 11-foot gator attacked the dog, St. Lucie Sheriff Ken Mascara said.

A trapper from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission later tracked down the gator and deputies helped get it on a truck. It was taken from the scene.

“FWC is in charge of the in-

vestigation, however we assisted with a helicopter and manpower,” Mascara said.

Officials said the dog survived the attack, but its condition wasn’t immediately known.

Fatal alligator attacks are rare, but they do happen. In 2016, 2-year-old Lane Graves was killed by alligator as he was vacationing with his family from Nebraska at Walt Disney World. Since then hundreds of gators have been relocated from the area.

According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, between 1948 and 2021 there have been 442 unprovoked alligator bites on humans, including 26 fatalities.

School: Fifth-grader threatened to shoot class

VA NEWPORT NEWS — A fifth-grade student at the same Virginia elementary school where a first-grader shot his teacher last month told classmates in a text message that he would “pop some bullets” and tell someone to shoot up the class, a school official wrote in an email to parents.

Karen Lynch, an administrator who is currently leading Richneck Elementary, wrote in the email that several fifth-grade students were texting each other on Saturday when one of them allegedly made the threat. Another student told their parent, who contacted the teacher of the student who made the threat, Lynch wrote. The teacher then notified administrators.

“I immediately contacted the student’s parent and excluded the student from school,” Lynch

wrote.

Lynch said police are investigating and a threat assessment is in progress.

On Jan. 6, a 6-year-old student at Richneck brought a loaded 9 mm handgun to school and shot his teacher Abby Zwerner, seriously wounding her.

Dance marathon raises \$15M for cancer patients

PA STATE COLLEGE — Hundreds of Penn State students have raised more than \$15 million for pediatric cancer patients in the annual 46-hour dance marathon known as Thon.

The \$15,006,132.46 total was announced Sunday afternoon at the conclusion of the Penn State Interfraternity Council/Panhellenic Dance Marathon, billed as the world’s largest student-run philanthropy. That topped last year’s total of \$13,756,374.50,

Money raised benefits pediatric cancer patients and their families at the Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center. Child cancer survivors and their families also participate along with the dancers, who are helped by thousands of other students in support roles.

Officials say the dance marathon, which celebrated its 50th anniversary last year, has raised \$204 million and the fund has helped over 4,800 families.

Decorative helicopter falls into water park pool

NJ EAST RUTHERFORD — A decorative helicopter fell into a swimming pool at a New Jersey water park, injuring four people on Sunday afternoon.

One person was taken to a hospital and three others were treated at the scene after the object crashed from the ceiling at the DreamWorks Water Park in East Rutherford, NorthJersey.com reported. None of the injuries were life-threatening.

The venue was evacuated and an investigation will take place, New Jersey State Police Sgt. Philip Curry told the news outlet. DreamWorks Water Park located about 13 miles west of New York City in the Meadowlands Sports Complex.

Family names casino in wrongful death lawsuit

NV LAS VEGAS — The family of a Florida lawyer who suffered a heart attack at a Las Vegas blackjack table last year and died months later has filed a wrongful death lawsuit against a casino.

The Las Vegas Review-Journal reported David Jagolinzer was staying at the Wynn Las Vegas while in town for a legal conference last spring.

According to the lawsuit, Jagolinzer went into cardiac arrest on April 6 and was slumped over the blackjack table for more than 15 minutes but the dealer continued to deal cards to another player.

Wynn employees tried using a defibrillator on Jagolinzer, but the complaint alleges Wynn employees weren’t properly trained to use it. The suit filed last week in District Court also alleges that Wynn employees didn’t immediately check on Jagolinzer and they started counting his gaming chips instead.

— From wire reports

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Celtics start stretch run as NBA favorites

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Best record in the NBA. A team that won the Eastern Conference and went to the NBA Finals last season. A pair of All-Stars, including the MVP. And a coach who isn't an interim coach anymore. The Boston Celtics have much to like about where they are right now.

Jayson Tatum's All-Star scoring records — 55 points in the game, 27 points in the third quarter — were the big story coming out of Team Giannis' 184-175 victory over Team LeBron on Sunday night.

And it might have signaled that the soon-to-be 25-year-old Tatum — Boston's first All-Star MVP since Larry Bird in 1982 — is ready to take the step from stardom to something even bigger.

"I guess I'm not 19 anymore," said Tatum, whose birthday is March 3. "But yeah, I say it all the time. I'm extremely grateful and blessed to be in this situation. I'm not too far removed from being a kid in St. Louis with essentially a ball and a dream and dreaming about these moments of being here. And living out that dream, in reality, is hard to describe. I try not to really think about the things I've accomplished. I never want to get complacent. I'm always chasing something, chasing more."

That chase resumes Thursday night, when the Celtics open their post-All-Star slate in Indiana. Boston takes a league-best 42-17 record into the stretch run, a half-

game better than Milwaukee (41-17) for the top spots in both the East and the NBA. But the Bucks are ailing; Khris Middleton's knee is a concern, and winning All-Star captain Giannis Antetokounmpo played only 20 seconds Sunday night because of a wrist issue. The Celtics, meanwhile, are soaring. Tatum and Jaylen Brown — playing for Team LeBron — combined for 90 points in the All-Star Game, further solidifying themselves as one of the best pairings in the league right now.

And the last minute of the third quarter of the All-Star Game was basically them playing 1-on-1. Everyone else on the court stopped to let it happen. Brown went first, hitting a stepback from near the right corner. Tatum lost the ball off the dribble on the next possession. They weren't done; Brown made a three over Tatum, hitting him with the "too small" move while laughing. Tatum then made a three of his own, and the battle ended when he stopped Brown from getting a shot off before the end-of-quarter buzzer sounded.

"Going against my brother in Jayson, going back and forth, it was like no one was in there at all," Brown said.

Sitting back and watching it all was Celtics coach — and Team Giannis coach — Joe Mazzulla, who isn't the interim coach anymore. Boston made him the permanent coach last week, no surprise after he has kept the Celtics on a title-contending path

even after he had to take over for Ime Udoka on almost no notice just before training camp. Udoka was suspended over inappropriate conduct with a Celtics employee.

The last time Mazzulla was a head coach without an interim title was March 16, 2019. It was in the NCAA Division II tournament, when his Fairmont State club lost a first-round game to Mercyhurst.

"I'm going to miss that term, I guess, a little bit," Mazzulla said. "And my thing is, the interim tag was never a thing because we're all interims. You have to kind of have a short-term view but also a long-term. ... As coaches, we're here to make the game. The game's not ours. It doesn't belong to us. What matters is the seeds that we plant, and the things that we're able to accomplish with the team."

In Boston, the seeds are planted. Brown and Tatum have blossomed into full-grown stars. And the Celtics have reason to have the biggest goal of all down the stretch this season.

"Historically, or at least since I've been in the league, the team that has kind of clicked in this last stretch, has kind of peaked and played their best of the season going into the playoffs, usually is the team that wins it all," Tatum said. "So, this stretch is important. You want to be as healthy as possible going into the playoffs. You want to be playing your best basketball, individually and as a group. That's what we're trying to do."

Hawks fire McMillan with team stuck at 8th in East

Associated Press

ATLANTA — The Atlanta Hawks on Tuesday fired coach Nate McMillan, who was unable to follow up on the success of leading the team to the 2021 Eastern Conference finals.

Atlanta general manager Landry Fields announced the firing. The Hawks are 29-30 and in eighth place in the East.

Assistant coach Joe Prunty will serve as interim coach. Prunty joined the Hawks in July 2021 as lead assistant.

The 58-year-old McMillan went 99-80 as Atlanta's coach, including a 27-11 record as interim in the second half of the 2020-21 season. His success that season earned him the full-time position.

McMillan was frustrated in his attempts to improve Atlanta's defense, a consistent weakness that weighed down a team led by high-scoring guard Trae Young.

McMillan denied reports early this season

that he considered resigning.

Overall in 19 seasons, McMillan has a 760-668 record with Seattle, Portland, Indiana and the Hawks.

"I would like to thank Nate for his leadership and professionalism during his time with the Hawks," Fields said in a statement. "He is truly a class act, and we appreciate the graciousness and work ethic he brought with him every day."

The Hawks finished 43-39 in the 2021-22 season and, after escaping the play-in tournament, lost to the Miami Heat 4-1 in the first round of the playoffs.

Atlanta then added more emphasis to a win-now approach by trading Danilo Gallinari and three first-round picks to the San Antonio Spurs for All-Star guard Dejounte Murray.

The trade formed a backcourt pairing of All-Star guards in Murray and Young and

placed more heat on McMillan to guide the Hawks back to the top of the conference.

Instead, the Hawks have struggled near .500 most of the season. They lost four of six games before the All-Star break and are only one game ahead of 10th-place Toronto in the East. The slide left Atlanta closer to falling out of the play-in tournament than moving in to the No. 6 spot for a guaranteed playoff position. The New York Knicks are sixth, 3½ games ahead of Atlanta.

"Decisions like these, especially in-season, are always extremely difficult, but we believe it's in the best interest of our team to move forward with another voice leading the way," Fields said.

McMillan dealt with persistent rumors he had disagreements with Young. Fields' desire to seek "another voice" could be a sign McMillan's message had worn thin with Young and other players.

Big second-half run lifts No. 14 K-State

Associated Press

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Kansas State coach Jerome Tang leaped onto the courtside table and pumped his fists, then landed a spectacular dismount, before climbing into the student section and joining in the “Wabash Cannonball” dance to celebrate another ranked win.

This one was as special as any of them.

Keyontae Johnson scored 25 points, Markquis Nowell added 14 points and 10 assists, and the No. 14 Wildcats followed a long first-half slump with a big second-half run to beat ninth-ranked Baylor 75-65 on Tuesday night.

In doing so, they gave their first-year coach a season sweep of Tang’s former team and his longtime mentor, Scott Drew.

“I tried to tell y’all I’m athletic,” said Tang, who spent 19 years on the Baylor bench and helped bring a national title to Waco, Texas. “They were arguably the hottest team in the league, except the second half of the last game and this game.”

Cam Carter added 10 points for the Wildcats (21-7, 9-6 Big 12), who trailed 34-31 at the break before their 18-4 charge gave them control.

Keyonte George hit six three-pointers and scored 23 points to lead Baylor (20-8, 9-6).

No. 8 Texas 72, No. 23 Iowa State 54: Sir’Jabari Rice and Tyrese Hunter each scored 15 points and the host Longhorns raced away from the Cyclones with a big first half to remain atop the Big 12.

Texas (22-6, 11-4) is tied with No. 3 Kansas for first place with three games left in the regular season. The Longhorns haven’t won even a share of the league crown since 2008.

Osun Ossunniyi scored 12 points to lead Iowa State (17-10, 8-7).

No. 10 Marquette 73, No. 19 Creighton 71: Tyler Kolek’s short jump shot gave his team the lead with 29 seconds left, and the Golden Eagles took a huge step toward the Big East regular-season title with a win over the host Bluejays.

Kam Jones led Marquette (22-6, 14-3) with 19 points.

Baylor Scheierman had 18 points to lead Creighton (18-10, 12-5). Ryan Nembhard added 16.

No. 25 Texas A&M 68, No. 11 Tennessee 63: Wade Taylor IV scored 25 points, including four free throws down the stretch, and the host Aggies extended their winning streak to six games.

Julius Marble added 21 points and nine rebounds for Texas A&M (21-7, 13-2 Southeastern Conference).

It’s the fourth loss in five games for Tennessee (20-8, 9-6), with its only win in this stretch coming in a 68-59 victory over then-No. 1 Alabama on Wednesday.

No. 13 Miami 76, Virginia Tech 70: Norchad Omier had 17 points and 14 rebounds as the visiting Hurricanes won their seventh straight.

Nigel Pack added 16 points for Miami (23-5, 14-4 Atlantic Coast Conference), which had five players in double figures.

Villanova 64, No. 16 Xavier 63: Justin Moore scored 25 points to give the visiting Wildcats their biggest victory under first-year head coach Kyle Neptune.

Cam Whitmore added 11 points for Villanova (14-14, 8-9 Big East), which dealt a big blow to the Musketeers’ Big East title hopes.

Souley Boum led Xavier (20-8, 12-5) with 17 points.

Michigan State 80, No. 17 Indiana 65: Tyson Walker shook off a slow start to score 23 points and lifted the Spartans in their first home game since last week’s shootings on campus that killed three students.

The Hoosiers (19-9, 10-7) relied on Trayce Jackson-Davis, as usual, and he had 19 points, seven rebounds and five assists.

No. 22 San Diego State 77, Colorado State 58: Jaedon Le-Dee scored 14 points and Matt Bradley scored 10 of his 13 in the first four minutes of the second half as the host Aztecs (22-5, 13-2 Mountain West), solidified their lead in the conference race.

Testimony: Tide star delivered gun used in shooting

Associated Press

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — University of Alabama basketball star Brandon Miller brought a teammate the gun that was used in a fatal January shooting near campus, an investigator testified Tuesday.

Miller, a freshman standout, brought Darius Miles’ gun to him on the night of the shooting after Miles texted him and asked him to do so, Tuscaloosa Police investigator Brandon Culpepper testified, according to news outlets. The allegation of Miller’s involvement on the night of the Jan. 15 shooting came during a preliminary hearing for Miles and Michael Davis, who face capital murder charges for the death of 23-year-old Jamea Harris.

Former Tide player Miles is accused of providing his gun to Davis, who fired it and killed Harris, prosecutors say.

Alabama coach Nate Oats told reporters Tuesday the team has been aware that Miller allegedly brought Miles the gun, but the team’s leading scorer is not in “any type of trouble.” He has started every game since the shooting.

Miller has not been criminally charged. A team representative did not immediately know if Miller had an attorney.

“We’ve known the situation,” Oats said at a news conference later Tuesday. “We’ve been fully cooperating with law enforcement the entire time. I mean, the whole situation is just sad.”

“We were informed by law

enforcement of other student-athletes being in the vicinity, and law enforcement has repeatedly told us that no other student-athletes were suspects,” Oats said. “They were witnesses only. Our understanding is that they have all been fully truthful and cooperative.”

The 6-foot-9 Miller is the biggest star of the second-ranked Tide team. He is projected to be an NBA Draft lottery pick.

The shooting occurred on the Strip, a business district of bars and restaurants that cater to students near the Tuscaloosa campus. Harris was sitting in the passenger seat of a car when she was struck by a bullet, police said.

Investigators wrote in a court

document that Miles, who had been a junior reserve forward on the team, admitted to providing the gun used in the fatal shooting, but Davis fired the weapon.

Culpepper said Tuesday that Miles told Davis where his gun was in Miller’s car.

Chief Deputy District Attorney Paula Whitley told the judge that there was ample evidence to proceed with the case against Miles and Davis.

A defense lawyer suggested during Tuesday’s hearing that Miles was reacting defensively when he told Davis where the gun was located.

“The reason that the gun was provided to Michael Davis was for protection,” Mary Turner argued.

McDavid scores twice, hits 800 points

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Connor McDavid reached 800 career points and scored his 43rd and 44th goals in the third period to give the Edmonton Oilers a 4-2 victory over the Philadelphia Flyers on Tuesday night.

McDavid also assisted on Leon Draisaitl's tying goal early in the third, with McDavid picking up his 800th point and Draisaitl his 700th on the play.

Playing in his 545th game, McDavid became the fifth-fastest player in NHL history to hit the mark, behind Wayne Gretzky (352 games), Mario Lemieux (410), Mike Bossy (525) and Peter Stastny (531).

McDavid gave the Oilers the lead with 7:21 left when his pass deflected in off Flyers defenseman Travis Sanheim. McDavid then scored a short-handed goal into an empty net with 2:25 remaining.

McDavid leads the NHL in goals and points with 105.

Maple Leafs 6, Sabres 3: Newly acquired center Ryan O'Reilly scored twice on visiting Toronto's first two shots on net

and added an empty-net goal in a victory over Buffalo.

Playing his third game in four nights since being acquired from St. Louis, O'Reilly scored 37 seconds apart in the opening period and the Maple Leafs led 4-0 on goals in a span of 8:18.

O'Reilly added two assists and sealed the win with the first five-point outing of his career by scoring into an empty net with 1:10 remaining — and after the Sabres scored three times to cut Toronto's lead to 5-3.

Red Wings 3, Capitals 1: Pius Suter scored twice, Robert Hagg ended a 75-game goal drought and visiting Detroit beat Washington.

The Red Wings won for the sixth time in seven games, moving ahead of the Capitals in the Eastern Conference wild-card race and taking another step to ending their six-year playoff drought. Washington lost a fifth in a row in regulation — its longest stretch without a point since January 2014, the last time the team missed the postseason.

Lightning 6, Ducks 1: Nick Paul had the first of four of his team's goals in a span of 5:55 in

the second period, Brayden Point scored his 200th NHL goal and host Tampa Bay dealt Anaheim its sixth straight loss.

Ross Colton, Anthony Cirelli and Zach Bogosian also scored during the second-period outburst, and Point and Corey Perry scored in the third. Andrei Vasilevskiy finished with 24 saves.

Blackhawks 3, Golden Knights 2 (SO): Tyler Johnson scored the lone goal in a shootout to lift host Chicago past Vegas for its third straight victory.

Johnson beat Laurent Brossoit with a low shot in the third round of the tiebreaker after scoring a power-play goal with 55 seconds left in regulation to force overtime.

Hurricanes 4, Blues 1: Andrei Svechnikov scored twice in the first eight minutes to break a 19-game goal drought and host Carolina beat St. Louis.

Sebastian Aho had a second-period goal, and Seth Jarvis added a goal and two assists. Svechnikov also had an assist as the Hurricanes won their fourth game in a row and for the 11th time in their last 12. Frederik

Andersen stopped 35 shots for his fifth consecutive victory.

Predators 5, Canucks 4 (SO): Matt Duchene scored the only goal in the shootout as host Nashville held off Vancouver.

Vancouver's Conor Garland made it a one-goal game with 1:06 to go, and Andrei Kuzmenko tied it with his second goal of the night with 15.4 seconds left.

Canadiens 5, Devils 2: Sam Montembeault stopped three breakaways and made 37 saves to help Montreal end New Jersey's six-game home winning streak.

Defenseman Johnathan Kovacevic and Nick Suzuki scored in a 1:13 span in the second period to put Montreal ahead. Justin Barron, Rem Pitlick and Mike Matheson also scored for the Canadiens.

Wild 2, Kings 1: Ryan Hartman scored twice and Filip Gustavsson made 33 saves and host Minnesota beat Los Angeles for its third straight win.

Phoenix Copley made 18 saves for Los Angeles, which had won seven of nine. Anze Kopitar scored with 20.5 seconds remaining for the Kings.

Marta returns, boosts Brazil's chances in World Cup

Associated Press

Brazilian forward Marta is back from a year-long injury, and her availability for this summer's Women's World Cup, potentially her last, boosts Brazil's outlook.

"(To) be around such a good player and a competitive player and a team player, that is something that will help this team going forward, absolutely," Brazil coach Pia Sundhage said. "I think it's pretty cool to be around Marta."

Brazil faced the United States in the final match of the 2023 SheBelieves Cup on Wednesday in Frisco, Texas.

"She, in some ways, redefined

this game," U.S. coach Vlatko Andonovski said. "Her creativity and ability to change the game in a moment is absolutely amazing."

The 37-year-old, who has played in five World Cups, is regarded as one of the greatest female soccer players of all time. Marta is the all-time leading international goal scorer for Brazil with 115 goals. She also holds the record for the most goals scored in either the men's or women's World Cup with 17.

"I think she deserves every applaud, every 'great Marta,' because the way she's been doing good things for the women's game is something that I ad-

mire," Sundhage said.

Canada star Christine Sinclair remembers playing against Marta before the 2012 Olympics. Canada tied the match late, and Marta came back and scored the winning goal.

"She's just one of those individuals that can just single-handedly change a game," Sinclair said.

Marta sustained a season-ending ACL injury in March 2022 while playing with the Orlando Pride of the National Women's Soccer League, resulting in a 327-day absence.

Brazil's opening SheBelieves match against Japan in Orlando was her first match back. Four

minutes after entering the match, the midfielder set up Debinha's game-winning goal in the 1-0 victory. While Brazil was unable to secure a win against Canada in the next round, Marta played more minutes.

It's been difficult getting back into match shape, she said, but "the feeling to be back and be here in this environment, doing what I love, it's like, incredible."

Marta's efforts off the field have complemented her innate talents on it. She is a six-time FIFA World Player of the Year.

"I can only imagine what it's like in Brazil, being a young girl and having Marta to look up to," Sinclair said.