

F-16 Fighting Falcon marks 50 years

By DAVID CHOI

Stars and Stripes

Col. Matthew Gaetke first arrived at the home of the 8th Fighter Wing in South Korea 15 years ago as an Air Force captain assigned to fly the F-16 Fighting Falcon.

Today, he is back at Kunsan Air Base, this time as wing commander. Since that first tour, Gaetke has logged 2,200 flight hours, most of them in the F-16, which turned 50 on Feb. 2.

“The thing that you see in pictures of the F-16 that’s hard to appreciate is just how good the office window is,” he said during an interview Tuesday, referring to the bubble canopy that gives pilots of the multirole fighter a wide view of the world around them.

“Having that window in some amazing sunrises or seeing your wingman silhouetted against the morning sun on a thunder cloud — there’s things that you see that you wish you could de-

scribe for folks.”

Kunsan was the first U.S. air base overseas to receive the F-16, now a respected fighter the world over with a proven combat record.

A prototype developed by General Dynamics first flew on Jan. 20, 1974, an unplanned flight to avoid an accident on the runway at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.

The prototype took to the skies again less than two weeks later for its first official flight.

The Air Force took delivery of its first F-16 in August 1978, according to a 2003 news release from current maker Lockheed Martin.

Today, approximately 3,100 F-16s are in service in 25 countries, with a 113-jet backlog on orders for six countries for the newest version, the Block 70/72, according to Lockheed Martin.

The fourth-generation warplane, built as a simplified fighter with reduced size, costs and

weight, can pull up to nine Gs, more than most other fighters, according to the Air Force.

About 40 F-16s occupy the Kunsan flightline today. The compact fighter is the backbone of the 7th Air Force, headquartered at Osan Air Base, whose mission is to defend South Korea from North Korea, wing spokeswoman Capt. Kaylin Hankerson said by email Thursday.

As tensions increase on the Korean Peninsula with each ballistic missile test or artillery round fired by the North, the F-16 has flown increasing numbers of sorties, including alongside U.S. allies.

On Oct. 22, for example, two U.S. F-16s, two South Korean F-15K Slam Eagles and two Japanese F-2s escorted an Air Force B-52H Stratofortress bomber in the three countries’ first combined airpower demonstration.

The fourth-generation F-16

makes up about 50% of the Air Force fleet and has flown in every major U.S. conflict since 1974.

The Fighting Falcon, also known as the Viper by its pilots, is easily upgraded with new equipment to face evolving threats, according to Dan Hampton, a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel and former F-16 pilot who earned four Distinguished Flying Crosses with Valor in Kosovo, Iraq and the first Gulf War.

“What’s made it so successful is that it’s so adaptable,” he said by phone Saturday.

The jet was designed with modular components that could be replaced with the latest technology, Hampton said.

“The first F-16 that flew 50 years ago looks nothing like these F-16s that we have on the ramp out here,” Gaetke said. “The cockpit looks very different than it did when I was here the first time 15 years ago.”

\$3.4B dry dock most expensive project in Navy history

By WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii — The Navy has begun the most expensive building project in its history with construction of a \$3.4 billion submarine-repair dry dock in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

The initial work of installing foundational piles into the harbor waters began this month, with project completion expected by early 2028.

The new dry dock will replace the smallest of the four at the Pearl Harbor Naval Ship-

yard and Intermediate Maintenance Facility at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

The current dry dock is too small to handle the Navy’s Virginia-class attack submarines, the service’s nuclear-powered subs that are replacing the slightly smaller Los Angeles-class vessels.

The Pearl Harbor project eclipses the \$1.7 billion dry dock complex now being built at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine.

All four of the Navy’s public shipyards, which also include Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Vir-

ginia and Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and Intermediate Maintenance Facility in Washington, are in dire need of upgrading and modernization, according to a May 2023 report by the Government Accountability Office.

In 2018, the Navy undertook a \$21 billion infrastructure plan to upgrade dry docks, buildings and equipment at the shipyards, the report states.

The construction of a dry dock is complex, costly and, thus, rare, Capt. Stephen Padhi, who is overseeing construction, said at the roundtable.

Padhi is commander of Office in Charge of Construction, Pearl Harbor Navy Shipyard, a newly commissioned command by Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command.

“The amount of just material that goes into these projects alone is staggering,” Padhi said.

“We’re talking about 250,000 cubic yards of concrete,” he said. “If that were delivered by truck, we’d be talking about 25,000 trucks.”

The project will require about 63,000 tons of steel.

“That’s enough steel to build eight submarines,” Padhi said.

Iran warns proxies not to provoke US

The Washington Post

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Iran, eager to disrupt U.S. and Israeli interests in the Middle East but wary of provoking a direct confrontation, is privately urging Hezbollah and other armed groups to exercise restraint against U.S. forces, according to officials in the region.

Israel's brutal war on Hamas in Gaza has stoked conflict between the United States and Iran's proxy forces on multiple fronts. With no cease-fire in sight, Iran could face the most significant test yet of its ability to exert influence over these allied militias.

When U.S. forces launched strikes this month on Iranian-backed groups in Yemen, Syria and Iraq, Tehran publicly warned that its military was ready to respond to any threat. But in private, senior leaders are urging caution, according to Lebanese and Iraqi officials who were briefed on the talks. They spoke to *The Washington Post* on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive conversations.

U.S. officials say the message might be having some effect. As of Saturday, Iranian-backed mi-

litias in Iraq and Syria hadn't attacked U.S. forces in more than 13 days, an unusual lull since the war in Gaza began in October. The militants held their fire even after a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad killed a senior Kataib Hezbollah official.

"Iran may have realized their interests are not served by allowing their proxies unrestricted ability to attack U.S. and coalition forces," one U.S. official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter.

The Biden administration has taken a similarly cautious approach with Iran. In launching dozens of strikes on Feb. 2 — retaliation for a drone strike last month that killed three U.S. service members in Jordan — U.S. forces targeted Iranian proxies in Iraq and Syria but did not strike inside Iran.

U.S. diplomats, meanwhile, are pressuring Israel and Hamas to agree on a cease-fire in Gaza. During the negotiated pause in the fighting in November, attacks by Iranian-backed groups dropped throughout the region.

To emphasize the new directive, Iran has dispatched military leaders and diplomats

across the region to meet with local officials and militia members.

"Iran is doing its utmost to prevent the expansion of the war and the escalation from reaching the point of no return," said an Iraqi official with close ties to Iranian-backed forces there.

Days after Kataib Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the attack that killed the three U.S. Army reservists, an Iranian military commander landed in Baghdad last month to meet with the group's leaders. The commander pressured it to issue a statement suspending attacks on U.S. targets.

The leaders were unhappy with the suspension, the Iraqi official said, but acceded to the request of the country that has trained and armed their forces.

Still, the exchange might also have demonstrated the limits of Tehran's influence: After the U.S. strikes, the group reversed itself, pledging "painful strikes and broad attacks."

It's been a balancing act for Iran since Oct. 7, when Hamas' surprise attack on Israeli communities near Gaza triggered the war there.

The Iranian-backed groups

form the self-styled "axis of resistance," a loose alliance of armed militias that includes Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and Kataib Hezbollah in Iraq and Syria. Tehran uses them to spread its influence across the region and serve as a forward line of defense against the United States and Israel.

Though they're funded and trained by Iran, the groups operate independently and outside Tehran's formal security apparatus. The arrangement has allowed them to advance Iranian policy aims while insulating Tehran from direct responsibility — and possible retaliation — for their actions.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian praised the groups during a recent visit to Lebanon and promised continued support. He told reporters in Beirut that Israel sought "to drown the United States in the swamp of war in the Middle East."

But in private, Iranian emissaries have adopted a more measured tone. They've praised Hezbollah's sacrifices but cautioned that war with Israel would risk precious gains in the region.

Houthi rebels damage a Belize-flagged ship in strait

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A missile attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels that damaged a Belize-flagged ship traveling through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait that connects the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden has forced the crew to abandon the ship, authorities said Monday. Another ship reportedly came twice under attack in the Gulf of Aden.

The Iran-backed Houthis also claimed they shot down an

American MQ-9 Reaper drone, something not immediately acknowledged by U.S. forces in the region. However, the Houthis have downed U.S. drones before.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military said it was conducting new airstrikes targeting the rebels, including one that targeted the first Houthi underwater drone seen since they began launching attacks on international shipping in November.

The ship targeted in the

Houthi attack on Sunday reported sustaining damage after "an explosion in close proximity to the vessel," the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center reported.

"Military authorities report crew have abandoned the vessel," the UKMTO said. "Vessel at anchor and all crew are safe."

Houthi Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree issued a statement claiming the attack, saying the vessel

was "now at risk of potentially sinking."

"The ship suffered catastrophic damages and came to a complete halt," Saree said. "During the operation, we made sure that the ship's crew exited safely."

The private security firm Ambrey reported the British-registered, Lebanese-operated cargo ship had been on its way to Bulgaria after leaving Khorfakkan in the United Arab Emirates.

New round of wet winter storms hits Calif.

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The latest in a series of wet winter storms gained strength in California early Monday, with forecasters warning of possible flooding, hail, strong winds and even brief tornadoes as the system moves south over the next few days.

Gusts topped 30 mph in Oakland and San Jose as a mild cold front late Saturday gave way to a more powerful storm on Sunday, said meteorologist Brayden Murdock with the National Weather Service office in San Francisco.

“The winds are here and getting stronger, and the rains will follow quickly,” he said Sunday

afternoon.

California’s central coast is at risk of “significant flooding,” with up to 5 inches of rain predicted for many areas, according to the weather service. Isolated rain totals of 10 inches are possible in the Santa Lucia and Santa Ynez mountain ranges as the storm heads toward greater Los Angeles.

Thunderstorms in valleys around the state capital on Monday could bring “brief tornadoes, large amounts of small hail, heavy rain, lightning, and gusty winds,” the weather service in Sacramento warned on X.

Residents in the region, including Sacramento, Chico, Yuba City, Stockton and Modesto,

“are advised to pay close attention to the weather,” the office said later in a separate statement.

Early Monday, a man was rescued along a creek in El Dorado Hills, east of Sacramento. The man, who had been camping in the area, was trapped in a tree as floodwaters rose, El Dorado Hills Deputy Fire Chief Dave Brady told KCRA-TV.

The latest storm is expected to move through quicker than the devastating atmospheric river that parked itself over Southern California earlier this month, turning roads into rivers, causing hundreds of landslides and killing at least nine people.

“It’s not the ideal setup for an

atmospheric river, but it does have some of the characteristics,” including a band of subtropical moisture bringing up the rear of the storm, Murdock said. “Otherwise it’s just a cold front.”

But it’s a cold front strong enough to cause problems including flash flooding and power outages, forecasters said. Flood watches and warnings were issued in coastal and mountain areas up and down the state.

Rainfall will be widespread even in the mountains, but several feet of snow is possible at elevations above about 6,800 feet across the Sierra Nevada, the weather service said. Motorists are urged to avoid mountain routes.

American admits to fatal attack near German castle

Associated Press

BERLIN — An American man on Monday admitted to charges of murder and rape after he allegedly pushed two U.S. women down a ravine, fatally injuring one of them near Germany’s Neuschwanstein castle last year.

The 31-year-old defendant admitted to the charges during the start of his trial, the German news agency dpa reported. Defendants in the German legal system do not formally enter pleas to charges.

“The defendant has committed an unfathomable crime,” defense lawyer Philip Mueller said in a statement. The defendant, whose name hasn’t been released in line with German privacy rules, confirmed that his lawyer’s statement was correct but did not answer any questions.

The defendant is charged with murder, rape with fatal consequences, attempted murder and possession of child pornography.

The attack happened on June 14 near the Marienbruecke, a

bridge over a gorge close to the castle that offers a view of Neuschwanstein. Prosecutors say the defendant met by chance the two female tourists, ages 21 and 22, on a hiking path and lured them off the trail. They said in a statement that he apparently first forced the younger woman to the ground and tried to undress her.

When the older woman tried to help her, a scuffle ensued and the suspect allegedly pushed her down a steep slope. She sustained a head injury, bruises and grazes but survived.

The suspect then allegedly strangled the younger woman until she was unconscious and raped her, prosecutors said, before pushing her down the slope as well. She died.

Prosecutors said they secured a laptop and cellphones from the suspect containing child sexual abuse material.

The suspect was arrested shortly after the attack.

A verdict is expected to be announced in mid-March at the earliest.

COVID vaccine study finds links to health conditions

Bloomberg News

Vaccines that protect against severe illness, death and lingering long COVID symptoms from a coronavirus infection were linked to small increases in neurological, blood and heart-related conditions in the largest global vaccine safety study to date.

The rare events — identified early in the pandemic — included a higher risk of heart-related inflammation from mRNA shots made by Pfizer, BioNTech and Moderna, and an increased risk of a type of blood clot in the brain after immunization with viral-vector vaccines such as the one developed by the University of Oxford and made by AstraZeneca.

The viral-vector jabs were also tied to an increased risk of Guillain-Barre syndrome, a neurological disorder in which the immune system mistakenly attacks the peripheral nervous system.

More than 13.5 billion doses of COVID vaccines have been administered globally over the past three years, saving over 1 million lives in Europe alone. Still, a small proportion of people immunized

were injured by the shots, stoking debate about their benefits versus harms.

The new research, by the Global Vaccine Data Network, was published in the journal *Vaccine* last week. The research looked for 13 medical conditions that the group considered “adverse events of special interest” among 99 million vaccinated individuals in eight countries, aiming to identify higher-than-expected cases after a COVID shot. The use of aggregated data increased the possibility of identifying rare safety signals that might have been missed when looking only at smaller populations.

Myocarditis, or inflammation of the heart muscle, was consistently identified following a first, second and third dose of mRNA vaccines, the study found. The highest increase in the observed-to-expected ratio was seen after a second jab with the Moderna shot. A first and fourth dose of the same vaccine was also tied to an increase in pericarditis, or inflammation of the thin sac covering the heart.

Withdrawal shows Kyiv lacks artillery

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Dwindling ammunition threatens Ukraine's hold on the 620-mile front line under withering assault by Russian artillery. Defensive lines are in jeopardy.

Ukrainian forces withdrew from the city of Avdiivka in the Donetsk region on Saturday after daily Russian onslaughts from three directions for the last four months.

Avdiivka was a stronghold for Ukrainian positions deeper inside the country, away from Russia. A frontline city ever since Russia first invaded Ukraine in 2014, the fortified settlement with a maze of trenches and tunnels served to protect important — less strengthened — logistical hubs further west.

Its seizure boosts Russian morale and confirms that the Kremlin's troops are now setting the pace in the fight, to the dismay of Ukrainian forces who have managed only incremental gains since their counteroffensive last year.

Congressional inaction

The Biden administration linked the loss of Avdiivka to congressional inaction on \$60 billion in military aid for Ukraine.

President Joe Biden said he told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in a Saturday phone call after Ukraine announced it was withdrawing troops from Avdiivka that he remained confident that

the U.S. funding would eventually come through. But, when reporters asked if he was confident a deal could be struck before Ukraine loses more territory, Biden responded: "I'm not."

Dwindling supplies

The Associated Press interviewed over a dozen commanders, including heads of artillery units, in the war's most intense combat zones in the weeks ahead of Avdiivka's fall. They said shortages, which have always plagued Ukrainian forces since the full-scale invasion, grew acute last autumn.

Dwindling supplies of Western-supplied long-range artillery in particular means Ukrainian forces are inhibited from striking high-value targets deep behind Russian lines, where heavy equipment and personnel are accumulated.

For weeks, Ukrainian forces across the frontline have complained about critical shortages in ammunition, with some artillery batteries fighting with only 10% of supply they need. Desperate to economize shells, military leaders ordered units to fire at only precise targets. But commanders on the ground say this is barely enough to restrain their better supplied enemy. Concerns are growing that without military aid the fall of Avdiivka may be repeated in other parts of the frontline.

A victory for Moscow

The withdrawal of Ukrainian soldiers

from the heavily fortified town handed Russia its biggest victory since the battle of Bakhmut last year. It will allow the Kremlin's troops to push their offensive farther west, deeper into Ukrainian-held territory over less-fortified areas. Pokrovsk, a railway junction farther east, could be the next Russian objective, military bloggers said.

Russian military officials and war bloggers said that the capture of Avdiivka reduced the threat to the Russian-held city of Donetsk.

Economizing shells

"Currently the ammunition deficit is quite serious. We are constantly promised that more is coming, but we don't see it coming," said Khorobryi, commander of an artillery battery. Their battery has only 5-10% of ammunition needed, he said.

That, he said, robs forces of their ability to effectively attack and regain territories. Even worse, Ukraine loses fighters because it cannot give infantry covering fire.

He, like other officers interviewed for this story, spoke on condition that only their first names be used for security reasons.

"We have nothing to fight with, we have nothing to cover our frontlines," said Valerie, who commands a howitzer unit that uses NATO-standard 155 mm rounds. To repel a Russian attack, he said they needed 100-120 shells per unit per day. Today, they have a tenth of that, he said.

Gaza hospital 'not functional' as troops raid complex

The Washington Post

Israel's dayslong raid inside Nasser Hospital in southern Gaza has collapsed services and swept up scores of people — including patients and doctors — in mass arrests, the Gaza Health Ministry and a senior U.N. official said.

The hospital in the city of Khan Younis is the largest in southern Gaza, but it "is not functional anymore," the head of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said Sunday, calling for access to the patients. He said a WHO team sent to deliver fuel and assess medical needs was barred from entering the facility on Friday and Saturday, "despite reaching the hospital compound," where about 200 patients remain.

"The cost of delays will be paid by patients' lives," he said, adding that at least 20 people needed to be "urgently referred to

other hospitals to receive health care."

The raid is Israel's latest military operation against a major health-care facility in Gaza, where at least 29,000 people have been killed and more than 68,000 injured since the war began on Oct. 7, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The attacks have crippled the enclave's beleaguered medical system, forcing doctors and staff to treat trauma injuries on the floor, operate without anesthesia, and watch as critical patients die when the power goes out and their oxygen depletes.

Seven patients at Nasser Hospital died after Israeli troops stormed the complex on Friday and a power outage shut off the oxygen, Ashraf al-Qudra, a spokesman for the Gaza Health Ministry, said in a statement Sunday.

Israel has turned the hospital complex "into a military barracks and put it out of

service," he said, adding that the Israeli military arrested 70 members of the hospital's staff.

The Israel Defense Forces overran Nasser Hospital to recover the bodies of hostages it believed were being held there, spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said, and to halt militant activity the IDF alleged was taking place on hospital grounds.

Israeli forces have not yet found the bodies of any hostages but said on Sunday that they discovered medicine at the hospital bearing the names of Israelis who were abducted by Hamas. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant also said Sunday that "200 terrorists" had surrendered at the hospital, without offering details.

A later IDF statement said "hundreds of terrorists and terror suspects" were apprehended and then "transferred to undergo further investigations by security forces."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Leaking propane tank found at home blast

VA STERLING — When firefighters arrived at a home in a Washington, D.C., suburb to investigate a report about a gas smell Friday night, they discovered a 500-gallon underground propane tank with a leak on the side of the residence.

Shortly after they arrived, the house exploded and burst into flames, with multiple mayday calls coming from the firefighters trapped inside. Crews rushed in to try to rescue them from the debris that covered them, but one firefighter was killed and 10 others were injured, Loudoun County Fire and Rescue officials said.

Four of the firefighters hurt in the blast remained in hospitals Saturday, according to Loudoun Fire and Rescue System Chief Keith Johnson.

The firefighter killed in the blast was identified as Trevor Brown, 45, a volunteer with Sterling Volunteer Fire Company.

Pregnant woman found dead in 1992 identified

IN FORT WAYNE — A pregnant woman who was found dead in 1992 in a northeastern Indiana basement has been identified through forensic genetic genealogy and DNA provided by her father, authorities said.

The woman was identified as Tabetha Ann Murlin of Fort Wayne, who was about 26 weeks pregnant at the time of her death, said Allen County Coroner Dr. E. Jon Brandenberger.

“This is Tabetha’s day, and you’ve been waiting to have a

day for her for all this time,” the coroner said at a news conference attended by some of Murlin’s relatives nearly 32 years after her body was discovered.

Brandenberger said Murlin would have been 23 when a construction worker found her decomposed body wrapped in a blanket in May 1992 in the flooded basement of a home being renovated in Fort Wayne.

The cause and manner of Murlin’s death have not been determined and the investigation into her death is continuing, officials said.

Judge charged with shooting ex as he slept

PA HARRISBURG — A suspended magistrate judge in Pennsylvania shot her estranged boyfriend in the head as he slept, police said in filing attempted murder and aggravated assault charges against her.

Tests showed Magisterial District Judge Sonya M. McKnight, 57, had gunshot residue on her hands an hour after Michael McCoy was shot in the bed of his home in the Harrisburg area, Susquehanna Township Police wrote in an arrest affidavit.

Authorities said McCoy is now blind in his right eye.

Police wrote that McCoy, 54, had tried “numerous times” to get McKnight to move out after he ended their one-year relationship.

McCoy awoke to “massive head pain” and was unable to see, police said, and when he began to scream McKnight told him, “Mike what did you do to yourself?” He had suffered a gunshot wound to the right temple that exited his left temple,

police said. McCoy told police that he did not shoot himself.

Man wrongfully jailed for 37 years getting \$14M

FL TAMPA — Robert DuBoise spent 37 years in a Florida prison for a 1983 rape and murder he did not commit. Now, he’s set to receive \$14 million from the city of Tampa as compensation for all those lost years.

DuBoise, who was 18 when the crime occurred, was initially sentenced to death for the killing of 19-year-old Barbara Grams. Although his sentence was later reduced to life in prison, it wasn’t until 2018 — with help from the Innocence Project organization — that prosecutors agreed to give the case another look.

DNA testing that was not available in the early 1980s pointed toward two other men in the slaying, leading to DuBoise’s release from prison in 2020. Not long after that, DuBoise sued the city of Tampa, police officers who investigated the case and a forensic dentist who had testified that his teeth matched a purported bite mark on the victim.

City to quit controversial gunshot detection tech

IL CHICAGO — Chicago won’t renew its ShotSpotter contract and plans to stop using the controversial gunshot detection system later this year, Mayor Brandon Johnson’s office announced.

The system, which relies on an artificial intelligence algorithm and network of microphones to identify gunshots, has been criticized for inaccuracy, racial bias and law enforcement

misuse.

An Associated Press investigation of the technology detailed how police and prosecutors used ShotSpotter data as evidence in charging a Chicago grandfather with murder before a judge dismissed the case due to insufficient evidence.

The city plans to wind down the use of ShotSpotter technology by late September, according to city officials. Since 2018, the city has spent \$49 million on the ShotSpotter system.

Police chief convicted of lying to get machine guns

IA ADAIR — The police chief of a small Iowa town was convicted by a federal jury of lying to federal authorities to acquire machine guns prosecutors said he sold for his own profit.

The jury convicted Adair Police Chief Brad Wendt, 47, of conspiring to make false statements to the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, making false statements to the agency, and illegal possession of a machine gun. He was convicted on 11 of 15 charges.

Wendt was indicted in December 2022, accused of lying to the bureau in official letters asking to buy the machine guns or to see them demonstrated.

Authorities said he bought machine guns for the police department, then sold them for an almost \$80,000 personal profit. Trial evidence showed he bought machine guns for his gun store, including a .50-caliber machine gun he mounted to his own armored Humvee, using the letters, federal prosecutors said.

— From wire reports

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Points records fall in NBA All-Star Game

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The NBA wanted more competition. It got more points instead — more than ever before.

And once again, the All-Star Game was all offense.

All-Star MVP Damian Lillard of the Milwaukee Bucks scored 39 points and the Eastern Conference beat the Western Conference 211-186 on Sunday night, with the winners putting up the most points in the game's 73-year history. The previous mark: 196 by the West in 2016.

"We had fun," East captain Giannis Antetokounmpo of the Bucks said.

It was a flurry of records: The total points of 397 smashed the record of 374 set in 2017, while the East made 42 3-pointers to break the mark of 35 set by Team LeBron in 2019. The sides combined for 193 points in the first half to break the any-half record of 191 set last year, and the East tied an any-half record by scoring 104 by intermission.

Jaylen Brown of the Boston Celtics had 36 and Tyrese Haliburton from the hometown In-

diana Pacers finished with 32 for the East, while Antetokounmpo had 23 and Jayson Tatum finished with 20.

"To be able to have this kind of accomplishment, it's special," Lillard said.

Perhaps unnoticed: Karl-Anthony Towns of the Minnesota Timberwolves scored 50 points for the West in just 28 minutes. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander of the Oklahoma City Thunder scored 31 points for the West.

"The shot-making from the East was incredible," West forward Kevin Durant said. "Hard to play defense when somebody's shooting 30-, 40-footers over you."

The West scored a ton of points, too: At 186, it had the fourth-most by any team in All-Star history. And obviously, the most ever in a loss.

Among the other records:

■ The East tried 97 3-pointers; the previous record was 90 by Team LeBron in 2019.

■ The teams combined for 66 3s made and 168 3s attempted (previous records were 62 and 167 in 2019).

■ The teams combined for 163 field goals made and 289 attempted (previous records were 162 in 2017 and 286 in 2016).

"Obviously, it wasn't high intensity, at all," Haliburton said.

Lillard made some history, too. He defended his 3-point shootout title Saturday night — then won MVP on Sunday night. The only other player to win a Saturday event and All-Star MVP in the same weekend was Michael Jordan in 1988, when he won the dunk contest as well as the MVP trophy.

"Dame put on a show," Tatum said, "and I was happy for him."

The highlights were from everywhere. Lillard pulled up from half-court in the third quarter — swish. Luka Doncic tried a shot from about 70 feet late in the first half; it hit near the top of the backboard. Towns even threw an alley-oop to Stephen Curry; the Warriors star is much more of a shooter than a dunker, so he simply laid it in instead.

The only drama in the fourth

was about the record — and really, that wasn't in doubt. The East had 160 points through three quarters, only needing 37 more to set the team record.

Brown's 3-pointer with 1:54 left broke the mark, giving the East 197. Haliburton made the shot that sent a scoreboard to the 200-point mark for the first time in any sort of official NBA history, connecting with 1:27 left.

Lillard said the East wanted the record.

"Everybody was asking what the record was," Lillard said. "We found out and went after it."

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver and other league executives were seeking a more competitive All-Star Game after last season's 184-175 matchup was widely panned — and television ratings plummeted.

Even Hall of Famer Larry Bird, honored Sunday at the NBA Legends Brunch, said was hoping the message from the league resonated and players took the All-Star Game a little more seriously.

Nets fire Vaughn as coach after disappointing first half

Associated Press

The Brooklyn Nets fired Jacques Vaughn on Monday after ending a disappointing first half of the season with a 50-point loss in Boston in their final game before the All-Star break.

About a year after giving Vaughn a contract extension, the Nets changed course and said an interim coach would be named soon.

The Nets dropped five of their last six games before the break to fall to 21-33, putting them in 11th place in the Eastern Conference. Their 136-86 loss to the Celtics on Wednesday was their worst defeat since moving to Brooklyn in 2012 and the second-worst in franchise history, and leading

scorer Mikal Bridges seemed particularly frustrated in his postgame comments.

Vaughn finished 71-68 with the Nets, guiding them into the playoffs on two separate stints.

"This was an incredibly difficult decision, but one we feel is in the best interest of the team going forward," general manager Sean Marks said in a statement. "Jacque has represented this organization with exemplary character and class for the past eight years. The consistent positivity and passion he poured into our team daily will remain with the players and staff he interacted with throughout his tenure."

Vaughn replaced the fired Steve Nash on Nov. 1, 2022, and

quickly led the Nets from a poor start toward the top of the East. Brooklyn went 12-1 that December and 43-32 the rest of the season, making the playoffs despite trading Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving during the season.

But Brooklyn's lack of star power this season has been apparent, and Vaughn lamented last week the minutes restrictions that have kept Ben Simmons and some of his other top players from staying on the floor long enough to give the Nets a better chance to be competitive.

The Nets got off to a 15-15 start this season, but things began to turn when Vaughn made a curious decision to barely

play or entirely rest all his top players during a 144-122 home loss to Milwaukee on Dec. 27. The NBA fined the Nets \$100,000, the first time a team was sanctioned for violating the league's player participation policy that went into effect this season.

Vaughn got his first chance to coach the Nets in March 2020 after Kenny Atkinson was fired just before the season was suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic. He led the Nets to a 7-3 record and into the playoffs in the restart "bubble" at Walt Disney World, but the Nets then opted to give the head coaching job to Nash, despite having no experience. Vaughn stayed on as an assistant.

Thornton, Ohio State upset No. 2 Purdue

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Ohio State stunned No. 2 Purdue on Sunday in its interim coach's debut, winning 73-69 a day after the NCAA Tournament selection committee picked the Boilermakers as the early favorite to be the No. 1 overall seed during March Madness.

Bruce Thornton scored 22 points and Jamison Battle added 19 points to help Ohio State (15-11, 5-10 Big Ten) pull off the upset in Jake Diebler's first game at the helm.

Chris Holtmann was fired Wednesday after several disappointing seasons. The beleaguered Buckeyes had lost nine of their last eleven games. Purdue (23-3, 12-3) had been favored by 8½ points, according to FanDuel Sportsbook.

Ohio State played with energy from the start, led 35-30 at the break and six minutes into the second half were up by 12.

With the Boilermakers closing down the stretch, it seemed like only a matter of time until Zach Edey took over the game, but it didn't happen.

Lance Jones hit a 3-pointer for Purdue to tie the score at 65 with 1:39 left. But Battle hit a jumper and then, with 34 seconds left, hit a pair of free throws to bump the Ohio State lead to 69-65.

An easy dunk by Edey reduced the deficit to two with 16 seconds left. Running out time, the Boilermakers fouled Thornton, who went to the line and made both foul shots.

Edey finished with 22 points and 13 rebounds, the 58th career double-double for the Purdue star.

South Florida 90, No. 24 Florida Atlantic 86: Selton Miguel scored a career-high 25 points and Chris Youngblood added 23 as the American Athletic Conference-leading Bulls won their 11th straight game.

USF (19-5, 12-1 AAC), under first-year coach Amir Abdur-Rahim, nearly squandered a 25-point lead in front of a home record crowd of 10,659.

FAU (20-6, 10-3) got 23 points from Vladislav Goldin and 20 from Johnell Davis. The Owls, who advanced to the Final Four

last season, dropped to third place in the American.

Miguel had 16 points and Youngblood picked up 15 as USF built a 46-31 halftime lead.

Northwestern 76, Indiana 72: Ryan Langborg scored 26 points, Matt Nicholson and Nick Martinelli had double-doubles and the visiting Wildcats held off a furious Hoosiers rally.

Northwestern led by seven entering a wild final minute in which the teams combined for 21 points. Indiana scored 12 of those points, the last three coming on a jumper by Mackenzie Mgbako that made it 75-72 with nine seconds left. Brooks Barnhizer made one of two free throws for a four-point Northwestern lead and Indiana's Anthony Leal missed a 3-pointer as time expired.

Nicholson had 14 points and 16 rebounds for the Wildcats (18-8, 9-6 Big Ten) and Martinelli had 13 and 13. Boo Buie scored 14 points, leaving him four shy of tying John Shurna's school-record of 2,038 career points.

Kel'el Ware had 22 points, 16 rebounds and four blocks for the Hoosiers (14-11, 6-8). Mgbako scored 20 and Trey Galloway had seven points and 12 assists.

Utah 70, UCLA 69: Branden Carlson scored off an offensive rebound at the buzzer, helping the visiting Utes snap the Bruins' six-game winning streak.

Dylan Andrews hit a go-ahead jumper with six seconds remaining for UCLA, which led by six earlier in the half.

Utah inbounded and raced the length of the court before Deivon Smith missed a layup. Carlson grabbed the ball in traffic and put it in.

Smith and Carlson finished with 17 points each in Utah's first win at Pauley Pavilion since 2018-19. The Utes (16-10, 7-8) completed their second season sweep of the Bruins since joining the Pac-12. They blew out UCLA 90-44 in Salt Lake City on Jan. 11.

Lazar Stefanovic scored a season-high 19 points playing all 40 minutes for the Bruins (14-12, 9-6).

Matsuyama rallies from 6 down with 62 at Riviera

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The conversation began seven years ago when Japanese star Hideki Matsuyama won his fourth PGA Tour title to pass Shigeki Maruyama, his mentor. Maruyama told him the ultimate mark was nine tour wins, a record for most by an Asian-born player.

Matsuyama had little reason to believe that would come Sunday at Riviera.

Six shots behind to start the final round of the Genesis Invitational, Matsuyama delivered a record performance — 9-under 62, the lowest closing round by a winner at Riviera — to achieve the record that really mattered.

He now has nine PGA Tour wins, one better than K.J. Choi

of South Korea.

"Reaching nine wins was one of my big goals, passing K.J. Choi," Matsuyama said after his three-shot victory. "After my eighth win, I've been struggling with my back injury. There were a lot of times where I felt I was never going to win again. I struggled reaching to top 10, but I'm really happy that I was able to win today."

This was an exquisite performance, second only to his 61 in the final round at Firestone in 2017 on a day no one else shot lower than 65.

Matsuyama was part of a five-way tie for the lead on the back nine until he hit a beautiful fade with a 6-iron from 187 yards into a breeze on the tough 15th hole

that carried the bunker and rolled out to 8 inches for a tap-in birdie.

"Perfect shot," he said.

On the par-3 16th, he dangled the club after his tee shot because it was 5 yards right of where he had been aiming, only to see it roll to 6 inches from the cup for another birdie. He added a third straight birdie with a chip down the slope on the par-5 17th to just over 3 feet.

Matsuyama lightly pumped his fist — a rare show of emotion for him — when his 4-foot par putt with a sharp right-to-left break dropped in for a 62.

Doug Tewell shot 63 in the final round to win in 1986, the previous record.

The only downer for Mat-

suyama was not being able to pose with Tiger Woods, the tournament host who withdrew on Friday with the flu.

Matsuyama finished at 17-under 267 for a three-shot victory over Will Zalatoris (69) and Luke List (68). Patrick Cantlay and Xander Schauffele, best friends playing in the final group, faded in the middle of the back nine and tied for fourth.

"Once I saw Hideki finishing at 17 under, it was a bit of a deflatter, I'm sure for the rest of the field," Schauffele said. "But hats off to him. It's incredible. He's done it a few times now, shooting lights out on Sunday."

It was the third time Matsuyama shot 63 or lower on Sunday to win.

Panarin lifts Rangers over Islanders in OT

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — After falling behind by three goals early in the second period, the New York Rangers kept their composure, kept up the pressure and got a big comeback win to remain perfect in outdoor games.

Artemi Panarin scored 10 seconds into overtime and the Rangers beat the crosstown-rival Islanders 6-5 in a Stadium Series game at MetLife Stadium on Sunday.

“Just sticking with what we know,” Rangers captain Jacob Trouba said. “The whole group came together and everyone kind of stuck with it and got the result we wanted. It’s a pretty cool memory.”

Panarin knocked in the puck off Islanders defenseman Noah Dobson and goalie Ilya Sorokin and the puck trickled across the goal line after Dobson knocked the right side of the goal loose.

The goal was confirmed after a review.

“I was flooded with emotions,” Panarin said. “I had to hold back tears. It was so much of a spectacle.”

Vincent Trocheck had two goals and an assist, and Erik Gustafsson, Chris Kreider and Mika Zibanejad also scored for the Rangers, who won their season-high seventh straight and improved to 5-0 outdoors. Panarin, Alexis Lafreniere and Adam Fox each had two assists, and Igor Shesterkin finished with 36 saves.

“To win the way we did was incredible,” Zibanejad said. “There’s no better way to finish it off.”

Rangers coach Peter Laviolette was behind the bench for his fifth outdoor game, tying Joel Quenneville for the most in NHL history, and got his first win in the open air.

“These games that take place

are special, I’ve been fortunate enough to be a part of them,” Laviolette said. “There have been some good ones but this one has to be up there, near the top of the list.”

Kings 2, Penguins 1: Adrian Kempe scored twice in the third period, including a short-handed go-ahead goal with 3:10 to play as visiting Los Angeles rallied past Pittsburgh.

The Kings won their third straight to finish off a four-game road trip by beating the Penguins on a night Pittsburgh honored franchise icon Jaromir Jagr, who had his No. 68 retired during a pregame ceremony.

Cam Talbot finished with 29 saves for Los Angeles, which has won five of six.

Sidney Crosby scored his 31st goal of the season for the Penguins with a power-play goal late in the first period, but Pittsburgh let a chance to build momentum at the start of a pivotal

four-game homestand slip away over the final 20 minutes.

Avalanche 4, Coyotes 3: Devon Toews scored the go-ahead goal with 6:35 remaining, Nathan MacKinnon had a goal and an assist to give him at least a point in all 26 home games and host Colorado extended Arizona’s skid to nine in a row.

Ross Colton and Jack Johnson also scored and Alexander Georgiev stopped 28 shots for the Avalanche.

MacKinnon extended his point streak this season at Ball Arena with a second-period goal. His home point streak is the second-longest to open a season in NHL history, trailing only Wayne Gretzky’s 40-game mark, set during the 1988-89 season with the Los Angeles Kings.

Matt Dumba, Lawson Crouse and Logan Cooley scored for Arizona, which hasn’t won since Jan. 22. Karel Vejmelka made 33 saves.

Harper wants longer deal with Phils, has accepted first base

Associated Press

CLEARWATER, Fla. — Bryce Harper wants to finish his career with the Philadelphia Phillies, playing into his 40s and perhaps gloving a throw at first base for the final out of a World Series.

Harper arrived at spring training Sunday and the two-time NL MVP said he accepts his move to first from the outfield, a makeshift decision last year that got him back on the field following Tommy John surgery.

He has seven years and \$196 million left on his \$330 million, 13-year contract, a relative bargain with a \$25.4 million average salary that ranks 25th among current players.

“I want to be here for a long time and understand playing into my 40s, that’s the biggest thing for me,” the 31-year-old said Sunday in the Phillies’ spring training clubhouse. “So I wanted to get that done.”

After 11 seasons as an outfielder, Harper moved to first last year when he returned from Tommy John surgery, which he had in November. Back as a designated hitter May 2, Harper started playing first July 21 and had 36 starts there, plus 13 in the playoffs.

Phillies president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski met with Harper during

the offseason and discussed a long-term shift to the infield.

“We had a pretty good conversation, me and Dombo, we sat down and he said this would be great for our organization, and I said, ‘OK,’” Harper said. “I wanted them to know that I was on board with anything that they wanted to do. I said if you want me in right field, I’ll play right. If you want me at first, I’ll play first base, and I think as a collective they said first base is where we want you, and I said, ‘OK, I’m going to do anything I can to be there.’”

Harper’s agent, Scott Boras, has advocated opt-outs in contracts to ensure stars don’t fall behind top-of-the-market prices.

“He was fully aware with the magnitude of the opt-out in regard to his rights structure and the benefit of it,” Boras said. “I advised him of it multiple times. On each occasion. Bryce said: ‘I’m going to Philadelphia. I want the fans to know that I’m going to be there for the remainder of my career. I’ve got to recruit teammates, and I want them to know I’m going to be there.’”

“He feels as though the fact that he did not include an opt-out in his contract would not be something that would be used against him,” Boras said.

Philadelphia had a void at first created when Rhys Hoskins tore his left ACL while fielding a grounder in a spring training game last March. Hoskins became a free agent after the season and signed a \$34 million, two-year contract with Milwaukee.

“For longevity, I think it’s good for Bryce and it’s good for the ballclub,” Phillies manager Rob Thomson said of the switch.

Harper was slowed by back spasms last summer, coming out of an Aug. 10 game against Washington, then making only six starts in the field over the next 21 games.

“When he first started doing it last year, the back kind of flared up at times, but I think as he gets used to it, I think that won’t be as much of an issue,” Thomson said.

Harper’s current deal runs until he turns 38. He isn’t pressing for quick negotiations on a new deal.

“I understand there’s other guys to take care of, right? Understanding that Wheels is a big one for us right now,” he said, a reference to pitcher Zack Wheeler entering the last season of a \$118 million, five-year deal. “Contract negotiations can happen throughout the season and things like that. So, we’ll see what Scott and Dave can come up.”