

US hits three more alleged drug boats

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military conducted three strikes in the eastern Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea on Monday, killing 11 people, according to U.S. Southern Command.

In a post on X Tuesday, SOUTHCOM said “intelligence confirmed” the vessels were engaged in drug-trafficking operations. A 39-second video was included on the post showing the boats either moving through the water or stationary before being struck.

No U.S. forces were harmed in the operations, SOUTHCOM said.

“Turns out President’s Day — under President [Donald] Trump — is not a good day to run drugs,” Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth posted on X.

The death toll from the strikes on alleged drug boats is now at 144 people in at least 42 attacks carried out since early September in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific.

Hegseth said this month in a post on X that “some top cartel drug-traffickers” in the region “have decided to cease all narcotics operations INDEFINITELY due to recent (highly effective) kinetic strikes in the Caribbean.” However, Hegseth did not provide any details or infor-

mation to back up this claim, made in a post on his personal account on social media.

SOUTHCOM responded to questions about Hegseth’s post saying it had “nothing to add at this time.”

Trump has said the U.S. is in “armed conflict” with cartels in Latin America and has justified the attacks as a necessary escalation to stem the flow of drugs. But his administration has offered little evidence to support its claims of killing “narcoterrorists.”

The U.S. resumed strikes in late January after largely backing off in the region following the capture of Venezuelan Presi-

dent Nicolás Maduro on Jan. 3.

The U.S. military has steadily amassed troops, naval and air assets in the Caribbean to strike alleged drug traffickers.

The USS Gerald R. Ford, along with accompanying ships USS Mahan, USS Bainbridge and USS Winston S. Churchill arrived in November, concentrating nearly 20% of the Navy’s deployed warships in the region.

The strike group joined other ships in the Caribbean, including the Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group and its embarked Marine expeditionary unit. Also patrolling the region are guided-missile cruisers USS Gettysburg and USS Lake Erie.

Shutdown in El Paso puts spotlight on drone issues

Bloomberg

The U.S. military has spent years working to defeat increasingly numerous and capable drones with directed-energy systems that cost less and offer more rounds than traditional missiles. One of those systems was at the center of the confusing airspace closure in El Paso, Texas, last week.

A U.S. Army-owned LOCUST system, manufactured by AeroVironment Inc., was used by the Department of Homeland Security to target drones from a site in New Mexico, according to a person familiar with the situation who spoke on condition of anonymity.

But a lack of communication between government agencies meant that DHS’s tests prompted the Federal Aviation Administration to close the airspace around El Paso last Tuesday for “special security reasons.”

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said the closure — initially scheduled to continue for 10 days — was due to a Mexican drug cartel drone entering U.S. airspace. The restriction was lifted hours later after, Duffy said, the threat was neutralized. But other officials pointed to testing of the counter-drone technology that the FAA feared would affect safety of civilian aircraft at El Paso International Airport.

The confusing turn of events — even White House and Texas officials seemed surprised by the airspace’s closure — overshadowed a deeper issue: the Pentagon’s struggle to defeat low-cost threats without relying on a costly and limited supply of high-end missiles.

Drone warfare is center-stage in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, allowing off-the-shelf technology to quickly punch back against multi-million dollar weapons systems that took

years or decades to develop.

And thanks to their small size and low cost, drone use is spreading well beyond the confines of battlefields.

“Along the border, they are being used increasingly by transnational criminal organizations for surveillance and smuggling operations,” said Bella Grabowski of the America First Policy Institute, adding that military installations and critical infrastructure can be targets for surveillance as well as potential intelligence collection.

To counter the rising threat, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has directed his department to pursue “drone dominance” by accelerating and expanding production of drones for U.S. military use, while seeking to speed up purchases of counter-drone technologies.

The Army has been working for years to develop and field directed-energy weapons such

as high-powered microwaves and high-energy lasers, with the aim of saving costly missiles for more complex threats.

As part of that effort, the service appeared close to fielding a 50kW laser weapon on a Stryker combat vehicle.

The laser performed well in desert test environments in the U.S. But when sent to the Middle East for further evaluation, the system’s reliability didn’t hold up and the Army realized it had problems trying to fix it in the field.

LOCUST has seemed like another promising option. The technology, which can be mounted on a number of different vehicles, consists of two parts: a laser system and a tracking system.

An artificial intelligence program locks onto drones as far as two miles away, deciphering targets and boasting greater beam control than more powerful lasers.

US troops in Nigeria to help train its forces

Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria — About 100 U.S. troops plus equipment have arrived in Nigeria to help train soldiers in the West African country as the government fights against Islamic militants and other armed groups, the Nigerian military announced Monday.

The arrival followed a request by the Nigerian government to the U.S. government for help with training, technical support and intelligence-sharing, the military said in a statement.

The deployment follows an easing of tensions that flared between the U.S. and Nigeria when President Donald Trump said

the country wasn't protecting Christians from an alleged genocide. The Nigerian government has rejected the accusation, and analysts say it simplifies a very complicated situation in which people are often targeted regardless of their faith.

Maj. Gen. Samaila Uba, spokesman for Nigeria's Defense Headquarters, previously has said that the U.S. troops won't engage in combat or have a direct operational role, and that Nigerian forces will have complete command authority.

In December, U.S. forces launched airstrikes on Islamic State-affiliated militants in northwestern Nigeria. Last

month, following discussions with Nigerian authorities in Abuja, the head of U.S. Africa Command confirmed a small team of U.S. military officers were in Nigeria, focused on intelligence support.

Nigeria is facing a protracted fight with dozens of local armed groups increasingly battling for turf, including Islamic sects like the homegrown Boko Haram and its breakaway faction Islamic State West Africa Province.

There is also the ISIS-linked Lakurawa, as well as other "bandit" groups that specialize in kidnapping for ransom and illegal mining.

Recently, the crisis has worsened to include other militants from the neighboring Sahel region, including the Jama'at Nus-rat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, which claimed its first attack on Nigerian soil last year.

Several thousand people in Nigeria have been killed, according to data from the United Nations. Analysts say not enough is being done by the government to protect its citizens.

While Christians have been among those targeted, analysts and residents say the majority of victims of the armed groups are Muslims in Nigeria's Muslim-dominated north, where most attacks occur.

New Djibouti range allows training with less travel

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

A new small-arms range that recently opened at a strategic outpost in Djibouti gives U.S. forces there more chances to sharpen their aim before being deployed for combat operations, Air Force officials said this week.

Chabelley Airfield recently marked the "operational milestone" with the opening of its \$1.6 million range, which expands training opportunities for U.S. and partner forces, the 776th Expeditionary Air Base Squadron said in a statement Monday.

The new range has tripled local training capacity and enables troops to develop their skills while avoiding "exposure associated with off-base movements," Air Force Lt. Col. Lawrence Melnicoff, 776th Expeditionary Air Base Squadron commander, said in the statement.

"Training in the same environment where we operate matters," Melnicoff added.

Prior to the range's comple-

tion, personnel were required to convoy to off-base training locations or wait up to a month to access the range at nearby Camp Lemonnier, according to the statement. Melnicoff said the range "hardens force protection and anchors Chabelley as a credible, self-sustaining operational node."

The development is one in a series of upgrades to key locations for U.S. Africa Command in a region where countering Islamic militants such as al-Shabab and Islamic State in Somalia is a top priority.

In October, a new medical care facility opened at Chabelley, marking the latest sign the U.S. military is putting down permanent roots at a location known for projecting American airpower across east Africa.

Upgrades also are being made at AFRICOM locations in Kenya. While Djibouti serves as a key location on Somalia's northern border, Kenya plays a similar role to Somalia's south.

Hegseth forces ouster of Army secretary adviser

The Washington Post

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has forced the ouster of a senior military adviser to Army Secretary Dan Driscoll, defense officials said, marking the Pentagon chief's latest intervention into the service's internal affairs amid long-simmering tension between two of the Trump administration's top political appointees.

Hegseth directed Driscoll to fire Col. David Butler during a discussion at the Pentagon last week, officials said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss a private conversation between Hegseth and Driscoll.

Butler has served most recently as a spokesman and media strategist for Driscoll and Gen. Randy George, the Army's chief of staff. He had been nominated for promotion to brigadier general, but Hegseth took issue with that plan for reasons that remain unclear, officials said.

Officials familiar with the matter said that Butler's name appeared on a list of about three doz-

en promotion-eligible Army officers that should have been sent to the White House for approval months ago. It appears his inclusion was among the reasons those promotions have been delayed. After Hegseth's order to Driscoll last week, these people said, Butler elected to submit his retirement paperwork rather than hold up his colleagues' promotions.

Hegseth issued the directive just ahead of Driscoll's departure for Switzerland, where the Army secretary is participating in high stakes discussions aimed at ending the Russia-Ukraine war.

In a statement provided to The Washington Post, Driscoll acknowledged the colonel's retirement but declined to address the reasons for it.

Butler declined to comment.

Butler's previous work as the senior spokesman for Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 2019 to until his retirement in 2023, appears to be a factor in the effort, officials familiar with the matter said.

Minn. cops denied access to Pretti evidence

The Minnesota Star Tribune

The Trump administration has formally denied Minnesota law enforcement access to information and evidence from the FBI investigation into the shooting death of Alex Pretti by federal agents on Jan. 24 in Minneapolis.

The announcement comes in the wake of White House border czar Tom Homan announcing the end of Operation Metro Surge and a drawdown of federal agents in Minnesota. Homan's arrival came in the wake of global outrage over the killing of Pretti, and Homan vowed a renewed focus on cooperation between state and federal officials.

Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension Superintendent Drew Evans said in a news release Monday that the FBI notified him last week that it will not share evidence from its investi-

gation with the state.

Evans said the BCA has continued to request access to federal investigative materials not only from the killing of Pretti but also from the killing of Renee Good by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent Jonathan Ross on Jan. 7 in south Minneapolis and the shooting of Julio Sosa-Celis by a federal agent in north Minneapolis on Jan. 14.

"While this lack of cooperation is concerning and unprecedented, the BCA is committed to thorough, independent and transparent investigations of these incidents," Evans said, "even if hampered by a lack of access to key information and evidence."

The BCA, Hennepin County Attorney's Office and Minnesota Attorney General's Office have been working together to con-

duct an independent state investigation into the killings of Good and Pretti.

Hennepin County Attorney Mary Moriarty said in a statement Monday that the federal government's refusal to cooperate shows it is "not confident in their agents' actions or their immediate response." She praised the BCA for its efforts to conduct a joint investigation but said that even without federal cooperation, the "work continues" on a state investigation.

Gov. Tim Walz posted on social media that, "Minnesota needs impartial investigations into the shootings of American citizens on our streets. [President Donald] Trump's left hand cannot investigate his right hand. The families of the deceased deserve better."

Last week, Walz said the state

and federal governments were "very close" to an agreement to share investigative materials.

"We're only asking for what's always been done," Walz said. "We're only asking for the right thing. ... Justice needs to be served."

Two weeks ago, people familiar with the ongoing effort to repair relationships between the federal and state governments told the Minnesota Star Tribune the announcement of a joint investigation between the FBI and BCA into the killing of Pretti was imminent.

That announcement never came.

Walz said the Trump administration pulled back from the joint investigation after details of the agreement were reported by the Star Tribune before it was formally announced.

California walloped by storm with high winds, heavy snow

Associated Press

California was walloped Monday by a powerful winter storm carrying treacherous thunderstorms, high winds and heavy snow in mountain areas.

Millions of Los Angeles County residents faced flash flood warnings as rain pounded the region and people in some areas scarred by last year's devastating wildfires were under an evacuation warning through Tuesday because of the potential for mud and debris flows.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass ordered emergency crews and city departments to be ready to respond to any problems.

The storm wreaked havoc on roadways spanning from Sonoma County to the Sierra Nevada. Traffic was halted temporarily in both directions on Interstate 80 near the Nevada state line due to spinouts and crashes, the California Department of Transportation reported. In Santa Barba-

ra County, a large tree toppled onto US-101, shutting down southbound lanes.

Forecasters said the western slope of the Sierra Nevada, northern Shasta County — including portions of Interstate 5 — and parts of the state's Coast Range could see up to 8 feet of snow before the storm moves through late Wednesday. The heavy snow, wind and low visibility could also make travel conditions dangerous to near impossible, forecasters added.

"It has seemed 'springlike' for a large part of 2026, but winter is set to show it's not quite done yet," the Shasta County Sheriff's Office said in a social media post urging residents to stay aware of the storm.

California's Office of Emergency Services said it was placing fire and rescue personnel and resources in areas most at risk for flooding, mud and debris flows.

MLK protege, candidate Jesse Jackson dies at 84

Associated Press

CHICAGO — The Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, a protege of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and two-time presidential candidate who led the Civil Rights Movement for decades after the revered leader's assassination, died Tuesday. He was 84.

His daughter, Santita Jackson, confirmed that her father died at home, surrounded by family.

As a young organizer in Chicago, Jackson was called to meet with King at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tenn., shortly before King was killed, and he publicly positioned himself thereafter as King's successor.

Jackson led a lifetime of crusades in the United States and abroad, advocating for the poor and underrepresented on issues from voting rights and job opportunities to education and health care.

He scored diplomatic victories with world leaders, and through

his Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, he channeled cries for Black pride and self-determination into corporate boardrooms, pressuring executives to make America a more open and equitable society.

And when he declared, "I am Somebody," in a poem he often repeated, he sought to reach people of all colors. "I may be poor, but I am Somebody; I may be young; but I am Somebody; I may be on welfare, but I am Somebody," Jackson intoned.

It was a message he took literally and personally, having risen from obscurity in the segregated South to become America's best-known civil rights activist since King.

Despite profound health challenges in his final years including a rare neurological disorder that affected his ability to move and speak, Jackson continued protesting against racial injustice into the era of Black Lives Matter.

Expectations low as Ukraine, Russia resume peace talks

Associated Press

GENEVA — Delegations from Moscow and Kyiv met in Geneva on Tuesday for another round of U.S.-brokered peace talks, a week before the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbor.

However, expectations for any breakthroughs in the scheduled two days of talks in Switzerland were low, with neither side apparently ready to budge from its positions on key territorial issues and future security guarantees, despite the United States setting a June deadline for a settlement.

The head of the Ukrainian delegation, Rustem Umerov, posted photos on social media of the three delegations at a horseshoe-shaped table, with the Ukrainian and Russian officials sitting across from each other. President Donald Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, and son-in-law Jared Kushner sat at the head of the table.

"The agenda includes security and humanitarian issues," Umerov said, adding that Ukrainians will work "without excessive expectations."

Discussions on the future of Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory are expected to be particularly tough, according to a person familiar with the talks who spoke on condition of anonymity because they was not authorized to talk to reporters.

Russia is still insisting that Ukraine cede control of its eastern Donbas region.

Also in Geneva will be American, Russian and Ukrainian military chiefs, who will discuss how a ceasefire monitoring might work after any peace deal, and how to implement it, the person said.

During previous talks in Abu Dhabi, military leaders looked at how a demilitarized zone could be arranged and how everyone's militaries could talk to one another, the person added.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov cautioned against expecting developments on the first day of talks as they were set to continue on Wednesday. Moscow has provided few details of previous talks.

Ukraine's short-handed army is locked in a war of attrition with Russia's bigger forces along the roughly 750-mile front line. Ukrainian civilians are enduring Russian aerial barrages that repeatedly knock out power and destroy homes.

The future of the almost 20% of Ukrainian land that Russia occupies or still covets is a central question in the talks, as are Kyiv's demands for postwar security guarantees with a U.S. backstop to deter Moscow from invading again.

Trump described the Geneva meeting as "big talks."

"Ukraine better come to the table fast," he told reporters Monday.

It wasn't immediately clear what Trump was referring to in his comment about Ukraine, which has committed to and taken part in negotiations in the hope of ending Russia's devastating onslaught.

The commander of the U.S. military — and NATO forces — in Europe, Gen. Alexis Grynkewich, and Secretary of the Army Dan Driscoll will attend the meeting in Geneva on behalf of the U.S. military and meet with their Russian and Ukrainian counterparts, Col. Martin O'Donnell, a spokesman for the U.S. commander said.

Iran says it temporarily closed Strait of Hormuz

Associated Press

GENEVA — Iran announced the temporary closure of the Strait of Hormuz on Tuesday for live fire military drills in a rare show of force as its negotiators held another round of indirect talks with the United States in Geneva over its disputed nuclear program.

It was the first time Iran has announced the closure of the key international waterway, through which 20% of the world's oil passes, since the U.S. began threatening Iran and rushing military assets to the region. It marks a further escalation in a weekslong standoff that could ignite another war in the Middle East.

As the talks began, Iran's state media announced that it had fired live missiles toward the Strait and would close it for several hours for "safety and maritime concerns."

The semiofficial Tasnim news agency, which is close to the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, said missiles launched inside Iran and along its coast had struck their targets in the Strait.

Iranian state TV later said the talks had wrapped up after almost three hours.

Iranian state TV had reported earlier that the negotiations would be indirect and will focus only on Iran's nuclear program and not domestic policies, including its bloody crackdown on protests last month.

The first round of talks Feb. 6 were held in Oman, a sultanate on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula, and were indirect.

The latest were held inside the residence of the Omani envoy to Geneva, with the two sides apparently meeting separately with mediators.

Beijing on patrol as allies, US drill in South China Sea

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

A two-day series of maritime drills by the U.S., Australian and Philippine navies this week in the South China Sea drew a response by China's navy with a demonstration of its own.

Aircraft and warships from the U.S. and its two allies converged inside the Philippines' exclusive economic zone for a "maritime cooperative activity" meant to reinforce cooperation and protect freedom of navigation, according to separate news releases from the three militaries.

The exercise Sunday through Monday focused on visual information drills and a replenishment-at-sea, the U.S. 7th Fleet said in its release Tuesday. The U.S. regularly conducts similar drills alongside the Philippines

and other allies.

Beijing on Tuesday said it deployed air and naval forces on "combat readiness patrols" Sunday and Monday in response, according to the state-run China Military Online website.

"The Philippines' efforts to rally external countries to organize so-called 'joint patrols' are disrupting the South China Sea and undermining regional peace and stability," Senior Col. Zhai Shicen said Tuesday, according to the website.

The guided-missile destroyer USS Dewey and a U.S. Navy P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft from Patrol Squadron 4 represented the U.S. during the exercise, while Australia provided the HMAS Toowoomba and another P-8A Poseidon.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man found guilty of killing brother and his family

NJ MONMOUTH COUNTY — A New Jersey man was convicted Friday of killing four relatives in what prosecutors said was a murder and arson plot spawned by a soured business relationship between the man and his younger brother.

Paul Caneiro, 59, was found guilty on four counts of murder, two counts of aggravated arson and two weapons counts in the 2018 killing of his brother, Keith Caneiro, 50; Keith's wife, Jennifer, 45, and their two young children. A Monmouth County jury handed down the verdict after deliberating Friday for about five hours.

Caneiro now faces a potential life term when he's sentenced May 12.

Monmouth County prosecutors said during the two-month trial that Caneiro killed the relatives because his brother had discovered he was stealing money from their businesses and from him personally.

Emergency crews responded to fires reported at both brothers' homes on Nov. 20, 2018. Paul Caneiro's wife and children escaped safely from their home in Ocean Township.

State mandates cursive writing instruction

PA HARRISBURG — Two hundred and fifty years ago in Pennsylvania, the Declaration of Independence was written and signed in cursive.

Now, schools across the commonwealth are mandated to teach that style of handwriting. Gov. Josh Shapiro signed into

law last week a bipartisan measure that requires schools to teach K-12 students to write in cursive.

While many schools have and continue to teach writing, proponents of the legislation said the practice improves students' cognitive development and connects students to American history.

"Cursive writing fosters fine motor skills, enhances memory retention and equips students to read foundational documents in their original form," said state Sen. Wayne Langerholc, R-Johnstown.

The law went into effect upon the governor's signing on Wednesday. According to *My-cursive.com*, a website devoted to teaching and learning handwriting, Pennsylvania's mandate means that more than half of the states in the U.S. require cursive as part of a school curriculum.

Brush fires close I-95, impact Daytona 500

FL DAYTONA BEACH — On Sunday several brush fires broke out across the region and closed heavily congested interstates and county roads as officials said it would impact Daytona 500 goers.

In Volusia County, Interstate 95 closed in both directions between Interstate 4 and State Road 400 in Daytona Beach and State Road 421 in Port Orange on Sunday afternoon due to a wildfire that began with a vehicle fire along the interstate, Florida Highway Patrol said.

By 4:30 p.m. all southbound lanes of I-95 in Volusia County was to be reopened, FHP said.

The fire along I-95 also included four small brush fires to-

taling 10 acres, according to a press release by Volusia County. The fire burned 20 vehicles at the Crazy Horse Campground near the Daytona Flea & Farmers Market. This portion of the fire is now under control, the county said.

7,700 gallons of jet fuel spill into the James River

VA NEWPORT NEWS — An estimated 7,700 gallons of jet fuel spilled into the James River on Friday afternoon near Newport News Shipbuilding, according to officials.

The spill happened during a refueling operation involving the aircraft carrier John F. Kennedy, which is nearing completion at the shipyard, according to a release from the city of Newport News.

According to the Virginia Department of Health, local drinking water and tap water remain safe, and there is no impact to public water systems, the Newport News release said.

Former official charged over 'panic button' bribes

NY NEW YORK — A former high-ranking official in the New York Police Department has been charged with accepting \$35,000 in cash, luxury travel perks and other bribes from a Florida businessman seeking to sell panic buttons to the city's public schools and police.

In an indictment Thursday, federal prosecutors said Kevin Taylor attempted to steer an \$11 million contract toward the company, SaferWatch, while serving as the commanding officer of the NYPD's School Safety Division. The company markets its product as a "mobile panic

alert system" for mass shootings and other emergencies.

In exchange, the company's founder, Gene Roefaro, showered Taylor and his romantic partner with gifts — including luxury hotels and airfare to the Bahamas and Las Vegas, helicopter tours, tickets to Broadway musicals and a "medieval-themed dinner theater" — along with multiple cash payments, prosecutors said.

Taylor pleaded not guilty to bribery and wire fraud charges on Thursday.

Council says solar could help streetlight woes

CA LOS ANGELES — Faced with numerous complaints about broken streetlights that have plunged neighborhoods into darkness, two Los Angeles City Council members unveiled a plan Friday to spend \$65 million on installing solar-powered lights.

With 1 in 10 streetlights out of service because of disrepair or copper wire theft, Councilmembers Katy Yaroslavsky and Eunisses Hernandez launched an effort to convert at least 12% of the city's lights to solar power — or about 500 in each council district. Broken streetlights emerged as an hot-button issue in this year's election, with council members scrambling to find ways to restore them.

By switching to solar, the streetlights will be less vulnerable to theft, said Yaroslavsky, who represents part of the Westside.

Three other council members — Traci Park, Monica Rodriguez and Hugo Soto-Martinez — signed on to the proposal. All five are running for reelection.

— From wire reports

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Meyers Taylor wins monobob for 6th medal

Associated Press

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy — Elana Meyers Taylor's two young sons watched her leap into the air, throw her fists skyward, wave the American flag, then fall to her knees and start to cry.

In time, they'll understand what they saw.

They saw history.

The 41-year-old U.S. bobsledder — a mother of two special-needs children, an athlete whose career was jeopardized by concussions, someone who dealt with plenty of doubt in recent years — is, finally, an Olympic champion. Meyers Taylor won the gold medal in monobob at the Milan Cortina Games on Monday night, her sixth career medal and first Olympic title.

"I thought it was impossible," Meyers Taylor said.

She was never happier to be wrong.

She became the oldest American woman to hear "The Star-

Spangled Banner" played in her honor at the Winter Games. Rallying in the fourth and final heat, Meyers Taylor prevailed with a four-run, two-day time of 3 minutes, 57.93 seconds.

Meyers Taylor had medaled five times before — three silver, two bronze. She was the most decorated Black athlete at a Winter Olympics even before this win, and her place in history got a whole lot more dazzling on a frosty night in the Italian mountains. And this medal, her sixth, tied Bonnie Blair for the most by a U.S. woman in the Winter Olympics.

"To have my name up there with Bonnie Blair, it doesn't even make sense to me," Meyers Taylor said.

Germany's Laura Nolte — the leader after the first, second and third runs — was second and Kaillie Humphries Armbruster of the United States was third.

"I'm a bit sad because now at

the moment it feels like I lost gold — and not that I won silver. In a few hours I think I can celebrate it, because it's still a great result," Nolte said. "Elana also deserves it. She's a super kind human and she has won silver for many times now and the gold was missing."

It was the fifth career medal for Humphries Armbruster. She's 40 and about 18 months removed from becoming a mom — and she technically became the first woman 40 or older to clinch an Olympic bobsled medal, since she finished her competition exactly 2 minutes, 29 seconds before Meyers Taylor crossed the line to join the 40-something medal club.

"You get a lot of people that like to write you off as soon as you reach 40; it's all downhill from there, is what you hear. I think Elana and I are both proof that that's not true," Humphries Armbruster said. "As soon as you become a mom, your body's not the

same, and you can never get that high performance back, and I think we were able to show that that's not true again."

Nolte led by 0.15 seconds going into the final run, with Meyers Taylor second and Humphries Armbruster third — 0.24 seconds off the lead. Barring big mistakes, gold, silver and bronze would be theirs in some order; nobody else was within 0.6 seconds of Humphries Armbruster, nor within about a full second of Nolte's lead going into the final heat.

They go in reverse order in sliding. That meant Humphries Armbruster went first among the final three, then Meyers Taylor, then Nolte.

Humphries Armbruster finished in 3:58.05, knowing she was assured of her fifth career medal when she crossed the line. As the sled skidded to a stop, she was already on her feet — throwing her arms into the air, knowing at least bronze was coming her way.

Japan wins first gold in pairs with record free skate

Associated Press

MILAN — Riku Miura and Ryuichi Kihara thought their chances of Olympic gold had gone by the wayside when the Japanese skaters made an uncharacteristic slip-up during their short program at the Milan Cortina Games.

Turns out they were just making it more dramatic.

The two-time defending world champions rebounded Monday night with a world-record free skate under the current scoring system, lifting them from fifth place all the way to the top step of the podium and their country's first Olympic medal in the pairs event.

Miura and Kihara dropped to their knees in a tearful embrace when they realized they had won gold.

"My main message to them today was be the best in the world. Don't worry about yesterday," said their longtime coach, Bruno Marcotte. "I told them that it wasn't over. Before they went out on the ice, I just said, 'Be yourself.'"

They were the best version of it.

Miura and Kihara scored 158.13 points for the free skate and a career-best 231.24 overall,

earning a gold medal to go with the silver they helped the Japanese team win last week. Anastasiia Metelkina and Luka Berulava earned the first medal for Georgia at a Winter Games with their silver, and Minerva Fabienne Hase and Nikita Volodin of Germany took bronze.

"It's an amazing moment for my country," Berulava said. "I'm in shock."

Hase and Volodin, who led after the short program, made several mistakes in their free skate and slid to third. But rather than dwell on failing to win the gold medal, Hase chose to look at the positives: "We won an Olympic medal. It doesn't suck," she said.

"It's a medal at the Olympics. I don't think it matters the color," Hase added. "A bronze medal in our first Olympics is amazing."

The chaotic short program Sunday night had left some of the best in the world skating early and out of contention.

Deanna Stellato-Dudek and Maxime Deschamps, the 2024 world champions from Canada, cost themselves about 10 points when she inexplicably fell while getting down from a lift. Stellato-Dudek also took a hard fall during their warmup for the free skate Monday night, sliding into one of the padded barriers and

then flexing her shoulder when she got back up.

The 42-year-old Stellato-Dudek, who was born in the Chicago area, was undoubtedly envisioning a much different Olympic debut. The Canadian pair wound up with 192.61 points, putting them 11th among the 16 teams that made the free skate.

"Just to be out here on and skating on the ice was a privilege and really amazing," Deschamps said.

Emily Chan and Spencer Akira Howe, a private first class in the U.S. Army, took the lead by becoming the first team to break the 200-point barrier. Sara Conti and Niccolò Macii, of Italy, quickly knocked them from their perch despite a messy free skate.

But the podium contenders were just starting to take the ice.

Sui Wenjing and Han Cong, the defending Olympic champions, bounced back from Sui's fall on their opening triple loop in their short program that left them in sixth place. They still had problems in their free skate, turning a triple salchow into a double, but their score of 208.64 points put in them in first place with five pairs left to go; they finished fifth.

Hellebuyck stands out as US starting goalie

Associated Press

MILAN — Connor Hellebuyck could not be doing much better midway through the Olympics.

“Is there more than 100%?” he asked with a laugh after backstopping the United States past Germany in the round-robin finale. “I feel good. It’s pretty hot out there. I’m sweating a lot now I have to stand around and do a bunch of (interviews), so I’m going to chill now. I guess I’m at 99% right now as we speak. But, yeah, I feel good out there.”

The Americans feel good about him. Hellebuyck showed in the preliminary round why he’s the U.S. starting goaltender in Milan, leading the tournament with a .952 save percentage and matching Canada’s Jordan Binnington for the best goals-against average at 1.00.

“He’s confident. He wants to be in the net. He wants to make the saves and to make a big difference. He has the skills to back it up, but I think that attitude and how confident he is in himself and in his game is I think what makes him so great.” U.S. forward Matt Boldy said.

Hellebuyck started two of the three group-play games and stopped 40 of the 42 shots he faced against Latvia and Germany. Jeremy Swayman was shaky against Denmark, but bounced back from allowing a goal from nearly center ice to get the win.

Jake Oettinger dressed once as the No. 3 netminder, with coach Mike Sullivan repeatedly saying how tough a decision he and his staff had at the position with three options just about any country would love to have.

It was always Hellebuyck. He was the guy at the 4 Nations Face-Off last year and is the reigning NHL MVP and Vezina Trophy winner as the league’s best goalie.

“He’s won a lot of trophies,” winger Jake Guentzel said. “We feel good with him back there.”

Not tested a whole lot by Latvia, Hellebuyck was there when Leon Draisaitl, Moritz Seider, Tim Stützle and Germany had quality scoring chances. He allowed just one goal to Stützle, and Sullivan called it Hellebuyck’s best game yet.

“You could feel his confidence from the bench just watching him

make the saves,” Sullivan said. “When he’s at his best, my observation of him is he has economy of motion, and a lot of pucks just hit him, and he makes it look easy the way he squares up to pucks, but his rebound control, he swallowed everything. There was no rebounds for Germany to have an opportunity to create a next play.”

Hellebuyck figures to be in the crease in the quarterfinals Wednesday night when the U.S. faces the winner of the qualification playoff between Sweden and Latvia. He feels in a good rhythm after playing twice in four days, with a little bit of rest before the next start.

“There was a conversation about how we wanted to go about things, and this just made the most sense,” Hellebuyck said.

It never made sense for anyone but Hellebuyck to be the U.S. starter, even if his season with the Winnipeg Jets was not going all that well. He has a 2.79 goals-against average and a .900 save percentage after a league-best 2.00 and a .925 in 2024-25.

None of that matters at the Olympics, where his teammates

are counting on Hellebuyck being the backbone of what they hope is a deep run.

“I expect just him being him,” defenseman Zach Werenski said. “We have full trust in him. I train with him in the summers. I know how hard it is to score on him consistently. He’s just super solid back there. He’s steady, doesn’t give up much, doesn’t give up any rebounds and it makes us have a calming presence in front of him.”

The U.S. is rolling into the quarterfinals after outscoring opponents 16-5. For all the scoring talent up front, the team needs Hellebuyck to be at his best the rest of the way given the difficulty level ratcheting up. That should not fade Hellebuyck.

“He has so much fun out there, and I think for us seeing that, it just kind of gives us a boost of confidence because he’s just so steady in the net,” captain Auston Matthews said. “Never really seems like he’s in a panic or anything. He’s just in such good position and that’s why he’s one of the best in the world. That’s a guy that we’ve got a lot of faith in back there.”

Dolphins make roster cuts, starting with star WR Hill, Chubb

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — The Dolphins released star receiver Tyreek Hill on Monday, ending the All-Pro’s four-year tenure in Miami.

Hill, who turns 32 on March 1, is recovering from a season-ending injury suffered in a game against the New York Jets on Sept. 29 that required surgery to repair significant damage to his left knee, including a torn anterior cruciate ligament.

It is one of several major roster cuts the Dolphins made Monday. Miami also cut offensive lineman James Daniels and receiver Nick Westbrook-Ikhine, and will release two-time Pro Bowl pass rusher Bradley Chubb.

Hill’s contract, which runs through 2026, would have represented around \$51 million against the Dolphins’ cap.

“These past few years have been some of the most meaningful of my life and career,” Hill said in an Instagram post Monday afternoon.

Hill had consecutive 1,700-yard receiving seasons in his first two years with Miami, including a league-leading 1,799 yards and 13 touchdowns in 2023. The five-time All-Pro entered the 2025 season aiming to regain that elite form after a relatively down year in 2024, when he had 81 catches for 959 yards.

Hill’s Dolphins tenure was characterized by tremendous production on the field coupled with numerous rocky moments off the field, including an altercation with police outside of Hard Rock Stadium ahead of the 2024 season opener, and pulling himself from that season’s finale and later indicating he wanted to play elsewhere.

Chubb still on the move

Chubb spent the past three seasons with Miami after being traded to the Dolphins from Denver in 2022.

He suffered a gruesome knee injury late in the 2023 season that required surgery to fix a torn anterior cruciate ligament, meniscus and

patellar tendon in his right knee and sidelined him all of 2024. Chubb had 11 sacks in 2023 before the injury.

Last season, Chubb’s 8½ sacks led the team. He represented a \$31 million cap hit for 2026.

Undecided on Tagovailoa

New general manager Jon Eric Sullivan faces the question on whether to move on from 2020 first-round pick Tua Tagovailoa, who was benched by former Miami coach Mike McDaniel toward the end of last season because of poor play.

Tagovailoa signed a four-year, \$212.4 million extension in July 2024, but has since shown a decline in accuracy and mobility. He finished 2025 with 15 interceptions, second-most in the NFL and a career high.

Cutting Tagovailoa would result in a \$99 million dead cap charge. If the move is designated as a post-June 1 release, those charges are split over two years, with \$67.4 million allocated to the 2026 cap and \$31.8 million in 2027.

No. 1 Michigan, No. 3 Duke set for big matchup

Associated Press

Michigan had a long wait to chase down Arizona for the No. 1 spot in The Associated Press men's college basketball poll. Staying there beyond this week won't be easy, either.

That's because the Wolverines visited No. 7 Purdue on Tuesday night in a matchup with the team that held the pre-season No. 1 ranking. Then comes a marquee nonconference tussle Saturday night with No. 3 Duke in the nation's capital, pairing two teams that have looked every bit like Final Four favorites.

That weekend game stands out as the headliner on the AP Top 25 national schedule, coming in the heat of league play for both teams while offering a dry run for NCAA Tournament prep.

"The ratings show that (marquee matchups) are well-received by the fans," Michigan coach Dusty May told reporters Monday. "Obviously, attendance and the people that are looking for tickets, you tell them to go to the secondary market, and then you start looking what the secondary market is — that

shows that this game is going to be good for the game and the sport."

The Wolverines (24-1) claimed 60 of 61 first-place votes in the new poll to end Arizona's nine-week reign at the top. They had sat at No. 2 for six of those weeks before reaching No. 1 for the first time since January 2013. The Blue Devils (24-2) climbed one spot to No. 3 in Monday's poll, barely missing on setting up a 1-vs-2 date with Michigan.

The Wolverines entered the week ranked No. 1 in KenPom's adjusted defensive efficiency by allowing 87.9 points per 100 possessions while ranking fourth on the offensive side (126.6).

Duke, meanwhile, entered Monday's win against Syracuse ranked No. 2 in defense (89.3) and No. 10 in offense (125.2) behind star freshman Cameron Boozer inside.

"Conference play can really bog you down," Blue Devils coach Jon Scheyer said after Saturday's win over then-No. 20 Clemson. "It's such a grind. ... Neutral-site game, that's what you're going to play in the post-season. You play a great oppo-

nent who is different, you're not watching them all the time.

"You go into the game obviously to win. But the lessons you come away with I think completely outweigh the risk-reward when you think about that game."

The game also offers another example of Scheyer's willingness to schedule tough matchups. Duke has already played a home-and-home series with Arizona, the kind of pairings getting harder to find with bigger conference schedules gobbling up slots in the realignment era.

Arizona's bounceback?

The Wildcats started 23-0 before losing at Kansas and then at home to Texas Tech last week. The schedule isn't letting up as they try to bounce back.

First comes Wednesday's home game against No. 23 BYU and star freshman AJ Dybantsa, who entered the week averaging a national-best 24.4 points per game. Then comes Saturday's trip to No. 2 Houston.

Arizona entered Monday alongside Michigan and Duke as the only teams ranked inside

the top 10 of KenPom's adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency metrics.

Missing Saunders

Speaking of BYU, the Cougars have their own tests. In addition to playing the Wildcats, BYU also hosts No. 6 Iowa State on Saturday.

Those will be the program's first games since losing guard Richie Saunders to a season-ending knee injury. The 6-foot-5 senior had started 60 games the past two seasons and was averaging 18.0 points on the season.

Watch list

Clemson and Utah State are both vying to get back into the poll as the top vote-getters among unranked teams.

The Tigers were No. 20 last week after starting 10-1 in the ACC before falling out Monday after a home loss to Virginia Tech and a loss at Duke. Clemson visits Wake Forest on Wednesday and then hosts Florida State on Saturday.

The Aggies, who spent a week at No. 23 last month, host Boise State on Wednesday then visit Nevada on Saturday.

Heise hits go-ahead 3, No. 6 Iowa State tops No. 2 Houston

Associated Press

AMES, Iowa — Nate Heise hit a go-ahead 3-pointer and Tamin Lipsey came up with an offensive rebound in the final seconds to cap No. 6 Iowa State's rally in a 70-67 victory over Big 12 leader and second-ranked Houston on Monday night.

Heise was 3-for-3 from 3-point range hours after sister Taylor Heise scored to help the U.S. Women's Olympic hockey team beat Sweden 5-0 to reach the gold-medal game in Milan.

The Cyclones (23-3, 10-3) closed with a 17-4 run to take down a second top-10 team in three days. Iowa State topped No. 8 Kansas 74-56 on Saturday.

The Cougars (23-3, 11-2) had their six-game winning streak snapped and their conference lead was cut to a half-game over No. 4 Arizona heading into their matchup Satur-

day in Houston. Iowa State is third, a game behind the Cougars.

Heise hit the 3-pointer from the left corner with 1:17 to play to give the Cyclones a 69-67 lead. Houston had two chances to tie or take the lead, but was called for a shot-clock violation with 43 seconds to play, then Chris Cenac Jr., missed a shot with four seconds left.

Blake Buchanan was fouled after rebounding Cenac's miss, but missed the front end of a one-and-one. Lipsey, though, got the offensive rebound, tapping the ball back to Joshua Jefferson, who was fouled with a second left. Jefferson made his first free throw for the final margin.

Jefferson led Iowa State with 12 points. Heise had 11 and Buchanan had 10.

Kingston Flemings led the Cougars with 22 points. Emanuel Sharp had 16 points, all in the first half. Milos Uzan added 11 points.

No. 3 Duke 101, Syracuse 64: Cameron Boozer had 22 points and 12 rebounds and helped the host Blue Devils rout the Orange.

Isaiah Evans scored 21 points, Nikolas Khamenia added 14 points off the bench and Patrick Ngongba and Cayden Boozer each had 12 for Duke (24-2, 13-1 Atlantic Coast Conference), which looked primed for a weekend nonconference showdown with top-ranked Michigan.

The Blue Devils shot 62.3% from the field, including 12-for-20 from 3-point distance.

Boozer shot 8-for-10 from the field and finished with the 14th double-double of his freshman season.

William Kyle III scored 12 points and Nate Kingz added 10 for Syracuse (15-12, 6-8), which failed to carry the momentum from back-to-back victories for the first time since winning three straight in January.