

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US says Taliban talks ‘very productive’

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The latest round of talks with the Taliban — now in their second week — has been “very productive,” a member of the American negotiating team said Friday, while strenuously denying Washington sought a fixed deadline for the withdrawal of its estimated 14,000 troops from Afghanistan as part of a final peace deal.

Negotiations have had fresh momentum in recent weeks after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited Afghanistan’s capital, Kabul, at the end of last month. At the time, he said Washington was hopeful of an agreement before Sept. 1.

The appointment last year of Zalmay Khalilzad as a U.S. special peace envoy began the accelerated effort to find a negotiated end to Afghanistan’s war and America’s longest military engagement.

Since then Khalilzad has held scores of talks with the Afghan government in Kabul and abroad, with the Taliban as well as with Afghanistan’s neighbors — including Pakistan which has been accused of

aiding the insurgents.

The U.S. official in Qatar’s capital, Doha, where the Taliban maintain a political office and talks are being held, told The Associated Press that the U.S. “definitely did not offer” an 18-month withdrawal as part of a peace deal.

Speaking anonymously due to the sensitivity of the talks, the U.S. negotiator was responding to a timeframe Taliban officials told the AP months earlier.

The U.S. negotiator said the deal being negotiated in Doha with the Taliban is “comprehensive and includes specifics on all four parts including a cease fire, timeline, participating in intra-Afghan negotiations and counter-terrorism assurances.”

On Saturday, several prominent Afghan figures left Kabul for Doha ahead of much-anticipated all-Afghan talks to begin on Sunday. The talks are co-sponsored by Germany and Qatar and include the Taliban.

An earlier round of intra-Afghan talks, which were to be held last April, were scuttled after the two sides could not agree on participants. The Afghan government had

submitted a list of 250 people. The Taliban likened it to a wedding party.

This time, the Taliban say 60 people will participate. Attaullah Rahman Salim, the deputy head of the government’s high peace council, said 64 would be sitting around the table.

The list includes former mujahedeen who fought the Soviets in the 1980s as well as former government officials, former ambassadors, civil society representatives and a smattering of women.

Participants at the table will be there as ordinary Afghans “on equal footing” and not as government representatives, said the German sponsors.

The Taliban who have consistently refused to hold direct talks with President Ashraf Ghani’s government calling it a puppet administration. They have, however, readily agreed to talks with any Afghan, including from within the government, but as an ordinary Afghan.

Ghani, who has been conspicuously quiet about the upcoming intra-Afghan dialogue, has consistently demanded Taliban talk directly with the government.

2nd quake in 2 days jolts Southern Calif.

Associated Press

RIDGECREST, Calif. — Crews in Southern California assessed damage to cracked and burned buildings, broken roads, leaking water and gas lines and other infrastructure Saturday after the largest earthquake the region has seen in nearly 20 years jolted an area from Sacramento to Las Vegas to Mexico.

No fatalities or major injuries were reported after Friday night’s 7.1-magnitude earthquake. But warnings by seismologists that large aftershocks were expected to continue for days — if not weeks — prompted further precautions.

The California National Guard was sending 200 troops,

logistical support and aircraft, said Maj. Gen. David Baldwin. The Pentagon had been notified, and the entire California Military Department was put on alert, he said.

The quake struck at 8:19 p.m. Friday and was centered 11 miles from Ridgecrest, the same area of the Mojave Desert where a 6.4-magnitude temblor hit just a day earlier.

April Hamlin, a Ridgecrest native, said she was “already on edge” when the second quake hit. At first she and her three kids thought it was another aftershock.

“But it just kept on intensifying,” she said. “The TV went over, hanging by the cord. We heard it break. We heard glass breakage in the other rooms, but

all we could do was stay where we were until it stopped.”

In San Bernardino County, which saw significant damage, Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency amid “conditions of extreme peril to the safety of persons and property.”

State highway officials shut a 30-mile section of State Route 178 between Ridgecrest and the town of Trona southwest of Death Valley, because of a rockslide and severe cracking.

In Ridgecrest, fire and police officials said they were initially swamped by calls for medical and ambulance service. But police Chief Jed McLaughlin said there was “nothing but minor injuries such as cuts and bruises,

es, by the grace of God.”

Two building fires — one involving a mobile home — were quickly doused, he said. Natural gas leaks were reported, but the lines were shut off.

Trona, with about 2,000 residents, was reported to have at least one collapsed building. Roads were buckled or blocked, and police put out a call for bottled water for residents.

Antoun Abdullatif, 59, owns liquor stores and other businesses in Ridgecrest and Trona. “I would say 70% of my inventory is on the floor, broken,” he said Saturday morning in Ridgecrest. “Every time you sweep and you put stuff in the dust bin, you’re putting \$200 in the trash.”

Iran ready for higher uranium enrichment

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — A top aide to Iran's supreme leader says the Islamic Republic is ready to enrich uranium beyond the level set by Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal, just ahead of a deadline it set Sunday for Europe to offer new terms to the accord.

A video message by Ali Akbar Velayati included him saying that "Americans directly and Europeans indirectly violated the deal," part of Tehran's hardening tone with Europe. European parties to the deal have yet to offer a way for Iran to avoid the sweeping economic sanctions imposed by President Donald Trump since he pulled the U.S. out of the accord a year ago, especially those targeting

its crucial oil sales.

All this comes as America has rushed thousands of troops, an aircraft carrier, nuclear-capable B-52 bombers and advanced fighter jets to the Mideast. Mysterious oil tanker attacks near the Strait of Hormuz, attacks by Iranian-backed rebels in Yemen on Saudi Arabia and Iran shooting down a U.S. military drone have raised fears of a wider conflict engulfing the region.

In the video, available Saturday on a website for Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Velayati said that increasing enrichment closers to weapons-grade levels was "unanimously agreed upon by every component of the

establishment."

"We will show reaction exponentially as much as they violate it. We reduce our commitments as much as they reduce it," said Velayati, Khamenei's adviser on international affairs. "If they go back to fulfilling their commitments, we will do so as well."

Under the atomic accord, Iran agreed to enrich uranium to no more than 3.67%, which is enough for peaceful pursuits but is far below weapons-grade levels of 90%. Iran denies it seeks nuclear weapons, but the nuclear deal sought to prevent that as a possibility by limiting enrichment and Iran's stockpile of uranium to 661 pounds.

On Monday, Iran and United Nations inspectors acknowl-

edged it had broken the stockpile limit. Combining that with increasing its enrichment levels narrows the one-year window experts believe Iran would need to have enough material to build a nuclear weapon if it chose to do so.

"This would be a very worrisome step that could substantially shorten the time Iran would need to produce the material needed for nuclear weapons," said Miles Pomper, a senior fellow at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies' James Marin Center for Nonproliferation Studies. "Both Iran and the Trump administration should be looking for ways to de-escalate the crisis, rather than exacerbate it."

DOJ still presses for 2020 census citizenship question

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department says it will press its search for legal grounds to force the inclusion of a citizenship question on the 2020 census, hours after President Donald Trump said he is "very seriously" considering an executive order to get the question on the form.

Trump said Friday his administration is exploring a number of legal options, but the Justice Department did not say exactly what options remain now that the Supreme Court has barred the question at least temporarily.

The government has already begun the process of printing the census questionnaire without that question.

The administration's focus on asking broadly about citizenship for the first time since 1950 reflects the enormous political stakes and potential costs in the once-a-decade population count that determines the allocation of seats in the House

of Representatives for the next 10 years and the distribution of some \$675 billion in federal spending. It also reflects Trump's interest in reshaping how congressional districts are drawn.

Districts now are based on the total population. Some Republicans want them based on the population of eligible voters, a change that could disadvantage Democrats by excluding immigrants. The Supreme Court has left open the issue of whether districts based only on the population of eligible voters is constitutional.

The Census Bureau's own experts have said a citizenship question would discourage immigrants from participating in the survey and result in a less accurate census that would redistribute money and political power away from Democratic-led cities where immigrants tend to cluster to whiter, rural areas where Republicans do well.

Alaskans trading jackets for shorts with record heat

Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Alaskans who routinely pack knit caps and fleece jackets in summer on Friday were swapping them for sunscreen and parasols amid a prolonged heat wave.

Residents of Anchorage and other south-central cities completed a fifth week of above-normal temperatures, including a record high 90 degrees on Thursday in the state's largest city.

On Friday, as temperatures dipped just slightly, Anchorage resident Lucy Davidson sought relief with her grandchildren at a beach at Goose Lake. She said she picked up a portable air conditioner at a garage sale six years ago. It had not been used some summers, but it's getting a workout lately.

"That thing has been a blessing," Davidson said. "It stays on non-stop."

The temperature Thursday in Anchorage hit 90 degrees

at Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport, 5 degrees higher than the city's previous recorded high of 85 degrees.

Three other Alaska locations, Kenai, Palmer and King Salmon, set or tied all-time high-temperature records on Thursday.

A high-pressure ridge over much of south-central Alaska is strengthening and responsible for the record temperatures, National Weather Service meteorologist Bob Clay said. Anchorage's average high temperature for July 4 is 75 degrees, Clay said.

Temperatures have been in the 70s for all but one day since June 23, National Weather Service meteorologist Michelle McAuley said.

Anchorage experienced its wettest May ever but was warmer than normal every day in June, she said. The high-pressure system is expected at least through Monday, she said.

Utah teachers train for shooting scenarios

Associated Press

SPANISH FORK, Utah — Nancy Miramontes had 30 seconds to find the gunman.

The Utah school psychologist weaved through a maze of dusty halls before spotting him in the corner of a classroom, holding a gun to a student's head. She took a deep breath and fired three shots, the first time she's ever used a gun. One bullet pierced the shooter's forehead.

"Nice work," a police officer told her as they exchanged high-fives in front of cardboard props representing the gunman and student.

Miramontes recently joined 30 other Utah teachers at a series of trainings where police instructed them on how to respond to an active shooter. Teachers went through the shooting drill inside a warehouse set up to look like a school, then moved outside to a

shooting range.

Active-shooter training for educators is becoming more common nationwide, and Utah is one of several states that generally allow permit holders to carry guns in public schools. Other states, including Florida and Texas, have programs that allow certain teachers to be armed if they are approved under a set of stipulations.

Utah County Sheriff Mike Smith said the popularity of concealed carry permits in Utah makes such trainings even more important. About half the teachers brought their own handguns to the shooting range.

"If teachers are going to be bringing firearms into schools, let's make sure they know how to handle them safely," Smith said.

At least 39 states require lockdown, active-shooter or similar safety drills, according

to the Education Commission of the States. Other states have less explicit requirements or leave it to districts.

Utah requires its elementary schools to conduct at least one safety drill each month and its secondary schools to have detailed emergency response plans.

The firearm training is voluntary, but the Utah County Sheriff's Teachers Academy already has a waiting list for its next four-week program.

Despite increasing prevalence, some school safety experts aren't in favor of firearms training and worry that such lessons could cause undue stress or harm.

"Are police tasking teachers to perform a law enforcement responsibility by arming them to protect others? We have to be cautious of what we ask people to do in these traumatic, stressful situations," said Ken

Trump, a school safety expert with the National School Safety and Security Services consulting firm.

Miramontes said her teacher friends in Utah and other states debated about it on Facebook. But after the training, she said she felt empowered.

"I know how to protect myself and my students now; I know what to expect if the worst happens," she said.

At the recent session, officers showed teachers how to disarm a gunman, where to shoot on the body, how to properly aim and unload a firearm. They also went over de-escalation techniques, self-defense and medical responses such as how to pack a wound and tie a tourniquet on a child.

Officers spent months designing the course, and local businesses donated money and equipment. Attendees paid \$20 to participate.

Mystery of NSA leak lingers as case winds up

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Federal agents descended on the suburban Maryland house with the flash and bang of a stun grenade, blocked off the street and spent hours questioning the homeowner about a theft of government documents that prosecutors would later describe as "breathtaking" in its scale.

The suspect, Harold Martin III, was a contractor for the National Security Agency. His arrest followed news of a devastating disclosure of government hacking tools by a mysterious internet group calling itself the Shadow Brokers. It seemed to some that the United States might have found another Edward Snowden, who also had been a contractor for the agency.

"You're a bad man. There's no way around that," one law enforcement official conducting the raid told Martin, court papers say. "You're a bad man."

Later this month, about three years after that raid, the case against Martin is scheduled to be resolved in Baltimore's federal court. But the identity of the Shadow Brokers and whoever was responsible for a leak with extraordinary national security implications will remain a public mystery even as the case concludes.

Authorities have established that Martin walked off with thousands of pages of secret documents over a two-decade career in national security, most recently with the NSA, which is headquartered about 15 miles from his home in Glen Burnie, Md. He pleaded guilty to a single count of willful retention of national defense information and faces a nine-year prison sentence under a plea deal.

Investigators found in his home and car detailed description of computer infrastructure and classified technical operations in a raid that took place two weeks after the Shadow Brokers surfaced online to advertise the sale of some of the NSA's closely guarded hacking tools. Yet authorities have never publicly linked Martin or anyone else to the Shadow Brokers, and the U.S. has not announced whether it suspects government insiders, Russian intelligence or someone else entirely.

The question is important because the U.S. believes North Korea and Russia relied on the stolen tools, which provide the means to exploit software vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure, in unleashing punishing global cyberattacks on businesses, hospitals and cities. The release, which occurred while the NSA was already under scrutiny because of Snowden's 2013 disclo-

tures, raised questions about the government's ability to maintain secrets.

"It was extraordinarily damaging, probably more damaging than Snowden," cybersecurity expert Bruce Schneier said of the Shadow Brokers leaks. "Those tools were a lot of money to design and create."

Yet none of that is likely to be mentioned at Martin's July 17 sentencing. The hearing instead will turn on dramatically different depictions of the enigmatic Martin, a Navy veteran, longtime government contractor — most recently at Booz Allen Hamilton — and doctoral candidate at the time of his arrest.

Prosecutors allege Martin jeopardized national security by bringing home reams of classified information even as, they say, he once castigated colleagues as "clowns" for lax security measures.

The agents who searched his home that August 2016 afternoon found a trove of documents in his car, home and a dusty, unlocked shed. The 50 terabytes of information from 1996 to 2016 included personal details of government employees and "Top Secret" email chains, handwritten notes describing the NSA's classified computer infrastructure and descriptions of classified technical operations.

More San Francisco homeless living in vehicles

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Most homeless people in San Francisco sleep in parks and on sidewalks, but a growing number are living out of their vehicles, helping fuel an overall 17% increase in homelessness in the last two years, according to a report released Friday.

San Francisco tallied about 8,000 homeless in its one-night count in January, when counties across the country conducted similar counts as required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Other counties in California also saw double-digit increases,

reflecting the state's severe housing crunch. In May, Alameda County, which includes Oakland, reported a 43% increase over two years, while last month, Los Angeles County reported a year-to-year 12% jump to nearly 59,000 homeless, with more young adults, older people and families on the streets.

The San Francisco report, released by the city's Department of Homelessness & Supportive Housing, paints a picture of a city in crisis despite hundreds of millions of dollars spent every year to tackle the problem. Nearly 1,200 people were on the waiting list for shelter

beds the week of the January count.

Officials say they can't keep pace with the number of people who become homeless in a city where the median sales price of a house hovers at \$1.4 million and median rent for a one-bedroom apartment is around \$3,700. Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed said they had been living in a place they or their partner rented or owned, or with family or friends, immediately prior to becoming homeless.

Homelessness continues to be associated with deep poverty, mental illness and addiction — tents and people sprawled out

on sidewalks are all too visible. But people of higher income levels, including those who own cars, are also struggling, said Jeff Kositsky, the San Francisco agency's director.

"I'm seeing people with decent RVs but with no place to live, and many of them have jobs," he said. "It's very concerning, and it all indicates what everybody already knows in California: that we have a severe affordable housing shortage."

San Francisco identified nearly 600 passenger vehicles, RVs or vans that appeared to be inhabited, according to the report.

Security officer's warning caused Chicago stampede

Associated Press

CHICAGO — A stampede at a Fourth of July fireworks display that injured more than a dozen people at Chicago's Navy Pier started when a private security officer shouted for bystanders to take cover, police said Friday.

Chicago police spokeswoman Kellie Bartoli said "approximately 13" people who fell or were trampled during the ruckus were hospitalized with minor injuries. The rush of people occurred shortly after a brawl that resulted in at least two stabbings.

The incidents happened just after 10 p.m. as thousands crowded Navy Pier on Lake Michigan's shoreline. Police said they were searching Friday for two male suspects in the stabbings.

Authorities speculate that shortly after

the stabbings, someone exploded a firecracker near a group of people, prompting shouts of "gun" or "shots fired." Chief of Patrol Fred Waller told a news conference Friday that the ensuing panic was fueled by warnings to bystanders to take cover shouted by a member of a private security firm employed by Navy Pier.

Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson said that despite the fracas, the officer's warning was appropriate.

"If you're going to make an error in judgment, we want to err on the side of caution," Johnson said. "Suppose there had been an active shooter, and he had said nothing?"

Chicago police tactical and SWAT teams that provided the main security for the fireworks show, backed by covert state and federal law enforcement officers responded by searching the area but found

no gunman.

The private security firm was not identified and Navy Pier officials did not respond to a request for comment but issued a statement that said Thursday's "unfortunate isolated incident" was quickly managed by security teams and law enforcement officers.

"We are continuing to work with the Chicago Police Department on this matter and to ensure that we are doing all that we can to keep people safe while they are visiting the pier," the statement said.

In the earlier incident, authorities said teens allegedly flashing gang signs began fighting, with a 14-year-old boy being stabbed in the arm and rib area and a 15-year-old boy stabbed in the armpit. Both were transported to Lurie Children's Hospital and were reported in stable condition.

Marathon runner found dead after cheating allegations

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A marathon runner has been found dead in the Los Angeles River, days after he was disqualified from the Los Angeles Marathon following allegations of cheating.

The body of Dr. Frank Meza, 70, was discovered shortly before 10 a.m. Thursday, authorities said. Sarah Ardalani, a spokeswoman for the coroner's office, said an autopsy is pending.

The Los Angeles Times reported Meza as the man found dead and a medical li-

cense and voter registration records match his home address and date of birth.

Meza, a retired physician who began entering marathons in his 60s after coaching young athletes, had denied the allegations of cheating. He had come under suspicion for his fast splits and finishes in marathons statewide but claimed it was impossible for him to prove he didn't cheat. He did say he had stopped to relieve himself but said he ran the entire 26.2 miles.

"My take on all this, it was supposed to be fun," he told the Times. "Obviously it's

not fun anymore."

Meza's wife, Tina, told the Daily Beast her husband had been devastated by the allegations. He told her Thursday he was heading out for a run.

The Los Angeles Marathon disqualified Meza's finish in this year's race after they said he left the course and came back from a different position. His time of 2 hours 53 minutes 10 seconds had been the fastest ever for a man his age and triggered suspicion within the running community, which began investigating.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police arrest naked man on 'tons of acid'

WI LA CROSSE — A La Crosse man is in trouble with the law after he was arrested for running around a parking lot naked and telling officers he was on “tons and tons of acid.”

The La Crosse Tribune reported that police received a complaint during the early morning hours of June 29 of a man running around naked and yelling incoherently.

Police found the 29-year-old in a parking lot on the city's north side. Asked why he was running around naked, the man said “oh, that's what all those drugs are for” and “what's wrong with being a heroin addict?”

Police asked him what he'd taken and he responded “tons and tons and tons and tons and tons of acid.”

Skull found atop ledge likely belonged to man

AL RUSSELLVILLE — Authorities said a skull found atop a ledge in northwest Alabama likely belonged to a man who had been dead for years.

Franklin County Sheriff Shannon Oliver said the skull discovered last month by hikers was likely that of a male between the ages of 18 and 49. He said the person had been dead between two and seven years.

Officials haven't determined the identity of the dead person, nor do they know how the skull came to rest atop a rock ledge near Bear Creek.

Owner of escaped gator faces cruelty charges

PA PITTSBURGH — The owner of an alligator that escaped from a Pittsburgh

home last month is facing charges stemming from the discovery of numerous animals at the residence.

Police filed 33 counts of neglect against Mark McGowan, along with single counts of animal cruelty and recklessly endangering another person.

Authorities started investigating McGowan after “Chomp,” a 5-foot-long alligator, was found along a city street June 6.

Officer on ice cream run nabs suspect

NY NEW YORK — A police officer's craving for cake batter ice cream put him and his colleagues in the right place to take action when a loaded gun fell out of a man's shorts at a Baskin-Robbins shop in New York City.

Police said three on-duty officers were at the shop in Coney Island, Brooklyn when Emmanuel Lovett walked in, tugged his denim shorts and dropped a pistol to the floor.

The officers swarmed and arrested the 33-year-old man. Police said his robbery record prohibited him from having a gun.

Woman who didn't give money pushed into cars

TN NASHVILLE — Police arrested a homeless man in Tennessee who they said pushed a woman into traffic after she refused to give him money.

News outlets reported Timothy Donahoe, 65, was arrested and charged with assault and reckless endangerment. According to an arrest affidavit, Donahoe approached a woman and asked for money. When the woman said she didn't carry cash, police said Donahoe punched her and pushed her into

the road in front of a vehicle.

The vehicle didn't hit her, but police said her face was bruised.

Elk's 250-mile journey to give birth tracked

CO STEAMBOAT SPRINGS — Wildlife researchers said an elk traveled more than 250 miles across Colorado to give birth.

The Steamboat Pilot and Today reported that Colorado Parks and Wildlife officials placed a collar on the elk cow known as R190 near the town of Maybell in late March.

Officials tracked the elk as she zigzagged east and crossed the Continental Divide. She gave birth last month in North Park, a large mountain valley in north-central Colorado.

Utility: Raccoon is to blame for power outage

IL SPRINGFIELD — Utility officials said a raccoon is to blame for a power outage that affected Illinois state office buildings in Springfield.

City Water, Light and Power officials said the raccoon found its way into an electrical cabinet and damaged equipment, causing the outage in downtown Springfield. Utility officials said the raccoon survived.

Man stabs pit bull as it attacks his 2 dogs

MA CHICOPEE — A Massachusetts man fatally stabbed a pit bull terrier after it attacked his two dogs.

MassLive.com reported a pit bull terrier broke through a barrier in a window and launched at the dogs near Lincoln Grove Park.

Police said the owner of the two dogs began to yell at the pit

bull and tried to shield his animals, but the dog continued to attack and bite both dogs.

Chicopee Police Officer Michael Wilk said “as a last resort,” the man removed a pocket knife and stabbed the canine. The dog was found dead by officers nearby.

3 injured when boat overturns on the road

MO FRENCH VILLAGE — Authorities said three women were seriously hurt when a pontoon boat overturned as they road on it while it was being towed down a Missouri road.

The Missouri State Highway Patrol said the crash happened in St. Francois County when the trailer's right rear tire dropped off the road. The report said the boat wasn't properly secured onto the trailer, causing it to come off the trailer and overturn.

Police check on man leads to shooting

GA NEWNAN — A man found sleeping was shot by deputies after they said he tried to run them over.

A Coweta County deputy noticed Nicholas Bolton, 34, sleeping in the back seat of his car in a Newnan parking lot. After Bolton refused to get out or produce his license, deputies said he climbed into the front seat and started the car, disobeying commands not to leave.

A deputy blocked Bolton's car, spinning it. A second deputy tried to box in Bolton. The first deputy concluded Bolton was trying to run over the second deputy and shot Bolton once through the windshield.

Bolton was hospitalized in critical condition.

From wire reports

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Women's World Cup

Journey to final began in Rio for US

Los Angeles Times

LYON, France — The players on the U.S. national team have talked a lot about the journey that has taken them to Sunday's Women's World Cup final. What they haven't talked much about, though, is how and where that journey began.

For that you have to go back three summers, to the weeks following the team's loss to Sweden in the quarterfinals of the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, when coach Jill Ellis decided the program had to be overhauled.

The players, the formation, the tactics, everything.

"I remember talking to my staff and saying, 'We've got to make sure we're prepared for this piece of the evolution,'" Ellis said.

A couple of months later, Ellis added a talent identification position to the coaching staff and hired B.J. Snow, the man who succeeded her at UCLA, to fill it. Over the next two years, Ellis and Snow cast a wide net, calling more than 60 players into camp to audition for the World Cup team.

Before the team could start its climb, it had to hit rock bottom. That came early in 2017 in a 3-0 loss to France, the most one-sided defeat for the Americans in nearly 10 years.

"I remember thinking after that loss that we had a long

way to go," said defender Kelley O'Hara, sitting in a sunny courtyard of the team's hilltop hotel, a converted 19th century convent with an altar in the lobby and two confessionals, repurposed as planters, flanking the front door.

"But that's kind of a good thing. You don't ever want to feel like it's easy all the time, and things just work out, and there's no obstacles, and there's no room for growth or need for growth. Jill, that's been her biggest thing: wanting to challenge this team and make this team evolve and grow, ever since 2016."

Just about everything the team had done up to that point was questioned. Players were moved from the positions they had always played to the ones for which they were best suited. Crystal Dunn, a former National Women's Soccer League scoring champion, became a defender, as did O'Hara, who had played in two World Cups as a midfielder. Julie Ertz, a defender, moved into the midfield, and Carli Lloyd, a two-time world player of the year as a midfielder, became a forward.

Eleven of the players who made this World Cup roster weren't on the team four years ago in Canada.

Those new positions didn't fit the old formation, so Ellis changed that too, going from the staid 4-4-2 she had always

used, with four defenders, four midfielders and two forwards, to a fluid, pressing, attack-minded 4-3-3.

"As hard as that was — it was hectic and stressful and difficult and full of obstacles and a lot of uncertainty for a lot of people — it was necessary," O'Hara said.

Those changes on the field forced other ones to be made off the field. Lloyd moved into a reserve role, Alex Morgan emerged as the captain and leader. New players such as Rose Lavelle, Mallory Pugh and Tierna Davidson had to be taught what it means to be a national team player, following in the massive footsteps of Mia Hamm, Julie Foudy, Kristine Lilly and Abby Wambach.

"That was an evolution as well," said O'Hara, 30, one of a dozen players on the tournament's oldest team who has celebrated a 30th birthday. "It's always been about what is this team at its core. And that's been a team that has that grittiness, that bite and that never-say-die attitude."

"It's something that the older players instilled in me when I got on this team and for me it was something that was very important — and is still very important — to make sure this team always embodies."

As extensive as that evolution has been, it's been equally successful. Since that loss to

France, the U.S. has lost only twice in 49 matches, outscoring the opposition 157-32.

Now the journey that Ellis and her team began after their Olympic defeat, the Americans' earliest exit from a major tournament, is resulting in more history, this time of the positive kind.

The U.S. is the first country to reach three consecutive Women's World Cup finals and with a victory over the Netherlands on Sunday, it would become the second to win consecutive titles and the only one to win the championship four times — in eight tries — overall.

Just by showing up on Sunday, O'Hara and six teammates — Morgan, Lloyd, Ali Krieger, Becky Sauerbrunn, Tobin Heath and Megan Rapinoe — will become the first women to suit up for three straight Women's World Cup finals.

"That is kind of crazy," O'Hara said. "It's cool. It's like a baseball stat."

It also means all seven were on the last U.S. team to lose a game in a Women's World Cup, eight years ago in the group stage against Sweden. They are 14-0-2 in the tournament since then, losing the 2011 final to Japan on penalty kicks following a game that officially goes into the books as a draw.

Sweden downs England to wrap up third place

Associated Press

NICE, France — Kosovare Asllani and Sofia Jakobsson each scored and Sweden beat England 2-1 Saturday night to take third place in the Women's World Cup.

Asllani, who was taken off the field on a stretcher during Sweden's semifinal loss to the Netherlands, started Saturday and gave the Swedes the lead in the 11th minute as they took advantage of early struggles by England.

Alex Greenwood had plenty of time

to clear Fridolina Rolfo's cross but sent it straight into the path of Asllani, who drilled it into the bottom right corner. England goalkeeper Carly Telford got a hand on it but couldn't keep it out of the net.

Sweden almost doubled its lead five minutes later but Jakobsson's effort came off the right post and went out off of Telford's knee.

Jakobsson scored moments later, cutting inside the left side before curling into the opposite side of the net.

England cut Sweden's lead to 2-1 in the

31st when Fran Kirby cut in from the right, beat her defender and fired a shot inside the left post.

Ellen White thought she had tied the score two minutes later but her goal was ruled out after the video review determined there had been a handball. The forward had also had what would have been an equalizing goal ruled out in the semifinal loss to the United States.

Lucy Bronze almost leveled in the final minute but her effort was headed off the line by Nilla Fischer.

Leonard and George headed to Clippers

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The Los Angeles Clippers made a huge decision.

That meant Kawhi Leonard could finally make his.

The Clippers will be landing Leonard as a free agent after they acquire Paul George from the Oklahoma City Thunder in a massive trade for players and draft picks, a person familiar with the negotiations said.

George will be traded for at least four first-round picks, according to the person who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity early Saturday because none of the moves have been finalized. And Leonard made his decision to sign with the Clippers after the team swung the deal to land George, the person said.

ESPN, which first reported the trade, also said the Thunder were getting Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and Danilo Gallinari from the Clippers.

Leonard going to the Clippers means that for the first time, a reigning NBA Finals MVP will be changing teams before the following season. Leonard was also being pursued by the Los Angeles Lakers and the Toronto Raptors, the team he led to last season's NBA title.

The most the Clippers can offer Leonard is \$142 million over four years, which is the deal he is expected to sign. Players can sign with new teams as early as noon Eastern on Saturday.

"New adventure in OKC," Gallinari tweeted.

Leonard is entering his ninth NBA season, is a three-time All-Star, a two-time champion and one of only three players in league history to win the NBA Finals MVP award with multiple franchises.

Notoriously a man of few words, at least publicly, Leonard is generally considered to be the best two-way player in

the NBA — dominant on the offensive end, airtight on the defensive end.

His game-winning, four-bounce-off-the-rim jumper to beat the buzzer in Game 7 of the Eastern Conference semifinals against Philadelphia was perhaps the signature moment of this past season's playoffs.

And he just turned 28 last week — still very much in his prime.

So, too, is George.

The 29-year-old — who is owed roughly \$105 million for the next three seasons — spent the last two years alongside Russell Westbrook in Oklahoma City. George averaged a career-best 28 points last season even while dealing with shoulder issues that required surgery, and the Thunder couldn't get out of the first round in either of those seasons.

He was a finalist for both NBA MVP and Defensive Player of the Year last season, when

he led the league with 2.21 steals per contest.

A California native, going to the Clippers and pairing with Leonard means he'll have a real chance of being on a title contender.

The Lakers didn't wait long before starting to move on from their quest for Leonard. Danny Green announced that he is signing a two-year deal with the Lakers, meaning he, too, is leaving Toronto.

"Kawhi has made his decision. Seems like the announcement is out," Green said in a video he posted to his social media accounts. "It's time for me to make my announcement ... I will be teaming up with new teammates in LA, the Los Angeles Lakers."

Green said he enjoyed Toronto and that it was unfortunate how free agency turned out for that city, the Raptors and for Canada.

Serena warms up for mixed doubles with singles win

Associated Press

WIMBLEDON, England — Serena Williams warmed up for her opening mixed doubles match at Wimbledon by reaching the fourth round in singles.

The seven-time singles champion, who was expected to play with partner Andy Murray later Saturday at the All England Club, beat Julia Goerges for the second year in a row, eliminating the 18th-seeded German 6-3, 6-4 on Saturday.

"I wanted to play mixed because I've played not even 15 matches, or just about 15 matches, so far this year," Williams said. "So I thought it could really help me."

Williams and Murray were supposed to debut as a team on Friday, but that was postponed. They likely will get on court later Saturday.

"There's such a buzz going around about me and Andy that I've gotten nervous now, I feel like I might have a little bit per-

formance anxiety," Williams said. "I hope I can live up to the hype."

Williams beat Goerges in the semifinals last year before losing to Angelique Kerber in the final. She will next face No. 30 Carla Suarez Navarro, who made it to the fourth round at Wimbledon for the third time by beating unseeded American Lauren Davis 6-3, 6-3.

Murray, who is limited to playing doubles at the moment as he returns from an operation for a hip replacement, lost in the men's doubles tournament on Saturday.

Top-ranked Ash Barty also made it through to the second week in singles, winning her 15th straight match. The French Open champion beat Harriet Dart 6-1, 6-1 and will next face Alison Riske of the United States.

Two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova, who a week ago wasn't even sure if she

could hold a racket in her left hand, reached the fourth round at the grass-court Grand Slam for the first time since her last title at the All England Club in 2014, beating Magda Linette 6-3, 6-2 on No. 2 Court.

Kvitova, seeded sixth, broke her opponent three times while never giving Linette a chance to break back even once.

The 29-year-old left-hander from the Czech Republic was attacked in her home in 2016, needing surgery on her playing arm. She reached the Australian Open final at the beginning of this year but then pulled out of the French Open with an injured left forearm.

Kvitova will next face Johanna Konta, who reached the Wimbledon semifinals in 2017. The 19th-seeded Konta beat 2017 U.S. Open champion Sloane Stephens 3-6, 6-4, 6-1, her fourth victory over the American in four matches this year.

In the men's draw, two-time Wimbledon champion Rafael Nadal defeated two-time semifinalist Jo-Wilfried Tsonga 6-2, 6-3, 6-2.

Nadal beat Tsonga on Centre Court in a match that wasn't nearly as taxing as his second-round victory over Nick Kyrgios. He never faced a break point, broke Tsonga five times, and served out the match with an ace.

Also, No. 5 Kei Nishikori, 2017 Wimbledon semifinalist Sam Querrey and Tennys Sandgren all reached the fourth round.

Sandgren beat 12th-seeded Fabio Fognini 6-3, 7-6 (12), 6-3 on Court 14, one of the smaller venues on the grounds.

During the match, Fognini said he wanted a bomb to explode at the All England Club. He later said his comments came in the heat of the moment because he was upset about not playing well and the condition of the grass.

Judge's HR in 11th lifts Yanks over Rays

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Aaron Judge and the New York Yankees are on some kind of hot streak heading into the final weekend before the All-Star break.

Judge hit his second homer of the game leading off the 11th inning, Brett Gardner added a three-run shot and the Yankees beat the Tampa Bay Rays 8-4 on Friday night.

"When it gets to be winning time with these guys, these guys know what to do," New York manager Aaron Boone said. "Just another really impressive performance. Judge went up there real aggressive, went superhero on us."

Judge connected on the first pitch from Ryne Stanek (0-2) to give him nine career multi-homer games.

"I know he can get his fastball up to 100 (mph) and a good splitter," Judge said. "So my biggest thing was to try to get ready early and stay on the heater but also have a chance at that splitter."

The big slugger also went deep in the first against two-way player Brendan McKay as New York extended its AL East lead over Tampa Bay to a season-high 8½ games.

The Yankees have won 16 of 18 since June 15 and are 9-2 against the Rays this season.

"Look, they're a better team than us right now," Tampa Bay manager Kevin Cash said. "There's no denying that. They have a better record for many of the right reasons and they perform better than us. In a game, in a head-to-head matchup, they make the most of those situations more than we have."

Aaron Hicks tied it in the eighth with a pinch-hit homer for the Yankees, who used a five-run 10th to beat the Rays 8-4 on Thursday in the opener of a four-game series.

David Hale (2-0) left with two on and one out in the 11th. Aroldis Chapman, who blew a two-run lead in the ninth Thursday, walked Travis d'Arnaud with two outs but got a lineout from Tommy Pham to get his 24th save.

Masahiro Tanaka, who entered 2-0 with a 0.41 ERA in three starts against the Rays this season, was charged with four runs and six hits in 6⅓ innings.

McKay allowed three runs and six hits over five innings in his second pitching start. The left-hander gave up one hit in six scoreless innings in his big league debut last Saturday, a

win over Texas.

"I've faced two very quality lineups and got my feet wet to what it's like up here," McKay said.

Nate Lowe hit his first major league homer and Mike Zunino also went deep for the Rays.

After replacing Tanaka with runners on first and third, Nestor Cortes Jr. allowed Kevin Kiermaier's two-run single that gave Tampa Bay a 4-3 lead.

Hicks got the Yankees even in the eighth.

Judge, who faced McKay while on a rehab assignment for an oblique injury June 15 with Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre against Durham, hit a hard grounder that just missed the pitcher's leg in the fourth. He struck out swinging on a 93 mph fastball from McKay with two on to end the fifth.

MLB roundup

Padres edge Dodgers as earthquake shakes stadium

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Hunter Renfroe hit a tiebreaking homer in the eighth inning, Eric Lauer threw two strikes in the midst of a strong earthquake that rattled the stadium, and the San Diego Padres edged the Los Angeles Dodgers 3-2 Friday night.

All-Star lefty Clayton Kershaw pitched seven sharp innings for the Dodgers, but the loss snapped their nine-game home winning streak.

Lauer was facing Enrique Hernandez when the quake struck in the fourth. Lauer's first three pitches of the at-bat — including two strikes — came during shaking that unnerved some in the crowd of 49,790 enough to move from their seats in the upper reserve level and caused the press box to lurch for several seconds.

Early magnitude estimates from the U.S. Geological Survey wavered between 6.9 and 7.1.

The TV broadcast was

marred by the bouncing of the camera.

Hernandez appeared to react to the quake by stepping out of the batter's box after Lauer's third pitch. He eventually flied out to left field to end the inning.

There was nothing said by the public address announcer regarding the quake.

Angels 5, Astros 4: Mike Trout hit his AL-leading 26th homer, and Kole Calhoun, Shohei Ohtani and Andrelton Simmons also went deep to give visiting Los Angeles a win over Houston.

Calhoun, Ohtani and Simmons all connected off Houston starter Justin Verlander (10-4) as he gave up three home runs for the third time in his last five starts.

The Angels won for the third time in the four games since pitcher Tyler Skaggs was found dead in his hotel room on Monday. The victory snaps a seven-game skid against Houston and ends a five-game winning streak overall by the Astros.

Braves 1, Marlins 0: Brian McCann hit a bases-loaded single with one out in the ninth inning to lift host Atlanta over Miami, which has lost five straight.

The Braves had only three hits before the winning rally.

Phillies 7, Mets 2: Jay Bruce hit a go-ahead single in the ninth inning off closer Edwin Diaz, Mets manager Mickey Callaway lost an early replay challenge that might have cost him late and Philadelphia beat host New York.

Orioles 4, Blue Jays 1: Chris Davis homered and had three RBIs and Dylan Bundy pitched 6⅔ innings of one-run ball to snap a four-start losing streak as visiting Baltimore beat Toronto.

Diamondbacks 8, Rockies 0: Christian Walker hit two homers and drove in a career-high five runs, leading host Arizona to a win over Colorado.

Royals 7, Nationals 4 (11): Adalberto Mondesi hit a go-ahead single in the 11th inning, and visiting Kansas

City snapped a four-game losing streak with a win over Washington.

Red Sox 9, Tigers 6: Xander Bogaerts and Rafael Devers homered for Boston, and Eduardo Rodriguez won for the fifth time in his last eight starts in a win over host Detroit in a game delayed more than two hours due to rain.

Athletics 5, Mariners 2: Franklin Barreto hit his first home run of the season, Robbie Grossman added a pinch-hit, two-run double in the ninth inning, and visiting Oakland beat Seattle.

Twins 15, Rangers 6: Jorge Polanco homered on his 26th birthday, Martin Perez held his former team scoreless until the seventh inning and host Minnesota routed Texas.

Cardinals 9, Giants 4: Jose Martinez, Paul Goldschmidt and Dexter Fowler homered, Tommy Edman tripled in the go-ahead run in the fourth inning and visiting St. Louis beat San Francisco.