

# STARS AND STRIPES®

Tuesday, July 16, 2019

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## North Korea warns it might resume nuke, missile tests over US-S. Korean exercises

BY KIM GAMEL  
*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea warned on Tuesday that upcoming U.S.-South Korean military exercises could stall the resumption of nuclear negotiations and suggested it might restart nuclear or missile tests, which were suspended last year.

The saber-rattling came a day after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said he hoped Washington and Pyongyang could “be a little more creative” in the next round of talks.

President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un agreed to resume working-level talks during their meeting at the Korean border on June 30. The leaders didn’t set a date, but Pompeo said at the time it would probably be in mid-July.

The U.S. administration is eager to break the deadlock that followed the collapse of a second summit between Trump and Kim in February in Vietnam.

The sides failed to reach agreement as the North demanded extensive relief from economic sanctions and the U.S. insisted the North denuclearize first.

On Monday, Pompeo said the goal remained “to fully and finally denuclearize North Korea in a way that we can verify,” but he also raised the possibility of compromise.

“I hope the North Koreans will come to the table with ideas that they didn’t have the first time. We hope we can be a little more creative, too,” he said in an interview on “The Sean Hannity Show.”

North Korea also strongly objects to joint drills conducted

each year by the U.S. and South Korea, as it considers them rehearsals for an invasion.

The Trump administration announced this year that it was canceling the main drills that occurred each spring and fall, known as Key Resolve/Foal Eagle and Ulchi Freedom Guardian.

The North was not mollified because the allied militaries replaced them with smaller-scale training exercises. The next one is expected to take place in August, although no official announcement has been made.

“If the military exercise really goes ahead, it would affect the [North Korean]-U.S. working-level talks,” an unnamed North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman was quoted as saying by the state-run Korean Central News Agency.

“We will formulate our decision on the opening of the [North Korean]-U.S. working-level talks while keeping watch over the U.S. move hereafter,” the spokesman said.

North Korea’s Foreign Ministry also accused the U.S. of violating the spirit of a June 12 agreement reached during the first summit between Kim and Trump.

Trump announced after that meeting that he was “stopping the war games,” a move that critics said was a major concession to the North in exchange for little in return.

Kim suspended nuclear and missile tests last year as diplomacy gained momentum.

“With the U.S. unilaterally reneging on its commitments, we are gradually losing our justification to follow through on the commitments we made with the U.S.,” the Foreign Ministry said in a separate statement carried on KCNA.

## On Hill, Esper says he regrets Turkey’s ‘drift’ from NATO

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Army Secretary Mark Esper, President Donald Trump’s nominee to become secretary of defense, told his Senate confirmation hearing Tuesday he is troubled by Turkey’s decision to defy the U.S. by acquiring Russian-made air defenses.

“It is very disheartening to see how they have drifted over the past several years,” Esper said, citing the Turkish government’s purchase of the S-400 air defense system that the Trump administration has said is likely to trigger U.S. economic sanctions and jeopardize Turkey’s role in the NATO alliance, whose primary adversary is Russia.

Turkey began taking delivery of S-400 components in recent days, but the Trump administration has yet to announce any retaliatory action. The Pentagon has repeatedly said the purchase would mean Turkey’s indefinite suspension, and potentially its permanent removal, from the U.S. F-35 stealth fighter program.

Asked about the S-400 decision, Esper told the committee it was “the wrong one, and it’s disappointing.”

Later he went farther, saying that although Turkey has been a reliable NATO ally, it is headed in the wrong direction. He said he recently told Turkey’s defense minister, “You can either have the S-400 or you can have the F-35. You cannot have both. Acquisition of the S-400 fundamentally undermines the capabilities of the F-35.”

Esper also told the committee he believes the United States should pursue diplomatic solutions to its differences with Iran and avoid war.

“I agree we do not want war with Iran,” he said. “We are not seeking war with Iran. We need to get back on the diplomatic channel.”

Esper said the administration plans to brief lawmakers soon on a plan for working with other countries to more closely monitor commercial shipping in and around the Persian Gulf. He said this plan, which he called Operation Sentinel, is intended to deter Iran from impeding navigation in the Gulf and avoid Iranian miscalculations.

Testifying a day after Trump submitted his nomination to the Senate, Esper faced a mostly friendly series of questions from members of the Armed Services Committee. One clear exception was Sen. Elizabeth Warren, the Massachusetts Democrat who is running for her party’s presidential nomination. She indicated she does not intend to vote for Esper’s confirmation, citing what she called his unwillingness to commit to avoiding potential conflicts of interest with his former employer, Raytheon Co., which is a major defense contractor.

“You should not be confirmed as secretary of defense,” Warren said.

The Republican-led Senate is expected to attempt to get Esper confirmed as early as Thursday, ending seven months of leadership uncertainty at the Pentagon.

# Chinese ships seen near disputed islands

By AYA ICHIHASHI  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A group of Chinese vessels entered Japanese territorial waters near the Senkakus — a group of uninhabited islands west of Okinawa in the East China Sea — on Monday, according to the Japanese coast guard.

“Four China Coast Guard vessels entered the territorial waters at about 4 p.m. on Monday and exited by 4:16 p.m.,” a spokesman for Japan’s 11th Regional Coast Guard in Naha told Stars and Stripes on

Tuesday morning. The rules of his job do not allow him to be named.

“The Japan Coast Guard warned the vessels to exit the waters and will continue warning them not to enter,” he said.

China Coast Guard ships also entered Japanese-controlled waters on July 10, the spokesman said.

Four vessels spent two hours in Japanese territory before exiting into the contiguous zone.

China Coast Guard vessels were spotted in the Japanese contiguous zone for 64 days straight from April 12 to June 14. The

contiguous zone extends past a nation’s territorial waters and up to 24 nautical miles.

“Since the Senkaku Islands became Japanese land in 2012, this is the longest record” for Chinese incursions, the spokesman said.

On June 11, a Chinese aircraft carrier sailed between two islands in Okinawa prefecture, according to Japanese officials.

Japanese officials have been increasingly concerned about Chinese encroachment as Beijing modernizes its military and becomes more assertive in the region.

## US fears Iran seized UAE-based oil tanker

*Associated Press*

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A small oil tanker from the United Arab Emirates traveling through the Strait of Hormuz entered Iranian waters and turned off its tracker two days ago, leading the U.S. to suspect Iran seized the vessel amid heightened tensions in the region, an American defense official said Tuesday.

Iran offered no immediate comment on what happened to the Panamanian-flagged oil tanker Riah late Saturday night, though an Emirati official acknowledged the vessel sent out no distress call. Oil tankers pre-

viously have been targeted in the wider region amid tensions between the U.S. and Iran over its unraveling nuclear deal with world powers.

Those tensions also have seen the U.S. send thousands of additional troops, nuclear-capable B-52 bombers and advanced fighter jets into the Mideast. Mysterious attacks on oil tankers and Iran shooting down a U.S. military surveillance drone have added to the fears of an armed conflict breaking out.

The Riah, a 190-foot oil tanker, typically made trips from Dubai and Sharjah on the UAE’s west coast before going

through the strait and heading to Fujairah on the UAE’s east coast. However, something happened to the vessel after 11 p.m. Saturday, according to tracking data.

Capt. Ranjith Raja, of the data firm Refinitiv, told The Associated Press on Tuesday that the tanker hadn’t switched off its tracking in three months of trips around the UAE.

“That is a red flag,” Raja said.

A U.S. defense official later told the AP that the Riah was in Iranian territorial waters near Qeshm Island, which has a Revolutionary Guard base on it.

“We certainly have suspi-

cions that it was taken,” the official said. “Could it have broken down or been towed for assistance? That’s a possibility. But the longer there is a period of no contact ... it’s going to be a concern.”

The official spoke on condition of anonymity as the matter did not directly involve U.S. interests.

An Emirati official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing security matter, said the vessel “did not emit a distress call.”

“We are monitoring the situation with our international partners,” the official said.

## Proposed law urges Pentagon to assess capabilities in Baltics

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — A defense bill passed by U.S. lawmakers calls on the Pentagon to take steps to counter Russia in the Baltic region, including by potentially reinforcing air defenses and stepping up troop rotations.

The Baltic Reassurance Act is part of the National Defense Authorization Act, which was passed by House lawmakers last week.

The initiative, which still

needs Senate backing, calls for the Defense Department to assess the need for more cyber, intelligence and surveillance capabilities, weapons depots and troop deployments in the Baltic region, where the U.S. military and Western security analysts have warned that NATO allies may be outgunned by Russia.

Opportunities to transfer and sell military gear to the Baltic states also should be considered, the bill says.

The Baltic region has long been an area of concern for the U.S. military in Europe.

In 2016, NATO sent multinational battlegroups to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — all of which were annexed by the Soviet Union from the end of World War II until 1991 — and northern Poland to boost security amid a military buildup in Kaliningrad, a Russian exclave sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania depend on NATO’s Baltic Air Policing mission to safeguard their skies. Russian military aircraft regularly encroach into Estonian airspace, and those

violations have increased since 2014 when Russia annexed Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula.

It is uncertain how the House version of the NDAA will fare in the Senate, given the partisan divide over the defense budget in the two houses and the fact that the Republican-controlled Senate passed its own NDAA last month.

The House version of the NDAA calls on the Pentagon to consider “the feasibility of providing additional air and missile defense systems in the Baltic region.”



# Deadline extended to transfer education benefits

By SCOTT WYLAND

*Stars and Stripes*

Military personnel with more than 16 years of service will have an additional six months to transfer their Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits to family members while Congress decides whether to remove the restriction on transfers.

A new Defense Department rule was set to take effect on July 12, limiting the benefit transfers to troops with at least six years of service but no more than 16 years.

The Pentagon extended the deadline until Jan. 12, 2020, for troops who have

more than 16 years of service to give Congress time to discuss the House Armed Services Committee's proposal to change the rule. Troops still must have served at least six years and be able to reenlist for four more years.

"This is a welcome decision by the department to slow down implementation of a policy that will unfairly affect some of our most seasoned servicemembers," Armed Services Committee member Rep. Joe Courtney, D-Conn., said in a statement.

Courtney proposed repealing the 16-year limit and received the committee's unanimous support. He sent a letter on

June 24 to acting Defense Secretary Mark Esper requesting that the Pentagon delay imposing the restriction.

The Pentagon announced plans for the limit in July 2018. Previously, there were no restrictions on when servicemembers could transfer education benefits to family members after they'd served six years.

Servicemembers wounded in combat who have received Purple Heart medals are exempted from the rule.

When veterans advocates criticized the restriction, military officials said the transfers were intended as a retention tool and not as a benefit to career servicemembers.

# Enlisted women now free to apply for sub duty

By JOSHUA KARSTEN

*Stars and Stripes*

Enlisted women hoping to join the ranks of Navy submariners will no longer have to wait for infrequent opportunities to apply.

The Navy will now accept applications continuously from female enlisted sailors to serve in non-nuclear rates, said an administrative message signed by Vice Adm. John Nowell Jr., chief of naval personnel.

Women will be considered to serve on previously integrated crews on four submarines or initial enlisted integration on other boats.

In the past, application windows were determined by the submarine community's needs and available billets for the integration of individual boats, the service said in a statement Monday.

"Applications will be processed as they are received, and there is no specified due date," according to the statement, which encouraged interested sailors to submit their applications "as soon as possible."

Enlisted women first integrated into submarine crews in 2015, five years after the Navy first lifted the prohibition on women serving in the submarine force, when 38 sailors were selected for two crews of the USS Michigan. Female officers first filled the ranks in 2011.

Under the new process, sailors for all communities can apply to be converted into one of 10 open submarine ratings — only four of which are open for chief petty officers and senior chief petty officers.

Sailors of all ranks up to senior chief can apply to be a submarine yeoman, culinary specialist, logistics specialist or informa-

tion systems technician.

The ratings of sonar technician, fire control technician, electronics technician navigation and electronics technician communications as well as machinist's mate weapons and machinist's mate auxiliary are open to sailors up to petty officer first class.

"Personnel specialists and independent duty corpsmen will also be considered," the statement said.

The non-nuclear submarine enlisted community manager will best fit each sailor to a rating based on their application package and the needs for each rating.

Applications will be considered for four previously integrated submarines: the USS Ohio and USS Michigan, out of Bangor, Wash., and the USS Florida and USS Georgia, out of Kings Bay, Ga.

# US, Russian delegations set for talks on arms control

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Delegations from the U.S. and Russia are expected to meet this week to discuss arms control and the possibility of coaxing China into negotiating a new, three-way nuclear weapons pact, two senior administration officials said Monday.

The New START treaty, the last major arms control treaty remaining between the U.S. and Russia, expires in 2021. There has been talk of negotiating an extension to the existing treaty, but the White House thinks the next generation of arms control must include China.

China has nuclear weapons, ballistic missile capabilities and the know-how to make chemical and biological weapons

— and it is updating its nuclear arsenal. China has signed various international weapons agreements, but none limiting nuclear weapons.

New START restricts both the U.S. and Russia to 1,550 deployed strategic nuclear warheads on a maximum of 700 deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles and strategic bombers.

Daryl Kimball, director of the Arms Control Association, has advocated for a five-year extension of New START, saying there is no chance a new agreement adding China can be negotiated before the treaty expires in 2021.

"It would be malpractice to discard New START in the hopes of negotiating a more comprehensive, ambitious nuclear arms control agreement with Russia and China

and getting it ratified and into force," said Kimball, who accuses the Trump administration of dithering for more than a year before beginning talks.

Before the Group of 20 summit last month in Japan, Russian President Vladimir Putin said he planned to push President Donald Trump for an extension to New START. Putin said his nation was ready to agree to an extension, but Russia had not seen any initiative from the Americans even though the treaty expires in 2021.

At the same time, Russia also has expressed an interest in multilateral arms control deals, according to one of the administration officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the issue ahead of the talks Wednesday in Geneva.

# Trump digs in on incendiary tweets, says 'many agree'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defiant in the face of widespread criticism, President Donald Trump renewed his belligerent call for four Democratic congresswomen of color to get out of the U.S. “right now,” cementing his position as the most willing U.S. leader in generations to stoke the discord that helped send him to the White House.

Content to gamble that a sizable chunk of the electorate embraces his tweets that have been widely denounced as racist, the president made clear that he has no qualms about exploiting racial divisions once again.

“It doesn’t concern me because many people agree with me,” Trump said Monday at the White House. “A lot of people love it, by the way.”

The episode served notice that Trump is willing to again rely on incendiary rhetoric on issues of race and immigration to preserve his political base in the lead-up to the 2020 election.

There was near unanimous condemnation from Democrats for Trump’s comments and a rumble of discontent from a subset of Republicans — but notably not from the party’s congressional leaders.

Republican Sen. Mitt Romney, of Utah, the

party’s White House nominee in 2012 and now one of the president’s most vocal GOP critics, said Trump’s comments were “destructive, demeaning and disunifying.”

Far from backing down, Trump on Monday dug in on comments he had initially made a day earlier on Twitter that if lawmakers “hate our country,” they can go back to their “broken and crime-infested” countries. His remarks were directed at four congresswomen: Reps. Ilhan Omar, of Minnesota; Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, of New York; Ayanna Pressley, of Massachusetts; and Rashida Tlaib, of Michigan. All are American citizens and three of the four were born in the U.S.

“If you’re not happy in the U.S., if you’re complaining all the time, you can leave, you can leave right now,” he said.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who said Trump’s campaign slogan truly means he wants to “make America white again,” announced Monday that the House would vote on a resolution condemning his new comments.

The resolution “strongly condemns President Donald Trump’s racist comments” and says they “have legitimized and increased fear and hatred of new Americans and people of color.”

## No charges for officer in chokehold case in NY

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Federal prosecutors won’t bring civil rights charges against a New York City police officer in the 2014 chokehold death of Eric Garner, a decision made by Attorney General William Barr and announced one day before the five-year anniversary of his death, officials said.

The announcement of the decision not to bring charges against Officer Daniel Pantaleo comes a day before the statute of limitations was set to expire in the case that produced the words “I can’t breathe” — among Garner’s final words — as a rallying cry among protesters of the police treatment of black suspects.

“The evidence here does not support Officer Daniel Pantaleo or any other officer with a federal civil rights violation,” said Richard Donoghue, the U.S. attorney for eastern New York. “Even if we could prove that Officer Pantaleo’s hold of Mr. Garner constituted unreasonable force, we would still have to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Officer Pantaleo acted willfully in violation of the law.”

Gwen Carr, Garner’s mother, and the Rev. Al Sharpton said they were outraged and heartbroken. Sharpton called for Pantaleo’s dismissal from the NYPD.

A senior Justice Department official told The Associated Press that prosecutors watched video of the confrontation “countless” times but weren’t convinced Pantaleo acted willfully in the seconds after the chokehold was applied.

There were two sets of recommendations made. The Eastern District of New York recommended no charges, but Justice Department civil rights prosecutors in Washington recommended charging the officer. Barr made the ultimate decision, the official said.

## Mnuchin says budget deal is ‘very close’

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — It’s House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and top Senate Republican Mitch McConnell vs. hardliners in the White House as lawmakers pursue a deal on federal spending and the debt. The hardliners, wary of further increases to federal spending, appear to be losing.

Talks between Pelosi and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin appear to be progressing. Mnuchin on Monday told reporters, “I think we’re very close to a deal,” though he cautioned that “these deals are complicated.”

Mnuchin says increasing the \$22 trillion debt limit needs to be done this month to avert any risk of a U.S. default on obligations like bond payments. He said he doesn’t think there will be a government shutdown when the budget year ends Sept. 30, nor does he think “either

party or anybody wants to put the credit of the United States government at risk.”

Mnuchin and Pelosi spoke again Monday evening.

The talks increasingly hinge on a durable, powerful and familiar political coalition: GOP defense hawks demanding bigger Pentagon budgets and Democrats seeking equal treatment for domestic priorities.

Lawmakers are negotiating an increase to spending “caps” for federal agency budgets, along with separate must-do legislation to increase the government’s debt limit. The negotiations are opaque but appear to be guided by the concept of “parity” in spending increases for defense and nondefense agency budgets, based on a public exchange of letters between Mnuchin and Pelosi.

McConnell played a key behind-the-scenes role in setting

up the negotiations and has encouraged Mnuchin’s central role. He wants a deal that would satisfy his defense hawks and his pragmatic-minded power base on the Appropriations Committee. He also knows that the path to a successful deal goes through Pelosi and is likely to include more money than acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney, a former tea party lawmaker, would like.

The negotiations are closely held but a key concern for Pelosi is getting \$22 billion over the next two years to cover the rapidly growing cost of privately provided veterans health care. She sent a letter to Mnuchin on Saturday agreeing with his request to increase the debt limit but pushing for relief for the Department of Veterans Affairs’ private health care program, which threatens to squeeze other domestic priorities.



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## County has high hopes for marine sanctuary

**MD** LA PLATA — Officials in a Maryland county where a historic ship graveyard was recently designated a national marine sanctuary hope the recognition will also bring economic benefits.

Kellie Hinkle, chief of the tourism division for the Charles County Department of Recreation, Parks and Tourism, told The Daily Record the newly dubbed Mallows Bay-Potomac River National Marine Sanctuary could see about a 20 percent increase in tourism visitors. She said hotel occupancy and restaurant traffic will also likely increase.

The site about 40 miles south of Washington contains more than 100 abandoned steamships.

## Man breaks state spearfishing record

**UT** TOOELE — A Utah man has set a state spearfishing record.

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources announced Jacob Hansen, 39, of Tooele, broke the state record for spearfishing a tiger muskie fish on June 13 at Fish Lake in southern Utah. His record-breaking fish is 51 inches long and weighs 32 pounds.

Faith Jolley, with the DWR, said the previous record was set in 2013 at Fish Lake when someone caught a 46-inch, 28-pound tiger muskie.

## Bordering states fired up over hot peppers

**NM** ALBUQUERQUE — The long-simmering battle between New Mexico and Colorado over which state grows the best chile is heating

up.

New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham went on the offensive after Colorado Gov. Jared Polis proclaimed on Twitter that hot peppers from Pueblo were the best and would be stocked across a four-state region by a well-known grocery store chain. Polis went on to say stores in Lujan Grisham's state would be supplied with inferior New Mexico chile.

Lujan Grisham fired back, saying New Mexico chile is "the greatest in the world" and she's ready for a chile duel.

## Man sentenced for having banned animals

**CO** GRAND JUNCTION — A man has been sentenced for possessing prohibited, non-native sheep at his private hunting ranch in Colorado.

The Grand Junction Daily Sentinel reported Saturday that Michael Gates, 34, pleaded guilty June 19 to illegally possessing and importing exotic sheep species. He received a one-year deferred judgment sentence.

Authorities said the Vernal, Utah, resident procured the animals for clients to hunt at his ranch near Dinosaur, 295 miles west of Denver. The Colorado Parks and Wildlife department said the animals included Mouflon sheep hybrids, Texas Dall sheep and Painted Desert sheep.

## Underwater music event supports reefs

**FL** BIG PINE KEY — Divers and snorkelers gathered underwater to listen to music and coral reef protection messages in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

The Lower Keys Underwater Music Festival was staged Sat-

urday at Looe Key Reef, about 6 miles south of Big Pine Key. The event encourages environmentally responsible diving and preservation of the world's coral reefs.

Music and public service announcements were featured in the four-hour broadcast by a local radio station that was delivered underwater via speakers suspended beneath boats above the reef.

## Group opening pantry to help feed pets

**WV** CLARKSBURG — A West Virginia organization is helping to feed hungry pets and provide other necessities with its pet pantry.

The Exponent Telegram reported the Progressive Women's Association in Clarksburg is starting Peppy's Pet Pantry to help people who have trouble affording their pets. Association assistant director Kelli Hagerman said the group wants to make it possible for people to keep their pets.

She said the pantry will have dog and cat food, kitty litter and accessories such as leashes, bowls, collars and toys.

Hagerman said the pantry has received items from local humane societies and individuals as well as monetary contributions.

## 2 king penguin chicks born at zoo on display

**NE** OMAHA — Two king penguin chicks that hatched in March are on display at Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium.

The first chick hatched March 14 and now weighs 26 pounds. The second hatched March 16 and weighs 32 pounds. Their genders are not yet known.

The chicks will remain in a segregated "chick pen" in the

Antarctic penguin habitat until they molt their nonwaterproof down feathers.

It also allows the chicks to get acclimated to the habitat and the other penguins.

## Experts puzzled over growth in walleye

**OH** PORT CLINTON — Experts are puzzled over the explosion of the walleye population in Lake Erie, but anglers pursuing Ohio's most popular fish couldn't be happier.

Fisheries experts at the Ohio Division of Wildlife said the bountiful supply of walleye in recent years is difficult to explain, but the \$800 million state sport fishing industry has benefited.

The Plain Dealer reported that after a decades-old roller coaster ride with the walleye population, the number caught in the U.S. waters of Lake Erie increased from 417,000 in 2011 to almost 2 million in 2018.

Ohio banned commercial walleye fishing in the late 1960s to allow the Lake Erie population to recover.

## Thief steals lottery tickets worth \$360K

**VA** STAFFORD — Authorities in Virginia said a suspect stole more than 12,000 lottery tickets valued at up to \$360,000 from a convenience store.

The Stafford County Sheriff's Office said the suspect broke into a Fas-Mart convenience store Saturday morning and stole the scratch-off lottery tickets and 170 cartons of cigarettes.

The suspect was caught on security cameras covering up with a dark hoodie.

From wire reports

Your objective source for military news  
updated 24/7 from bases  
around the world.  
Now online at [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com).

STARS AND STRIPES®



# Rested Woods aims for Open

Associated Press

That was Tiger Woods in his red shirt on Sunday at the Masters. That was Tiger Woods slipping on the green jacket.

But it's not the same Tiger Woods.

The evidence has less to do with how he plays — still plenty good to beat the best in the world on the biggest stage — and more to do with how often he plays.

The chanting and cheering Sunday afternoon at Augusta National sounded as though it would go on forever. Woods, 11 years and four back surgeries removed from his last major, methodically worked his way around the back nine and beat a cast of contenders that included the past two major champions (Brooks Koepka and Francesco Molinari) and the No. 1 player in the world (Dustin Johnson).

It was his 15th major, and it started anew the countdown in his pursuit of Jack Nicklaus and his record 18 majors.

That now seems a lot longer than three months ago.

Woods has played just three tournaments — 10 rounds — since he won the Masters. For only the seventh time in his career, he went from one major to the next without having played in between, and then he missed the cut at Bethpage Black in the PGA Championship.

Unusual? Not anymore.

He goes into the British Open, which starts Thursday on a Royal Portrush links, having not played since he shot 69 in the final round at Pebble Beach on June 16. A good back nine allowed him to tie for 21st. He finished 11 shots behind Gary Woodland.

There were not many options. Woods has not played the week after the U.S. Open since 2003. Instead of having the Quicken Loans National, which his foundation ran, the tour offered two new events in Detroit and Minnesota. The only time Woods has played a week before the British Open was in 1995, when he was still in college. He played the Scottish Open at Carnoustie ahead of the British

Open at St. Andrews.

His only public activity since Pebble Beach was a social media post for Nike on Monday in which he says he is getting up at 1 a.m. because that would be 6 a.m. at Royal Portrush, and he wanted “to be prepared for the time change.”

“If you want to succeed, if you want to get better, if you want to win, if you want to accomplish your goals, well, it starts with getting up early in the morning,” he said.

The inactivity is another reminder that Woods is managing his health as much as his game.

Most telling was what he said at Bethpage Black: “There are more days I feel older than my age than I do younger than my age,” he said.

What to expect at the final major of the year?

Anything.

No one was more perplexed about his lack of competition going into the British Open than Pádraig Harrington.

“If you’re serious about winning The Open, you’ve got to be playing tournament golf at least before it,” Harrington said. “You’d rather be playing links golf and being in a tournament than just on your own going into it.”

That was never the case with Woods.

In his younger days, Woods came over to Ireland with Mark O’Meara for a mix of links golf and fishing, either at Portmarnock or Royal County Down, and sometimes to the south in Waterville. In a 10-year stretch since he first went to Ireland, Woods won the Open three times and contended in three others.

“I think it has been instrumental in preparing for the British Open, not only for getting adjusted for the time, but also getting used to playing links golf,” he said in 2002 in Ireland, where he won a World Golf Championship. “We play in all different types of weather, which certainly makes it interesting. And I think it’s instrumental in my preparation for The Open Championship.”

Harrington wasn’t being as critical of Woods as the headlines suggested. There is simply a different way to prepare, and no one can argue with Woods’ results.

“I was always mightily impressed when Tiger Woods would play in a major without playing the week before,” Harrington said. “I’d be a basket case if I didn’t play the week before. Different personalities. Completely different.”

Woods finished last year with a victory in the Tour Championship, and he had been building toward that. He inched closer to contention two weeks before the British Open, and then had the lead briefly on Sunday at Carnoustie and tied for sixth. He pushed Koepka all the way to the end in a runner-up finish at the PGA Championship.

And then he won at East Lake.

Since then?

He was clearly fatigued at the Ryder Cup, where he didn’t win a match, and after two months away from the game, he finished 17th against an 18-man field in the Bahamas. He played three tournaments in a five-week stretch to start this year and finished nearly 11 shots out of the lead on average. And then he skipped Bay Hill, citing soreness in his neck. His explanation was simple. Sometimes he doesn’t feel that great, a product of age and injuries.

Woods lost in the quarterfinals of Match Play, and two weeks later won the Masters.

In the three events since then, he missed the cut and finished 10 shots and 11 shots out of the lead.

“If I feel good, then I feel like I can play any venue,” Woods said at the U.S. Open. “When I’m stiff and not moving as well, it becomes a little bit more difficult.”

This sounds like the new normal. He would not elaborate — that’s the old normal — on how he felt at Bethpage, where he played only nine holes of practice in the three days leading up to the first round. “I was in rough shape,” he said.

## Long odds for repeat by Molinari

Associated Press

PORTRUSH, Northern Ireland — Golf’s oldest championship is all about tradition, and this is one Francesco Molinari could have done without.

Fifty-one weeks after he won the British Open and gazed at his name etched on the silver claret jug, he had to return it.

Getting it back won’t be easy.

“I’m well aware of the challenges ahead,” Molinari said Monday on the first day of official practice at Royal Portrush. “There’s a lot of guys capable this week of winning the trophy. All I can do is do my best, try to put up a good defense and be in contention on Sunday. It’s a long week ahead, so I’ll try to take it step-by-step.”

The first order of business was getting to know the links.

Molinari was among the 11 players who played the Irish Open in 2012 at Royal Portrush. The sharp elevation, sensational views of the limestone cliffs known as White Rocks and the Dunluce Castle in the distance, it all looked familiar. But it’s not quite the same course.

Molinari, who gets panned for being a flat-liner and loves it, didn’t do anything too wild with golf’s oldest trophy. He poured a few drinks from it but mostly kept it out of reach of his children to keep anything from happening to it.

“I was very, very careful with it, especially the first few weeks,” Molinari said. “So much so that I forgot my Track-Man on the plane not to forget the claret jug. That, obviously, had the priority.”

And now it’s back with the R&A for seven days until a new name is carved into the silver base. Not since Pádraig Harrington in 2007 and 2008 has a player turned in the jug on Monday and reclaimed it six days later.

Six of them finished 11 shots or more out of the lead.

## NBA briefs

# Cavaliers part ways with guard Smith

Associated Press

CLEVELAND—J.R. Smith's never-a-dull-moment run with the Cavaliers is over.

Cleveland released the colorful shooting guard Monday before his \$15.6 million contract for next season became guaranteed. The Cavs had been trying to trade Smith for months, but the team was unable to find the right deal even after he agreed to extend his guarantee date from June 30 to July 15.

By waiving Smith, the Cavaliers will open salary-cap space and will move under the luxury tax threshold for next season.

The 33-year-old played in just 11 games last season after he stepped away from the team in hopes of being traded or released. It was a mutual decision because he wasn't happy with his role and the Cavaliers didn't want him to be a negative influence on their young players.

Once he clears waivers, Smith will be a free agent and can sign anywhere. Last week, Smith said he wasn't finished

playing and smiled when asked if it's been strange not being part of a team for the past eight months.

"Technically my whole career's been in limbo, so this is easy for me," he said before playing in the All-Star Celebrity Softball Game.

Smith's release ends an interesting tenure with the Cavaliers, who acquired him in a trade from the New York Knicks in 2015.

He was both loved and loathed by Cleveland fans, who were never quite sure what he might do on or off the floor.

One of the NBA's most accurate three-point shooters, Smith played a vital part in Cleveland winning the 2016 championship, ending a 52-year title drought for the city's three major sports teams. Smith made two three-pointers during a critical stretch of Game 7 of the Finals, helping the Cavaliers complete a historic comeback from a 3-1 series deficit to dethrone the Golden State Warriors.

Smith will also be remembered for a gaffe in Game 1 of the 2018 Finals.

In the closing seconds, he grabbed an offensive rebound after a missed foul shot and dribbled out the clock to end regulation, thinking the Cavs were ahead. The game was tied, and Cleveland lost in overtime on the way to being swept in four straight games by the Warriors.

## 76ers extend Simmons

PHILADELPHIA — The Philadelphia 76ers and star guard Ben Simmons have agreed to a \$170 million, five-year contract extension, a person familiar with the situation told The Associated Press. The max deal is the latest big commitment by a team expected to make a serious push at its first NBA championship since 1983.

Simmons, 22, will make about \$8.1 million this season, the last of his four-year rookie deal. His salary for the next season will jump to about \$29.3

million and rise to nearly \$39 million in 2024-25, according to the person who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity Monday because the contract is not official.

The deal solidifies the 76ers' core for the next few seasons. All-Star Joel Embiid and Al Horford are under contract through 2023, Tobias Harris through 2024 and now Simmons through 2025. Horford got a \$109 million, four-year deal and Embiid agreed last season to a \$147 million, five-year deal.

Philadelphia is 101-58 in regular-season games when Simmons plays. He has had 22 triple-doubles in the last two seasons.

Simmons also has had 80 double-doubles in the past two seasons, but he missed all 11 three-point attempts his rookie season and was 0-for-6 last season. Defenses sagged on Simmons daring him to shoot because the speedy All-Star can't do much outside the paint.

# Cubs acquire Maldonado from Royals for Montgomery

Associated Press

CHICAGO — With their All-Star catcher sidelined, the Chicago Cubs quickly found some experienced help behind the plate.

The NL Central leaders acquired Martin Maldonado in a trade with Kansas City on Monday night that sent left-hander Mike Montgomery to the Royals.

Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein announced the deal following Chicago's 6-3 loss to Cincinnati — adding that top catcher Willson Contreras was going on the 10-day injured list with a strain to the arch area of his right foot.

The 32-year-old Maldonado, a Gold Glove winner in 2017 with the Angels, was batting

.227 with six homers and 17 RBIs in 74 games for the struggling Royals this season. The Cubs will be his fifth team in nine major league seasons, and Epstein expects him to provide a strong defensive presence.

"He can really receive," Epstein said. "He can really throw. He's caught playoff games. He's handled some of the best pitchers in the game. He's a favorite of pitchers to throw to. He calls a great game."

Contreras' injury initially was not deemed serious and he was expected to start Tuesday, but an MRI showed enough damage to warrant shutting down the 27-year-old. Epstein said Contreras should improve quickly with rest and the club hopes he'll be ready to play once eligible to return from a

backdated stint on the IL.

"Our medical staff feels like if he were to try to play on it, that he'd be risking exacerbating the injury and turning it into something long term," Epstein said. "So we have to get ahead of it, take it out of Willie's hands and get him off his feet."

The Cubs, holding a slim lead in their crowded division, weren't sure if Maldonado would arrive at Wrigley Field in time for Tuesday night's game against the Reds. He was pulled by the Royals from Monday night's home game against the Chicago White Sox for a pinch-hitter, backup catcher Cam Gallagher, in the sixth inning.

Maldonado is a .220 career hitter with 57 homers and 210 RBIs in 686 games.

Montgomery, 30, is 1-2 with a 5.67 ERA in 20 relief appearances for the Cubs this year, and was 14-17 with three saves in 119 games for Chicago over four seasons.

Montgomery got the final out in Game 7 of the 2016 World Series at Cleveland, ending the Cubs' 108-year championship drought.

"You can't talk about his contributions without talking about him getting the last out in that World Series that changed everybody's lives," Epstein said.

Montgomery is expected to get a chance to start with the Royals, who drafted him in 2008. He was traded to Tampa Bay four years later with Wil Myers and Jake Odorizzi, and made his big league debut with Seattle in 2015.



# Freeman helps Braves win 5th straight

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — One pitch was all Freddie Freeman needed to power the Atlanta Braves to their fifth straight victory.

The left-handed slugger sent an offering from Milwaukee Brewers starter Adrian Houser deep to center field to bring home three of the Braves' four runs in a 4-2 win Monday night.

"We've been clicking for two months now," Freeman said. "None of this surprises anyone in this clubhouse. We are playing really good baseball."

The homer marked Freeman's 25th of the season and helped the first-place Braves improve to a season-best 21 games over .500.

Freeman is the fastest player

in Braves franchise history to reach 25 homers since Andruw Jones in 2005. Freeman reached the mark in 95 games. It took Jones 78 games.

Max Fried (10-4) pitched five scoreless innings to secure the win. The left-hander surrendered three hits and struck out five in just 78 pitches. Braves manager Brian Snitker said he pulled Fried early after a blister had formed on his left index finger.

"I thought it was smart not trying to pitch through it," Snitker said. "It was pretty significant. If he hadn't have said anything and kept pitching, it probably would have torn open."

Fried is now 2-0 with 11 shut-out innings pitched against Milwaukee this year.

Freeman's home run put Atlanta on the board first in the fourth. The blast scored Ronald Acuna Jr. and Dansby Swanson, who each reached on a base hit.

The Braves improved to a major-league best 40-17 since Snitker moved Acuna to the top of the order on May 10.

Houser (2-4) fell to 0-4 as a starter this season after allowing four earned runs on eight hits in six innings.

Milwaukee, which stranded seven baserunners, has now dropped five of its last six and eight of its last 10 games.

"We just gotta make more plays," Brewers manager Craig Counsell said. "That's what it comes down to. Whether it be better at-bats and stuff or just making a play defensively [or]

making a big pitch when it counts. ... We gotta find a way to make plays. That's how we kind of break through this. Just make more plays. That's the only way to do it."

Ryan Braun hit his 13th home run of the season in the sixth and Keston Hiura brought home the Brewers' other run on a deep drive to center that fell just beyond the outstretched glove of Acuna. The RBI triple pulled Milwaukee to within 3-2.

Austin Riley singled on a fly ball off Braun's glove in the seventh. The base hit scored Ozzie Albies.

Christian Yelich had two hits on the night and added a stolen base, his 22nd of the season.

## MLB roundup

# D'Arnaud hits three homers to rally Rays past Yanks

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Travis d'Arnaud hit three home runs, including a three-run shot with two outs in the ninth inning off Aroldis Chapman, and the Tampa Bay Rays beat the New York Yankees 5-4 on Monday night.

D'Arnaud tied a Tampa Bay record for homers in a game. It has been done five times, most recently by Evan Longoria in 2012.

The Yankees had been 49-0 this season when leading after eight innings. The Rays won for just the second time in seven games in the Bronx this year and cut the Yankees' lead in the AL East to five games.

Andrew Kittredge (1-0) got the win despite allowing Edwin Encarnacion's second homer of the game, a two-run shot in the eighth that put the Yankees up 4-2. Oliver Drake got one out for his first save.

**Dodgers 16, Phillies 2:** Cody Bellinger hit his 32nd and 33rd homers, Clayton Kershaw

(8-2) struck out seven in six innings and major league-leading Los Angeles routed host Philadelphia.

Bellinger passed reigning NL MVP Christian Yelich for the MLB lead in homers. He clubbed solo shots in the fifth and sixth for his 11th career multi-homer game and fourth this season.

**Red Sox 10, Blue Jays 8:** Rookie Michael Chavis hit his first grand slam, Xander Bogaerts had three hits and Andrew Benintendi drove in three runs as host Boston beat Toronto.

Boston batted around for five runs in the first inning against starter Trent Thornton (3-7) and then sent 10 batters to the plate in the third, scoring five more.

**Giants 19-2, Rockies 2-1:** Brandon Crawford homered three times and drove in nine runs in two games as visiting San Francisco swept Colorado in a day-night doubleheader.

In the first game, Crawford went 5-for-6 with two homers

and tied a San Francisco team record with eight RBIs as the Giants scored a season high in runs in a rout of the Rockies.

**Indians 8, Tigers 6:** Oscar Mercado hit his second home run of the game — a leadoff blast in the seventh inning — and host Cleveland beat Detroit.

Mercado homered into the bleachers in left field off Victor Alcantara (3-2) to break a 5-all tie. Mercado also hit a solo home run off Detroit starter Daniel Norris in the fifth.

**Reds 6, Cubs 3:** Eugenio Suarez and Yasiel Puig each hit his 22nd home run of the season, and visiting Cincinnati rallied past Chicago.

Jesse Winker raced home with an unearned go-ahead run to cap a two-run seventh inning that made a winner of All-Star Luis Castillo (9-3).

**Royals 5, White Sox 2:** Jakob Junis (5-8) struck out a career-high 10 and Nicky Lopez drove in a pair of runs and scored twice as host Kansas City beat Chicago.

The Royals beat Lucas Giolito for the first time and thwarted his bid for a 12th victory. The right-hander entered the game 6-0 with a 2.13 ERA in 10 previous career starts against Kansas City.

**Cardinals 7, Pirates 0:** Miles Mikolas (6-9) pitched a complete-game eight-hitter and Tyler O'Neill hit a pair of two-run homers, leading host St. Louis over Pittsburgh.

It was the first complete game this season and second overall for Mikolas. He struck out three and walked none while throwing 100 pitches.

**Angels 9, Astros 6:** Albert Pujols got three hits and drove in three runs, and host Los Angeles remained unbeaten since the All-Star break with a victory over AL West-leading Houston.

Pujols had his first three-hit game since May 13. Andrelton Simmons also homered as the Angels rallied from an early three-run deficit.