

Navy pulls plug on futuristic railgun

Associated Press

BATH, Maine — The U.S. Navy pulled the plug, for now, on a futuristic weapon that fires projectiles at up to seven times the speed of sound using electricity.

The Navy spent more than a decade developing the electromagnetic railgun and once considered putting them on the stealthy new Zumwalt-class destroyers built at Maine's Bath Iron Works.

But the Defense Department is turning its attention to hypersonic missiles to keep up with China and Russia, and the Navy cut funding for railgun research from its latest budget proposal.

"The railgun is, for the moment, dead," said Matthew Caris, a defense analyst at Avascent Group, a consulting firm.

The removal of funding suggests the Navy saw both challenges in implementing the technology as well as shortcomings in the projectiles' range compared to hypersonic missiles, he said.

The Navy's decision to pause research at year's end frees up resources for hypersonic missiles, directed-energy systems like lasers and electronic warfare systems, said Lt. Courtney Callaghan, a Navy spokesperson.

Information gleaned during testing will be retained in the event the Office of Naval Research wants to pick up where it left off in the future, she said.

All told, the Navy spent about \$500 million on research and development, according to Bryan Clark, an analyst at the Hudson Institute.

The concept held the possibility of providing an effective weapon at pennies on the dollars compared to smart bombs and missiles.

That's because railguns use electricity instead of gunpowder, or jet or rocket engines, to accelerate a projectile at six or seven times the speed of sound. That creates enough kinetic energy to destroy targets.

But there were a number of problems. Those included the range of about 110 miles in testing. A Navy vessel could not employ the gun without putting itself within range of a barrage of enemy missiles. And its usefulness for missile defense was also limited by range and rate of fire, Clark said.

The idea dates back to the 1940s. But there have always been major hurdles because the parallel rails, or conductors, are subjected to massive electric current and magnetic forces that can cause damage after a few

shots, said defense analyst Norman Friedman.

A big question was always whether the gun could stay together during continuous firing, Friedman said.

A normal gun can be fired about 600 times before the barrel has to be refurbished, but the barrel on the railgun prototype had to be replaced after about a dozen or two dozen shots were fired, Clark said.

A few years ago, the Navy was talking about putting the gun on the future USS Lyndon B. Johnson, the last of three stealthy destroyers. It's nearing completion and builder trials at Bath Iron Works.

The 600-foot-long warship uses marine turbines similar to those that propel the Boeing 777 to help produce up to 78 megawatts of electricity for use in propulsion, weapons and sensors.

That's more than enough electricity for the railgun, and the ship has space following the cancellation of the advanced gun system, leaving the ship with no conventional cannon-based weapon.

Instead, the Navy is pursuing an offshoot of the railgun, a hypervelocity projectile, that can be fired from existing gun systems.

Biden wants to celebrate; COVID doesn't take holiday

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — After nearly six months in office, grappling with a pandemic every step of that way, President Joe Biden was determined to party.

"This is a holiday weekend," Biden declared Friday as he parried journalists' "negative" questions about the ongoing U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, "I'm going to be celebrating it."

Biden wants Americans to celebrate too, after enduring 16 months of disruption in the pandemic and more than 605,000 deaths. The White House encouraged gatherings and fireworks displays all around the country to mark — as though ripped from a Hollywood script — the nation's "independence" from the virus.

And there is much to cheer: Cases and

deaths from COVID-19 are at or near record lows since the outbreak began, thanks to the robust U.S. vaccination program. Businesses and restaurants are open, hiring is picking up and travel is getting closer to pre-pandemic levels.

Still, it's hardly a "Mission Accomplished" moment. More than 200 Americans still die each day from COVID-19, a more infectious variant of the virus is spreading rapidly at home and abroad, and tens of millions of Americans have chosen not to get the lifesaving vaccines.

"If you've had the vaccine, you're doing great," said Dr. Mati Hlatshwayo Davis, an infectious disease physician at the John Cochran VA Medical Center and St. Louis Board of Health. "If you haven't had the vaccine, you should be alarmed and that's just the bottom line, there's no

easy way to cut it."

"But that doesn't take away from the fact that this country is in a significantly better place," she said.

Biden had hoped to have 70% of the adult population vaccinated by Sunday, but clocked in at about 67%, according to figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Officials insisted that the miss would have little practical effect on Americans' ability to mark the Independence Day holiday.

At least 1,000 guests, including first responders, were expected on the White House's South Lawn for a cookout and fireworks viewing, the White House said. The White House was not requiring vaccinations but was asking guests to get a COVID-19 test and to wear a mask if they are not fully vaccinated.

New commander takes reins of USFK

By DAVID CHOI

Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — Gen. Paul LaCamera, described by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin as a “quiet warrior” who “drives results,” has taken command of U.S. Forces Korea, United Nations Command and Combined Forces Command.

“Our alliance — forged in blood in the crucible of the Korean War — has been the bedrock of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula for more than 70 years,” LaCamera said during a Friday ceremony at Barker Field that included video remarks from Austin and flyovers by A-10 Warthogs and F-16 Fighting Falcons.

“I look forward to us getting together in the true spirit of one team, to strengthen our alliance and to propel it to even greater heights,” LaCamera, who previously commanded U.S. Army Pacific, told an audience that included the head of Indo-Pacific Command, Adm. John Aquilino, and South Korean defense minister Suh Wook.

He replaces Gen. Robert Abrams, who is retiring after a 39-year Army career punctuated by an aggressive “kill the virus” response to the COVID-19 pandemic. His time with USFK began amid unprecedented — though now stalled — diplomatic efforts aimed at eliminating the North Korean nuclear threat and restoring peace on the divided peninsula.

Austin, in his recorded message, called

LaCamera “an exceptional leader with more than 36 years of combat and command experience.”

“If it is humanly possible to take what [Abrams] has accomplished here and improve upon it,” Austin said, “there’s only one officer that I know who can do it. And that’s Paul LaCamera.”

Prior to leading USARPAC, the West Point graduate was at the helm of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, the campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

He’s now tasked with keeping approximately 28,500 U.S. service members equipped and trained as North Korea’s advancing nuclear development continues to threaten the United States and its allies.

Taliban gains ground in northern Afghanistan after troops retreat

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban’s march through northern Afghanistan gained momentum overnight with the capture of several districts from fleeing Afghan forces, several hundred of whom fled across the border into Tajikistan, officials said Sunday.

More than 300 Afghan military personnel crossed from Afghanistan’s Badakhshan province as Taliban fighters advanced toward the border, Tajikistan’s State Committee for National Security said in a statement. The Afghan troops crossed over at about 6:30 p.m. local time Saturday

“Guided by the principles of humanism and good neighborliness,” the Tajik authorities allowed the retreating Afghan National Defense and Security Forces to cross into Tajikistan, the statement said.

Since mid-April, when President Joe Biden announced the end to Afghanistan’s “forever war,” the Taliban have made strides throughout the country. But their most significant gains have been in the northern half of the country, a traditional stronghold of the U.S.-allied warlords who helped defeat them in 2001.

The Taliban now control roughly a third of all 421 districts and district centers in Af-

ghanistan.

The gains in northeastern Badakhshan province in recent days have mostly come to the insurgent movement without a fight, said Mohib-ul Rahman, a provincial council member. He blamed Taliban successes on the poor morale of troops who are mostly outnumbered and without resupplies.

“Unfortunately, the majority of the districts were left to Taliban without any fight,” said Rahman. In the last three days, 10 districts fell to Taliban, eight without a fight, he said.

Hundreds of Afghan army, police and intelligence troops surrendered their military outposts and fled to the Badakhshan provincial capital of Faizabad, said Rahman.

Even as a security meeting was being held early Sunday to plot the strengthening of the perimeter around the capital, some senior provincial officials were leaving Faizabad for the capital Kabul, he said.

The areas under Taliban control in the north are increasingly strategic, running along Afghanistan’s border with central Asian states. Last month the religious movement took control of Imam Sahib, a town in Kunduz province opposite Uzbekistan and gained control of a key trade route.

French Air Force brings Rafale jets to Hawaii drills

By WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — Three Rafale fighter jets and 150 airmen with the French Air Force are flying training missions in Hawaii with American F-22 Raptors through Fourth of July weekend.

This is the first time Dassault Rafales, which are the French air and space force’s primary fighter, have flown in Hawaii. The deployment is part of France’s effort to reaffirm its role as a stabilizing force in the Pacific.

France’s air force and navy began using Rafales in 2001. The twin-engine jets are highly versatile, dubbed as “omnirole” fighters because in a single sortie they can be used for multiple missions, such as aerial reconnaissance, ground support, in-depth strikes and anti-ship strikes.

On Wednesday morning, six F-22 Raptors flew on a training mission with the French fighters, 1st Lt. Amber Kelly-Herrard, spokeswoman for the 15th Wing at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, said in a statement. The F-22s are part of the 199th Fighter Wing under the Hawaii Air National Guard.

Rapid testing ends at US Patriot Express locations

BY KYLE ALVAREZ
Stars and Stripes

RAF MILDENHALL, England — Onsite COVID-19 testing services will be discontinued from July 15 for Patriot Express flights out of Baltimore/Washington and Seattle-Tacoma international airports, the Air Mobility Command said.

The Patriot Express, also called the Rotator or Cat B, is the Pentagon's charter flight system used by service members and their families for official international travel. Thousands of people annually use the flights to arrive at their new overseas assignments or return to the United States.

Passengers traveling through U.S. airports must still obtain and present proof of their negative COVID-19 test, vaccination, waiver or recovery before travel, as required by their international destination, according to U.S. military guidance.

The Defense Department began rapid, onsite COVID-19 testing last fall amid a surge in cases. Since November, Air Force medical staff deployed to airports administered over 22,000 rapid tests.

"Thank you to all the Airmen who worked diligently for the last seven months conducting testing at our busy Patriot Express terminals," AMC commander Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost said in a statement Thursday. "These efforts decreased confusion amid rapidly changing COVID-19 travel requirements and ensured DoD families and international partners were kept safe."

Support services, such as transportation, lodging and food, will no longer be offered by AMC to Patriot Express passengers who test positive for COVID-19, who have come in close contact with a coronavirus patient or who are suspected of being infected, the command said Thursday.

The Defense Department decided to end the airport testing based on a few factors, including widely available testing and vaccines, the statement said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention still requires all passengers traveling into, within, or out of the United States and U.S. territories to wear a mask. Passengers will also continue to be screened for symptoms before flying, the command said.

High vaccination rate seen among overseas US military communities

BY KARIN ZEITVOGEL
Stars and Stripes

The overseas U.S. military population, including teens and tweens, is getting vaccinated against the coronavirus at a faster rate than the U.S. population in general, data released by military health officials shows.

"To date, more than 73% of our U.S. Army Europe and Africa military community is fully vaccinated," Brig. Gen. Mark Thompson, who heads Regional Health Command Europe, said in a statement Friday.

Anyone age 12 and over is eligible for the vaccine, said Gino Mattorano, a spokesman for the health command.

The high vaccination rate puts the Army community in Europe and Africa ahead of a goal set by President Joe Biden for 70% of American adults to be at least partly vaccinated by July 4.

It is also around 27 points greater than the 46.7% of the eligible U.S. population that the

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said had been fully vaccinated against the virus as of the end of last month.

The vaccination rate among children in the overseas military community was also high, with 77.4% percent of 16- to 17-year-olds vaccinated, and 62.3% of 12- to 15-year-olds, acting assistant defense secretary for health, Dr. Terry Adirim, told reporters at the Pentagon on Wednesday.

Adirim, a pediatrician, was unable to provide a comparable percentage for the children over 12 of military families in the U.S. who have been vaccinated, noting that they can get their shots off base at pharmacies and clinics.

"I don't think we really know why" the overseas numbers are as high as they are, Adirim said. "I'm just glad that they are."

Out of nearly 28.5 million cases in the U.S. since March last year, more than 4.03 million, or 14%, were in children, the American Academy of Pediatrics said in June.

Iran reimposes restrictions as variant spreads

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran announced Sunday it was reimposing coronavirus restrictions on major cities, as the spread of the highly contagious delta variant spurs fears of another devastating surge in the nation.

After more than a year battling the worst virus outbreak in the Middle East, Iran ordered the closures of non-essential businesses in 275 cities, including the capital of Tehran.

The shutdown of all public parks, restaurants, dessert shops, beauty salons, malls and bookstores applies to the country's "red" and "orange" zones, or municipalities ranked as having an elevated risk of COVID-19.

The government said it was also imposing a travel ban between cities with high infection rates.

Iran's new restrictions are designed to slow the spread of the highly transmissible delta variant first detected in India, which on Saturday President Hassan Rouhani warned was driving a potential "fifth wave" of infections in the country. Reports of new cases have risen steadily in recent weeks, nearly doubling from mid-June to early July.

The country has reported a total of 3.2 million infections and 84,627 deaths — the highest toll in the region.

The spike comes as Iran's vaccine rollout lags, with less than 2% of the population of 84 million fully vaccinated, according to online scientific publication Our World in Data. Iran says it has administered some 6.3 million doses so far. Those shots have mainly come from abroad, including from COVAX, an international initiative meant to distribute vaccines to low- and middle-income countries.

With foreign vaccines still in short supply, the country has accelerated efforts to develop its own shots. Last month, authorities granted emergency use authorization to the domestically produced COVIRan Barekat shot, without publishing data on its safety or efficacy. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who previously warned against the import of American and British vaccines amid deep-rooted distrust of the West, received the homemade vaccine on state TV and encouraged the public to follow suit.

Demolition crews move in at collapsed condo

Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. — Rescue crews made way for demolition teams at the site of a collapsed South Florida condo building as officials shifted their focus to bringing down the unstable remainder of the structure ahead of a tropical storm.

The search and rescue mission was suspended Saturday afternoon so workers could begin the precarious business of boring holes to hold explosives in the concrete of the still-standing portion of the Champlain Towers South tower in Surfside, Miami-Dade Assistant Fire Chief Raide Jadallah told relatives awaiting word on missing loved ones.

Jadallah said the suspension was a necessary safety measure because the drilling could cause the structure to fail. If that were to happen, he said, “It’s just going to collapse without warning.”

But in a video stream of Jadallah’s closed-door briefing to relatives of the missing, one of them was heard calling it “devastating” that the search was on pause. She asked whether rescuers could

at least work the perimeter of the site so as not “to stop the operation for so many painful hours.”

Once the structure is demolished, the remnants will be removed immediately with the intent of giving rescuers access for the first time to parts of the garage area that are a focus of interest, Jadallah said. That could give a clearer picture of voids that may exist in the rubble and could possibly harbor survivors.

No one has been rescued alive since the first hours after the collapse.

While the demolition operation carried risks, officials said it could not be avoided with Tropical Storm Elsa looming in the Caribbean and forecast to hit the state by Tuesday morning. The storm heightened concerns that the remaining structure could fall, endangering the crews below and complicating the search.

The confirmed death toll from the June 24 collapse stood at 24, but 121 people were still unaccounted for. The Miami-Dade Police Department on Saturday night added Graciela Cattarossi, 48, and

Gonzalo Torre, 81, to the list of those confirmed dead.

“We have a building here in Surfside that is tottering. It is structurally unsound,” Gov. Ron DeSantis said Saturday. “And although the eye of the storm is not likely to pass over this direction, you could feel gusts in this area.”

The timing of the demolition depends on how swiftly workers can drill holes and insert explosive charges — a slow process to ensure the building doesn’t collapse prematurely in an uncontrolled way.

DeSantis said Saturday that the demolition could come within 36 hours once the site is readied. On Sunday morning, Jadallah estimated it could come as early as late Sunday night.

Miami-Dade police will go door-to-door to evacuate residents in surrounding buildings in advance of the demolition, Surfside officials said. No one will be allowed in the buildings to the immediate north and south of the collapsed structure.

Chestnut sets new record as fans return to hot dog contest

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Chowdown champ Joey “Jaws” Chestnut broke his own record to gulp to a 14th win in the men’s Nathan’s Famous Hot Dog Eating Contest on Sunday, while Michelle Lesco took the women’s title.

Chestnut downed 76 franks and buns in 10 minutes. That’s one more than he did in setting the men’s record last year, when the contest unfolded without fans because of the coronavirus pandemic.

“It just felt good,” Chestnut, of Westfield, Ind., said in an ESPN interview after his win Sunday. “Even if I was uncomfortable, having everybody cheer me and push me, it made me feel good.”

Lesco, of Tucson, Ariz., downed 30¾ dogs in 10 minutes and called her win “an amazing feeling.”

Reigning women’s champ

and record-holder Miki Sudo skipped this year because she’s expecting a baby in a few weeks with fellow competitive eater Nick Wehry. He vied for the men’s title, but came up short.

The annual Fourth of July frankfurter fest normally happens outside Nathan’s flagship shop in Brooklyn’s Coney Island neighborhood. But this year’s planning took place amid shifting coronavirus restrictions, and the event was held in a nearby minor league baseball stadium, Maimonides Park, with 5,000 spectators.

Last year, it was held indoors and without an in-person audience because of the pandemic.

Chestnut said he’d missed the fans last year.

“I’ve been looking forward to this all year,” he told ESPN in an interview before this year’s competition.

Cuba evacuates 70K people as Tropical Storm Elsa closes in

Associated Press

HAVANA — Cuba evacuated 70,000 people along the island’s southern region Sunday amid fears that Tropical Storm Elsa could unleash heavy flooding after battering several Caribbean islands, killing at least three people.

The Cuban government had opened shelters and moved to protect sugarcane and cocoa crops ahead of the storm. Most of those evacuated went to relatives’ homes, while about 23,000 people were sheltered at government facilities. Some 400 living in mountainous areas took refuge in natural caves that had been prepared for the emergency.

The storm’s next target was Florida, where Gov. Ron DeSantis declared a state of emergency in 15 counties, including in Miami-Dade County where the high-rise condominium building collapsed last week.

On Sunday morning, Elsa was located about 50 miles north of Kingston, Jamaica, and was heading west-northwest. It had maximum sustained winds of about 60 mph, according to the National Hurricane Center in Miami.

The center said the storm is expected to gradually weaken as it moves across Cuba on Monday.

“After Elsa emerges over the Florida Straits and the southeastern Gulf of Mexico, some slight restrengthening is possible,” it said.

The storm killed one person in St. Lucia, according to the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency. In the Dominican Republic, a 15-year-old boy and a 75-year-old woman died Saturday in separate incidents after walls collapsed on them, according to a statement from the Emergency Operations Center.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Overdue library books from '20s, '30s returned

MA SOMERVILLE — A Massachusetts man has returned long overdue books that were checked out in the 1920s and 1930s to the Somerville Public Library.

Bob Alvarez, 63, found the books in the basement of his Methuen home in a wooden box, The Boston Globe reported.

The books belonged to his late aunt, Helen Godimis, who died in 1937 at the age of 16 from the flu, the newspaper reported.

She left behind 39 books. Some of them were from Somerville schools, some from the library and others were apparently from his aunt's personal collection. The oldest books had copyrights from the 19th century.

Alvarez will not be charged late fees as the library stopped charging the fees as of July 1.

Boys, 8 and 9, charged in man's shooting death

SC WESTMINSTER — An 8-year-old and a 9-year-old boy have been charged with killing a man who was shot with a rifle while cutting down brush in a South Carolina field, authorities said.

Both boys shot at Danny Andrew Smith with a rifle as he rode his tractor in the field near Westminster, Oconee County Sheriff Mike Crenshaw said in a statement.

Smith, 62, was shot once in the back, but investigators charged both boys because they both fired the gun in Smith's direction, Crenshaw said.

Deputies have the .22 caliber rifle used to kill Smith, but

Crenshaw said investigators are not releasing how the boys got the rifle or why they shot at Smith.

Painters misspell city's name on water tower

WI PLOVER — Painters scrambled to fix a giant typo on a central Wisconsin village's water tower.

The Stevens Point Journal reported that crews repainting the village of Plover's water tower misspelled the village's name as "Plvoer."

Village Administrator Dan Mahoney said the painters accidentally reversed the templates used to paint the letters before raising them up to the tower. He said the mistake was quickly covered and repainted.

The mistake has become the butt of social media jokes, with people posts such as "Lvoe it!!" and "Big lvoer of it."

Historic resort in 'Blue Hawaii' to be auctioned

HI WAILUA — The historic resort where Elvis Presley's character got married in the 1961 film "Blue Hawaii" will go up for auction at a foreclosure sale this month.

The Garden Island newspaper reported the abandoned Coco Palms Resort will be auctioned July 26 on the steps of the Fifth Circuit Courthouse in Lihue.

Coco Palms initially opened in 1953 next to a historic coconut grove and an ancient Hawaiian fishpond. It has been closed since Hurricane Iniki slammed into Kauai in 1992. Several attempts to restore the property since have failed.

School employee scolded for cutting girl's hair

MI MOUNT PLEASANT — A Michigan school district has reprimanded three employees after a 7-year-old girl's hair was cut at her elementary school.

The Mount Pleasant Public Schools Board of Education said in a news release that an independent third-party investigation determined that despite "good intentions" of the worker who cut the girl's hair, doing so without permission from her parents and without the knowledge of district administrators violated school policy.

"As a result of the district's investigation, the employee who cut the student's hair will be placed on a 'last chance' agreement during which time any future violations will likely result in termination," the school board said.

Jimmy Hoffmeyer told The Associated Press that his daughter, Jurnee, arrived home from school with much of her hair on one side cut. She said a classmate used scissors to cut her hair on the school bus, Hoffmeyer said.

Two days later — after complaining to the principal and having Jurnee's hair styled at a salon with an asymmetrical cut to make the differing lengths less obvious — Jurnee arrived home with the other side cut by a school employee to even it out.

Prison guard hid pills in Rice Krispies treats

SC COLUMBIA — A guard was fired and arrested after trying to smuggle prescription stimulant pills into

a South Carolina women's prison by hiding them in Rice Krispies treats, authorities said.

Marcy Shaffer, 43, took the treats out of their original packages, pushed the pills inside and put them in a plastic bag, according to arrest warrants.

Shaffer was caught as she tried to take the treats into the Camille Graham Correctional Institution, the Department of Corrections said in a statement.

Shaffer hid four amphetamine and dextroamphetamine pills in the treats and had two more in a prescription bottle which was not labeled for the drugs, according to arrest warrants.

Shaffer is charged with possession of narcotics with intent to distribute, furnishing prisoners with contraband and misconduct in office.

Park may have exposed visitors to more bacterium

KS GODDARD — Visitors to a splash park near Wichita may have been exposed to two additional bacterium, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment said.

The department added coliform and E. coli to the list of bacterium possibly encountered by patrons of Tanganyika Wildlife Park's splash park, The Wichita Eagle reported.

The state health department had reported three people who attended the park tested positive for Shigella. People who visited the park also have tested positive for the norovirus, sapovirus and a type of E. coli called enteropathogenic E. coli, the state health department said.

The splash park has been closed since June 19.

— From wire reports



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Bucks reach finals for first time since '74

Associated Press

ATLANTA — The Milwaukee Bucks were an instant success in the NBA, winning a championship in just their third season and reaching the finals again three years later.

Nearly a half-century later, they finally have a shot at another title.

Khris Middleton scored 32 points, including a run of 16 straight in a decisive third quarter that carried the Bucks to a 118-107 victory over the upstart Atlanta Hawks in Game 6 of the Eastern Conference finals Saturday night.

Milwaukee won the series 4-2, advancing to the NBA Finals for the first time since 1974. Game 1 against the West champion Suns is Tuesday night in Phoenix.

The Bucks didn't even need Giannis Antetokounmpo to lock up their spot. The two-time MVP missed his second straight game with a knee injury, but Middleton & Co. had his back.

Jrue Holiday added 27 points and four other players scored in double figures.

Antetokounmpo cheered them on from the bench.

"One of the biggest things we did the last two games was play for him," said Pat Connaughton, who had 13 points and eight rebounds. "We do have a true team."

Trae Young returned to the Hawks lineup after missing two games with a bone bruise in his right foot, but the young star never got anything going. After both teams struggled to find the range in the first half, the Bucks suddenly couldn't miss in the third quarter.

Especially Middleton.

Atlanta actually had a chance for its first lead of the game when Young's behind-the-back pass gave Kevin Huerter an open look from three-point range.

The shot rimmed out, and Middleton quickly ripped off the next 13 points to suddenly push Milwaukee's edge to 60-45.

Young broke up the one-man onslaught with a driving basket, but Middleton responded with a three-pointer that gave him 16 straight Milwaukee points.

Middleton finished the quarter with 23 points, nearly outscoring the Hawks all by himself. Atlanta had 29 points in the period as Milwaukee headed to the final quarter with a commanding 91-72 lead.

"My teammates and my coaches, they told me to keep being aggressive," Middleton said. "I love it. Each one of these guys, they work every single day. Everybody stays ready. Everybody stays locked in. We all play for each other. And that's all you can ask for."

Cam Reddish, who missed much of the season with an Achilles injury, came off the bench to spark the Hawks. He scored 21 points — making six of seven three-pointers — as the Hawks sliced a 22-point deficit down to six in the closing minutes.

"The message was, 'No regrets. We don't want any regrets. ... Empty the tank,'" said Nate McMillan, the Hawks interim coach. "And they did."

But the Bucks finished it off, rekindling memories of the franchise's early years when Milwaukee quickly became the center of the NBA world with a team led by two of the game's greatest players, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Oscar Robertson.

The duo led the team to its only NBA title in 1971. The Bucks returned to finals in '74, only to lose to the Boston Celtics in seven games.

Kucherov leads Lightning to verge of title repeat

Associated Press

It's impossible for Nikita Kucherov to fly under the radar while leading the Tampa Bay Lightning to the verge of a second consecutive Stanley Cup championship.

Just how much he's producing can still come as a surprise.

"I didn't even realize he had 32 points," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said Saturday.

Despite not playing all regular season while rehabbing from hip surgery, Kucherov leads all scorers in the playoffs with those 32 points on eight goals and 24 assists and has five points through three games of the Cup final against the Montreal Canadiens. It's no coincidence given Kucherov's impact that Tampa Bay won all three. With a victory in Monday's Game 4, the Lightning would sweep the series and hoist the Cup for a second time in 10 months.

"Obviously it helps us win

games, most importantly," Tampa Bay defenseman Ryan McDonagh said of Kucherov's play. "He can score in different fashions, power play and 5-on-5, and I think when he's on his game, he just lets the game come to him and take what's given and is just in the right spots."

The Lightning could not be in a better spot, having never trailed in the final and having seemingly wrestled the will to win away from Montreal. The Canadiens look like a defeated team, and much of that is thanks to Kucherov.

"That line is good, but I think they have been scoring on all four lines, so I don't think it's a matter of one player or one line right now," Montreal coach Dominique Ducharme said. "I'm not saying that we're doing a perfect job right now on him."

Kucherov had another goal and assist in a 6-3 win in Game 3 Friday that kept open the possibility of a sweep.

"We have game plan, right, and everybody's buying in and everybody's doing their job," Kucherov said. "And when everybody's doing their job, it makes it easier and we all play a full 60 minutes the right way and that's what we're doing right now."

Kucherov is averaging 18 minutes a game and playing at an elite level despite not skating a single game between the 2020 Cup clincher in the Edmonton bubble Sept. 29 and the first game of the first round May 16. While there have been complaints about the Lightning stashing Kucherov and his \$9.5 million salary cap hit on long-term injured reserve all season and activating him for the playoffs when the cap is not in effect, the NHL investigated and found no impropriety with taking advantage of that loophole.

"Nothing inappropriate was done here, and at the end of the day all the (general) managers know what the rules are," Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said

Monday. "The facts seem to align with the situation that allowed Tampa to bring back a significant player in the playoffs. I'm not apologizing for what is a sound system and has been a sound system from the start."

The Lightning's team system has been sound thanks in large part to the line of Ondrej Palat, Brayden Point and Kucherov.

"He can do it all offensively," Canadiens center Nick Suzuki said. "He can make plays, shoot the puck real well and he's a competitive guy. He really brings it all."

Bringing it all beyond the offense is what Cooper marvels at when watching and coaching Kucherov now. That is not lost on teammates, either.

"We expect a lot out of him and he expects a lot out of himself, and he's going to bring it most nights," McDonagh said. "It's fun to see him really wanting to win on an elite level right now."

Wimbledon resumes after last Middle Sunday

Associated Press

WIMBLEDON, England — Wimbledon's traditional Middle Sunday of rest will disappear in 2022, as will the Manic Monday that follows it.

For one last time, the oldest Grand Slam tournament was quiet as Week 1 of this year's edition ended. And for one last time, Week 2 will begin with a bevy of action, the only major to schedule all 16 women's and men's fourth-round singles matches on the same day.

"I think I will miss it, to be honest," 2018 champion Angelique Kerber said.

Get ready for a packed scheduled Monday that includes teenagers Coco Gauff and Emma Raducanu, No. 1 Ash Barty and Kerber in women's matches, along with Novak Djokovic, Roger Federer, a total of eight of the top 10 seeds and 20-year-old

American Sebastian Korda in men's matches.

It won't be the same moving forward, and Federer understands why the All England Club is changing its ways in this regard.

"Everybody wants more days. Look, more days means more revenue, more options, more this and that. I get it," he said. "I don't think they did it only because of revenue. I think they just think it's going with the times, as well."

It's quite possible that the rest of the fortnight could end up being viewed as its own sort of referendum on the present and future of tennis.

That's because while there are representatives of the old guard who have multiple Grand Slam titles, including at the All England Club — Federer (20), Djokovic (19) and Kerber

(three) — there truly are so many fresh faces.

Of the 32 singles players still in the brackets, 26 never have been to the quarterfinals at Wimbledon — and 20 are participating in the fourth round for the first time.

Korda, who faces No. 25 seed Karen Khachanov, is making his debut at Wimbledon, as is Ilya Ivashka, a 27-year-old from Belarus who takes on No. 7 Matteo Berrettini, a 2019 U.S. Open semifinalist who leads all remaining players with 60 aces.

Djokovic's opponent, No. 17 Cristian Garin of Chile, and Federer's, No. 23 Lorenzo Sonego of Italy, were a combined 0-5 at the All England Club until this year.

The other men's matches Monday are No. 2 Daniil Medvedev vs. No. 14 Hubert Hurkacz, No. 4 Alexander Zverev

vs. No. 16 Felix Auger-Aliassime, No. 5 Andrey Rublev vs. Marton Fucsovics, and No. 8 Roberto Bautista Agut vs. No. 10 Denis Shapovalov.

Bautista Agut was a semifinalist in 2019, the last time the tournament was played because of the cancellation a year ago amid the pandemic, and is the only man left other than eight-time champion Federer and five-time champion Djokovic to even have been to so much as one quarterfinal at Wimbledon.

Kerber, No. 23 Madison Keys and No. 19 Karolina Muchova are the only women with past quarterfinal experience at the place.

Kerber faces Gauff, a 17-year-old American who also made it to the fourth round in 2019 and is coming off her first Grand Slam quarterfinal.

Olympic qualifying teams move into title rounds

Associated Press

Tomas Satoransky ended Canada's hopes of making the Tokyo Olympics.

Satoransky's fading-away, off-the-glass jumper with 1.8 seconds left in overtime wound up being the deciding basket in the Czech Republic's 103-101 win over Canada in an Olympic qualifying tournament semifinal at Victoria, British Columbia, on Saturday.

It was a wild end to a wild game: Canada was down by six with less than 20 seconds left in regulation before Andrew Wiggins scored six points in a span of 7.5 seconds to tie the game, and then the Czechs rallied from a five-point deficit in the final 2:18 of overtime.

Blake Schilb scored 31 points for the Czechs (2-1), who will play Greece (2-1) in Sunday's title game at Victoria. All four sites of qualifying tournaments — Lithuania, Canada, Serbia and Croatia — will hold championship games Sunday to determine the last four teams in the Olympic men's basketball field.

Greece 81, Turkey 63: Rick Pitino has taken five teams to the NCAA Tournament, and is one win from taking Greece to the Olympics.

Nick Calathes scored 18 points and Greece erased an early 14-point deficit to beat Turkey on Saturday night and move into Sunday's Victoria region championship game.

Kaunas, Lithuania bracket

Slovenia 98, Venezuela 70: Mike Tobey was born in New York, went to high school in New Jersey, played college ball for Virginia, began his pro career in North Carolina and eventually signed with a club in Spain.

He's now one win from a trip to the Olympics with Slovenia.

Tobey scored 27 points and grabbed 12 rebounds, Luka Doncic of the Dallas Mavericks was one rebound shy of a triple-double and Slovenia eased past Venezuela in the semifinals of an Olympic qualifying tournament.

Lithuania 88, Poland 69: Domantas Sabonis scored 17 points, Jonas Valanciunas added 15 and Lithuania pulled away in the second half to earn a spot in the Kaunas final.

Belgrade, Serbia bracket

Serbia 102, Puerto Rico 84: Vasilije

Micic scored 21 points, Nemanja Bjelica added 18 and host Serbia moved into Sunday's final at Belgrade against Italy.

Filip Petrushev and Danilo Andjusic each scored 15 points and Milos Teodosic finished with 11 points and 10 assists for Serbia (3-0), which won the silver medal at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics.

Italy 79, Dominican Republic 59: Italy used a 17-0 run in the third quarter to build what became a 32-point lead, and had no trouble reaching Sunday's final.

Split, Croatia bracket

Germany 86, Croatia 76: Germany closed the game on a 19-2 run to stun host Croatia and move into Sunday's championship game in Split against Brazil.

Maodo Lo scored 29 points and added eight assists for Germany (3-0), which got 13 points from Joshiko Saibou and 11 from Andreas Obst.

Brazil 102, Mexico 74: Vitor Benite scored 22 points and Brazil (3-0) had little trouble with Mexico on its way to Sunday's final in Split.

Rafael Luz scored 12 points and Alex Garcia scored 11 for Brazil, which outscored Mexico 54-27 from three-point range.

Mets, Walker add to Yankees' misery

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Taijuan Walker dealt, Brandon Nimmo delivered and Mets fans delighted over an easy victory in the Bronx.

All of their "Let's go Mets!" chants got minimal pushback at this Subway Series opener, what with many Yankees fans sensing this season has already gone off the rails.

Walker took a no-hitter into the sixth inning, Nimmo provided a spark in his return from the injured list and the New York Mets beat the crosstown Yankees 8-3 Saturday to open a three-game set.

The Mets already led 8-0 when Aaron Judge homered with one out in the sixth to end Walker's bid for the record-tying eighth no-hitter in the majors this season. He was lifted after 5½ innings having allowed two runs, two hits and two walks, striking out five on 106 pitches.

"He's been like another ace," Mets manager Luis Rojas said. "We talk about Jacob deGrom; Taijuan has been like another ace for us."

The right-hander's ERA rose slightly to 2.44 during a breakout season after signing a \$23 million, three-year free agent contract in February. The Mets are pushing for the 28-year-old to be a first-time All-Star when rosters are revealed Sunday.

"I'm definitely anxious to find out," Walker said. "But right now, it's out of my hand."

Walker (7-3) got a standing ovation as he left from thousands of Mets fans among the season-high crowd of 40,047 at Yankee Stadium — the highest attendance for either New York team since before the coronavirus pandemic.

"It was felt," Rojas said. "It was loud, it was electric. I think the guys missed it."

Playing for the first time since a brutal 11-8 loss to the Los Angeles Angels on Wednesday, the Yankees slogged through another frustrating defeat with just three hits, all in the sixth inning. They have dropped six of seven and fell to 41-40.

"We can talk about it until we're blue in the face," Boone said. "We've got to put together complete games, especially when we're going up against good opponents."

Tigers 11, White Sox 5: Eric Haase hit a three-run, inside-the-park homer and later cleared the fence for another three-run drive, and host Detroit snapped Chicago's five-game winning streak.

The Tigers trailed 2-0 in the fourth inning when Jonathan Schoop and Miguel Cabrera drew walks from Dallas Keuchel (6-3). Haase hit a sinking liner that bounced past

diving center fielder Billy Hamilton and rolled to the wall as the runners circled the bases.

Phillies 4, Padres 2: Bryce Harper homered and drove in two runs, Rhys Hoskins also went deep and host Philadelphia beat San Diego.

Zach Eflin (3-6) allowed two runs and three hits in six innings, and the Phillies' bullpen held the lead.

Manny Machado hit his 13th homer, a two-run drive.

Reds 3, Cubs 2: Joey Votto and Tyler Naquin homered and host Cincinnati handed Chicago its eighth straight loss.

The Reds' bullpen pitched four scoreless innings. Ryan Hendrix (4-1), the second of four Cincinnati relievers, got the win.

Blue Jays 6, Rays 3: At Buffalo, N.Y., George Springer homered for the second straight day, Santiago Espinal hit his first career home run and Toronto beat Tampa Bay.

The Blue Jays won for the 10th time in 13 games. The Rays have lost five straight overall and 10 in a row on the road.

Giants 6, Diamondbacks 5: Austin Slater hit a two-run homer in the eighth inning, Mike Yastrzemski also had a two-run shot and visiting San Francisco rallied to beat Arizona.

The Diamondbacks went up 5-4 on David Peralta's bloop single in the fifth inning, but Slater fouled off a couple of good pitches from Ryan Buchter (0-2) before hitting a 463-foot homer to center.

Royals 6, Twins 3: Hunter Dozier drove in three runs and Edward Olivares hit a two-run homer, helping host Kansas City beat Griffin Jax and Minnesota.

Danny Duffy lasted only four innings, allowing two runs on six hits and two walks, but the the Royals' bullpen was solid for the second straight day.

Jax (1-1), the first draft pick ever from the Air Force Academy, allowed six runs on eight hits and three walks in his first career start.

Marlins 3, Braves 2: Sandy Alcantara pitched six strong innings, Garrett Cooper homered and drove in two runs, and visiting Miami beat Atlanta.

Alcantara (5-7) walked the first two batters he faced and issued two free passes in the third, but didn't allow a hit until Ozzie Albies singled with two outs in the third. He gave up one unearned run and five hits with four walks and four strikeouts.

Angels 4, Orioles 1: Alex Cobb allowed one run in a season-high 7½ innings, David

Fletcher extended his hitting streak to 17 games and host Los Angeles beat Baltimore for its third straight win.

Cobb (6-3) allowed four hits and struck out five with one walk.

Major League home run leader Shohei Ohtani, who had gone deep in 11 of 15 games, was 0-for-2 and walked three times, with two being intentional.

Brewers 11, Pirates 2: Omar Narváez had five hits, Avisail García drove in five runs and Jace Peterson added four RBIs as visiting Milwaukee rolled to its 11th straight victory.

It is the Brewers' longest winning streak since they began the 1987 season with a franchise-record 13 victories in a row.

Rangers 7, Mariners 3: John Hicks homered in his first two at-bats, Eli White added a three-run shot and Texas snapped a 13-game losing streak in Seattle.

The Rangers won in Seattle for the first time since July 23, 2019, and ended the longest active losing streak in an opponents' park in the majors.

Hicks' first long ball was the start of a four-run inning. He opened the fourth with another drive that was the start of a three-run inning.

Astros 3, Indians 2: Jake Odorizzi pitched six strong innings, Carlos Correa and Abraham Toro homered and visiting Houston beat Cleveland, which has lost a season-high five straight.

Odorizzi (3-3) allowed one earned run and four hits while pitching into the seventh.

Dodgers 5, Nationals 3: A.J. Pollock hit a go-ahead single in the sixth inning, and visiting Los Angeles extended a winning streak to eight for the third time this season.

Washington is 0-6 this season against the Dodgers.

Los Angeles starter Clayton Kershaw lasted just 54 pitches and four innings because of rain, which caused a 1-hour, 44-minute delay.

Rockies 3, Cardinals 2: Trevor Story snapped a scoreless tie with a three-run homer in the seventh inning and host Colorado held off St. Louis.

Daniel Bard struck out Dylan Carlson with runners at second and third for his 12th save.

Athletics 7, Red Sox 6 (12): Tony Kemp hit a game-winning sacrifice fly to cap a three-run 12th inning, and host Oakland snapped Boston's eight-game winning streak.