

## Afghans battle Taliban at Pakistan border

*Associated Press*

ISLAMABAD — Afghan government forces battled Friday to retake a border crossing with Pakistan from Taliban insurgents.

The Taliban had overrun the Spin Boldak crossing earlier in the week. On Friday, witnesses on the Pakistan side of the border said they saw intense fighting and reported seeing bodies.

Afghan Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Arian later tweeted that the government had retaken control of Spin Boldak.

The Reuters news agency said one of its photographers was killed in the area. Reuters said Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Danish Siddiqui, who was embedded with the Afghan special forces, was killed as the commando unit sought to recapture Spin Boldak.

The agency said Siddiqui and a senior Afghan officer were killed in what they described as Taliban crossfire. “We are urgently seeking more information, working with authorities in the region,” Reuters President Michael Friedenberg and Edi-

tor-in-Chief Alessandra Galloni said in a statement.

Siddiqui was an Indian national. Afghanistan’s ambassador to India, Farid Marmundzay, tweeted his condolences.

The Taliban have overrun dozens of districts in Afghanistan since the start of the final phase of the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops, after a 20-year military presence. The U.S. says its withdrawal is 95% complete.

The fighting at Spin Boldak was confirmed by Fawad Aman, Afghanistan’s deputy defense ministry spokesman. The Associated Press also obtained footage of fighters, apparently Taliban, receiving treatment in a hospital in the Pakistani border town of Chaman.

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are fraught with suspicion. Afghanistan routinely accuses Pakistan of giving safe haven to the Afghan Taliban, whose leadership is headquartered in Pakistan’s southwestern Baluchistan provincial capital of Quetta. The Chaman border crossing opposite Spin Boldak is also in Baluchistan

province.

Afghanistan and the United States have criticized Pakistan in the past for allowing Taliban fighters to cross into Pakistan to receive medical treatment. Nearly 2 million Afghan refugees also live in Pakistan, having fled decades of war in their homeland.

Pakistan has used its influence over the Taliban to press the insurgents into talks with the U.S. and the Afghan government.

In the latest round of accusations, Afghanistan’s vice-president, Amrullah Saleh, tweeted that Pakistan’s air force warned the Afghan army and air force against trying to dislodge Taliban from Spin Boldak, an accusation Pakistan dismissed.

In response, Pakistan issued a statement saying 40 Afghan soldiers slipped across the border to Pakistan during the Taliban takeover of the crossing earlier this week.

The soldiers were returned to Afghanistan “with respect and dignity,” said the statement, which added that Pakistan also offered Afghanistan’s security force any logistical support it needed.

## 1st female finishes Navy special warfare training

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — For the first time, a female sailor has successfully completed the grueling 37-week training course to become a Naval Special Warfare combatant-craft crewman — the boat operators who transport Navy SEALs and conduct their own classified missions at sea.

Navy officials said they would not identify the woman or provide more details on her — a routine military policy for special operations forces. She was one of 17 sailors to graduate and receive their pins on Thursday. She is also the first of 18 women who have tried out for a job as a SWCC or a SEAL to succeed.

The sailor’s graduation marks just the latest inroad that women have made into some of the military’s most difficult and competitive commando jobs — just five years after all combat posts were opened to them. She will now head to one of Naval Special War-

fare’s three special boat teams.

“Becoming the first female to graduate from a Naval Special Warfare training pipeline is an extraordinary accomplishment and we are incredibly proud of our teammate,” said Rear Adm. H.W. Howard III, the commander of Naval Special Warfare. “Like her fellow operators, she demonstrated the character, cognitive and leadership attributes required to join our force.”

“She and her fellow graduates have the opportunity to become experts in clandestine special operations, as well as manned and unmanned platforms to deliver distinctive capabilities to our Navy, and the joint force in defense of the nation,” Howard added.

Of the 18 females who have sought a Navy special operations job, 14 did not complete the course. Three of them, however, are currently still in the training pipeline, one for SWCC and two attempting to become

SEALs. Overall, according to the Navy, only about 35% of the men and women who begin the training for SWCC actually graduate.

A year ago, a female soldier became the first woman to complete the Army’s elite Special Forces course and join one of the all-male Green Beret teams. One other female soldier has finished training and will report to her assigned Special Forces group next month, and another will be attending the Military Freefall School next month, and then will report to her team.

So far, no women have successfully completed Marine special operations training. Marine spokesman Maj. Hector Infante said that since August 2016, nine females have attempted to get through the assessment and selection process. He said two candidates made it through the second phase, but didn’t meet performance expectations and, along with a number of male counterparts, didn’t get selected to continue.

# Firm fumes over slow Navy contract award

*Bloomberg News*

More than two years after the U.S. Navy committed to buy the final two ships in its \$57 billion, four-vessel Gerald R. Ford class of aircraft carriers, the company building the systems to launch and land planes from its deck is complaining that the service is dawdling on giving it a contract.

The delay on the systems for the USS Doris Miller, the last of the carriers, “is having negative impacts to the industrial base that I fear will only increase the longer it takes” to issue a contract, Scott Forney, president of the electromagnetics unit of closely held General Atomics wrote in a previously undisclosed June 25 letter to acting Navy weapons buyer Frederick Stefany that’s al-

so been provided to congressional staff and lawmakers.

Forney said the company has provided two contract proposals since 2019, but “we have received no formal response.”

It’s a complaint endorsed by the House Appropriations Committee, which said Monday in its report on the Pentagon budget for fiscal 2022 that the delay is “causing a disruption to the production and manufacturing processes of these essential components, impacting the construction and increasing the cost growth” of the ship.

Navy spokesman Capt. Clay Doss said in an email on Monday night that a “preproduction planning contract” for the equipment “is on track for award” by Dec. 31 to

support a “previously planned full construction contract award in fiscal 2023.”

As recently as May, the service praised the electromagnetic launch system and arresting gear on the first ship, the USS Gerald R. Ford, despite repeated questions about its performance raised by the Government Accountability Office and the Pentagon’s own testing office.

Earlier problems with the advanced system gained then-President Donald Trump’s critical attention. Comparing the catapult system to the steam-driven version on previous ships, Trump said in 2018 that “steam is very reliable, and the electromagnetic — I mean, unfortunately, you have to be Albert Einstein to really work it properly.”

## PETA complains to Navy IG about Cobra Gold tradition

**By CAITLIN DOORNBOS**  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — An animal-rights group submitted a formal complaint Thursday to the Navy’s inspector general protesting the tradition of killing animals and drinking snake blood as part of the multinational Cobra Gold military exercise in Thailand.

It’s the latest effort by the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals to end the “ritualistic killing and consumption of animals” in the annual exercise co-hosted by the U.S. and Thailand, according to a statement by the group issued Thursday.

“PETA is calling on the Office of the Naval Inspector General to end the use of animals in this gruesome frat party-like event and reprimand any senior officer who orders Marines to throw decency aside in favor of bloodlust,” PETA veterinarian and Air Force veteran Ingrid Taylor said in the statement.

The exercise involves the Army and Marine Corps, but only Marines were seen drinking co-

bra blood in photos from the 2020 Cobra Gold exercise that inspired PETA’s protests.

The blood-drinking tradition is part of the jungle-survival training during which Thai instructors share their knowledge of life-sustaining sources of food and hydration, the Army said in a statement issued March 2, 2020.

But PETA called the survival drills an “annual frat-like party masquerading as training” and said the animal slaying violates military law.

“During Cobra Gold 2020, U.S. Marines and instructors were recorded killing chickens with their bare hands, skinning and eating live geckos, consuming live scorpions and tarantulas, decapitating cobras and drinking their blood,” PETA said. “Since these acts would violate U.S. cruelty-to-animals laws, they ‘bring discredit upon the armed forces’ and senior commissioned officers who order troops to engage in them have participated in ‘conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman.’”

## UN peacekeepers urged to protect Afghan women

*Associated Press*

UNITED NATIONS — Women’s rights supporters and faith leaders are calling for a United Nations peacekeeping force for Afghanistan to protect hard-won gains for women over the last two decades as American and NATO forces complete their pullout from the war-torn country and a Taliban offensive gains control over more territory.

Under the Taliban, women were not allowed to go to school, work outside the home or leave their house without a male escort. And though they still face many challenges in the country’s male-dominated society, Afghan women have increasingly stepped into powerful positions in numerous fields — and many fear the departure of international troops and a Taliban takeover could take away their gains.

In a May 14 letter obtained by The Associated Press, 140 civil society and faith leaders from the U.S., Afghanistan and other

countries “dedicated to the education and rights of women in Afghanistan” asked U.S. President Joe Biden to call for a U.N. peacekeeping force “to ensure that the cost of U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan is not paid for in the lives of schoolgirls.”

The letter also asked the U.S. to increase humanitarian and development aid to Afghanistan “as an important security strategy” to strengthen women and girls and religious minorities like the Hazaras. Three bombings at a high school in a Hazara neighborhood in Kabul on May 8 killed nearly 100 people, all of them Hazara and most of them young girls just leaving class.

The signatories blamed the Trump administration for failing to honor a U.N. Security Council resolution adopted in 2000 demanding equal participation for women in activities promoting global peace “by refusing to insist that women were part of the peace talks” with the Taliban.

# Biden: US will protect Haiti embassy

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden said Thursday that the U.S. will bolster security at its embassy in Haiti following last week's assassination of that country's president, but sending American troops to stabilize the country was "not on the agenda."

Haiti's interim government last week asked the U.S. and the United Nations to deploy troops to protect key infrastructure following President Jovenel Moïse's assassination. Biden signaled he was not open to the

request, which comes as he is drawing down U.S. forces in Afghanistan this summer.

"We're only sending American Marines to our embassy," Biden said. "The idea of sending American forces to Haiti is not on the agenda," he added.

Mathias Pierre, Haiti's elections minister, told The Associated Press Thursday that he believes the request for U.S. troops is relevant given what he called a "fragile situation" and the need to create a secure environment for elections scheduled to happen

in 120 days.

He also said Biden's comment that sending U.S. troops was "not on the agenda" still leaves the option open.

"This is not a closed door. The evolution of the situation will determine the outcome," Pierre said. "In the meantime, the government is doing everything we can to stabilize the country, return to a normal environment and organize elections while trying to come to a political agreement with most political parties."

# Trump 'not into coups,' disputes book

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former President Donald Trump insisted Thursday that he wouldn't have used the military to illegally seize control of the government after his election loss. But he suggested that if he had tried to carry out a coup, it wouldn't have been with his top military adviser.

In a lengthy statement, Trump responded to revelations in a new book detailing fears from Gen. Mark Milley that the outgoing president would stage a coup during his final weeks in office.

Trump said he's "not into coups" and "never threatened, or spoke about, to anyone, a coup of our Government." At the same time, Trump said that "if I was going to do a coup, one of the last people I would want to do it with is" Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The mere mention of a coup was a stunning remark from a former president, espe-

cially one who left office under the cloud of a violent insurrection he helped incite at the U.S. Capitol in January in an effort to impede the peaceful transfer of power to Democrat Joe Biden. Since then, the FBI has warned of a rapidly growing threat of homegrown violent extremism.

Trump's comment was in response to new reporting from "I Alone Can Fix It: Donald J. Trump's Catastrophic Final Year" by Pulitzer Prize-winning Washington Post reporters Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker. The book reports that Milley was shaken by Trump's refusal to concede in the weeks after the election.

According to early excerpts published by CNN and the Post on Wednesday ahead of its release, Milley was so concerned that Trump or his allies might try to use the military to remain in power that he and other top officials strategized about how they

might block him — even hatching a plan to resign, one by one.

Milley also reportedly compared Trump's rhetoric to Adolf Hitler's during his rise to power.

"This is a Reichstag moment," Milley reportedly told aides. "The gospel of the Fuhrer."

Milley's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment. But Milley has previously spoken out against drawing the military into election politics, especially after coming under fire for joining Trump on a walk through Lafayette Square for a photo op at a church shortly after the square had been violently cleared of protesters.

Trump, in the statement, mocked Milley's response to that moment, saying it helped him realize that his top military adviser was "certainly not the type of person I would be talking 'coup' with."

# Mask mandate restored in LA as cases rise

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles County residents will again be required to wear masks indoors, regardless of their vaccination status, while the University of California system said that students, faculty and staff must be inoculated against the coronavirus to return to campuses.

The announcements Thursday came amid a spike in COVID-19 cases, most of them the highly transmissible delta variant that has proliferated since California fully reopened its economy on June 15 and did away with capacity limits and social distancing. The vast majority of new cases are

among unvaccinated people.

The rapid and sustained increase in cases in Los Angeles County requires restoring an indoor mask mandate, said Dr. Muntu Davis, public health officer for the county's 10 million people. The public health order will go into effect just before midnight Saturday.

"This is an all-hands-on-deck moment," Davis said during a virtual news conference.

He didn't fully detail what would be some exceptions to the mask rule but said, for example, people could still take off their masks while eating and drinking at restau-

rants.

Davis said officials will focus on education rather than enforcement. Handing out citations to people who don't comply is "not something we really want to have to do," he said.

Los Angeles County has been recording more than 1,000 new cases each day for a week, and there is now "substantial community transmission," Davis said. On Thursday, there were 1,537 new cases, and hospitalizations have now topped 400.

"The next level is high transmission, and that's not a place where we want to be," he said.



# Rescuers rush to help as Europe's flood toll mounts

Associated Press

BERLIN — Emergency workers in western Germany and Belgium rushed Friday to rescue hundreds of people threatened by historic floods, including residents of a town where the ground gave way beneath their homes, as the disaster claimed dozens more lives and search for the missing went on.

The death toll rose to more than 125, and hundreds of people were still unaccounted for.

Sixty-three people perished in the German state of Rhineland-Palatinate, including 12 residents of an assisted living facility for disabled people in the town of Sinzig who were surprised by a sudden rush of water from the nearby Ahr River, authorities said.

In neighboring North Rhine-Westphalia state, the number of

dead stood at 43, but officials warned that it could increase.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said he was “stunned” by the devastation and pledged support to the families of those killed and to cities and towns facing significant damage.

“In the hour of need, our country stands together,” Steinmeier said in a statement. “It’s important that we show solidarity for those from whom the flood has taken everything.”

A harrowing rescue effort unfolded in the German town of Erftstadt, southwest of Cologne, where people were trapped when the ground gave way and their homes collapsed.

Fifty people were rescued from their houses, county administrator Frank Rock told German broadcaster n-tv. Aerial photos showed what ap-

peared to be a massive landslide at a gravel pit on the town’s edge.

“One has to assume that under the circumstances some people didn’t manage to escape,” Rock said.

Authorities cautioned that the large number of missing could stem from duplicated reports and difficulties reaching people because of closed roads and disrupted phone service.

After Germany, where the death toll stood at 106, Belgium was the hardest hit. The country had confirmed the deaths of 20 people, with another 20 still missing, Belgian Interior Minister Annelies Verlinden told the VRT network Friday.

Several dikes on the Meuse River that runs from Belgium into the Netherlands were at risk of collapsing, Verlinden said.

## Fla. condo recovery effort may end soon

Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. — Efforts to recover human remains from the debris of a South Florida condo building are nearing an end.

Miami-Dade police identified six more victims of last month’s Surfside condo collapse on Thursday, meaning that 92 of the 97 confirmed dead have been identified.

County officials have accounted for at least 240 people connected to the building, with just a few still classified as missing, or “potentially unaccounted for.”

A county statement late Thursday said the task of identifying victims had become increasingly difficult, relying heavily on the medical examiner’s office and expert technical and scientific work. More than 26 million pounds of debris and concrete have been removed as recovery work continues.

A cause has not yet been pinpointed for the collapse, although there were several previous warnings of major structural damage at the 40-year-old building.

A judge approved the sale of the oceanfront property on Wednesday, with proceeds intended to benefit victims of the deadly disaster.

At a hearing, Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Michael Hanzman ordered that the process begin to sell the site of Champlain Towers South, which could fetch \$100 million to \$110 million, according to court records.

The judge also approved returning \$2.4 million in deposits that some Champlain condo owners had made toward an assessment to pay for \$15 million in planned major repairs.

## Wildfire grows, prompts evacuations

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Firefighters scrambled on Friday to control a raging inferno in southeastern Oregon that’s spreading miles a day in windy conditions, one of numerous conflagrations across the U.S. West that are straining resources.

Authorities ordered a new round of evacuations Thursday amid worries the Bootleg Fire, which has already destroyed 21 homes, could merge with another blaze that also grew explosively amid dry and blustery conditions.

The Bootleg Fire, the largest wildfire currently burning in the U.S., has now torched an area larger than New York City and has stymied firefighters for

nearly a week with erratic winds and extremely dangerous fire behavior.

Early on, the fire doubled in size almost daily and strong winds from the south on Thursday afternoon yet again pushed the flames rapidly to the north and east.

The fire has the potential to move 4 miles or more in an afternoon and there was concern it could merge with the smaller, yet still explosive Log Fire, said Rob Allen, incident commander for the blaze.

That fire started Monday as three smaller fires but exploded to nearly 5,000 acres in 24 hours and was still growing, fanned by the same winds, Allen said.

Firefighters were pulled

back to safe areas late Thursday due to intense fire behavior and were scouting ahead of the main blaze for areas where they could make a stand by carving out fire lines to stop the blaze’s advance, he said.

Crews are watching the fire, nearby campgrounds “and any place out in front of us to make sure the public’s out of the way,” Allen said.

He said evacuation orders were still being assessed.

The Bootleg fire is affecting an area north of the Oregon-California border that has been gripped by extreme drought.

It was 7% contained as of Thursday, when authorities decided to expand previous evacuation orders near Summer Lake and Paisley.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Surprise! Couple finds 18 snakes under bed**

**GA** AUGUSTA — It's the stuff of nightmares: A Georgia couple found 18 snakes under their bed.

Instead of killing the creatures, the husband carefully plucked them off the ground, dropped them in a bag and relocated them to a nearby creek.

Augusta resident Trish Wilcher told WJBF-TV that as she and her husband, Max, were about to go to bed Sunday, she saw what she thought was some fuzz on the floor. She said it moved when she reached down.

"And then a second later another piece moved," Wilcher said. "And I went to my husband: 'We have snakes!'"

The couple found a mother snake with 17 recently hatched babies under their bed. Max Wilcher used a grabber tool to place each one in a linen bag. The ordeal took until around midnight.

**Good Samaritan killed while trying to save cat**

**NH** ROLLINSFORD — A good Samaritan in New Hampshire, who pulled over to rescue a cat in the middle of the road, was struck and killed by a car.

Rollinsford police said the person died from their injuries after they were transported to the hospital. The cat was also hit by the car and died, the Seacoastonline.com reported.

Stafford County Sheriff Mark Brave said the victim was

wearing dark clothing on a busy road and the driver was blinded by approaching headlights.

**Tricycle built for special needs child is stolen**

**MS** TUPELO — Someone stole a custom tricycle for a Mississippi child who has special needs, authorities said.

The tricycle belong to Ramsey Meadows, 13, was last seen on the evening of July 7 at his home in Tupelo, The Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal reported. The following morning, it was gone from its usual spot under the carport.

Ramsey has Down Syndrome and autism, said his mother, Stacy Flowers. The family got the \$2,100 tricycle two years ago through Medicaid. It's designed to give special needs children greater mobility.

**Police: Golf cart hit 6 kids when pedal sticks**

**VA** NATURAL BRIDGE STATION — Two children were seriously hurt and four others had minor injuries after they were hit by a golf cart at a private campground, Virginia State Police said.

It happened at Jellystone Park at Natural Bridge in Rockbridge County when police said an adult was driving the cart and the gas pedal stuck. The driver couldn't stop and the cart hit six children.

Two children were flown to a hospital with serious injuries and four others were taken to the hospital with minor injuries, police said.

Because it occurred on private property, police said no charges will be placed.

**Tourists fined for touching monk seal**

**HI** HONOLULU — U.S. authorities launched an investigation and fined Louisiana tourists honeymooning in Hawaii after a video on social media showed a woman touching an endangered Hawaiian monk seal.

The couple were "deeply sorry," a man identified as Stephen told the Honolulu Star-Advertiser. "We love Hawaii and the culture. We didn't mean to offend anyone."

A video posted on TikTok and other social media showed a woman touching the seal at a Kauai beach in June. The video showed her running away after the resting seal raised its head and snapped at her.

There are an estimated 1,100 Hawaiian monk seals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and 300 in the main Hawaiian Islands.

It's a felony to touch or harass a Hawaiian monk seal under state and federal laws, with penalties of up to five years in prison and a \$50,000 fine.

**Bogus texting scam targets drivers licenses**

**ME** AUGUSTA — Maine officials are warning residents of a text message phishing scam that targets people regarding their drivers licenses.

Secretary of State Shenna Bellows said Wednesday the

text messages come from someone claiming to be the "Secretary of State Drivers License Facility," and the texter asks the recipient to click a link to "complete this verification." She said the Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles never contacts residents via text messages about their drivers licenses.

Bellows said phishing scams such as this one seek to trick people into exposing personal information. They can also expose phones and computers to malware.

**Distillery expanding to welcome more visitors**

**KY** LOUISVILLE — Bourbon tourism is getting another boost from a distillery in Kentucky's largest city.

Angel's Envy says it will be able to accommodate twice as many guests once an \$8.2 million expansion is completed next spring at its downtown Louisville distillery.

The craft distiller says the project includes a new event space and bar, a larger retail space and several new tasting rooms.

The distillery will remain open to the public throughout the construction.

Kentucky is home to 66 spirits operations employing more than 5,100 people full-time statewide, officials said.

In 2020, the industry announced 20 projects in Kentucky, totaling more than \$300 million in new investment.

— Associated Press

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# Dodgers hurt, but still in the hunt

*Associated Press*

The Los Angeles Dodgers waited 32 years to win the World Series again. The road to a repeat championship is never easy, and they head into the second half of the season hoping the worst of the bumps along the way are behind them.

A suspended starting pitcher, injuries and offensive struggles have conspired against them. It's the first time since 2016 the Dodgers haven't been in first place at the All-Star break.

But they're close.

At 56-35, they have the second-most wins in the majors behind the rival San Francisco Giants (57-32). LA trails the first-place Giants by two games in the NL West, a division the Dodgers have won eight consecutive years.

"Considering what all we've been through, I'd say it's pretty good," All-Star first baseman Max Muncy said. "We haven't played anywhere near the caliber that we are capable of playing."

During one stretch, the Dodgers went 5-15. Injuries have knocked out starters Clayton Kershaw and Dustin May and shortstop Corey Seager, among others. The rotation took another big hit with starter Trevor Bauer going on paid administrative leave on July 2 after allegations of sexual misconduct and domestic violence.

"It's been a rough one," All-Star Mookie Betts said. "We've had a lot going on."

Muncy has been a bright spot, hitting .270, with 19 home runs and 52 RBIs in the first half.

The Dodgers could be seeking a starter at the trade deadline because the bullpen games they've been forced into aren't sustainable. May underwent Tommy John surgery in May, one of three pitchers on the team to do so this season.

Kershaw's timetable remains uncertain as the three-time Cy Young Award winner recovers from left forearm inflammation. The team expects to get back injured reliever Jimmy Nelson soon.

David Price will join the rotation at some point after working out of the bullpen in the first half. "Whatever these guys want me to do, I'm willing to do for them," he said.

Seager could be close to returning from a broken right hand. He spent the break in Arizona taking at-bats and if things went well, he may rejoin the team for its seven-game home stand beginning next week.

"This is when the really good teams start to ascend," manager Dave Roberts said. "I expect us to be at the top when we finish this thing this year."

The Dodgers visit Colorado for three games starting Friday

to open the second half. The Giants travel to Los Angeles next week for the final time during the regular season.

## Bauer out

Bauer, the Dodgers' \$100 million man, was 8-5 with a 2.59 ERA and team-leading 137 strikeouts in 17 starts before MLB placed him on leave.

Bauer's agents have denied the accusations against their client and said his sexual encounters with the woman were consensual. A court hearing is set for July 23.

The team canceled his bobblehead night in August and pulled Bauer's merchandise from the ballpark. The Dodgers have mapped out their post-All-Star rotation without him.

## Pujols' punch

Albert Pujols has exceeded expectations since being cast off by the Los Angeles Angels in May. The 41-year-old pinch hitter and occasional first baseman is a must-watch in every at-bat, whether he's adding to his career home run total of 675 or tying Willie Mays on the all-time hit list with a clutch ninth-inning single.

Pujols has expressed his happiness at being a Dodger and chasing a World Series title, something he hasn't won since 2011 with St. Louis. Besides his punch off the bench, he gives

the clubhouse a fatherly presence, whether he's talking baseball or life with his younger teammates.

He was a bargain pickup, too. The Angels are on the hook for Pujols' \$30 million salary this season, while the Dodgers pay him only a prorated league minimum.

## Betts and Belli

Mookie Betts and Cody Bellinger struggled at the plate in the first half, although Betts is showing signs of coming around.

Betts passed on playing in the All-Star Game, citing nagging injuries. He's hitting .256, with 13 homers and 38 RBIs in 79 games. He had a grand slam, three walks and an infield hit in the Dodgers' 22-1 rout of the Diamondbacks before the break.

Bellinger is still trying to find the form that carried him to NL MVP honors in 2019. After an off year in 2020, he's been limited to 34 games so far this season after suffering a hairline fracture in his left leg on a close play at first base in early April.

Bellinger is hitting .176, with four homers and 17 RBIs, and the Dodgers need his production to step up in the second half. Still, his defense in center field has been as valuable as ever, similar to what Betts provides in right field.

# Yankees-Red Sox game postponed due to positive tests

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — The Yankees' post-All-Star break opener against the Boston Red Sox on Thursday night was postponed because of positive COVID-19 tests among vaccinated New York pitchers Jonathan Loaisiga, Nestor Cortes Jr. and Wandy Peralta.

"It's a fluid situation that could spread. It has spread to some degree," Yankees general manager Brian Cashman said. "We have three positives and we have three

pending that we've had rapid tests on. ... We'll wait now for the lab tests to come back, which I'm assuming is going to be positive, as well. So that would increase our number to six, but we're not at six yet. We're at three confirmed."

Loaisiga went on the COVID-19 injured list Saturday, when the Yankees were in Houston, and he did not travel home with the team Sunday. Cortes and Peralta went on the COVID-19 IL on Thursday.

Cashman said all three were fully vacci-

nated, as are most of the players on the team. Among the three, two received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, and the other was either Pfizer or Moderna, according to Cashman.

"Those players are doing well thus far," he said. "And that would speak again to the belief that those vaccinations are working and ultimately they're to protect us from severe illness and/or death."

The three players awaiting lab results are in quarantine.



# Bucks can win without 40 from Giannis

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — As remarkable as Giannis Antetokounmpo has been in delivering MVP-caliber performances during the NBA Finals while playing with an injured knee, there have been games in which he was good but not great.

Good hadn't been good enough for a Milwaukee Bucks win — until Game 4.

And while Antetokounmpo will likely need to be great again, his teammates must prove they can deliver on the road the way they have at home. The Bucks and Phoenix Suns are tied 2-2 as the series returns to Phoenix for Game 5 on Saturday.

The Bucks need to maintain what they found in Milwaukee to rally from a nine-point, fourth-quarter deficit in a 109-103 Game 4 victory Wednesday night.

"Going down the stretch, we kept believing in ourselves," Antetokounmpo said after

Game 4. "We kept executing, setting screens. We kept running, we kept rebounding the ball, we kept blocking shots. We wanted this bad, and the team showed it tonight. But we've got to keep getting better."

Antetokounmpo has averaged 32.3 points, 14 rebounds and 5.5 assists in the finals despite hyperextending his left knee in the Bucks' previous series, causing him to miss the last two games of the Eastern Conference finals.

But the Bucks showed in Game 4 that they can beat the Suns even when their two-time MVP isn't at his absolute best.

Antetokounmpo had a more-than-respectable 26 points, 14 rebounds and eight assists in Game 4 as well as a spectacular block that prevented Phoenix's Deandre Ayton from tying the game with 1:14 left. Those numbers would make just about any other NBA player envious, but they actually represented a step

back after Antetokounmpo delivered back-to-back performances of over 40 points and 10 rebounds in Games 2 and 3.

It was Khris Middleton — not Antetokounmpo — who scored 40 points to lead the Bucks to their come-from-behind victory. Middleton reeled off eight straight points in the closing minutes to help the Bucks turn a 99-97 deficit into a 105-99 lead.

"That's what he does down the stretch," Antetokounmpo said. "We want him to have the ball. We want him to be the decision maker."

Other players chipped in as well.

Jrue Holiday followed up his 21-point Game 3 performance by shooting just 4-for-20 in Game 4, but he also made one of the game's biggest plays when he stole the ball from Chris Paul, sparking a fastbreak that resulted in a Middleton layup to put the Bucks ahead 103-99 with 27.2 seconds left.

"That's what it's all about — learning, learning how to win different types of ballgames, different styles," said Middleton, who scored 10 of the Bucks' last 12 points. "And that's what that was moment was about, finding a way to win a game where it seemed like we weren't going to win, and give us a chance to still have a life, going to Phoenix with a little bit of confidence, with a little bit of momentum."

The Bucks must win at least once in Phoenix to have a shot at their first title in 50 years. The last time the Bucks played there, they lost by double digits even as Antetokounmpo produced 42 points, 12 rebounds and four assists.

Phoenix's wall of defenders handled Antetokounmpo well enough Wednesday to make the Suns believe they can prevent him from repeating those superhuman outbursts he delivered in Games 2 and 3.

## US men's basketball team loses Love, Beal

Associated Press

On a U.S. basketball team filled with stars, nobody scored more than Bradley Beal during the season.

At the top of his NBA game, he was finally set to take on the international one.

The coronavirus has wrecked his Olympic dreams.

Beal will miss the Olympics after being placed into health and safety protocols and USA Basketball said Thursday it will replace him on its roster at a later date.

"I'm dying for him," coach Gregg Popovich said. "We all are."

On Friday, Kevin Love became the second player to drop out, citing a calf injury and leaving the team to replace two players on its roster.

The team's exhibition game against Australia scheduled for

Friday night in Las Vegas was canceled because of health and safety protocols. USA Basketball cited "an abundance of caution" in making the decision. The U.S. women's game against Australia was to be played as scheduled Friday in Las Vegas.

The Americans also announced that forward Jerami Grant has also been placed in health and safety protocols "out of an abundance of caution." Popovich said the Americans didn't expect that his Olympics would be in jeopardy.

It is unclear if Beal has been vaccinated. He had started all three exhibition games for the U.S. so far in Las Vegas, averaging 10.3 points on 10-for-21 shooting.

The Washington Wizards guard was second in the NBA this season with 31.3 points per game. Only Stephen Curry, who

passed on the Olympics, averaged more.

Love would have been trying for a second Olympic gold medal, having played for the Americans in London in 2012. He also was on the team that won gold two years earlier in the world championships.

That past USA Basketball experience helped him get selected for this roster despite his difficult NBA season. Love missed 46 games because of the injury and averaged just 12.2 points in 25 games.

He played in two of the Americans' three exhibition games in Las Vegas, scoring one point.

U.S. forward Bam Adebayo said he checked on Beal, who told him that he had no symptoms. Still, his news was a tough blow to the players who said they have been following safety

recommendations and hoped for good health.

"It still definitely gives you PTSD, somebody catching COVID," Adebayo said. "I remember when I had it, just one of those things I wouldn't wish on anybody."

Beal was expected to play for the Americans two years ago in the Basketball World Cup in China, but had to withdraw from consideration before training camp for family reasons.

He finally had his chance to suit up for the senior national team now and he seemed ready for it.

After scoring just two points in the Americans' loss to Nigeria in their opener, he followed with 12 points against Australia and then had 17 on Tuesday against Argentina in the first U.S. victory.

# Oosthuizen pulling away at British Open

Associated Press

SANDWICH, England — What looked to be a three-man chase going into the weekend at the British Open is turning into a one-man show. The star is Louis Oosthuizen.

The South African had a tap-in birdie at No. 12. He holed a 12-foot birdie putt on No. 13. And then he hit two beauties to about 25 feet on the par-5 14th and made that for an eagle.

Just like that, Oosthuizen was at 12 under and went three shots clear of Collin Morikawa. Jordan Spieth was tied for the lead until he failed to birdie the 14th and three-putted the 15th for bogey and dropped to 8 under.

At stake are some major championship records.

Oosthuizen can break the 36-hole record at the British Open if he finishes at 11-under 129. One more birdie and he can set the major championship record of 128 that Brooks Koepka set at

Bethpage Black in the 2019 PGA Championship.

Morikawa isn't one for golf records so he was unaware he could have tied the best round at Royal St. George's by making an 8-foot birdie putt on his final hole.

He burned the edge of the cup as the gallery groaned.

A winner in his first PGA Championship appearance last August, Morikawa is making quite a debut in links golf. He made seven birdies in his first 14 holes as part of a clinic in iron play and wound up with a 6-under 64.

Morikawa was at 9-under 131 overall, one short of tying the 36-hole record at the British Open.

He was three shots clear of Daniel Van Tonder (66), Emiliano Grillo (64) and Marcel Siem (67) among those who played early.

Morikawa isn't sure he would be in this position if not for com-

ing over to the Scottish Open last week at The Renaissance Club. It's not a true links, though the turf was so tight that he changed three of his irons (7 through 9).

He also adjusted his putting because of so many long putts in links golf. He uses his saw grip for the shorter putts, a conventional grip for the lag putts. He is learning fast.

"I just want to create my own memories," Morikawa said. "There's memories here and there, and I'm awful with golf history, unfortunately, like just remembering certain facts."

"I did not know 63 was the low out here. I just kind of came out and played golf."

On a morning of low scoring at Royal St George's, where the sun was shining and the breeze off the English Channel was light, Morikawa and Grillo each had a 64 — Grillo was inches away from holing his last shot from the fairway — and Ger-

man amateur Matthias Schmid had 65.

Morikawa was in sight of a bunch of scoring records that he apparently knew nothing about after some approach play that he said was "on a string."

After picking up shots at the first and fifth holes, Morikawa gave himself birdie chances from within 6 feet at Nos. 8, 9, 11 and 12 and made them all. He kept up momentum with a par save at the 13th after driving into a pot bunker, before hacking out of the deep rough on the par-5 No. 14 and making another birdie.

At that stage, he needed two birdies to post a 61 for the lowest score in major championship history.

Then came his only bogey, at the 15th after missing a 5-foot par putt following a poor chip from a swale to the right of the green. It ended a 27-hole stretch without a bogey and he finished with three pars.

# Kraken watching as NHL teams shuffle rosters

Associated Press

Before 30 NHL teams release the list of players available for the Kraken, many of them are shuffling the deck to make sure they're in good position for the Seattle expansion draft.

Rather than losing Ryan Graves, Colorado traded him to New Jersey. Rather than worry about whether 2020 playoff hero Anton Khudobin would get snapped up, Dallas took goaltender Ben Bishop's suggestion to expose him instead. Rather than trading or risking the Kraken nabbing defenseman Matt Dumba, Minnesota bought out Ryan Suter and Zach Parise for the expansion draft and other reasons.

"It was a contributing part of the decision," Wild general manager Bill Guerin said. "We get to protect two more players."

From players waiving no-movement clauses to GMs making trades and exercising buyouts, this week has been all about preparing for the expansion draft. Protected lists are due Saturday, the Kraken reveal their picks at the expansion draft Wednesday and the rest of the league isn't standing

idly by waiting to see what happens.

"We're looking at everything," Philadelphia GM Chuck Fletcher said Tuesday. "It's an exciting time in a sense that with the Seattle expansion draft, with the flat (salary) cap, you might see maybe a few more trades, a few more hockey trades throughout the week."

Out of Fletcher's crystal ball came the Avalanche's trade Thursday night that sent Graves to the Devils for young forward Mikhail Maltsev and the 61st pick in the regular draft. A 6-foot-5 defenseman who's only 26 and signed for two more years, Graves almost certainly would've been Seattle-bound and now can be protected by New Jersey, which had plenty of protection spots available.

With the 2017 Vegas expansion draft a cautionary tale and the goal of losing as little talent as possible this time, each move happening right now involves some strategy to guard against Seattle. Some moves are more selfless than others.

Bishop, who missed all season recovering from knee surgery, went to GM Jim Nill to

offer to waive his no-movement clause so the Stars could protect Khudobin. Bishop could either become for the Kraken what Marc-Andre Fleury was for the Golden Knights as an established goalie for an expansion team or return to Dallas with Khudobin and Jake Oettinger.

Any player with a no-movement clause — the most powerful tool in a player's contract — must be protected unless he agrees to waive it to save someone else. Colorado's Erik Johnson and Buffalo's Jeff Skinner are among the other players who agreed to waive theirs.

Duncan Keith waived his to facilitate a trade from Chicago to Edmonton, and the Oilers are well-positioned to protect the three-time Stanley Cup champion and two-time Norris Trophy winner.

Florida is in an easier spot after buying out veteran defenseman Keith Yandle, who had a no-movement clause. As GM Bill Zito said, "While a decision of this kind is never an easy one to make, we believe that this shift is necessary as we look towards the 2021-22 season and our club's future."