

US seeks fuel change for Europe bases

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Russian fossil fuels have long helped power American military bases in Europe.

Ramstein Air Base in Germany, the largest hub for U.S. troops and military supplies on the Continent, consumes Russian gas to the tune of more than \$4 million yearly, according to an April analysis by Brown University's Climate Solutions Lab. Collectively in Europe, U.S. installations have relied on Russian natural gas, oil and coal for 30% of their energy needs.

That dependency is now partly fueling Russia's war effort against Ukraine and a renewed push in Congress to reduce the U.S. military's reliance on Russian-sourced energy. The House's draft of the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act, an annual must-pass bill that sets policy and spending priorities for the Defense Department, singles out Russian fuel consumption by American forces in Europe and spurs the Pentagon to pursue total energy independence from Moscow.

"In every way possible, we should hinder Russia's economic and military capability. That's why it becomes exceedingly important that at the very minimum, the United States military is not engaging in any activity that would support or help the Russian

economy," Rep. John Garamendi, D-Calif., said Monday.

"The consumption of Russian fuel by the United States military directly helps the Russian economy and thereby the Russian ability to continue to engage in Ukraine."

The House legislation requires all main bases in Europe to adopt installation energy plans by June 2023 to reduce reliance on Russian fossil fuels and asks the Pentagon to eliminate the usage of Russian energy entirely no later than five years after the plans are completed.

"It is the sense of Congress that reliance on Russian energy poses a critical challenge for national security activities in the area of responsibility of the United States European Command," the provision states.

The Defense Department also would be required under the legislation to factor in energy security and resilience when opening any new U.S. military bases in Europe. Additional amendments proposed by lawmakers last week call for assessments of a base's capacity to replace Russian energy with energy produced in the U.S. and the establishment of a program to help wean Europe off Russia's fossil fuels.

Garamendi, who is the chairman of a House subpanel overseeing military installations, said he is confident Europe is moving in the right direction after meeting with

representatives from several countries — including Poland, Bulgaria, Finland and Sweden — at an annual session last week of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Congressional directives to divest from Russian energy are meant to complement Europe's efforts to do the same, he said.

"The overarching issue here is that the United States military will be working in a coordinated way with our NATO allies in reducing and eliminating the consumption of Russian fuel," Garamendi said.

Last year, Russia provided 45% of the European Union's natural gas imports and 27% of the bloc's oil imports, Amos Hochstein, the State Department's senior adviser for energy security, said last month in testimony to senators.

Some European countries are almost entirely dependent on Russian energy sources, he said.

Researchers estimated in April that Russian energy use on U.S. military bases could mean American taxpayers are inadvertently funneling \$1 million to Russia's war machine per week.

That figure has fluctuated in the last few months as Russia cuts off gas supplies to nations that do not comply with Russian President Vladimir Putin's demand for payment in rubles.

Biden in Mideast to discuss Iranian nuclear program

Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — Joe Biden opened his first visit to the Mideast as president on Wednesday by declaring a "bone deep" bond between the United States and Israel and pledging to strengthen economic connections between the two countries going forward.

He did not mention one of the larger goals of his visit: assuring uneasy Israeli and Saudi Arabian officials that he is committed to preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear power.

"We have a full agenda over the next few days, because the relationship between Israel and the United States covers every issue that matters to our mutual future," said Biden, who noted he was making his 10th visit to

Israel. "But we are united in our shared values and our shared vision."

Israeli officials said Iran's quickly evolving nuclear program is at the top of their agenda for talks with the U.S. president. Biden made reviving the Iran nuclear deal, brokered by Barack Obama in 2015 and abandoned by Donald Trump in 2018, a key priority as he entered office.

But indirect talks for the U.S. to reenter the deal have stalled as Iran has made rapid gains in developing its nuclear program. That's left the Biden administration increasingly pessimistic about resurrecting the deal, which placed significant restrictions on Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief.

Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid and President Isaac Herzog made clear that Iran's nuclear program will be a central focus for the Israeli side in their discussions with Biden. And Herzog noted the "security challenges emanating directly from Iran and its proxies, threatening Israel and its neighbors and endangering our region."

"We will discuss the need to renew a strong global coalition that will stop the Iranian nuclear program," Lapid said.

Because of concerns about a rise in COVID-19 cases, top White House officials said Biden would try to limit physical contact during the trip. At the arrival ceremony, Biden mostly skipped handshakes and offered Israeli officials fist bumps.

Navy officer must serve time for crash deaths

By ALEX WILSON
AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO—A U.S. Navy officer, Lt. Ridge Hanneman Alkonis, convicted of negligent driving resulting in the deaths of two Japanese citizens, must serve his three-year prison term, an appellate court ruled Wednesday.

"The appeal of this case is dismissed," said Tokyo High Court Judge Akira Ando as he denied Alkonis' plea and upheld the sentence from the Shizuoka District Court in October. "This is a case which is sufficient to consider a prison sentence."

Alkonis was negligent in falling asleep and failing to stop the car when he felt drowsy, Ando said. He said the three-judge panel considered Alkonis' remorse, the fact he has three children and that he paid the victims' families \$1.6 million in compensation. But

they agreed the gravity of the offense outweighed the mitigating factors.

Alkonis was driving May 29, 2021, in Shizuoka prefecture, about two hours from Yokosuka Naval Base, when his car plowed into pedestrians and parked cars outside a soba restaurant in Fujinomiya. Alkonis, his wife and three children were returning from a hike up Mount Fuji.

A woman, 85, died that day; her son-in-law, 54, died June 11, 2021. A second woman, 53, the daughter and wife of the other victims, was injured.

A spokeswoman for Naval Forces Japan called the ruling Wednesday "disproportionate." Alkonis at the time was a weapons officer at Yokosuka aboard the destroyer USS Benfold. He remained on duty while free on bail pending the outcome of his appeal, the Navy said.

"This was a tragic event that resulted in the loss of two precious lives, and tremendous pain for everyone involved," spokeswoman Cmdr. Katie Cerezo told Stars and Stripes by email Wednesday. "We respect the judicial process. However, we are disappointed with the result, which we believe is uncommonly disproportionate given the mitigating evidence."

Alkonis, 34, asked the court on June 8 for a lesser, suspended sentence, meaning he would serve no time provided he adhered to conditions set by the court.

He has 14 days to appeal the High Court's decision to the Japan Supreme Court. His father, Derek Alkonis, said after the ruling that he was unsure if his son intends to appeal.

Ando went point-by-point explaining why the High Court upheld the lower court. He said

the appellate panel also considered Alkonis' medical evaluation by the Navy and the fact that no drugs or alcohol were involved in the incident.

Alkonis left the courthouse on his own Wednesday; a court spokeswoman said she didn't know when he would be placed in custody.

Alkonis testified Aug. 24 that he lost consciousness due to a case of mountain, or altitude, sickness. Ando on Wednesday said it was "unlikely" that Alkonis suddenly fell asleep; he should have pulled over once he felt drowsy.

Alkonis expressed remorse during the appellate hearing in June.

"I feel the pain, shame and sorrow in every way possible," he told the panel. "I feel the burden of the damage I've caused every minute of every day."

US destroyer steams by South China Sea islands

By JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

A U.S. warship cruised past the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea to assert "navigational rights and freedoms" on Wednesday, according to a 7th Fleet spokesman.

The guided-missile destroyer USS Benfold steamed by the island group about 200 miles off the coasts of Vietnam and Hainan, China, and continued into the South China Sea, said Lt. Nicholas Lingo in an emailed statement.

The operation asserted rights to freedom of navigation and innocent passage "by challenging restrictions" imposed by China, Taiwan and Vietnam, Lingo wrote. It also challenged China's claim of "straight baselines" enclosing the islands, a bid to extend China's claim of maritime sover-

eignty far into the South China Sea.

That claim is disallowed under international law, according to a 1996 State Department report.

Beijing has occupied the Paracels since 1974 and has about 20 outposts throughout the chain.

More than 1,000 Chinese personnel reside on the largest feature, Woody Island, according to the CIA World Factbook website.

China, Taiwan and Vietnam require either permission or advance notification before a military vessel makes an "innocent passage" through the territorial sea, a violation of the Law of the Sea Convention, Lingo wrote. The U.S. demonstrates the illegality of the restrictions by making an innocent passage without prior notice or asking permission, he said.

Navy: More assault victims can seek restricted report

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

The Navy is broadening some rules related to sexual assault reporting and victim requests for transfers to align with Defense Department policy, the service said Tuesday.

Sexual assault victims now may request a restricted, or confidential, report even if they've told their commanding officer or others in their chain of command they were sexually assaulted, the Navy announced in an administrative order.

Commanding officers who have received a request from a sexual assault victim for an expedited transfer to another unit or base now have five days, up from three days, to consider the request.

Both changes are effective

immediately, the Navy said.

Restricted reports allow victims to tell certain people, such as a health care provider or sexual assault response coordinator, or SARC, about a sexual assault without triggering an official investigation or notification of their chain of command.

The idea is to give victims the ability to get medical, advocacy and legal help while they consider whether to file an unrestricted report, which requires an investigation and command notification, according to the DOD's sexual assault prevention and response website.

The change does not affect other elements of restricted reporting, such as ineligibility for a military protective order or expedited transfer, the Navy said.

Iran drones could boost Russian capabilities

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

Iranian drones could provide Russia with a capability it underfunded for years and support its army's artillery strikes against Ukraine if used effectively, analysts said Tuesday.

Declassified intelligence says Iran is preparing to train Russian forces on drone warfare and provide them with "several hundred" unmanned aerial vehicles for use in Ukraine, national security adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters Monday.

The announcement comes before a visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin to Tehran

next week, which Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov announced Tuesday.

Iran's drones are among the most advanced in the world after decades of development and experience in proxy wars in the Middle East, experts and U.S. military officials have said.

"It is one of a handful of nations that has a massive, robust drone development and fielding capability that has been proven in combat on a large scale," said Jeremy Binnie, an analyst at the defense intelligence firm Janes.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry dismissed Sullivan's statements, saying Iran and Russia

have collaborated on technologies since before the war, according to a report Tuesday by the Iranian news agency Tasnim.

If there is Iranian involvement over the skies of Ukraine, evidence will appear as drones are shot down, experts said.

Iran would most likely not send its larger drones, as it lacks the capacity to deliver several hundred overseas on the "expedited timeline" that Sullivan described, Binnie said.

But Iran could send smaller drones that would serve either to scout locations for artillery barrages or act as relatively in-

expensive guided missiles, he and other analysts said.

Smaller suicide drones like those provided by Iran to its proxy groups in Yemen, Iraq and Syria made an outsized impact in those conflicts, said Samuel Bendett at the Washington, D.C.-based think tank CNA.

Iran has invested in drone capabilities for decades, while Russia has been slow to develop them, Bendett said.

"Russia was simply late to the game," Bendett said. "Because it had different priorities after the Cold War, it didn't think that drones would play an important part in modern warfare."

Mayor reluctantly OKs US drones in southern Japan

By SETH ROBSON
AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

A Japanese mayor signed off this week on U.S. military plans to fly unarmed drones from a base in southern Japan to keep tabs on Chinese activity in the seas nearby.

Mayor Shigeru Nakanishi of Kanoya city agreed to a year-long deployment of MQ-9 Reapers at the nearby base, a city official told Stars and Stripes by phone Wednesday. City residents had expressed reservations about the drones and Nakanishi labored over his approval, public broadcaster NHK reported.

"I have decided that it's inevitable to accept temporary deployment of U.S. forces' unmanned aircraft MQ-9," he told the city assembly Monday, according to a news clip posted by Kagoshima Television that day.

The Japanese and U.S. governments plan to fly eight drones from Kanoya Air Base, a Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force installation on Kyushu Island, starting in September,

according to NHK on Tuesday.

Nakanishi signed off because "intelligence gathering is necessary for defense of our country under the Japan-U.S. alliance as the security environment surrounding Japan is becoming increasingly severe," the city official said.

The Reaper is primarily a surveillance aircraft but can carry an inventory of weapons, including Hellfire missiles and Paveway laser-guided bombs, according to the U.S. Air Force.

The Reapers will be configured for surveillance "and can't be equipped with weapons," according to a document from Japan's Ministry of Defense posted on the Kanoya city website. "We have confirmed with the U.S. side that it takes time to change the specifications and that the specifications won't be changed while they are at Kanoya Air Base."

Nakanishi plans to meet with Gov. Koichi Shiota of Kagoshima prefecture and explain his decision before the city signs an accord with the national government, the city official said.

USFK virus cases nearly triple as subvariant gets to S. Korea

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — New COVID-19 cases among U.S. military personnel stationed in South Korea have nearly tripled as infections in the country have soared to levels not seen since May.

U.S. Forces Korea counted 157 new infections in the week ending Monday, according to an update on its website. Nine of those cases were people who recently arrived on the peninsula.

The command reported 56 new cases from June 28 to July 4, close to the previous low for the year thus far, which is 50 infections between June 14 and 20.

South Korea reported 40,266 new cases on Tuesday, up from 19,371 from the same day the previous week, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency.

South Korea's caseload has jumped to levels not seen since it lifted its outdoor mask mandate in May. The KDCA reported its one-day record of 621,328 new infections on March 17 and 18.6 million cases since the start of the pandemic in 2020.

The surge is due to COVID-19's omicron subvariant, BA.5, which "is starting now faster than we expected," Prime Minister Han Duck-soo said during a meeting Wednesday at the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasures Headquarters.

The BA.5 and BA.4 subvariants represent 80% of new COVID-19 cases in the United States and preliminary studies indicate they "may have some increased ability to escape immunity, including from prior infections," according to a fact sheet from the White House on Tuesday.

Han said South Korean health officials expect infections to rise to 200,000 cases daily in August and September.

South Korea lifted some of its social distancing restrictions but still requires face masks on buses and subways. USFK, which has about 28,500 troops, has rescinded nearly all its social distancing regulations, including its mandatory face mask policy on military bases. U.S. personnel are expected to adhere to South Korean restrictions while outside U.S. bases.

Video shows Uvalde police waiting in school

Associated Press

UVALDE, Texas — A new wave of anger swept through Uvalde on Tuesday over surveillance footage of police officers in body armor milling in the hallway of Robb Elementary School while a gunman carried out a massacre inside a fourth-grade classroom where 19 children and two teachers were killed.

The video published Tuesday by the Austin American-Statesman is a disturbing 80-minute recording of what has been known for weeks now about one of the deadliest school shootings in U.S. history: that heavily armed police officers, some armed with rifles and bullet-proof shields, massed in the hallway and waited more than an hour before going inside and stopping the May 24 slayings.

But the footage, which until now had not surfaced publicly, anguished Uvalde residents anew and redoubled calls in the

small South Texas city for accountability and explanations that have been incomplete — and sometimes inaccurate — in the seven weeks since the shooting. Hours after the video was published, some residents at a Uvalde City Council meeting said they had not been able to bring themselves to watch it.

Jesus Rizo said officers who are paid taxpayer dollars to protect people should not have “sat there” when children were in danger.

“You could’ve saved some lives. You could have held somebody’s hand as they were dying,” he said. “The parents could have seen them one last time as they were dying.”

Others demanded consequences for police and more information in an investigation marked by confusing statements that have had to be retracted at times.

“Give these families some closure,” said Daniel Myers, a

pastor in Uvalde and family friend to one of the victims.

An investigative committee led by Texas lawmakers had earlier announced plans to show the video to Uvalde residents for the first time Sunday, in addition to sharing their findings after weeks of closed-door testimony from more than 40 witnesses.

“This has been the most unprofessional investigation or handling of it that I’ve ever seen in my life,” Uvalde Mayor Don McLaughlin said in an interview with The Associated Press. “These families get blindsided constantly.”

The footage from a hallway camera inside the school shows the gunman entering the building with an AR-15 style rifle and includes 911 tape of a teacher screaming, “Get down! Get in your rooms! Get in your rooms!”

Two officers approach the classrooms minutes after the

gunman enters, then run back amid the sounds of gunfire.

As the gunman first approaches the classrooms a child whose image is blurred can be seen poking their head around a corner down the hallway and then running back while shots ring out. Later, about 20 minutes before police breach the room, the video shows a man wearing a vest that says “sheriff” use a hand sanitizer dispenser mounted on the wall.

Throughout the video, the screams of children are redacted.

Officials said the 77 minutes of footage they are preparing to release this weekend does not contain images of children in the classroom. Rep. Dustin Burrows, a Republican who is leading the investigation, said after the video was posted by the Statesman that “watching the entire segment of law enforcement’s response, or lack thereof, is also important.”

Panel: Trump set rally after ‘unhinged’ meeting

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a heated, “unhinged” dispute, Donald Trump fought objections from his White House lawyers to a plan, eventually discarded, to seize states’ voting machines and then, in a last-ditch effort to salvage his presidency, summoned supporters to march on the U.S. Capitol for what turned into the deadly 2021 riot, the House Jan. 6 committee revealed Tuesday.

In another disclosure, raising the question of witness tampering, the panel’s vice-chair said Trump himself had tried to contact a person who was talking to the committee about potential testimony.

And still more new information revealed that Trump was so

intent on making a showing at the Capitol that his aides secretly planned for a second rally stage there on the day of the attack.

Rep. Liz Cheney, the panel’s vice chair, said it had notified the Justice Department that Trump had contacted the witness who has yet to appear in public.

“We will take any effort to influence witness testimony very seriously,” said Cheney, a Wyoming Republican.

A Trump spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Justice Department spokesman Anthony Coley declined to comment when asked if the department was investigating the call.

Twitter sues Musk to force completion of acquisition

Associated Press

Twitter sued Tesla CEO Elon Musk on Tuesday, trying to force him to complete his \$44 billion takeover of the social media company by accusing him of “outlandish” and “bad faith” actions that have caused the platform irreparable harm and “wreaked havoc” on its stock price.

Back in April, Musk pledged to pay \$54.20 a share for Twitter, which agreed to those terms after reversing its initial opposition to the deal. But the two sides have been bracing for a legal fight since the billionaire said Friday that he was backing away from his agreement to buy the company.

Twitter’s lawsuit opens with a sharply-worded accusation:

“Musk refuses to honor his obligations to Twitter and its stockholders because the deal he signed no longer serves his personal interests.”

“Having mounted a public spectacle to put Twitter in play, and having proposed and then signed a seller-friendly merger agreement, Musk apparently believes that he — unlike every other party subject to Delaware contract law — is free to change his mind, trash the company, disrupt its operations, destroy stockholder value, and walk away,” the suit stated.

Twitter filed its lawsuit in the Delaware Court of Chancery, which frequently handles business disputes among the many corporations, including Twitter, that are incorporated there.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man killed, woman hurt after tent set on fire

CA STOCKTON—Police in central California were searching for a woman they said set a tent on fire, killing a man and injuring a woman inside, authorities said.

The 35-year-old man and 40-year-old woman were inside a tent on Airport Way and Mormon Slough in Stockton when the suspect set them and their tent ablaze, the Stockton Police Department said in a brief statement. Both were taken to a hospital where the man died, police said.

In November 2019, two people were hospitalized for injuries after another fire in Mormon Slough, where homeless people live in an encampment, the Stockton Record reported.

Descendants marking slave ship anniversary

AL MOBILE—Descendants of the last African people abducted into slavery and brought to America's shores gathered on the banks of an Alabama river to pay tribute to their ancestors.

The descendants of the 110 people aboard the Clotilda, the last known slave ship to bring enslaved African people to the United States, held a ceremony to mark the anniversary of the vessel's arrival.

The event marked the anniversary of the ship arriving 162 years ago with 110 enslaved people brought to the country against their will, Darron Patterson, president of the Clotilda Descendants Association, said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press.

In 1860, the Clotilda illegally transported 110 people from what is now the west African nation of Benin to Mobile. The voyage happened decades after the law banning the importation of slaves had taken effect.

Agency upgrades office to prevent bird collisions

MA HADLEY—The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is going an extra step in its efforts to protect birds by upgrading its northeast headquarters to prevent bird collisions.

The agency announced it will install markings on exterior windows of its regional office in Hadley. The markings will be arranged in a pattern designed to alert birds to the presence of glass windows before it's too late.

The agency also programmed its interior lights to switch off at night to reduce the risk of attracting birds.

In its announcement, the Fish and Wildlife Service said it hoped to lead by example and encouraged private property owners to do their part.

Goodbye to cash tolls, some history at bridge

NJ FORT LEE—Starting July 10, drivers crossing the Hudson River from New Jersey into New York on the George Washington Bridge went through an electronic tolling system.

Drivers without E-ZPass who would otherwise be paying cash will instead have their license plates photographed by overhead cameras and bills sent to them by mail.

With the instituting of the new

system, the toll booths currently in place will be taken out, removing a link to a memorable chapter in New Jersey's political history known as "Bridgegate."

Vandalism, fires at churches investigated

MD BETHESDA—Investigations are underway into several weekend incidents of apparent arson and vandalism at churches in Maryland, authorities said.

Montgomery County authorities said the incidents took place at three churches of different denominations a short distance away from each other in Bethesda, TV station WJLA reported.

A blaze was apparently set at St. Jane Frances De Chantal Parish, forcing worshippers to attend mass at an alternate location, news outlets reported.

Earlier in the weekend, a fire was set at a Methodist church that was broken into, according to fire officials. And investigators found damaged headstones and broken wood pieces scattered around the vicinity of Wildwood Baptist Church, WJLA reported.

Lifeguard latest to be bitten by a shark

NY OCEAN BEACH—A lifeguard in the Fire Island community of Ocean Beach is the latest person to be bitten in recent days by a shark in New York's Long Island waters.

Ocean Beach Mayor James Mallott told Newsday that the lifeguard was performing training about 150 to 200 yards offshore when he felt something bite him near his left foot. The lifeguard then swam to shore, where he

was taken by ambulance to a nearby hospital, treated and released.

Ocean Beach is a village on Fire Island, a barrier island off the southern shore of Long Island.

The bite comes days after another lifeguard, who had been playing the role of a victim during a training exercise, was bitten in the chest and hand by a shark off Smith Point Beach, also located on Fire Island.

Officer who shot Rice, 12, quits new police job

PA TIOGA—The former Cleveland police officer who fatally shot 12-year-old Tamir Rice in 2014 withdrew from the police force of a Pennsylvania town amid backlash and media coverage over his hiring.

Timothy Loehmann was sworn in as the lone police officer in Tioga—a community of about 600 in rural north-central Pennsylvania, 300 miles from Cleveland—but left the \$18-per-hour position without having worked a single shift, according to borough council President Steve Hazlett.

Tamir, who was Black, was playing with a pellet gun outside a recreation center in Cleveland on Nov. 22, 2014, when he was shot and killed by Loehmann seconds after Loehmann and his partner arrived. The officers, who are white, told investigators Loehmann had shouted three times at Tamir to raise his hands.

The shooting sparked community protests about police treatment of Black people, especially after a grand jury decided not to indict Loehmann or his partner.

— From wire reports

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St. Andrews still packs appeal, tough test

Associated Press

ST. ANDREWS, Scotland — Jack Nicklaus posed atop the Swilcan Bridge, birdied the last hole he ever played in a major championship and had no intention of ever returning to St. Andrews, not wanting anything to dilute from such a powerful ending to an incomparable career.

That was 17 years ago. And those plans changed when St. Andrews wanted to make Nicklaus an honorary citizen on occasion of the 150th British Open. The only other Americans given that distinction were Bobby Jones and Benjamin Franklin.

It was the first time Nicklaus has been to the Old Course without golf clubs, and his appreciation only seemed to deepen.

“When I came here in 1964, I couldn’t believe that St Andrews was a golf course that would still test golfers of that time,” he said Monday. “It still tests the golfers at this time. It’s a magical golf course. ... And to believe the game of golf essentially started here, it just absolutely is mind-boggling to me that it still stands up to the golfers of today.”

That’s still to be determined.

The Old Course always feels a little older when it’s crusty and firm, yellow and wispy, when the quality of a shot isn’t measure until it hits the ground and starts bouncing along.

But without much wind in the forecast, and with the increasing talent of today’s game, few courses are more vulnerable to low scoring. The par is 72 with only two par 5s, one on each nine. But there are a few par 4s reachable from the tee without strong wind.

U.S. Open champion Matt Fitzpatrick was a junior tournament winner at St. Andrews. Most recently his experience has been at the Dunhill Links Championship on

the European tour in early October when the sky is gray and heavy and the turf is soft and green.

“I think with it being firm and par 4s more gettable, it could be a low one as well, weather permitting,” Fitzpatrick said.

Tiger Woods was back on the Old Course on Monday morning for nine holes, keeping up with an unusually busy schedule given the state of his battered right leg. He walked the course with a wedge and putter on Saturday into night and played 18 holes on Sunday. Woods also had the “Celebration of Champions,” a four-hole loop with other R&A champions through the years.

He is a two-time champion at St. Andrews, aware this might be the last time the 46-year-old plays an Open at the home of golf, at least at a high level. He first played in 1995 as an amateur.

So many others are trying to decipher the course. That includes Collin Morikawa, who won in his first test of true links last year at Royal St. George’s.

“Most courses by the second time I see it, I feel like I have a good grasp,” Morikawa said. “This course takes a little extra learning and memorization because there are so many blind shots and you’re aiming at so many towers, it just kind of meshes into one. There are so many greens that are double greens and big greens that you forget the little slopes, but that’s what you can’t do.”

There are seven double greens. The 18th hole is a par 4 that players can reach off the tee. The 17th hole requires a tee shot over the corner of a hotel and has a road behind it.

Morikawa was most mystified by the 351-yard 12th hole, short but deceptive because of four bunkers hidden from the tee.

“I have no idea what to do,” Morikawa

said. “I don’t know what I’m going to do. I could tell you 15 different ways to play it, and all could be wrong.”

The Old Course isn’t the only thing new to Morikawa. He had his first experience of Open ceremony when he handed back the silver claret jug to Martin Slumbers, the chief executive of the R&A. It wasn’t anything he found particularly enjoyable. Champions get a replica. They have to return the real thing.

“I woke up this morning and looked at it. The replica is beautiful, but it’s not the same. It really isn’t. It will never be,” Morikawa said. “But I don’t want to dwell on the past. I always look forward to what’s next. Maybe, hopefully, just giving it back kind of frees me up and allows me just to focus on winning this week.”

What kind of score will that take? It depends on the weather, another links tradition. It’s why John Daly would win in a playoff at St. Andrews after finishing at 6-under par, and why Woods could win the next time at 18-under par.

Nicklaus devotes most of his time to golf course design, and he has been railing against technology, particularly the golf ball, for allowing the game to get out of hand.

He said he still believes the Old Course can hold its own. And if there is a record score this week?

“So what? That’s sort of the way I look at it,” Nicklaus said. “They’re shooting low now compared to what they shot 100 years ago. But times change and golfers get better, equipment gets better, conditions get better.”

“But I don’t think it really makes a whole lot of difference, frankly,” he said. “It’s St Andrews and it is what it is, and it will produce a good champion. It always has.”

Zalatoris may complete Second Slam at British Open

Associated Press

ST. ANDREWS, Scotland — Will Zalatoris has a chance to join some illustrious company at British Open. It’s just not for the reason he would like.

Zalatoris is one runner-up finish from completing a career Second Slam — placing second at all four major tournaments. Jack Nicklaus has done it. So have Arnold Palmer and Tom

Watson.

The difference is those guys have won majors galore, and the 25-year-old Zalatoris has never won any kind of tournament on the PGA Tour.

“I’m not even in double-digit majors, and we’re talking about me having four runners-up in majors here,” Zalatoris said. “I think I’ll take that resume, but obviously I’d like to replace

some of the silver medals with some gold medals.”

Zalatoris turned professional in 2018 and has played at only nine majors so far, but he already is starting to make himself a constant contender.

He first finished second at the Masters in 2021. Then he lost a three-hole playoff to Justin Thomas at this year’s PGA Championship and followed that with

a runner-up spot at the U.S. Open behind Matt Fitzpatrick.

Another second-place finish would put him in that breathtaking company. Palmer, Nicklaus and Watson all completed their Second Slams after having already won a major. The first to achieve the feat, Craig Wood, managed to finish second in each major before actually winning one at the Masters in 1941.

Malkin stays with Pens, Kane with Oilers

Associated Press

Evgeni Malkin decided to return to the Pittsburgh Penguins after all, Evander Kane chose to stay in Edmonton and the goalie carousel kept spinning a day before the NHL's free agency period opened.

Malkin late Tuesday night signed a \$24.4 million, four-year deal that counts \$6.1 million against the salary cap through 2026. He had as recently as Monday told the team he was testing the market.

"Evgeni is a generational talent who will be remembered as one of the greatest players in NHL history," general manager Ron Hextall said. "His hockey resume and individual accomplishments speak volumes about him as a player, and we are thrilled to watch him continue his remarkable legacy in Pittsburgh."

Kane followed by announcing "I'm back," in a post on his verified Twitter account in which he revealed agreeing to a \$20.5 million, four-year contract with the Oilers.

He credited Edmonton for giving him an opportunity to continue his career in January after the San Jose Sharks terminated the remainder of Kane's contract for violating COVID-19 protocols while in the American Hockey League. Kane is challenging the Sharks' decision by filing a grievance through the NHL Players' Association.

"A big part of my decision to stay in Edmonton was because of the opportunity giv-

en to me only seven months ago, but also the chance to be a part of a championship team," wrote Kane, who maintained negotiations with the Oilers, even after the team gave him permission to other clubs.

"Throughout the last 12 months, there have been lots of road blocks, tons of adversity and many tough days," he added. "I'm grateful for the tremendous amount of support from family, friends, teammates and others who have helped me stay strong through these difficult times."

Kane topped 20 goals for eighth time in 13 NHL seasons despite appearing in just 43 games, all with Edmonton.

Before Malkin and Kane stole the headlines by re-signing, the Minnesota Wild added another shift to the NHL's offseason goalie shuffle when they traded Cam Talbot to the Ottawa Senators for Filip Gustavsson.

The Senators had an opening after dealing Matt Murray to Toronto. The Wild intended to bring back Talbot in the same timeshare with Marc-Andre Fleury they used down the stretch on the way to the best regular-season record in franchise history, but general manager Bill Guerin changed his mind five days after re-signing Fleury.

"Sometimes you just know in your gut that things might not work out, and somebody might not be happy. I don't want a player to be like that either, and sometimes it's best to just move on," Guerin said. "There was no

drama. We don't want to create drama."

The 37-year-old Fleury started all but one of Minnesota's playoff games in the first-round loss to St. Louis. Talbot didn't hide his disappointment about having to wait until the elimination game to see the ice in that series.

Guerin said Talbot did not directly request a trade.

"Cam is a wonderful guy. He's a big part of where our culture is today, and it's not that he would have been a problem," Guerin said. "It's just, you know, sometimes there's a little awkwardness and that's not always the best thing."

Talbot, who has a \$3.67 million salary-cap hit on the final year of the contract he signed with the Wild in 2020, will slide in next to Anton Forsberg in Ottawa's net. The 35-year-old Talbot went 13-0-3 in his last 16 regular-season starts.

With Fleury in the fold on a two-year, \$7 million contract, Gustavsson will be the clear No. 2 goalie for Minnesota while top prospect Jesper Wallstedt develops in the AHL. The swap also netted almost \$3 million in cap space for the strapped-for-space Wild.

The 24-year-old Gustavsson mostly struggled through 18 games with the Senators last season, going 5-12-1 with a 3.55 goals-against average. He was a 2016 second-round draft pick by Pittsburgh, when Guerin was in the front office there.

Take foul penalty getting stiffer, play-in will stay put

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The NBA has completed the process of changing the transition take foul rule, ending years of discussion about what to do with the long-maligned tactic.

And, also as expected, the play-in tournament is going to be around for the foreseeable future.

The league's board of governors finalized those two matters Tuesday, approving a plan to award one free throw when teams are disadvantaged by the take foul — as well as removing the "experimental" designation from the play-in element to the postseason.

"Generally, it was upbeat coming out of our meeting,"

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said. "People are thrilled that as we head into next season, it looks like we'll be on our normal track in terms of when the season starts, in terms of our protocols around the game, particularly around the health and safety of our players."

It wasn't a surprise that the league changed the penalty on take fouls; Silver told The Associated Press in early June that it would change, though cautioned that the new rule might still be tweaked in future years.

The take foul — in which the defender does not make a play on the ball — is what the league classifies as one that occurs either "during a transition scoring opportunity or immediately fol-

lowing a change of possession and before the offensive team had the opportunity to advance the ball." The exception is in the final 2 minutes of the fourth quarter or overtime.

The new penalty for such a foul is one free throw, which may be attempted by any player on the offended team in the game at the time the foul was committed, and continued possession.

Silver addressed a number of other topics, including:

Kevin Durant

Kevin Durant is under contract for four more years with the Brooklyn Nets, and his trade request has been one of the biggest stories of the offseason.

"This needs to be a two-way

street," Silver said. "Teams provide enormous security and guarantees to players, and the expectation in return is that they'll meet their end of the bargain."

Play-in tournament

The play-in tournament has generally been considered a success, so it was no surprise that the league is keeping it around.

It has been used in each of the past two seasons, where the teams that finish seventh, eighth, ninth and 10th in the East and West meet to determine the final two playoff spots in each conference.

It's been a hit, primarily because it tends to give a March Madness feel.

Sale solid in debut, but Rays prevail

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Chris Sale worked five scoreless innings in his season debut, but the Boston bullpen couldn't hold a two-run lead in a 3-2 loss to the Tampa Bay Rays on Tuesday night.

Sale, out all season with a fracture in his right rib cage, allowed three hits with one walk and struck out five. The lefty reached 97 mph on his fastball during a 78-pitch, 53-strike outing.

"I felt better as it went on," Sale said. "Feeling strong in the fourth and fifth inning, that's nice. I'll just keep building off of that."

The Red Sox are hoping the 33-year-old Sale can boost their chances of making the playoffs. This was just his 10th start for Boston since 2019; he missed 2020 and most of 2021 following Tommy John surgery.

"Sale was tough," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "He looked really sharp for not having pitched all season long in the big leagues."

Corey Kluber (5-5) allowed two runs and four hits in six innings to beat the Red Sox in consecutive starts. The right-hander went six shutout innings in a 7-1 victory at Boston last Wednesday.

Tampa Bay went up 3-2 in the sixth when pinch-hitter Francisco Mejía had an RBI single off Matt Strahm (3-3). Two more runs scored when the Red Sox made two errors on the same play.

Brooks Raley worked the ninth for his fifth save in six chances.

Boston second baseman Trevor Story left the game when he was hit on the right hand by a pitch he swung at in the fifth inning. He was scheduled to undergo X-rays late Tuesday night.

Orioles 4, Cubs 2: Ramón Urías hit a two-run homer and made a big defensive play, and visiting Baltimore beat Chicago for its ninth straight win.

Jorge Mateo also homered as the Orioles (44-44) reached .500 for the first time this season. It's the longest win streak for Baltimore since the franchise won 13 straight in September 1999.

Orioles right-hander Jordan Lyles (6-7) pitched seven innings of two-run ball in his second straight win.

Braves 4, Mets 1: Matt Olson hit a go-ahead, two-run homer in the sixth inning, Adam Duvall went deep for two runs in the seventh and host Atlanta trimmed New York's NL East lead to 1½ games.

The Braves dropped the series opener to

the Mets but haven't lost consecutive games since June 17-18. They are 30-9 since June 1, best in the major leagues over that span.

Atlanta had one hit against New York starter David Peterson (5-2) before Olson crushed a slider 426 feet to center field, his 14th homer of the season.

Reds 4, Yankees 3: Jonathan India drove in two runs with a go-ahead, bases-loaded single with two outs in the ninth inning, and visiting Cincinnati rallied past New York.

The Yankees were 49-0 when leading after eight innings and the Reds were 0-48 when trailing after eight before New York closer Clay Holmes (4-1) entered with a 3-0 lead but failed to retire any of the five hitters he faced. The Yankees have lost three straight for the second time this year.

Before pulling off their fifth straight win, Cincinnati did little against Gerrit Cole, who allowed four hits and struck out 11 in seven innings.

Astros 6, Angels 5: Kyle Tucker delivered a tiebreaking RBI double in the ninth inning, and visiting Houston blew a four-run lead before rallying for a victory over spiraling Los Angeles.

José Altuve led off the ninth with a walk from Angels closer Raisel Iglesias (2-6), who had his second straight calamitous outing. Aledmys Díaz singled before a double to right by Tucker, a first-time All-Star selection last week.

Cardinals 7, Dodgers 6: Albert Pujols and rookie Nolan Gorman homered as host St. Louis ended Los Angeles' seven-game winning streak.

Andrew Knizner drove in three runs on three singles as the Cardinals won their third straight.

Trea Turner had a two-run homer and single, and scored three runs for the Dodgers.

Athletics 14, Rangers 7 (12): Chad Pinder hit a grand slam during an eight-run 12th inning and visiting Oakland beat Texas.

Corey Seager homered for a career-high fifth straight game to get the Rangers within 4-3 in the ninth, and Kole Calhoun tied it with a single a few batters later.

Pinder was the Athletics' automatic runner to open the 12th and scored on Vimal Machin's sacrifice fly. Three more runs scored before Pinder came to bat with the bases loaded, and he hit the first pitch from Kolby Allard into the left-field seats to make

it 14-6.

Giants 13, Diamondbacks 0: Thairo Estrada hit two homers, Logan Webb struck out eight in six scoreless innings and host San Francisco routed Arizona.

Joey Bart and Yermín Mercedes also connected off Dallas Keuchel (2-7).

Blue Jays 4, Phillies 3: José Berríos matched his career high by striking out 13 in six innings, Lourdes Gurriel Jr. had four hits and host Toronto snapped a four-game losing streak.

Gurriel singled in the second, doubled and scored in the third, doubled home the go-ahead run in the sixth and singled in the eighth.

Tigers 7, Royals 5: Miguel Cabrera drove in the tying and go-ahead runs, matching Ted Williams for 14th place on the career RBI list, and visiting Detroit rallied past Kansas City to snap a four-game skid.

Cabrera's sacrifice fly in the fifth inning made it 3-3, and he had an RBI grounder for the Tigers' first run in a four-run seventh. He equaled Williams with 1,838 RBIs.

The Royals committed three errors in the seventh behind Jose Cuas (2-1), who allowed four runs, only one of them earned.

Brewers 6, Twins 3: Andrew McCutchen and Willy Adames each hit a two-run homer, and visiting Milwaukee beat Minnesota after three rain delays.

Jorge Polanco homered and Nick Gordon and Byron Buxton drove in runs for the Twins.

Rockies 5, Padres 3: Charlie Blackmon hit a tiebreaking three-run homer, Austin Gomber pitched six strong innings and host Colorado beat San Diego.

Guardians 4-0, White Sox 1-7: Shane Bieber pitched a three-hitter for his first complete game this year and José Ramírez and Amed Rosario drove in two runs apiece, sending host Cleveland past Chicago in a doubleheader opener.

Dylan Cease struck out nine in 5⅓ innings, and José Abreu, Luis Robert and Josh Harrison homered to help the White Sox earn a split.

Cease (8-4) allowed five hits and walked three. The right-hander has not allowed more than one earned run in nine consecutive starts, posting a 0.53 ERA over his last 51 innings.

Pirates 3, Marlins 2: Rookie Oneil Cruz hit a tiebreaking RBI triple and Jake Marisnick homered for the second straight game as visiting Pittsburgh beat Miami for its fourth straight victory.