

Ex-admiral among those disciplined for fire

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Navy leaders have disciplined more than 20 senior officers and sailors in connection with widespread leadership and other failures that contributed to the July 2020 arson fire that destroyed the USS Bonhomme Richard.

The most significant actions were taken against members of the ship's leadership team, including letters of reprimand and pay cuts for the former commander and executive officer. And Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro issued a letter of censure to retired Vice Adm. Richard Brown, who was the commander of Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, at the time of the fire.

The ship was undergoing a two-year, \$250 million upgrade pierside in San Diego when the fire broke out. About 115 sailors were on board, and nearly 60 were treated for heat exhaustion, smoke inhalation and minor injuries. The failure to extinguish or contain the fire led to temperatures exceeding 1,200 degrees Fahrenheit in some areas, melting sections of the ship into molten metal that flowed into other parts of the ship.

A Navy report last year concluded that the massive five-day blaze was preventable

and unacceptable, and that there were lapses in training, coordination, communications, fire preparedness, equipment maintenance and overall command and control. And, while one sailor — Seaman Apprentice Ryan Mays — has been charged with setting the fire, the report found that failings by about three dozen officers and sailors either directly led to the ship's loss or contributed to it.

"When leaders' actions or inactions result in the loss of life or capital resources, the senior leadership of the Department of the Navy has a responsibility to determine the root cause and hold those accountable," Del Toro said in a message sent to the Department of the Navy on June 2. "This fire could have been prevented with adequate oversight into the ship's material condition and the crew's readiness to combat a fire."

The Navy on Friday laid out the disciplinary actions taken by Adm. Samuel Paparo, current commander of Pacific Fleet. In most cases, Paparo issued letters in the sailors' personnel files that ranged in severity. In many cases a disciplinary letter can be career-ending.

According to the Navy, Paparo gave punitive letters of reprimand and pay forfei-

tures to Capt. Gregory Scott Thoroman, the ship's former commanding officer, and to Capt. Michael Ray, the former executive officer. Former Command Master Chief Jose Hernandez was given a punitive letter of reprimand.

Others who received letters in their files were Rear Adm. Scott Brown, who was director of fleet maintenance, and Rear Adm. Eric Ver Hage, commander of the Navy Regional Maintenance Center.

Mays is facing a court martial, and was charged with aggravated arson and the willful hazarding of a vessel. He has denied setting the fire. Mays set the fire because he was disgruntled after dropping out of Navy SEAL training, prosecutors said. His defense lawyers said there was no physical evidence connecting him to the ship's blaze.

The Navy report on the fire issued last year spread blame across a wide range of ranks and responsibilities, from Brown to senior commanders, lower ranking sailors and civilian program managers. It cited 17 for failures that "directly" led to the loss of the ship, while 17 others "contributed" to the loss of the ship. Two other sailors were faulted for not effectively helping the fire response. Of the 36, nine were civilians.

Russia rains fire on Ukrainian cities, killing civilians

Associated Press

KRAMATORSK, Ukraine — Ukrainian authorities across the country reported new Russian missile strikes and shelling Saturday that killed at least 16 more civilians, deaths that came after Russia's top military announced it was stepping up its onslaught against its neighbor.

The Russian Defense Ministry said Saturday that Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu gave "instructions to further intensify the actions of units in all operational areas, in order to exclude the possibility of the Kyiv regime launching massive rock-

et and artillery strikes on civilian infrastructure and residents of settlements in Donbas and other regions."

The new Russian attacks hit areas in the north, the east and the south of Ukraine. Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, has seen especially severe bombardments in recent days, with Ukrainian officials and local commanders voicing fears that a second full-scale Russian assault on the northern city may be looming.

At least three civilians were killed and three more were injured Saturday in a pre-dawn Russian rocket strike on the

northern Ukrainian city of Chuhuiv, which is close to Kharkiv and only 75 miles from the Russian border, a regional police chief said.

Serhiy Bolvinov, the deputy head of Kharkiv's regional police force, said the rockets partly destroyed a two-story apartment building.

"Four Russian rockets, presumably fired from around (the Russian city of) Belgorod at night, at about 3:30 a.m., hit a residential building, a school and administrative buildings," Bolvinov wrote on Facebook.

"The bodies of three people were found under the rubble.

Three more were injured. The victims are civilians," Bolvinov added.

In the neighboring Sumy region, one civilian was killed and at least seven more were injured after Russians opened mortar and artillery fire on three towns and villages not far from the Russian border, regional governor Dmytro Zhyvtsky said Saturday on Telegram.

In the embattled eastern Donetsk region, seven civilians were killed and 14 wounded in the last 24 hours in attacks on cities, its governor said Saturday morning.

House votes to boost military pay, benefits

SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Troops are poised to receive pay raises and inflation bonuses, expanded child care, contraception coverage, paid moving expenses for pets and other support under the House version of defense policy legislation for the 2023 fiscal year.

Lawmakers packed their \$840 billion National Defense Authorization Act, an annual military spending priorities bill slated to take effect Oct. 1, with a slew of quality-of-life improvements as high costs of living, elevated suicide rates and additional stressors take a toll on service members and their families.

The House on Thursday adopted the mammoth legislation, which typically totals more than 3,000 pages, but it will still need to be reconciled with a Senate version and paid for by a separate bill from congressional appropriators.

A shared provision among all

the drafts is a 4.6% pay hike for service members and civilian personnel, the largest in 20 years. House lawmakers also agreed to give additional 2.4% bonuses to troops earning less than \$45,000 per year to counter the effects of inflation that rose to 9% last month. The bonus amounts to a maximum of \$90 per month and would be paid from January to December 2023.

"I am especially proud that this year's bill supports those who defend our country by giving them the compensation they deserve," Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith, D-Wash., said in a statement.

In addition to wage hikes, the bill also provides relief for housing and other everyday costs and covers up to \$2,000 in pet moving costs for overseas military moves.

The White House on Tuesday shot down proposed extra pay for sailors working on ships undergoing lengthy overhauls and

soldiers in the Arctic due to "sufficient" existing law for special duty pay. But those provisions still made it into the legislation, championed by lawmakers alarmed by suicides tied to Alaskan bases and the USS George Washington.

Other measures targeting suicide prevention, including a six-year pilot program to provide troops with safes, locks or other devices to store their personal firearms, are also attached to the bill.

"We have an obligation to address this extraordinary rate of suicide in the military," Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., said this week on the House floor. "This is one modest step."

Speier also successfully lobbied to eliminate Tricare insurance co-pays for contraception for one year, giving women service members and their families benefits long available to civilians under the 2010 Affordable Care Act. An effort to expand troop access to abortions at military medical facilities

failed to clear the Rules Committee for a floor vote.

Another health care provision put forward by Democrat Andy Kim of New Jersey and Republican Trent Kelly of Mississippi will provide all members of the National Guard and reservists access to the same no-fee dental care as active-duty troops.

Other measures are dedicated to improving access to child care and the quality of military child development centers.

One provision would help families on waitlists for on-base care by paying them up to \$400 more per month to afford civilian child care. Another would provide financial support for extended family members who take on child care duties during a move to a different duty station.

Lawmakers also agreed to raise pay and improve benefits at child development centers to attract and retain employees as well as invest in the long-term upkeep of the facilities.

House lays out demands for DOD on Russia, China

The Washington Post

House lawmakers on Thursday approved an \$840 billion plan to direct Pentagon policy and spending in the year ahead, lending strong bipartisan support to legislation that aims to help the United States better compete with China technologically, address mistakes made during last year's withdrawal from Afghanistan, improve scrutiny of the military aid supplied to Ukraine and target a rise in domestic extremism.

The vote was 329 to 101.

The legislation, considered one of the few "must-pass" bills Congress authors each year, is yet to be reconciled with the

Senate's version.

The text of that document has not been made public and is expected to reshape how much money will be directed toward the Defense Department.

Implementing the defense bill will also be subject to congressional appropriations, which have not been finalized — and may not cover all of the programs authorized in the legislation.

The House bill devotes considerable attention to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, China's breakthroughs in hypersonic weapons and other cutting-edge military technology, and rampant inflation that is battering

the U.S. economy.

It also directs military leaders to analyze the dangers posed by individuals in uniform who espouse white supremacist beliefs, neo-Nazism and antisemitism. The legislation specifically mentions the Proud Boys, a far-right group whose prominent role in last year's attack on the U.S. Capitol has been an intense focus of federal prosecutors and the House select committee running a parallel investigation.

The bipartisan endorsement reflected in Thursday's vote did not accompany every provision. For instance, all Republicans voted against a measure requiring

a report to Congress on efforts to combat threats posed by white supremacy and neo-Nazism in the ranks.

Lawmakers also ordered the Pentagon to implement within six months better accounting practices for all of the U.S. military assistance being sent to Ukraine, and instructed the Department of Defense Inspector General to report biannually on the U.S. response to Russian aggression.

On China, lawmakers backed measures regarding its expanding global footprint and to cement U.S. relations with Taiwan, including studies to enhance military cooperation.

Panel subpoenas agents' deleted texts

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House committee investigating the U.S. Capitol attack subpoenaed the Secret Service on Friday night for text messages agents reportedly deleted around Jan. 6, 2021, as the panel probes Donald Trump's actions at the time of the deadly siege.

Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., said in a statement that the committee understands the messages had been "erased." Thompson outlined an aggressive timeline for production of the documents by Tuesday.

"The USSS erased text messages from January 5 and 6, 2021, as part of a 'device-replacement program,'" Thompson said late Friday.

He said the panel "seeks the relevant text messages, as well as any after action reports that have been issued in any and all

divisions of the USSS pertaining or relating in any way to the events of January 6, 2021."

The Secret Service did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The subpoenas come hours after the nine-member panel received a closed briefing from the watchdog for Department of Homeland Security, which oversees the Secret Service. The watchdog briefed the lawmakers about his finding that the Secret Service deleted texts from around Jan. 6, according to two people familiar with the matter.

Thompson, the Democratic chairman of the House Jan. 6 panel, told the Associated Press on Friday that the committee is taking a deeper look at whether records may have been lost. "There have been some conflicting positions on the matter," the Mississippi lawmaker said.

The private briefing was confirmed by

two people familiar with the matter who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity to discuss it.

The Secret Service insists proper procedures were followed. Agency spokesman Anthony Guglielmi said, "The insinuation that the Secret Service maliciously deleted text messages following a request is false. In fact, the Secret Service has been fully cooperating with the OIG in every respect — whether it be interviews, documents, emails, or texts."

He said the Secret Service had started to reset its mobile devices to factory settings in January 2021 "as part of a pre-planned, three-month system migration." In that process, some data was lost.

The inspector general first requested the electronic communications on Feb. 26, "after the migration was well under way," Guglielmi said.

Long Island has 5 shark attacks in 2 weeks

The Washington Post

Five shark attacks have been reported in the past two weeks off Long Island, including two within hours Wednesday, a dramatic increase in shark encounters that officials there said may represent a "new normal."

Four of the reported attacks took place on Fire Island in Suffolk County, including two at the popular Smith Point Beach and two near the village of Ocean Beach. The fifth was reported on Jones Beach Island in neighboring Nassau County.

None of the victims were seriously injured, and the sharks sighted were estimat-

ed to be four to five feet in length, officials said.

Shark sightings have been increasing off U.S. coasts, which scientists attribute to successful conservation efforts that have restored populations closer to historical levels. Still, the recent spate of attacks was highly unusual — there were only 47 confirmed unprovoked attacks nationwide in 2021, according to the Florida Museum of Natural History's International Shark Attack File.

"This is not something that isprecedented in any way in our history here in Suffolk County," Suffolk County Executive Steven

Bellone said at a news conference Thursday. "Prior to July 3, we had not had a recorded shark bite at [Smith Point Beach] since it had opened, during beach hours, back in 1959."

Bellone said the county is deploying drones and increased lifeguard patrols to monitor the waters, acknowledging that the uptick may represent the "new normal."

"The idea of more frequent contact with these kind of sharks may be what we will be coming to expect," Bellone said at a separate news conference Wednesday, ahead of the fifth attack.

Lawyer tells AG: Stop giving false info about doctor

AP/Report for America

INDIANAPOLIS — A lawyer on Friday emailed the Indiana state's attorney general asking him to stop spreading false or misleading information about an Indianapolis doctor who performed an abortion in June on a 10-year-old rape victim from Ohio.

Attorney Kathleen DeLaney sent the "cease and desist" letter to Indiana Republican Attorney General Todd Rokita on behalf of obstetrician-gynecologist Caitlin

Bernard, who performed a medical abortion on the girl.

The letter says Rokita's statements Wednesday on Fox News "cast Dr. Bernard in a false light and allege misconduct in her profession." DeLaney said the doctor could file a defamation claim against Rokita if he does not comply.

Rokita told Fox that his office was investigating whether Bernard violated medical privacy laws by talking about the victim to

the Indianapolis Star, and he said she failed to notify authorities about suspected child abuse.

Records obtained by The Associated Press and other local media show Bernard submitted the report July 2, which is within the state's required three-day reporting period for an abortion performed on a girl younger than 16.

"We are especially concerned that, given the controversial political context of the statements,

such inflammatory accusations have the potential to incite harassment or violence from the public which could prevent Dr. Bernard, an Indiana licensed physician, from providing care to her patients safely," the letter states.

"Like any correspondence, it will be reviewed if and when it arrives. Regardless, no false or misleading statements have been made," Kelly Stevenson, a spokesperson in Rokita's office, said via email.

Biden: US won't 'walk away' from Mideast

Associated Press

JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia — President Joe Biden, speaking at a summit of Arab leaders, said Saturday that the United States “will not walk away” from the Middle East as he tries to ensure stability in a volatile part of the world and boost the global flow of oil to reverse rising gas prices.

His remarks, delivered at the Gulf Cooperation Council on the final leg of a four-day Middle East tour, came amid concerns about Iran’s nuclear ambitions and support for militants in the region.

“We will not walk away and leave a vacuum to be filled by China, Russia or Iran,” Biden said. “We will seek to build on this moment with active, principled, American leadership.”

Although U.S. forces continue to target terrorists in the region and remain deployed at bases throughout the Middle East,

Biden suggested he was turning a page after the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Today, I’m proud to be able to say that the era of land wars in the region, wars that involved huge numbers of American forces, is not under way,” he said.

He announced \$1 billion in U.S. aid to alleviate hunger in the region and he pressed his counterparts, many of whom lead repressive governments, to ensure human rights, including women’s rights, and allow their citizens to speak openly.

“The future will be won by the countries that unleash the full potential of their populations,” Biden said, and that includes allowing people to “question and criticize leaders without fear of reprisal.”

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, convened the summit, which gave him an opportunity

to showcase his country’s heavyweight role in the Mideast. He also hinted that the kingdom could pump more oil than it is currently, something Biden is hoping to see when an existing production deal among OPEC+ member countries expires in September.

Earlier, Biden met individually with the leaders of Iraq, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, some of whom he hadn’t sat down with since taking office in January 2021.

Biden also met with King Abdullah II of Jordan. The White House later announced that the U.S. was extending and expanding financial assistance to the country, to no less than \$1.45 billion per year.

The summit in the Red Sea port city of Jeddah was an opportunity for Biden to demonstrate his commitment to the region after spending most of his presidency focused on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and China’s growing influence in Asia.

Mexican forces capture infamous drug lord

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — Infamous drug lord Rafael Caro Quintero, who was behind the killing of a U.S. DEA agent in 1985, was captured Friday by Mexican forces nearly a decade after walking out of a Mexican prison and returning to drug trafficking, Mexico’s navy said.

Caro Quintero was arrested after a search dog named “Max” found him hiding in brush in the town of San Simon in Sinaloa state during a joint operation by the navy and Attorney General’s Office, a navy statement said. The site was in the mountains near Sinaloa’s border with the northern border state of Chihuahua.

Mexico’s national arrest registry listed the time of Caro Quintero’s arrest as around midday. There were two pending arrest orders for him as well as an extradition request from the U.S. government.

Mexico’s Attorney General’s Office said in a statement late Friday that Caro Quintero was arrested for extradition and would be held at the maximum security Altiplano prison about 50 miles west of Mexico City.

Caro Quintero had walked free in 2013 after 28 years in prison when a court overturned his 40-year sentence for the 1985 kidnapping and killing of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agent Enrique “Kiki” Camarena. The brutal murder marked

a low point in U.S.-Mexico relations.

The former leader of the Guadalajara cartel, he had since returned to drug trafficking and unleashed bloody turf battles in the northern Mexico border state of Sonora.

He was on the FBI’s most wanted list, with a \$20 million reward for his capture through the State Department’s Narcotics Rewards Program. He was added to the FBI’s top 10 most wanted list in 2018.

He was one of the primary suppliers of heroin, cocaine and marijuana to the United States in the late 1970s. He blamed Camarena for a raid on a marijuana plantation in 1984.

6 people die in pileup caused by Montana dust storm

Associated Press

Six people have died after a dust storm fueled by wind gusts topping 60 mph caused a pileup Friday evening on Interstate 90 in Montana, authorities said.

Twenty-one vehicles crashed, and Montana Highway Patrol Sgt. Jay Nelson said authorities believe the weather was the cause.

“It appears as though there was heavy winds, causing a dust storm with zero visibility,” he said.

While the highway patrol did not have an

immediate count of the number of injuries, Nelson said additional ambulances had to be called in from Billings to help.

Gov. Greg Gianforte said on Twitter: “I’m deeply saddened by the news of a mass casualty crash near Hardin. Please join me in prayer to lift up the victims and their loved ones. We’re grateful to our first responders for their service.”

Montana Attorney General Austin Knudsen, who oversees the highway patrol, said in a statement: “The Montana Highway Patrol is on the scene with other first respon-

ders and investigating the incident. We will release more information as it becomes available and is appropriate out of respect of the lives lost and their loved ones.

“My prayers are with everyone affected by the tragic events during the dust storm in Big Horn County today,” Knudsen added.

The incident happened 3 miles west of Hardin. A video from The Billings Gazette showed hundreds of tractor-trailers, campers and cars backed up for miles along the two eastbound lanes of the interstate.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man gets 70 years for 2020 crossbow slaying

LA SHREVEPORT — A 26-year-old Louisiana man was been sentenced to 70 in years in prison for killing a man with a crossbow in 2020.

Daniel Ralph Haire had been convicted in May of manslaughter in the death of Rodney Christopher Nordby, 33, the Caddo Parish District Attorney's Office said.

Because Judge Chris Victory sentenced him as a habitual offender, Haire could have been sentenced to up to 80 years. Victory said Haire will not be eligible for probation, parole or a suspended sentence.

During an interview, Haire said he shot Nordby with the crossbow during an argument after inviting him to his home.

State troopers pursue 9-year-old driver

NC KNIGHTDALE — State troopers in North Carolina pursued a 9-year-old behind the wheel of a vehicle east of the state capital, the North Carolina State Highway Patrol said.

Patrol spokesman Sgt. Christopher Knox said troopers were alerted that a 9-year-old had "taken a motor vehicle" and was driving on Old Milburnie Road in Knightdale, east of Raleigh, The News & Observer of Raleigh reported.

Troopers spotted the vehicle and began to follow it, the patrol said. The young driver failed to stop for emergency equipment and went off the road, hitting the curb and a manhole before coming to a stop.

The child was not injured, but

was taken to a local hospital for evaluation. Knox said the patrol isn't seeking charges.

Man charged with painting swastikas

IL ELMHURST — A suburban Chicago man has been charged with spray-painting swastikas on several homes and motor vehicles, authorities said.

Joel Jexie, 25, of Elmhurst has been charged with three counts of hate crime and one count of criminal damage to property, DuPage County State's Attorney Robert Berlin and Elmhurst Interim Police Chief Michael McLean said.

Elmhurst police had received a call regarding vandalism and officers observed swastikas painted on two garage doors of a home and on a car, Berlin and McLean said.

Elmhurst police officers received another call regarding a swastika that was spray-painted on an SUV.

Investigators identified Jexie as a suspect in both cases as well as an April incident in which a swastika was spray-painted on a home, Berlin and McLean said. Jexie was taken into custody without incident, they said.

Veterans' families get back lost memorabilia

WV CHARLESTON — Medals and memorabilia that were once lost or abandoned were returned to the families of West Virginia veterans who served in World War II, Vietnam and Korea.

The items belonging to 13 veterans had been turned over to the State Treasury Depart-

ment's Unclaimed Property Division after they were found in safe deposit boxes.

State Treasurer Riley Moore said it's something that his department sees fairly often.

But previously, when families became aware of the memorabilia, they had to go through a lengthy process to settle with banks and notarize paperwork to get it back.

A law passed earlier this year allows the state to return items to their owners and settle fees with the bank for them.

Fire at firehouse damaging trucks

MS PEARL RIVER COUNTY — A volunteer fire department in a Mississippi community lost the use of three trucks when its own station went up in flames.

WLOX TV reported that the fire happened at the Nicholson Volunteer Fire Department station. Five neighboring firefighting agencies assisted in fighting the blaze.

Three trucks were heavily damaged, according to the TV station. And a county press release says several other pieces of key firefighting equipment were destroyed in the fire.

Former Nicholson fire chief Bobby Robbins estimated the damage at \$1 million and said it could take around 100 days to have the equipment replaced.

The cause was not immediately known.

Man out on bond charged with murder

MI HARPER WOODS — A man charged with attacking his girlfriend in June

now is accused of killing her and another man, two days after he posted bond and was released from a Detroit-area jail.

"This is the court's worst nightmare. ... The witness has been killed after the defendant was placed on bond, given the benefit of being placed on bond with house arrest," Judge Kenneth King said.

Welch, 23, had been released from the Wayne County jail and ordered to wear an electronic tether, WDIV-TV reported.

Zlayiah Frazier, 22, and Robert Bray Jr., 70, were killed at Welch's Harper Woods home, police said. Welch's mother was stabbed in the back.

Welch is charged with murder, attempted murder, arson and other crimes.

Stolen goods found in homeless camp bunker

CA SAN JOSE — Six people have been arrested in San Jose after officers discovered an underground bunker at a homeless encampment with \$100,000 of stolen power tools, weapons and other goods, police said.

Officers recovered power tools, three hunting shotguns, ammunition and three pickup trucks that were used to transport the haul to a bunker near Coyote Creek in San Jose after it was stolen from a nearby business, San Jose police said in a statement.

Images from authorities showed that the bunker had wooden beams, walls and a ceiling and electricity extension cords that police said appeared to be "plugged into somebody else's source."

— From Associated Press

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Rocker ready for his 2nd MLB draft

Associated Press

TROY, N.Y. — Kumar Rocker is ready for a second go-round in the MLB Draft.

A year after he was the lone first-round pick to not sign with a team, the hard-throwing right-hander and former Vanderbilt star is fresh from a brief professional tuneup that has him on track to be selected again as early as the first round when the draft begins on Sunday in Los Angeles.

Rocker was drafted No. 10 overall last year by the New York Mets. But the sides failed to reach an agreement by the August deadline because the Mets had concerns over the health of his right arm.

Rocker's agent, Scott Boras, confirmed that 10 months ago Rocker had "non-pitching-related minor surgery" on his right arm.

The 6-foot-5, 245-pound Rocker

emerged from months of training privately when he signed a minor league contract with the Tri-City ValleyCats of the independent Frontier League in mid-May. He notched his first professional victory two weeks ago, allowing two hits and one unearned run in five innings against the Empire State Greys, a travel team that had only two wins in 41 games after the loss.

It was the 22-year-old Rocker's fifth and final start for the ValleyCats before being deactivated to prepare for this year's draft. He posted a 1.35 ERA with 32 strikeouts and four walks and gave up 11 hits in 20 innings. His fastball clocked as high as 99 mph and was consistently in that range during his stint with Tri-City to go along with a nasty curveball and slider.

"I think I have a better understanding of pro hitters, just growing up a little bit on the mound," Rocker said after his final ap-

pearance for Tri-City.

Three years ago, Rocker led Vanderbilt to a College World Series title as a freshman. He was a three-year standout and posted a 2.89 ERA in 42 games (39 starts). He also was named MVP of the College World Series, racking up 44 strikeouts in 28 postseason innings, including a 19-strikeout no-hitter in an NCAA Super Regional against Duke. His ERA was a microscopic 0.96 in four postseason starts.

He opted not to go back to college after not signing with the Mets, training instead on his own. The short stint with the ValleyCats allowed him to get back in the groove of live action.

"He's the real deal," Tri-City manager Pete Incaviglia said. "It's not just his stuff that makes him, it's his will to compete. He loves to compete. He loves to take the ball every day. Those guys are special."

LIV rebels are in the running for British Open lead

Associated Press

ST. ANDREWS, Scotland — Golf's breakaway bunch have turned, it seems, into a band of brothers.

The rebels who have created a major rift in the world of golf by defecting to the Saudi-funded LIV series are working together for a common cause at the British Open this week.

"Everybody, it feels like, is against us," said Talor Gooch, one of the 24 LIV golfers playing at St. Andrews. "And that's OK. It's kind of banded us together, I think."

That 24 has been whittled down to an 11-strong group who will play the weekend at the home of golf.

Five were sitting in the top 20 after the second round Friday. Two were in the top 10. One, possibly the biggest fish in LIV's pool in Dustin Johnson, is in fifth place and four shots off the lead, through 13 holes on Saturday.

There remains a distinct possibility — much to the chagrin of the R&A, no doubt — that a player from the LIV tour could

be lifting the claret jug on Sunday evening.

The prospect was put to Martin Slumbers, the R&A chief executive, on the eve of the event and he said he would "welcome them onto the 18th green." Yet minutes earlier, Slumbers had delivered a withering verdict on the breakaway tour, describing it as a money grab that threatens golf's merit-based culture cultivated over centuries.

Such has been the R&A's desire to stop the LIV saga from disrupting the 150th British Open that the tour's CEO, Greg Norman, was told to not attend the pre-tournament dinner at St. Andrews for past champions. Norman is a two-winner winner. Phil Mickelson, the 2013 champion and now a LIV player, also didn't attend the dinner, saying the R&A told him the club didn't think it was a good idea he went.

LIV players weren't put up for official pre-tournament media duties, either.

There have been noticeable jeers for Ian Poulter, another of the defectors, as he hit his open-

ing tee shots in both of his rounds — even if he claimed to not have heard them. Random barbs have been heard from the galleries about the enormous sums of money taken by players to leave both the PGA Tour and the European tour.

Johnson said he has been able to put any negativity and criticism to one side.

"I don't read. I don't look at it," the former No. 1 said. "It doesn't bother me because, obviously, everyone has their own opinion and I have mine, and the only one I care about is mine."

Another LIV player, Lee Westwood, chose to blame the media for "stoking up" the matter, which has shone a light on Saudi Arabia's attempts to improve its image through sportswashing.

"I think the general public just want to go out there and see good golf," Westwood said. Johnson, who shot 5-under 67 on Friday to move to 9 under for the week, is contending at a major for the first time this year.

Through Friday, Gooch was the other LIV player in the top

10 — he was tied for eighth at 7 under — as he looks to improve on his best finish in seven previous appearances at a major, a tie for 14th at the Masters in April.

Also in the top 20 was Sadom Kaewkanjana, who was tied for 12th at 6 under, and both Westwood and Abraham Ancer, a further stroke back in a tie for 18th.

The fact that a quarter of the top 20 are LIV players might be used by the rebel series to push its status as a tour of some repute, as opposed to a rich man's playground for the unmotivated or those past their best.

"The credentials of everyone speaks for themselves," Gooch said. "It's obviously cool for me to see other guys that are out there playing well."

"We've caught a lot of flak for what we've done here recently. I think one thing that cannot be questioned is the quality of players that are there."

Among the other LIV players making the weekend were Sergio Garcia, Poulter and Reed, who is wearing a LIV-branded cap this week.

LaJoie out to prove Atlanta was no fluke

Associated Press

LOUDON, N.H. — Ten years ago, Corey LaJoie won more races in a NASCAR regional series season than Chase Elliott. LaJoie even won more races that season than Kyle Larson. LaJoie finished as runner-up — just 16 points back — to Larson in the season points standings.

Larson wrapped up the 2012 NASCAR K&N Pro Series East championship in the same race a 16-year-old rookie named Tyler Reddick made his debut.

All drivers with so much promise.

Check it out a decade later: Larson is the reigning NASCAR Cup Series champion and widely considered the best pure driver in the sport. Elliott won the 2020 Cup title and has a lock on the most popular driver award. Reddick just won his first Cup race and is a rising star so in demand that 23XI Racing this week signed him to a deal that doesn't start until 2024.

Then there's LaJoie.

The 30-year-old driver spent most of his career scuffling through driving for underfunded or upstart teams and had only one top-five finish over his first 182 career starts. But in start No. 183 Sunday at Atlanta

Motor Speedway, LaJoie led the field from the inside lane on a restart with three laps left in the race and his first career win in sight. Elliott slid up the banking to cut off his challenger. LaJoie ran out of room and smashed the outside wall. He settled for 21st, a number that hardly shows how agonizingly close he was to beating Elliott for the win and taking the checkered flag for the low-budget Spire Motorsports team.

"I wish I'd been sitting here looking at the trophy all week," LaJoie said. "I know that you're only as good as your last race, and you roll right into Loudon and then everybody forgets about it. For me, it's a lot of confidence. Because it's one thing yourself that you can do it if you're in the right opportunity over the last four, five years. A lot of it sometimes feels fabricated, whether it's to yourself, whether your beliefs are to be able to drive a race car, you start to question if you can do that, if you're ever going to get the chance that we had on Sunday afternoon to win a Cup race."

LaJoie led 19 laps in Atlanta, a modest total for most star drivers, but consider he's now led 46

his entire Cup career. Is he a one-weekend wonder or can LaJoie — buried in 31st in the points standings — race for a win Sunday at New Hampshire Motor Speedway? Well, his average finish is 29.6 in seven career starts. LaJoie, who has spent years trying to find a competitive race team to prove he can contend in elite equipment, now has to hope the near-miss in Atlanta was a springboard toward that first win and not just one more lost opportunity he won't sniff again.

"I think the biggest feeling I took away over the weekend was just confidence in the fact that I can do it and Spire is capable of doing it, on occasion," LaJoie said.

On occasion. Not exactly a ringing endorsement for a race team that lucked into one rain-shortened win in 2019 but otherwise has six top-10 finishes in 182 starts. LaJoie conceded his No. 7 Chevrolet team needed a flawless race most weekends just to finish inside the top 20.

Ty game

Ty Dillon is done at GMS Motorsports after only one season.

Dillon tweeted on Friday "we have mutually agreed to go our

separate ways" after a season in which he has yet to finish better than 10th. The team sent a similar tweet that read it was "focused on strong runs and getting the No. 42 Chevy Camaro to victory lane."

Dillon is 27th in points and winless in 185 career Cup starts.

The team did not announce a replacement for Dillon in 2023.

Go tally the votes

The tribe has spoken. Julia Landauer made her Xfinity Series debut Saturday at New Hampshire.

The 30-year-old Landauer, a 2012 contestant on "Survivor: Caramoan," has struggled like many prospects to find her way to race in one of NASCAR's three national series. She started racing go-karts when she was 10 years old and never stopped racing through college and found rides throughout the world, even the European NASCAR Whelen Series.

So what has kept her going through the years?

"Maybe a little craziness, maybe a little stubbornness, maybe not wanting to find other types of work," she said. "It's so exciting for me to make all the pieces of racing work."

30 women settle Watson-related claims against Texans

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Thirty women who had accused the Houston Texans of turning a blind eye to allegations that their former star quarterback Deshaun Watson was sexually assaulting and harassing women during massage sessions have settled their legal claims against the team, their attorney said Friday.

The terms of the settlements between each of the women and the Texans are confidential, said attorney Tony Buzbee.

In separate lawsuits, 24 women accused Watson of exposing himself, touching them with his penis or kissing them against their will during massage appointments while he played for Houston. One woman alleged Watson forced her to

perform oral sex. Last month, Buzbee announced 20 of those 24 lawsuits have been settled.

In a statement, Texans owners Janice McNair and Hannah and Cal McNair said while the team did not have any knowledge of Watson's alleged misconduct, they were "shocked and deeply saddened" when they first learned about the accusations and chose to resolve the claims against the team "amicably."

"This is not an admission of any wrongdoing, but instead a clear stand against any form of sexual assault and misconduct. We hope that today's resolution will provide some form of closure to the parties involved, our fans and the Houston community at large. As an orga-

nization, we will now turn our focus to the future and doing what we can to ensure respect for all," the McNairs said in their statement.

In the lawsuit filed last month against the team, a woman accused the Texans and some of their employees of having been told or being aware of Watson's troubling behavior and "known tendency to push boundaries during massage sessions."

The lawsuit alleged the Texans provided Watson with various resources, including rooms at a Houston hotel, massage tables and a nondisclosure agreement the women were told to sign, that allowed the quarterback "to further his misconduct with women."

Kershaw nearly perfect against Angels

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Clayton Kershaw took a perfect game through the seventh and finished with eight scoreless innings of one-hit ball in the Los Angeles Dodgers' 9-1 victory over the Los Angeles Angels on Friday night.

After retiring the Angels' first 21 batters in order, Kershaw (7-2) fell six outs short of his first perfect game and the second in Dodgers franchise history when Luis Rengifo lined a clean double to left leading off the eighth.

The Dodgers' left-hander finished the eighth inning strong and got the last of several standing ovations from a sellout crowd of 44,648 at Angel Stadium.

The three-time Cy Young Award winner struck out six and threw just 89 pitches in his eight innings. Kershaw threw the only no-hitter of his career back in 2014 against Colorado. Justin Turner had three hits, drove in four runs and also made the first of three spectacular defensive plays by the Dodgers' infield to keep Kershaw's perfect game intact. Will

Smith went 4-for-4 with a walk, while Hanser Alberto had a two-run triple in the fifth inning.

Rays 5, Orioles 4: Baltimore's winning streak ended at 10 when Christian Bethancourt hit his first home run and host Tampa Bay rallied for a victory.

The winning streak was the Orioles' longest in a single season since they won 13 straight in 1999.

Mariners 8, Rangers 3: Robbie Ray struck out 12 without a walk over 6⅓ innings, rookie All-Star center fielder Julio Rodríguez hit a grand slam and visiting Seattle extended its longest winning streak in more than two decades to 12 games.

The only time the Mariners had a longer winning streak was their team-record 15 in row in 2001, their last playoff season. Atlanta has the only longer streak this season with 14 straight wins.

Red Sox 5, Yankees 4 (11): Xander Bogaerts slid home on Michael King's wild pitch with two outs in the 11th inning, and visiting Boston recovered from a meltdown in the ninth to beat New York for its third win in 11

games.

All three of those Red Sox wins have come against the Yankees, who have the best record in the majors.

White Sox 6, Twins 2: Tim Anderson hit the go-ahead home run in the fourth inning and Adam Engel tacked on a three-run shot in the seventh, powering visiting Chicago to its fourth straight win.

Michael Kopech (3-6) finished five innings for his first win in eight starts.

Giants 8, Brewers 5: Mike Yastrzemski hit a walk-off grand slam off major league saves leader Josh Hader for his third homer of the ninth inning, and host San Francisco rallied from a three-run deficit.

Phillies 2, Marlins 1: J.T. Realmuto had three hits against his former team, including a tie-breaking double in the seventh inning off All-Star Sandy Alcántara, and visiting Philadelphia snapped a four-game skid.

Padres 5, Diamondbacks 3: A fired-up Yu Darvish struck out nine in seven innings and host San Diego beat Arizona.

Blue Jays 8, Royals 1: Teoscar Hernández and Matt Chap-

man hit three-run home runs, Alek Manoah snapped a three-start winless streak with seven strong innings and host Toronto beat depleted Kansas City.

Guardians 6, Tigers 5: Josh Naylor drove in two runs and Andrés Giménez delivered the go-ahead single in the seventh inning, lifting host Cleveland past Detroit.

Braves 8, Nationals 4: Austin Riley, Orlando Arcia and Adam Duvall homered as visiting Atlanta sent Washington to its eighth straight loss.

Rockies 13, Pirates 2: Brendan Rodgers homered and drove in four runs, C.J. Cron hit his 21st home run and German Marquez became the second Colorado pitcher to reach 900 career strikeouts in a win at Pittsburgh.

Cardinals 7, Reds 3: Nolan Gorman hit a tiebreaking homer and Brendan Donovan drove in three runs as host St. Louis halted a two-game skid with a win over Cincinnati.

Athletics 5, Astros 1: Skye Bolt homered with a career-high three RBIs, Cole Irvin pitched six sharp innings and Oakland won at Houston.

MLB to pay minor leaguers \$185 million to settle suit

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Major League Baseball agreed to pay minor leaguers \$185 million to settle a federal lawsuit alleging violations of minimum wage laws, a case that progressed through the courts for eight years without reaching a trial.

An early estimate is that perhaps 23,000 players could share the money with an average payment of \$5,000 to \$5,500, according to a filing by Brian Kriegler, the players' damages expert. More precise totals will not be calculated until notice is given to eligible players.

The deal, announced May 10, was filed Friday with the U.S. District Court in San Francisco. Chief Magistrate Judge Joseph C. Spero must approve the settlement, a step that usually is routine in this type of case.

"This settlement is a monumental step for minor league players toward a fair and just compensation system," Garrett Broshuis, the players' lead lawyer and a former minor league pitcher, said in a statement. "I've seen first-hand the financial struggle players face while earning poverty-level wages — or no wages at all — in pursuit

of their major league dream."

If approved, \$120,197,300 will be split among the players, \$55.5 million will go to the players' lawyers and up to \$5.5 million will cover reimbursement costs of the suit.

Also, \$450,000 will be for the costs of administering the settlement, \$637,000 will go to incentive awards for the player representatives in the suit, \$400,000 for a contingency fund and \$2,315,000 for a payment under the California Private Attorney General Act, which allows penalties for violating state labor code.

MLB told the court that it did

not oppose approval of the settlement.

"We are only in the second year of a major overhaul of the 100-year-old player development system and have made great strides to improve the quality of life for minor league players," MLB said in a statement. "We are proud that minor league players already receive significant benefits, including free housing, quality health care, multiple meals per day, college tuition assistance for those who wish to continue their education and over \$450 million in annual signing bonuses for first-year players."