

## NATO preps to defend against Russia

*Associated Press*

BRUSSELS — Russia's armed forces are bruised but by no means beaten in the war in Ukraine, a top NATO military officer said Monday, as he laid out the biggest revamp to the organization's military plans since the Cold War should Moscow dare to widen the conflict.

"They might not be 11 feet tall, but they are certainly not 2 feet tall," the chair of the NATO Military Committee, Adm. Rob Bauer, told reporters. "So, we should never underestimate the Russians and their ability to bounce back."

President Joe Biden and his NATO counterparts are set to endorse a major shakeup of the alliance's planning system at a summit in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius next week.

NATO, as an organization, does not provide weapons or ammunition to Ukraine. It's sought to avoid being dragged into a wider war with nuclear-armed Russia. At the same time, it is massively reinforcing the security of member countries near Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

Around 40,000 troops are on standby from Estonia in the north down to Romania on the Black Sea. About 100 aircraft take to the skies in that territory each day, and a total of 27 warships are operating in the Baltic and Mediterranean seas. Those numbers are set to rise.

Under its new plans, NATO aims to have up to 300,000 troops ready to move to its eastern flank within 30 days. The plans divide its territory into three

zones — the high north and Atlantic area, a zone north of the Alps, and another in southern Europe.

Bauer said that NATO's new planning is based on the strength of the Russian army before President Vladimir Putin launched the war on Ukraine almost 17 months ago. He said the war has depleted Russia's army, but not its navy or air force.

Of Russia's ground forces, around "94% is now engaged in the war in Ukraine," Bauer said.

"What we see in general is that the Russians are careful around NATO. They are not for seeking a conflict with NATO. I think that is a sign that they are very, very busy," he said. "In the land domain, I don't think they have a lot of forces available to do anything to anyone else."

"But we are convinced that the Russians are going to reconstitute," he said. "We will continue to look at them as a serious threat, in the maritime, and in the air especially, and in space, they are still very, very, capable, let alone of course in nuclear."

A revolt by Wagner mercenaries in Russia late last month raised deep security concerns in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland after a deal was reached for their leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, to be allowed to take refuge in Belarus.

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said that neighboring countries would face a heightened danger if the Wagner Group deploys its "serial killers" just over their border.

Vilnius lies about 22 miles from the Belarus border.

## US is weighing providing cluster bombs to Ukraine

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The United States is considering providing cluster munitions to Ukraine, the top American military officer said Friday.

Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the U.S. has been thinking about providing the munitions "for a long time." He noted that Russian troops are using them on the battlefield in Ukraine and that Ukrainian forces have received cluster bombs from other allies and have deployed the arms.

Milley said at the National Press Club that discussions are continuing. "The Ukrainians have asked for it, other European countries have provided some of that, the Russians are using it," Milley said. "There's a decision making process ongoing."

He also dismissed concerns that Ukraine's counteroffensive is going too slowly. Milley said he thought the initial campaign would take six weeks to 10 weeks. "It's going to be very difficult. It's going to be very long," Milley said. "No one should have any illusions about any of that."

Cluster bombs are weapons that open in the air, releasing submunitions, or "bomblets," that are dispersed over a large area and are intended to wreak destruction on multiple targets at once. The bombs can be delivered by planes, artillery and missiles, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross. The "bomblets" have a high rate of failure to explode, up to 40% in some recent conflicts, according to the ICRC.

Proponents of banning cluster

bombs say they kill indiscriminately and endanger civilians long after their use. Groups have raised alarms about Russia's use of the munitions in Ukraine.

It is not clear how America's NATO allies would view the U.S. providing cluster bombs to Ukraine and whether the issue might prove divisive for their largely united support of Kyiv. More than two-thirds of the 30 countries in the alliance are signatories of a 2010 convention on cluster munitions banning their use, production or stockpiling. The U.S., Russia and Ukraine are not signatories to the cluster bomb ban.

Last month, Laura Cooper, a deputy assistant secretary of defense focusing on Russia and Ukraine, testified to Congress that the Pentagon has assessed that

such munitions would help Kyiv press through Russia's dug-in positions.

While most Western officials will not publicly say Ukraine's counteroffensive is moving too slowly, there is growing sentiment that Ukraine needs to seize on the weather, conditions on the ground and any impact that last weekend's revolt may have on Russian military cohesion to bolster their advance.

While the U.S. has emphasized that the timing and place of Ukraine's efforts are solely its decision to make, there are concerns that Ukraine has not moved faster. For months the U.S. and Western allies have trained and equipped Ukrainian forces for the anticipated fight, yet many of those forces are not yet engaged in combat.

# Space Force looking to cement identity

*The Washington Post*

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — The uniforms resemble costumes from the television series “Battlestar Galactica,” and the logo is right out of Star Trek. Even the name given to its members, “guardians,” seems born of science fiction. But three years after it was established as the sixth branch of the U.S. armed forces, the U.S. Space Force is very much a reality.

It has a motto, “Sempra Supra” or “Always Above,” fitting for an agency whose future is outside Earth’s atmosphere. It has an official song, a short, melodic anthem about guardians “boldly reaching into space” that’s not as catchy as “The Army Goes Rolling Along.” It has a budget (\$26 billion last year, similar to NASA), bases across the country and a mission to transform the military’s relationship to the cosmos at a time when space has moved from being a peaceful commons to a crucial front in military conflict.

“We are very much clearly in the next chapter of the Space Force,” Gen. David Thompson, the vice chief of space operations, said during a recent event hosted by the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies. The mission of the Space Force now is to become an “enterprise that really makes sure that we’re ready to deliver warfighting capabilities.”

What that means in practice is still unclear: The Space Force remains one of the least understood arms of the federal government. Its culture and identity are still being molded, as its leaders push to set the department apart from the Air Force, Navy and Army by arguing that as a new, smaller service, it is free to do things differently. While the Air Force has more than 300,000 service members, there are only 13,000 guardians. Internally, Space Force officials are still debating its priorities, analysts have said: Is it to support warfighters on the ground? Or should it focus primarily on protecting assets in space? Or both? And despite all the talk of starting fresh and moving nimbly, the Space Force still exists within the rigid walls of the Pentagon, the world’s largest bureaucracy, which is often faulted for resisting change.

When Space Force Gen. Chance Saltzman, chief of space operations, introduced tenets to guide the force, he labeled them “A theory of success,” rather than a doctrine

because he wants them to continue to evolve.

“I’m proposing this theory so that people will debate with me,” he said during an event earlier this year at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. “So we’ll get better at figuring out what are the nuances that matter, what are the details that we to continue to refine.”

A glimpse of what the Space Force has become, and aspires to, can be seen on the Florida Space Coast, where the Space Age was born in the United States and where a new space era, driven largely by a growth in the private space industry, is taking hold.

Propelled largely by Elon Musk’s SpaceX, the number of launches in the Space coast has not only increased, but the topography of the place has also changed. Landing pads for SpaceX’s reusable rockets and historic launch sites — like pad 39A that launched the Apollo astronauts to the moon — are now in private hands.

The growth is remarkable. In 2021, 31 rockets blasted off from the facilities run by NASA and the Space Force. Last year, the number jumped to 57, and this year it’s expected to exceed 90.

With some thinking, that number will eventually exceed 200, 300 or even more, a top Space Force general decided he needed help managing the traffic. So last spring, Maj. Gen. Stephen Purdy, the commander of the 45th Space Wing, which oversees the base, arranged a meeting for a couple dozen of his staff at a place where many loathe to go but that is used to sending large numbers of vehicles into the sky at a regular cadence: Orlando International Airport.

During the visit to the Orlando airport, “our folks got a lot of good ideas,” he said in an interview in his office at Patrick Space Force Base. “Because these are people they don’t normally talk to. So they do things in a different way. They think a different way.”

What Purdy — and the Space Force as a whole — is trying to do is far more than just create airline-like operations. They are focused on redefining how the military uses space, and attempting to transform it into a domain where the U.S. can exert the kind of tactical dominance it now displays on land, air and sea.

That is easier said than done. Much of the military’s infrastructure in space was developed at a time when space was con-

sidered a peaceful place. Satellites, for example, were built to be big and robust and last for years, even decades, without interference. But then China and Russia showed that such fat targets were sitting ducks. China blasted a dead satellite with a missile strike in 2007, and Russia did it in 2021 — shows of force that shook the U.S. military leadership and polluted Earth orbit with dangerous debris for decades to come.

So the Space Force is pivoting, relying on constellations of small satellites that can be easily replaced and, to an increasing degree, maneuver.

That’s just one example of how the Space Force intends to ensure the U.S. maintains “space superiority,” as its leaders have often said, to protect the satellites the Defense Department relies on for warnings of incoming missiles, steering precision-guided munitions and surveilling both friendly and hostile forces.

The military is also working to harness solar energy in space, and then beam it to ground stations. Could the Space Force use that technology to beam power to remote areas to support soldiers on the ground?

Another idea: If the cadence of launches really does double or triple and the costs continue to come down, could the Space Force start using rockets to deliver cargo across the globe at a moment’s notice?

Soon there could be commercial space stations floating around in orbit. “Can we lease a room?” Purdy said. “Can we lease a module?”

The idea is to use space as if it were any other theater of war, with supply lines, logistical oversight and tactical awareness of what’s happening day in and day out. But all of that is more difficult in a weightless vacuum that extends well beyond the largest oceans.

“In no other military domain would you take a tank, or an aircraft or a jeep or a ship and gas it up and then say ... ‘OK, you will never refuel it again,’” Purdy had said earlier this year in an interview with the Aerospace Corp. The military also has the ability to repair tanks and jets. But the vehicles the Space Force depends on — satellites — are different. Refueling and servicing them are difficult and so every movement has to be considered carefully. “Am I going to need this fuel 10 years from now?” he said in the Aerospace Corp. interview.

# Challenge to split jury rejected in DOD appeal

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

The U.S. military's top appeals court has ruled that unanimous verdicts are unnecessary for criminal convictions, marking the latest twist in a flurry of cases that challenge the long-standing acceptance of split jury verdicts at courts-martial.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces on Thursday rejected the claim of an airman seeking to have his 2020 conviction on charges of attempted sexual abuse tossed out.

Lawyers for Master Sgt. Anthony Anderson argued that he has a constitutional right to unanimous verdict by a military jury.

The ruling upheld the Air Force Court of Criminal Appeals' finding that provisions of the Constitution related to due process, equal protection and unanimous jury verdicts don't invalidate split verdicts in mil-

itary courts.

"Nonunanimous verdicts have been a feature of American courts-martial since the founding of our nation's military justice system," the highest military appellate court wrote in its 5-0 decision.

The Uniform Code of Military Justice "expressly authorizes" conviction with at least three-fourths of the jury members present when the vote is taken, the court said.

Anderson was convicted on two specifications of attempted sexual abuse of a child during a court-martial at Ramstein Air Base in Germany.

The charges stemmed from online communications he had with a fictitious 13-year-old girl.

Anderson was sentenced to 12 months in prison, demotion to E-1 and a dishonorable discharge.

# Diversity, equity drive Navy Spouse of Year

*The (Norfolk, Va.) Virginian-Pilot*

"That's the sound of freedom," Tonya Murphy shouted, looking to the sky as a fixed-wing Naval aircraft flew overhead.

A Navy wife of 20 years and counting, Murphy has embraced military life—"the ups, the downs and the upside downs," Murphy said with a laugh.

Murphy was selected as the 2023 Navy Spouse of the Year by the Armed Forces Insurance program. Her husband, Cmdr. Scotty Murphy, serves as Submarine Squadron 6's Deputy for Readiness at Naval Station Norfolk.

"I love getting to represent the base. But representing the entire Navy — there are so many phenomenal spouses out there that are doing absolutely amazing things. There are moments when I am like, 'What am I doing that is any more ahhhhh than what they are doing,'" Murphy said, mimicking an angelic chorus.

Murphy has supported her husband through 11 permanent changes of duty stations and three sea tours, which took their family of five twice to Norfolk and Connecticut, as well as to Guam and Naples, Italy.

As the Navy Spouse of the Year, Tonya will attend town halls and speaking engagements across the country. Murphy's goal while in this role, she said, is to advocate for equity across all areas of military life.

"There are not a lot of Black officer spouses in the submarine force. It was not until my husband's executive officer tour — so 15 or 16 years in — that I was in a wardroom with another Black spouse. And it was so exciting," Murphy said.

"When we look at our military forces, it is such a diverse group of people. And as such, we should make sure that the resources we're offering, the answers we're giving, and the connections we're making, speaks to that diversity. Otherwise we are serving just a small portion of our community and kind of ignoring the rest, which then just leads to more of those feelings of being unseen," Murphy said.

In advocating for equity, Murphy said it is important for spouses to maintain their authentic self throughout their partner's military career.

"In military life, it can feel like we are an afterthought. The service member is who the focus is, and the spouse and the children just the dependents," Murphy said with an eye roll. "That can get hard, and I think that's where a lot of us spouses lose ourselves."

# Marine balances her service with dream of Olympic bobsled team

By ROBERT STEWART  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, U.S. Marine Corps logistics officer 1st Lt. Riley Tejcek still had a competitive itch.

Tejcek, a four-year softball player at George Washington University, had been a Marine for a few years when sports shut down, but she did not let that break her spirit. She took inspiration from Elana Meyers Taylor, another former GW softball player and five-time Olympic medalist, and broke into the world of bobsled.

Now, Tejcek, 26, is trying to become the first active-duty female Marine in the Olympics, but it will take a lot of training between now and 2026, when the Games will take over Milan, Italy.

"It takes everything I have for three hours of training a day, and then constantly competing against my peers, who don't have a job, who definitely aren't serving, who have that flexibility to be an athlete full time, when it's something I have to balance part time," Tejcek said last week at the Modern Day Marine Expo in Washington.

Tejcek is still trying to figure out that balance every day, she said.

"Something that I work really hard on is trying to have an active balance, over-communicate and train my men and women as a team to be able to know that, 'Hey, you guys can operate when I'm not there,'" Tejcek said. "How can I operate away from you guys, which is simulating almost a war situation, where I can't be eyes-on all the time."

In addition to her military and bobsleding endeavors, Tejcek also entered and won the 2023 Ms. Military Pageant. It was not about how contestants looked, she said, but what they were doing for the military community.

"I like to wear several different hats," Tejcek said. "I like to be able to put my hair up in a bun and be a Marine, right? I like to wear it down with the crown, and I like to flip back and tuck it under my helmet and just be a competitor. So everything that I do I want to compete. I want to be the best version of myself. I want to represent my country in all aspects and spheres and be a role model for young women."

# Rubio speaks out on UFO whistleblowers

*Miami Herald*

Multiple whistleblowers with access to restricted government information have claimed first-hand knowledge about U.S. activity involving UFOs, Sen. Marco Rubio said last week.

Rubio, vice chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, revealed in an interview with NewsNation that current and former government employees with high-level security clearances have “over the last couple of years” shared information with the committee involving what are now referred to as unidentified anomalous phenomena, or UAPs.

Rubio’s remarks come after intelligence whistleblower and former member of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency David Grusch told Congress that the U.S. government has been storing non-human spacecraft and has failed to disclose its activities. The House Oversight Committee has said it will investigate Grusch’s claims

and will hold a hearing led in part by Rep. Anna Paulina Luna of Florida.

Rubio, whose NewsNation interview was published last week, said Grusch’s claims were found to be credible by the inspector general of the intelligence community.

Grusch, according to published reports, is an Air Force veteran who previously served at the National Reconnaissance Office, which according to its website seeks to “develop, acquire, launch, and operate the nation’s space-based intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities to secure and expand the U.S. intelligence advantage.” The Debrief reported that from 2019 to 2021 Grusch worked as the reconnaissance office representative to the Unidentified Aerial Phenomena task force.

Rubio also said that government employees have shared with the Intelligence Committee what they described as first-hand knowledge about UAPs and the federal government. He said many of the people

who came forward “are very fearful of their career” because of the sensitivity of the government information involved.

“People who we entrusted to do some really important things for our country are saying some pretty incredible things that I think we have an obligation to take seriously and listen to,” Rubio told NewsNation.

Fascination with possible alien life and government secrets has existed for decades in the U.S., including stories about Roswell, N.M., and Area 51 in Nevada. The government rekindled talk of UFOs several years ago when it released previously leaked video of unidentified objects in the sky moving strangely.

Rubio, whose staff referred McClatchy to his full NewsNation interview when asked for comment, said it’s easy to laugh off talk of non-human aircraft. But he said the credentials of the people testifying to the committee underscore the seriousness of the matter.

## Heavy rains flood Chicago, cut NASCAR race short

*Associated Press*

CHICAGO — Heavy rains flooded Chicago streets Sunday, trapping cars and forcing NASCAR officials to cancel the last half of an Xfinity Series race set to run through the city’s downtown.

The National Weather Service issued a flash flood warning for multiple counties in the Chicago area, saying up to 6 inches of rain had already fallen in suburban Cicero and

Berwyn by midday. The NWS website warned the flooding could be “life-threatening” through 3 p.m., with numerous impassable roads, overflowing creeks and streams and flooded basements.

The Illinois State Police said parts of Interstate 55 and Interstate 290 have been closed because of flooding, with at least 10 cars trapped in water on Interstate 55 near Pulaski Road, a major north-south thoroughfare in the

city, WLS-TV reported. Trains were stopped in some parts of the city as well.

NASCAR officials had planned to complete the last half of an Xfinity Series race through the city’s downtown on Sunday morning after suspending action on Saturday due to lightning. They announced around midday Sunday they had decided to cancel the race because of the rain and declared Cole Custer the winner.

## Forecasts surge over 100 degrees across much of US

*Associated Press*

Excessive heat warnings remain in place in many areas across the U.S. and were expected to last at least through Monday.

In Arizona’s largest metro area, Phoenix and surrounding communities flirted with a high of 115 degrees Fahrenheit on Sunday.

The National Weather Service in Phoenix forecasted 116 degrees for Monday, just two degrees off the record high for that date set in 1907, before temperatures drop a few degrees for the next three days.

In Nevada, the first excessive heat warning of the summer runs through Monday evening for the Las Vegas metro area.

Daytime cooling centers are open across the region.

It was 102 degrees Friday at Harry Reid International Airport in Las Vegas, ending a 294-day stretch of temperatures staying below 100.

The high in central Las Vegas was near 112 degrees Sunday, with 113 predicted for Monday, according to the National Weather Service.

A heat wave baking much of interior California was expected to push the mercury past 105 degrees across the agricultural heart of the state.

A record of 111 degrees was marked Saturday in Paso Robles, surpassing a high of 107 set in 2013.

In Southern California, excessive heat warnings and advisories were extended

through Monday for inland areas east of Los Angeles.

Elsewhere, the heat and severe weather remained a concern throughout the U.S. southeast.

Heat advisories remained in effect throughout the southeast Sunday while a severe thunderstorm watch was in effect until 8 p.m. for parts of Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina and Tennessee.

Thunderstorm warnings were issued throughout the region on Sunday afternoon.

Authorities said 31 cows died in the northern Alabama town of Berlin during Saturday’s severe weather when lightning struck the tree they were hiding under.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Drone deployed to fight mosquito population**

**CA** IRVINE — A drone flies over a peaceful Southern California marsh and unleashes a rain of larvae-killing bacterial spore pellets. Its target: a surging population of mosquitoes that can spread diseases to humans.

The drone is the latest technology deployed by the Orange County Mosquito and Vector Control District to attack mosquito development in marshes, large ponds and parks.

Mosquitoes grow into larvae from eggs laid in water, making proliferation of the biting bugs a major concern after California's extraordinarily rainy winter.

The district sprawling over more than 800 square miles south of Los Angeles is reporting that traps are capturing three times the 15-year average number of mosquitoes.

**Chemical safety agency chief wrongly used \$90K**

**DC** WASHINGTON — The former head of a federal agency that investigates chemical accidents improperly spent more than \$90,000 during her tenure, including unauthorized trips to and from her California home, remodeling her Washington office and outside media training for herself, according to a new report by a federal watchdog.

The report by the Environmental Protection Agency's inspector general says Katherine Lemos, the former chair of the U.S. Chemical Safety Board, was not entitled to travel expenses worth nearly \$50,000 for at least 18 round trips between the cap-

ital and her home in San Diego from April 2020 through March 2022, when she changed her official workplace to San Diego.

Lemos took two additional round trips between San Diego and Washington from March 2022 until her resignation four months later, the report said. Those trips cost more than \$5,000, but investigators were unable to determine if they violated federal policy.

The report came two months after Lemos resigned amid criticism about extravagant spending and internal clashes with other board members. The safety board completed just one investigation in 2020, three in 2021 and three in the first seven months of 2022, the report said at the time. At least 17 investigations were waiting to be closed.

**Trans residents can alter papers despite new law**

**KS** TOPEKA — The Democratic governor in Kansas declared Thursday that the state will keep allowing transgender residents to alter their driver's licenses and birth certificates, despite a new law aimed at preventing it.

Gov. Laura Kelly issued a directive that allows agencies under her control to defy a legal opinion issued last week by Republican state Attorney General Kris Kobach, telling them to follow their lawyers' narrower view of the law.

The attorney general called the Kelly administration's legal analysis "nonsense" and promised, "We will see her in court."

The new law took effect Saturday and legally defines a person's sex as male or female based on their "biological repro-

ductive system" at birth, a standard that would apply to "any" law or state regulation. Kansas driver's licenses and birth certificates list a person's sex, and Kobach said they can't contradict what doctors assigned at birth.

**Medicaid expands amid new work provisions**

**GA** ATLANTA — Georgia is offering a new bargain to some adults without health insurance beginning Saturday: Go to work or school and the state will cover you.

But advocates have decried the plan, which will insure far fewer people than a full expansion of the state-federal Medicaid program, as needlessly restrictive and expensive.

The program is likely to be closely watched as Republicans in Congress push to let states require work from some current Medicaid enrollees.

Georgia is one of 10 remaining states that hasn't expanded Medicaid eligibility to include individuals and families earning up to 138% of the federal poverty line, or \$20,120 annually for a single person and \$41,400 for a family of four.

**Park closes ride due to crack in support beam**

**NC** CHARLOTTE — A North Carolina amusement park closed one of its roller coasters Friday after a crack was found on a support beam.

According to news reports, Carowinds shut down Fury 325. The park's website advertises the ride as the "tallest, fastest, longest giga coaster in North America" that crosses into both

North Carolina and South Carolina.

Video of the ride showed the beam bending, the top of it visibly detached, as cars with passengers whirled by.

Carowinds did not say how long repairing the ride would take. The rest of the park will remain open.

**Clinic faces penalties for false claims of asbestos**

**MT** MISSOULA — A health clinic in a Montana town plagued by deadly asbestos contamination faces millions of dollars in penalties — and potential bankruptcy — after a jury found it submitted more than 300 false asbestos claims to the U.S. government, making patients eligible for Medicare and other benefits they shouldn't have received.

The federally funded Center for Asbestos Related Disease clinic has been at the forefront of the medical response to deadly pollution from mining near Libby, Mont.

The town of about 3,000 people along the scenic Kootenai River gained national notoriety when it was declared a Superfund site two decades ago, following media reports that workers and their families were getting sick and dying due to dust from a W.R. Grace mine.

A seven-person jury said Wednesday night that the clinic's false claims caused more than \$1 million in damages to the federal government. Under federal law, the clinic is liable for three times the damages — or about \$3.2 million — and millions of dollars more in potential penalties.

— From wire reports

STARS  STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com).

Reporting  
World, National  
and Military News

# Ohtani enjoyed best month of career

*Associated Press*

Shohei Ohtani's walkup music most of last season was the theme to "The Greatest Showman."

After the Los Angeles Angels star's June, he should consider returning to it.

The Japanese two-way phenom has amazed fans, teammates and opponents since coming to the majors in 2018. June, though, was "The Greatest Sho" at the plate.

"I'm in a good spot right now," Ohtani said through interpreter Ippei Mizuhara when asked if he was pitching and hitting at his best. "Hitting-wise, I feel like it is up there, for sure."

Ohtani hit 15 home runs, the most in a month in Angels history. He became the first player in 10 years to reach 30 homers before July 1.

Ohtani reached that milestone and tied the AL record for most homers in June with a majestic 493-foot drive in Friday night's loss to Arizona. Mike

Trout, who was in the on-deck circle, did a double take when he heard it coming off the bat.

The power numbers, though, are only part of the story of a dominant month. Ohtani's .394 average, 41 hits, and 29 RBIs were his best in any month.

There was only one time in 27 games where Ohtani did not reach base, and he had hits in all but two.

His .952 slugging percentage in June was the third-highest in MLB history, surpassed only by Babe Ruth in 1920 and '21. His 1.444 OPS is the highest since Lou Gehrig had a 1.470 in 1936.

Besides vaulting into the major league lead in homers, Ohtani is tied in RBIs with 67. He raised his average 41 points to .310.

Ohtani goes into July with an eight-game hitting streak that includes a two-homer performance on June 27 against the Chicago White Sox. He became the first AL starting pitcher in nearly 60 years to go deep twice and strike out at least 10 in the

same game.

"Maybe for three or four days, you might think there's a hole, but he's figured out how to get that ball and drive it," Arizona manager Torey Lovullo said.

Ohtani has a .235 average on pitches outside the strike zone, including six home runs. He had eight homers and a .170 out-of-zone average in his first five seasons.

"He's the most focused and routine-oriented person I have seen, but he's always searching to get better. He was having trouble (on outside pitches), but he is understanding and studying what pitchers are doing to him," manager Phil Nevin said. "He's had some pretty good pitches on the outer part of the plate and has gone with it the other way."

"He wows you every day. He's such a talent and fun to watch."

Colorado's Kyle Freeland knows firsthand about Ohtani's improvements out of the zone.

During the fifth inning on June 23, Ohtani hit a changeup from the left-hander at least three baseballs off the plate and to the inside for a solo shot to right-center.

"There's only one human being on this planet that has any business swinging at that pitch. And that's him," Freeland said after the game.

After struggling for six weeks on the mound, Ohtani appears to have rediscovered his early form of a 3-0 record and 0.64 ERA in his first five starts. The right-hander has gone 2-1 with a 1.86 ERA with only one home run allowed. He had given up 11 during an eight-start stretch that saw him post a 5.88 ERA.

"He's done some things mechanically along with pitch mixing and game planning. Everything he's doing right now is in sync," Nevin said.

Through 16 starts, Ohtani is 7-3 with a 3.02 ERA. He leads the majors in opposing batting average (.180) and is third in strikeouts (127).

## Shohei, eight Atlanta players named to All-Star team

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — Shohei Ohtani became a two-way All-Star for the third straight year when he was picked for the American League pitching staff on Sunday, and eight Atlanta Braves were chosen for the July 11 game in Seattle — the most of any team since 2012.

Ohtani was elected to the pitching staff by players 10 days after fans voted him to start at designated hitter. Ohtani appeared on the most ballots among AL players. He is the only two-way All-Star in major league history.

"He's very respectful. He doesn't do a whole bunch of talking," AL manager Dusty Baker of Houston said. "He comes to play, and he really

handles the notoriety and the publicity with humility and greatness."

At the 2021 game in Denver, Ohtani grounded out against Max Scherzer and Corbin Burnes, and pitched a perfect first inning, retiring Fernando Tatis Jr. on a flyout and Max Muncy and Nolan Arenado on groundouts.

Last year at Dodger Stadium, Ohtani singled on Clayton Kershaw's first pitch of the game and walked against Joe Muro. Ohtani didn't pitch.

Atlanta outfielder Ronald Acuña Jr., shortstop Orlando Arcia and catcher Sean Murphy were elected to the National League starting lineup by fans. They will be joined by five Braves teammates voted in

by fellow players: starting pitchers Spencer Strider and Bryce Elder, first baseman Matt Olson, second baseman Ozzie Albies and third baseman Austin Riley.

Atlanta is a major league-best 56-27 after winning 23 of its last 26 games.

The contingent includes Atlanta's entire starting infield.

The previous team with eight All-Stars was the 2012 Texas Rangers. It was the first time an NL club had eight picks since the 2008 Chicago Cubs.

Atlanta is the first club with six position players since Boston in 2008.

Texas has six All-Stars this year and the Dodgers five.

Arizona rookie outfielder Corbin Carroll, a Seattle native

elected to start, is the youngest All-Star at 22. Dodgers designated hitter J.D. Martinez is the oldest at 35.

Twenty-six players are first-time All-Stars. Angels center fielder Mike Trout has the most All-Star selections with 11, making his 10th trip as a starter.

Starting pitchers Zac Gallen, Kershaw and Marcus Stroman also were voted to the NL staff along with relievers Alexis Díaz, Camilo Doval and Josh Hader.

NL reserves voted in by players included catcher Will Smith, shortstop Dansby Swanson, outfielders Lourdes Gurriel Jr. and Nick Castellanos, and designated hitter Jorge Soler.

# Djokovic, Swiatek win on rainy first day

Associated Press

WIMBLEDON, England — Novak Djokovic and Iga Swiatek advanced with straight-set victories Monday despite a rain delay as Wimbledon got started.

Venus Williams and Coco Gauff are among the big names whose matches were pushed back by the weather on Day 1.

Djokovic is halfway to the first calendar-year Grand Slam in men's tennis since 1969.

He seeks a fifth consecutive title at the All England Club and eighth overall, which both would tie records for men.

Djokovic, the No. 2 seed, beat Pedro Cachin 6-3, 6-3, 7-6 (4) after a rain relay that lasted more than an hour. Groundskeepers used leaf blowers to dry the grass.

"It was definitely frustrating, of course, for all the crowd. For us players, we both wanted to play but the conditions were not

great, obviously still slippery," Djokovic said of the delay.

The 36-year-old Serb used a towel to help dry some wet spots: "I normally come out with rackets, not with towels."

Swiatek, who owns four major titles but hasn't been past the fourth round at the All England Club, beat Zhu Lin of China 6-1, 6-3 at No. 1 Court, winning the final two games after the roof was closed following a rain delay.

Swiatek said she feels better prepared for the grass-court major this year following her title at the French Open.

"After Roland Garros," she said on court, "I really took some time to just appreciate what happened. Last year, when I won Roland Garros, it was my second Grand Slam so it still felt, like, overwhelming, but this time I really could just focus on celebrating and actual-

ly getting back to work with more peace in my head and I try to be open minded for the grass season and I think it's working. Hopefully I'm going to be able keep that mindset."

Barbora Strycova, a semifinalist in 2019, became the first winner of this year's tournament by beating Maryna Zanevska 6-1, 7-5.

Among other early winners were Victoria Azarenka of Belarus and Andrey Rublev of Russia.

Azarenka was greeted by polite clapping when she walked into Court 15 on Monday morning for her first Wimbledon match in two years. When the two-time Grand Slam champion finished off a three-set victory, she shook her racket with her right hand and pumped her left fist, then offered a wave to the spectators who were applauding warmly.

Unlike her opponent, Yuan Yue, whose nationality was noted on the scoreboard alongside her name, Azarenka had no country listed there. That's because players from Russia and Belarus are back competing at Wimbledon a year after they were barred by the All England Club because of the invasion of Ukraine — and, in a sort of half-measure adopted by some other sports, are deemed "neutral" athletes who officially do not represent any nation.

All entrants from those two countries needed to — and did — sign a declaration agreeing to three stipulations: They wouldn't be representing Russia or Belarus; they wouldn't accept funding from those governments or companies operated by them; they wouldn't express support for the invasion of Ukraine or the leaders of Russia or Belarus.

# Trout, Ohtani homer to lead Angels past D-backs

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — It usually bodes well for the Los Angeles Angels when Shohei Ohtani and Mike Trout go deep in the same game.

On Sunday, it helped snap the Halos' four-game losing streak.

Ohtani and Mike Trout hit solo shots, but it was Mickey Moniak's three-run homer in the second inning that was the big one as the Angels defeated the Arizona Diamondbacks 5-2 despite 12 strikeouts by Zac Gallen.

It was the 30th time in six seasons that Ohtani and Trout have homered in the same game, and eighth this year. The Angels are 21-9 when it happens, including 7-1 this season.

"When he (Ohtani) gets into one, it's fun to watch," manager Phil Nevin said. "It was nice to jump out to a lead. It was nice to see Mike get into one. Mickey's at-bat was tremendous, seeing

him get into a breaking ball there and a big home run."

**Braves 6, Marlins 3:** Ozzie Albies' two-run homer in the fifth gave his team the lead and host Atlanta overcame an early two-run deficit to beat Miami for its 16th win in 17 games.

**Mets 8, Giants 4:** Pete Alonso hit a two-run homer in the rain, hours after making his third All-Star team, and host New York beat San Francisco for its first series win in a month.

**Cardinals 5, Yankees 1:** Jordan Montgomery beat his former team for the second time since it traded him last summer, pitching host St. Louis past Gerrit Cole and New York.

**Royals 9, Dodgers 1:** Nicky Lopez matched a career high with four RBIs, Maikel Garcia and Bobby Witt Jr. drove in two runs apiece, and host Kansas City beat Los Angeles to finally wrap up a series win.

**Reds 4, Padres 3:** Pinch-hit-

ter Tyler Stephenson broke an eighth-inning tie with a two-run homer that sent host Cincinnati past San Diego.

**Red Sox 5, Blue Jays 4:** Alex Verdugo hit a tiebreaking home run in the ninth inning and visiting Boston beat Toronto to complete a three-game sweep.

**Tigers 14, Rockies 9:** Javier Baez and Jake Marisnick each hit a grand slam and visiting Detroit went deep five times to beat Colorado.

**Nationals 5, Phillies 4:** Stone Garrett hit a grand slam, and reliever Kyle Finnegan pitched out of late-inning jams that helped visiting Washington beat Philadelphia.

**Orioles 2, Twins 1:** Minnesota closer Jhoan Duran forced in the tiebreaking run when he hit rookie Jordan Westburg with a pitch in the eighth inning, enabling host Baltimore to stop a four-game skid.

**Mariners 7, Rays 6:** José Ca-

ballero was hit by a pitch from Jason Adam (2-2) to force in the tiebreaking run, and host Seattle erased an early five-run deficit in a win over Tampa Bay.

**Guardians 8, Cubs 6 (10):** Josh Naylor hit a two-run single in the 10th inning and visiting Cleveland regrouped to beat Chicago after All-Star closer Emmanuel Clase blew a four-run lead in the ninth.

**White Sox 8, Athletics 7:** Jake Burger hit his 18th home run of the season and visiting Chicago avoided a three-game sweep.

**Astros 5, Rangers 3:** Chas McCormick lined a tiebreaking triple with two outs and the bases loaded in the eighth inning, and visiting Houston hung on to beat Texas.

**Brewers 6, Pirates 3:** William Contreras hit a go-ahead, three-run homer in the third inning, and visiting Milwaukee beat Pittsburgh.

# Van Gisbergen wins NASCAR Cup Series debut

Associated Press

CHICAGO — When Shane van Gisbergen got the call from Justin Marks, it reignited his interest in the NASCAR Cup Series. He studied the races, the drivers and the cars.

Turns out he is a pretty good student.

Van Gisbergen won his Cup Series debut on a rainy Sunday in downtown Chicago, chasing down Justin Haley and Chase Elliott in a memorable finish to the series' first street race.

After passing Elliott, van Gisbergen dueled with Haley in the final laps before the three-time Supercars champion moved in front for good. Haley held on for second, and Elliott was third.

"The racing, the battles were really fun," van Gisbergen said. "But everyone was respectful and clean. It was really cool."

The 34-year-old van Gisbergen, a New Zealand native, became the first driver to win his Cup Series debut since Johnny

Rutherford in the second qualifying race at Daytona in 1963.

He got a chance to drive the No. 91 Chevrolet in Chicago as part of Trackhouse Racing's Project 91. Trackhouse is owned by Marks, and the goal for the Project 91 program is to give international drivers a shot at NASCAR.

"This was a shower idea," Marks said. "I mean it was me thinking I'm a huge fan of all different kinds of motorsports, and I've raced in all different kinds of motorsports. I wanted to bring my love global motorsport to NASCAR."

When van Gisbergen was credited with leading Lap 25, it was the first lap led for Project 91 in three starts. He became the sixth driver born outside the United States to win a NASCAR Cup Series race, joining Marcos Ambrose, Mario Andretti, Juan Pablo Montoya, Earl Ross and Daniel Suárez.

"He's going to go home and

tell all his friends how bad we are," Elliott cracked.

Van Gisbergen won his first Supercars championship in 2016 and added two more the past two years. He was helped in his NASCAR debut by Darian Grubb, who was the crew chief for Tony Stewart when he won the Cup Series championship in 2011.

Trackhouse Racing also won last weekend's Cup Series race with Ross Chastain at Nashville Superspeedway.

"I was a big Tony Stewart fan, so working with Darian was pretty special," van Gisbergen said.

Kyle Larson finished fourth in Chicago, followed by Kyle Busch and Austin Cindric. Christopher Bell won the two stages and led a race-high 37 laps, but faded to 18th.

The race was scheduled for 100 laps and 220 miles, but it was shortened because of fading sunlight after the start was

delayed for more 90 minutes because of a historic rainfall that flooded the course. The last half of the Xfinity Race, suspended Saturday because of lightning, was canceled.

Right before the scheduled start, as the rain persisted, pole-sitter Denny Hamlin took to Twitter to lobby for a delay, and Noah Gragson posted video of one of his tires floating on pit road. NASCAR then decided to allow the drivers to return to their haulers.

Steve O'Donnell, NASCAR's chief operating officer, said they never planned to start at that point.

"What we wanted to do was get all the things that needed to happen to be able to fire the engines and get us going taken care of," he said. "So that when we knew hey, the track is ready to go, you know we're not going through the anthem and driver introductions and those sort of things."

## Kings, Jazz give extension deals to Sabonis, Clarkson

Associated Press

All-NBA center Domantas Sabonis wasn't a free agent this summer. And he won't be for the next few summers, either.

Sabonis has agreed to a four-year contract extension with the Sacramento Kings, one that will keep him signed through the 2027-28 season, a person with knowledge of the talks confirmed Sunday.

The extension includes a raise on his salary for this coming season to nearly \$31 million, and his salary for the four subsequent years will average about \$47 million, said the person, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the team has not announced the signing.

The total value of the deal is about \$217 million. ESPN first reported the agreement on Saturday night, and The Sacramento Bee subsequently confirmed it as well.

It was part of a big-spending start to free agency this summer: Counting free agent deals that have been struck, sign-

ings of this year's rookie class and extensions, NBA teams have combined to hand out more than \$3 billion in contract value since Friday night.

Sabonis would have been in line to hit the free agent market in the summer of 2024, but the Kings ensured that won't be happening. He's a huge part of the Kings' current surge; the team made the playoffs this past season for the first time since 2006 and has the entirety of its starting five — Sabonis, De'Aaron Fox, Kevin Huerter, Harrison Barnes and Keegan Murray — coming back.

Sabonis is a three-time All-Star who averaged 19.1 points and a league-high 12.3 rebounds per game this past season, earning the All-NBA nod for the first time.

Utah was finalizing an extension for guard Jordan Clarkson on Sunday as well, a second person told the AP on condition of anonymity because it had not been signed. It will have a total value of \$55 million over the next three years, the person said; Clarkson had opted into a contract that would have paid him \$14.3 mil-

lion this coming season and now will average about \$18.3 million over three years.

Clarkson averaged a career-high 20.8 points for the Jazz this past season, and the extension will push his on-court earnings well past \$100 million for his career.

Also Sunday:

■ Miles Bridges signed his \$7.9 million qualifying offer from Charlotte for this coming season, a source told AP after the agreement was first reported by ESPN. Bridges missed all of this past season after he was charged with domestic violence in the summer of 2022. He eventually pleaded no contest and is serving three years of probation. The NBA gave Bridges a 30-game suspension earlier this offseason, but added that because Bridges missed the entirety of 2022-23, 20 of those games are considered already served.

■ Eric Gordon agreed to a contract with the Phoenix Suns, a source told AP after the agreement was first reported by The Athletic. Gordon is a career 37% shooter from three-point range, and is entering his 16th NBA season.