

Turkey opens NATO door for Sweden

Associated Press

VILNIUS, Lithuania — U.S. President Joe Biden on Tuesday hailed an agreement for Sweden to join NATO as more work remained to determine a path forward for Ukraine's future with the alliance.

Biden described the summit as a "historic moment" and said the United States agreed with a proposal, yet to be released publicly, to outline a path for Ukraine's eventual membership.

On Monday evening, the night before the summit opened, Turkey withdrew its objections to Sweden joining the alliance, a step toward the unity that Western leaders have been eager to demonstrate in the face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The deal was reached after days of intensive meetings, and it's poised to expand the alliance's strength in Northern Europe.

"Rumors of the death of NATO's unity were greatly exaggerated," Jake Sullivan, the U.S. national security adviser, told reporters triumphantly on Tuesday.

According to a joint statement issued when the deal was announced, Erdogan will ask Turkey's parliament to approve Sweden joining NATO. Hungarian Prime Minister

Viktor Orban, another holdout, is expected to take a similar step.

The outcome is a victory for Biden as well, who has touted NATO's expansion as an example of how Russia's invasion of Ukraine has backfired on Moscow. Finland has already become the 31st member of the alliance, and Sweden is on deck to become the 32nd. Both Nordic countries were historically nonaligned until the war increased fears of Russian aggression.

Because of the deal on Sweden's membership, "this summit is already historic before it has started," Stoltenberg said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that NATO's expansion is "one of the reasons that led to the current situation."

"It looks like the Europeans don't understand their mistake," Peskov said. He warned against putting Ukraine on a fast track for NATO membership.

"Potentially it's very dangerous for the European security, it carries very big risks," Peskov said.

Biden began Tuesday by meeting with Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda, where he emphasized his commitment to

transatlantic cooperation.

"Nothing happens here that doesn't affect us," he told Nausėda.

The White House said Nausėda presented Biden with the Order of Vytautas the Great, the highest award a Lithuanian president can bestow. Biden is the first U.S. president to receive it.

Biden and Erdogan were scheduled to meet Tuesday evening, and it was unclear how some of the Turkish president's other demands will be resolved.

He has been seeking advanced American fighter jets and a path toward membership in the European Union.

The White House has expressed support for both, but publicly insisted that the issues were not related to Sweden's membership in NATO.

"I stand ready to work with President Erdogan and Turkey on enhancing defense and deterrence in the Euro-Atlantic area," Biden said in a statement late Monday.

The phrasing was a nod to Biden's commitment to help Turkey acquire new F-16 fighter jets, according to an administration official who was not authorized to comment publicly.

Gen. Berger retires without a confirmed successor

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Marine Corps is without a confirmed leader for the first time in a century as Gen. David Berger stepped down as commandant on Monday and a Republican senator is blocking approval of his successor.

Berger took over as the 38th commandant in July 2019, and is required to leave the job after four years. Gen. Eric Smith, currently the assistant commandant, has been nominated to be the next leader, but will serve in an acting capacity because he hasn't been confirmed by the Senate.

Under the law, Smith can serve as the acting commandant, but he can do nothing that would presume confirmation. As a result, he can't move into the main residence or the commandant's office, or issue any new formal commandant's planning guidance,

which is traditional for a new leader. He has the authority to implement new policies such as budget, training and other personnel decisions.

Smith's promotion delay is the first of what could be many top level military officers held up by Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala. Tuberville has stalled all nominations for senior military jobs because he disagrees with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's decision to have the Defense Department pay for travel when a service member has to go out of state to get an abortion or other reproductive care. Abortion is now illegal in Alabama.

Speaking at a ceremony at the Marine Barracks Washington, just down the street from Capitol Hill, Austin and Berger called on the Senate to take action.

"We need the Senate to do their job so that

we can have a sitting commandant that's appointed and confirmed. We need that house to be occupied," said Berger, with a nod to the commandant's quarters at the edge of the parade field.

Austin and other Pentagon officials have pressed the Senate to move forward, saying that delays are already impacting more than 200 military officers, and many key leaders.

"You know, it's been more than a century since the U.S. Marine Corps has operated without a Senate confirmed commandant," Austin said during the ceremony.

Because of Berger's requirement to step down in July, the Marine job is the first of the military chiefs to be affected by Tuberville. The Army, Navy and Air Force are all expected to face the same delay later this year, as could the nomination of the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Zelenskyy blasts NATO over mixed messages

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Tuesday blasted NATO for waffling on his country's future membership, saying prior to joining an annual summit that the alliance's weak commitment to Ukrainian accession treats Kyiv as a chip on the negotiating table with Russia.

Zelenskyy's comments came as President Joe Biden joined allies in Vilnius, Lithuania, for high-level talks about Ukraine's future.

"It seems there is no readiness, neither to invite Ukraine to NATO nor to make it a member of the alliance," Zelenskyy said in a statement on his way to the annual gathering of world leaders. "This means that a window of opportunity is being left to bargain Ukraine's membership in NATO in negotiations with Russia. And for Russia, this means motivation to continue its terror. Uncertainty is weakness."

Zelenskyy's comments put him at odds with Biden, who endorsed NATO's new language on future membership for Ukraine.

NATO has been trying to craft a statement on Ukraine's eventual accession, but the ongoing war stands as a major obstacle in setting

the kind of clear timeline that Zelenskyy was seeking.

"We agree on the language that you proposed relative to the future of Ukraine being able to join NATO," Biden said Tuesday while speaking alongside NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg.

Despite his criticisms, Zelenskyy said he will be on hand Wednesday in Vilnius for the inaugural meeting of the newly formed Ukraine-NATO Council, where the issue of future membership will be hashed out.

Details about the agreement are expected to be unveiled after those talks. NATO membership comes with a security guarantee of mutual defense, so allowing Ukraine to join while it is at war would essentially make the United States and the 30 other allies combatants in the conflict. For that reason, Biden and Stoltenberg have emphasized that membership in the near term is an impossibility.

Following talks Tuesday, the alliance also detailed various democratic and military reforms required to join the pact.

"NATO will support Ukraine in making these reforms on its path toward future membership," an alliance communique stated.

The dispute with Zelenskyy cast a shadow over events in Vilnius, even as NATO celebrated a breakthrough on the eve of the summit when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Monday that he will stop blocking Sweden's entry into the alliance.

On Tuesday, allies continued to talk up their support for Ukraine, with officials repeating the standard talking point that allies were in it for the long haul. But on the sidelines, there was concern about Ukraine's slow-going counteroffensive.

Petr Pavel, the newly elected president of the Czech Republic and a former top NATO general with deep ties to the alliance, gave a blunt assessment about the stakes involved as Ukraine pushes to regain territory.

"Realistically, the window of opportunity will more or less close by the end of this year," said Pavel, who served as the head of NATO's military committee between 2015 and 2018.

Pavel said that as the war drags on, there will eventually be a decline in public support for continuing to arm Ukraine.

"Whatever is achieved by the end of this year will be the baseline for negotiations," Pavel said.

Philippine coast guard official: China might occupy reefs next

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

A Philippine coast guard official has warned that Chinese vessels swarming contested reefs in the South China Sea may portend an attempt to occupy those territories.

More than 50 Chinese maritime militia vessels were seen loitering at Iroquois Reef and Sabina Shoal, south of Reed Bank, the Philippine Inquirer reported Sunday, citing the Western Command of the Philippines' armed forces. The maritime features are west of Palawan province in the southwestern Philippine Islands.

It's the first time so many Chinese vessels have been spotted in the area, Commodore Jay Tarriela, the Philippine coast guard's maritime security adviser, told dzBB radio, according to the newspaper.

"The only analysis that we can provide for the presence of these Chinese maritime militias is to swarm a particular maritime feature and to occupy it," he said.

The Philippine coast guard will "intensify" patrols to determine whether the number of Chinese vessels has increased or decreased, Tarriela said.

"Our objective is to expose them and deploy our vessels to drive them away," he said.

In 2016, an international tribunal rejected China's claim to most of the South China Sea. Beijing has ignored the ruling and built military facilities on disputed territory, including areas claimed by the Philippines. The United States does not recognize China's claims and the Navy conducts frequent freedom-of-navigation patrols in the disputed waters.

The Philippines lacks powerful warships but could send smaller vessels that might provoke the Chinese ships to ram them and lose face, Patricio Abinales, a Philippines expert at the University of Hawaii, said in an email Tuesday.

"Question is at what point will the Americans then say enough is enough, we will back our Filipino allies," he said.

Marine questioned as teenager found

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Federal law enforcement officials said Monday that they are investigating after a 14-year-old girl was found inside the barracks at a California Marine Corps base.

A Marine with the Combat Logistics Battalion 5, 1st Marine Logistics Group was taken into custody briefly for questioning. He has been released to his command while the investigation continues, said Marine Capt. Charles Palmer of the 1st Marine Logistics Group at Camp Pendleton.

It was unclear how long the teenager was at the barracks. She was found by military police on June 28 after her grandmother had reported her missing on June 13.

After she was found on base, authorities returned the girl to her grandmother, according to the San Diego Sheriff's Department.

The case has been handed over to the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.

The sheriff's department and the San Diego Human Trafficking Task Force are assisting the investigation.

River threatens to top dam near Vermont capital

Associated Press

ANDOVER, Vt. — A storm that dumped up to two months of rain in two days in Vermont and other parts of the Northeast brought more flooding Tuesday in communities marooned by water, including the state capital, where a dam just upstream was threatening to overflow.

The flooding has already caused tens of millions of dollars in damage, officials said, with more to come: If water pours over the dam on the Winooski River that flows through Montpelier, it could surge through downtown blocks where the floods were already waist-high.

"Floodwaters continue to rise in some places, like our capital city, and have surpassed the levels seen during Tropical Storm Irene," Vermont Gov. Phil Scott said. Irene killed six people in Vermont in August 2011, washing homes off their foundations and damaging or destroying more than 200 bridges and 500 miles of highway.

The sun was out Tuesday and more sunshine was expected Wednesday. But more rain was forecast Thursday and Friday.

"We are not out of the woods," Scott said. "This is nowhere near over." He tweeted that the roads around his house were im-

passable Tuesday morning, so he had to hike through the woods to reach the state's emergency response center.

One woman was swept away in New York. There have been no reports of injuries or deaths related to the flooding in Vermont, where swift-water rescue teams aided by National Guard helicopter crews have done more than 100 rescues, Vermont Emergency Management said Tuesday.

Dozens of roads and highways were closed, including many along the spine of the Green Mountains. Flash flood warnings and advisories were in effect meanwhile for much of the state, from the Massachusetts line to Canada.

Downtown Montpelier, a city of 8,000, was swamped between the capitol building and the Winooski River. Montpelier Town Manager Bill Fraser warned that the Wrightsville Dam several miles to the north could exceed capacity for the first time.

"There would be a large amount of water coming into Montpelier which would drastically add to the existing flood damage," he said, adding that there are very few evacuation options remaining. "People in at risk areas may wish to go to upper floors in their houses."

Bank of America to pay more than \$100M for junk fees, fake accounts

Associated Press

Bank of America must pay more than \$100 million to customers for doubling up on some fees, withholding reward bonuses and opening accounts without customer consent.

Bank of America will pay \$90 million in penalties to its organization and \$60 million in penalties to the OCC, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau said Tuesday.

The Office of the Comptroller of the Currency found the bank's double-dipping on fees was illegal.

Bank of America, based in Charlotte, N.C., serves 68 million people and small business clients. The bank had \$2.4 trillion in consolidated assets and \$1.9 trillion in domestic deposits as of March 31, making it the second-largest bank in the U.S.

The bank did not immediately respond to

requests from The Associated Press for comment.

Bank of America had a policy of charging customers \$35 after the bank declined a transaction because the customer did not have enough funds in their account, the CFPB said. The agency determined that the bank double-dipped by allowing fees to be repeatedly charged for the same transaction.

Bank of America also offered people cash rewards and bonus points when signing up for a card, but the CFPB said the bank illegally withheld promised credit card account bonuses.

Since at least 2012, Bank of America employees illegally applied for and enrolled consumers in credit card accounts without their knowledge or authorization, the CFPB said.

Extreme heat hits region used to hot summers

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Even Southwestern desert residents accustomed to scorching summers are feeling the grip of an extreme heat wave smacking Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico and Southern California this week with 100-degree-plus temps and excessive heat warnings.

To add insult to injury, the region has been left high and dry with no monsoon activity, which can help offset the blazing temperatures. In Arizona, the monsoon season officially begins June 15 and can bring powerful storms with high winds, lightning and heavy bursts of rain.

In Phoenix, Martin Brown and his black Labrador, Sammy, escaped the heat Monday in the lobby of Circle the City, an air-conditioned walk-in health clinic for homeless people that is also a designated hydration station. Anyone can come in, sit and get bottled water or snacks like a burrito or ramen.

"We're homeless, so we don't have a choice. Well, we have a choice: We can sit at the park and swelter in the heat, but no thank you. This is much better," Brown said.

He spends five days a week there during business hours and then takes the bus to spend nights at the park to escape the "jungle hot" time of day.

The heat has made pockets of the desert city feel like ghost towns. A series of sunset concerts was canceled, and covered restaurant patios equipped with cooling misters sit empty.

Phoenix on Tuesday was poised to hit a 12th consecutive day of 110 degrees or higher, according to the National Weather Service. The longest recorded stretch so far was 18 days in 1974.

The high pressure needed to generate monsoon storms isn't in just the right position, according to state climatologist Dr. Erinanne Saffell, so metro Phoenix is left with below normal precipitation and dry conditions that facilitate hotter temperatures. Also, some experts believe this year's heavier snowpack in the West took more energy to melt, prolonging the progression of a summer high-pressure system.

"It just kind of delayed everything," Saffell said.

During the current wave, the "low" temps aren't dipping below the 90 degrees.

Test scores show students falling behind

Associated Press

Students across the United States fell further behind academically last school year despite extensive efforts to help them recover from pandemic learning setbacks, according to an analysis of test scores released Tuesday.

The research by NWEA, a non-profit group that administers standardized tests, lands as the 2024 deadline approaches quickly for schools to spend the last of the \$190 billion in federal pandemic relief money.

There are ways schools can take advantage of their limited resources and time to boost learning, said Chase Norden-

gren, the group's lead researcher for instructional strategies. He said they could group students based on needs and provide targeted instruction, for example, adjusting groups as individuals progress.

"We've been trying to send the message that this is a multiyear, if not decades-long recovery period and is going to require some fundamental rethinking of the ways that not only we educate students but we think about how students are grouped and how we think about their learning," he said.

The study used data from about 6.5 million students who took the MAP Growth assess-

ment in reading and math since the onset of the pandemic. Those numbers were compared with data on academic growth from three years before the pandemic.

The results this year — the third full school year since the COVID-19 pandemic hit — are in some ways worse than last year, when the NWEA analysis showed students largely made academic gains that paralleled their growth pre-pandemic, said Karyn Lewis, director of the Center for School and Student Progress at NWEA, and the study's co-author.

"And because kids are making gains at rates below pre-COVID trends, that means we're not

shrinking those achievement gaps. We're actually widening them," Lewis said.

With historic sums of money sent by the federal government, schools have expanded tutoring, summer learning programs and other recovery efforts.

But the analysis found the average student would still need the equivalent of 4.1 additional months of schooling to catch up in reading and 4.5 months for math. Black and Hispanic students, meanwhile, would need even more time to catch up — about a month or more. And "that really only brings them back to the pre-pandemic levels of inequality we already saw," Lewis said.

Judge declines block of Microsoft-Activision deal

Associated Press

A federal judge has handed Microsoft a major victory by declining to block its looming \$69 billion takeover of video game company Activision Blizzard. Regulators are seeking to ax the deal because they have said it will hurt competition.

U.S. District Judge Jacqueline Scott Corley said in a ruling that the Federal Trade Commission, which enforces antitrust laws, has not shown a likelihood it would prevail if it took the case to trial.

"The FTC has not raised serious questions regarding whether the proposed merger is likely to substantially lessen competition in the console, library subscription services, or cloud gaming markets," Corley wrote.

Microsoft appeared to have the upper hand in a 5-day San Francisco court hearing that ended late last month. The proceeding showcased testimony by Microsoft Chief Executive Officer Satya Nadella and longtime Activision Blizzard CEO Bobby Kotick, who both pledged to keep Activision's blockbuster game

Call of Duty available to people who play it on consoles — particularly Sony's PlayStation — that compete with Microsoft's Xbox.

"Our merger will benefit consumers and workers. It will enable competition rather than allow entrenched market leaders to continue to dominate our rapidly growing industry," Kotick said in a written statement after Tuesday's ruling.

The FTC had asked Corley to issue an injunction temporarily blocking Microsoft and Activision from closing the deal before the FTC's in-house judge can review it in an August trial.

Both companies suggested that such a delay would effectively force them to abandon the takeover agreement they signed nearly 18 months ago. Microsoft has promised to pay Activision a \$3 billion breakup fee if the deal doesn't close by July 18.

A number of other countries and the European Union have approved the Activision Blizzard takeover, but it still faces opposition from the United Kingdom's Competition and Markets Authority.

Trump lawyers request delay of classified documents trial

Associated Press

MIAMI — Lawyers for former President Donald Trump are asking a judge to postpone his criminal trial without setting a new date as he stands accused of illegally hoarding classified documents at his Florida estate.

In a late Monday filing, Trump's defense attorneys said the case was "extraordinary," with a large volume of documents and footage to be reviewed as the former president leads the race for the Republican nomination to unseat President Joe Biden.

They cited challenges to select jurors and concerns about whether he would get a fair trial if scheduled before the November 2024 election.

"The government's request to begin a trial of this magnitude within six months of indictment is unreasonable, telling, and would result in a miscarriage of justice," said the document filed by Chris Kise, one of Trump's lawyers.

The Justice Department had previously proposed to set the trial date for Dec. 11.

Earlier on Monday, Trump's

lawyers filed paperwork saying they agreed with federal prosecutors to delay to next week a pretrial hearing that specifically discusses how classified information is handled in court.

The hearing to discuss the Classified Information Procedures Act had previously been set for Friday.

But an attorney for Trump's valet Walt Nauta, who was charged alongside the former president, said he has another bench trial this week in Washington preventing him from appearing Friday in South Florida.

The attorneys said in their filing that they can appear at the pretrial conference to go over the 1980 law on July 18, adding they had also checked with U.S. attorneys on moving the date.

The judge in the case, U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon, still needs to agree to the new date.

Trump and Nauta were charged in a 38-count indictment with conspiring to hide classified documents at Mar-a-Lago from federal investigators. Both men have pleaded not guilty.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Ex-priest sentenced for drugging, molesting men

LA METAIRIE — A former Catholic priest in Louisiana has been sentenced to 25 years in prison after he pleaded guilty to drugging and molesting 17 men he met in a popular tourist area in New Orleans, a prosecutor said.

WVUE-TV reported that Stephen Sauer, 61, targeted people in the city's French Quarter who appeared drunk, lost or in need of help, according to Jefferson Parish District Attorney Paul D. Connick Jr.

The crimes occurred from 2019 to 2021, and many of the victims were visiting from out of state, Connick said.

The prosecutor said Sauer put narcotics in men's drinks at bars or gave them sleep-inducing drugs after they passed out from drinking. He then drove the victims to his home in the New Orleans suburb of Metairie, where he photographed or videotaped the unconscious men and molested some of them.

Amusement park adds more reviews after crack

NC RALEIGH — A North Carolina amusement park that came under investigation after a video surfaced online of parkgoers riding a roller coaster with a large crack in the support column has announced plans to repair the ride and said it will implement new inspection procedures.

Video footage of the Charlotte-based Carowinds' popular Fury 325, known as a "giga coaster" due to its dramatic height of 325 feet, showed a key support beam bending with the top visibly detached as cars packed

with unsuspecting passengers barreled by at speeds of up to 95 mph.

After Carowinds installs the new column, it plans to conduct accelerometer tests, which use sensors to measure the vibration of a structure. The park said it will then operate the ride for 500 full cycles while running various tests on the entire coaster. The manufacturer and a third-party testing firm will then perform a final inspection.

AG suit targets change of sex on driver's licenses

KS TOPEKA — The Republican attorney general of Kansas sued to block transgender residents from changing their sex on their driver's licenses and to rebuke the Democratic governor for defying his interpretation of a new law.

Attorney General Kris Kobach went to a state court in hopes of getting an order to stop Gov. Laura Kelly and agencies under her control to stop allowing the changes to transgender people's licenses. Kobach contends a law prevents such changes and requires the state to reverse any previous changes in its records, including about 1,300 made over the past four years.

The new law defines a person's sex as male or female, based on the "biological reproductive system" identified at birth, applying that definition to any state law or regulation. It also said that "important governmental objectives" of protecting people's privacy, health and safety justify single-sex spaces such as bathrooms and locker rooms. Kansas is among at least 10 states with a law against transgender people using facili-

ties in line with their gender identities, though the new law includes no enforcement mechanism.

New museum tells history of last known slave ship

AL MOBILE — A museum that tells the history of the Clotilda — the last ship known to transport Africans to the American South for enslavement — opened exactly 163 years after the vessel arrived in Alabama's Mobile Bay.

Ceremonies dedicating the \$1.3 million Africatown Heritage House and "Clotilda: The Exhibition" took place in Mobile. The exhibit tells about the ship, its survivors and how they founded the Africatown community in Mobile after they were freed from five years of slavery following the Civil War.

The Clotilda illegally transported 110 captive people from what is now the west African nation of Benin to Alabama. The captain, William Foster, transferred women, men and children off the Clotilda once it arrived in Mobile and set fire to the ship to hide evidence of the journey. Most of Clotilda didn't burn, and much of the ship is still in the Mobile River, which empties into Mobile Bay.

Contraceptive meds now available over the counter

AZ PHOENIX — Adults in Arizona can now obtain contraceptive medications over the counter at a pharmacy without a doctor's prescription under a governor's order.

Gov. Katie Hobbs said the rule will go into effect immediately. It applies to self-administered birth control such as hor-

monal and oral contraceptives, and patients 18 or older need only complete a screening and a blood pressure test.

"We are building an Arizona for everyone, which means ensuring people across the state have what they need to live a free and healthy life," the Democratic governor said in a statement.

Over 20 states have statutes that let pharmacists dispense FDA-approved hormonal contraceptives without a prescription, according to a statement from the Arizona Department of Health Services.

Truck makers pledge to phase out gas power

CA SACRAMENTO — Some of the nation's largest truck makers pledged to stop selling new gas-powered vehicles in California by the middle of the next decade, part of an agreement with state regulators aimed at preventing lawsuits that threatened to delay or block the state's emission standards.

California is trying to rid itself of fossil fuels, passing new rules in recent years to phase out gas-powered cars, trucks, trains and lawn equipment in the nation's most populous state.

It will take years before all of those rules fully take effect.

The announcement means lawsuits are less likely to delay similar rules for the trucking industry. The companies agreed to follow California's rules, which include banning the sale of new gas-powered trucks by 2036. In the meantime, California regulators agreed to loosen some of their emission standards for diesel trucks.

— From wire reports

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Guerrero Jr. matches dad, wins Home Run Derby

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Of course a Junior had to do something special in Seattle.

Vladimir Guerrero Jr. won the All-Star Home Run Derby on Monday night, matching Vladimir Sr.'s 2007 title to become the first father-son duo to accomplish the feat.

As far as who might win a head-to-head swing-off, well, that depends.

"It's kind of difficult right now," the Toronto Blue Jays star said with a wide grin, speaking through a translator. "With the time, with the minutes, I'll win. If it's by outs, he'll win."

In a ballpark made famous by the Mariners' Ken Griffey Jr. a generation earlier, Guerrero beat Tampa Bay's Randy Arozarena 25-23 in the final round. He was 8 when his father won the crown in San Francisco.

"I don't remember much about 2007," Vladimir Jr. said.

"I guess I was too young."

Guerrero totaled 5½ miles of homers — 29,390 feet to be exact. He defeated Julio Rodríguez 21-20 in the semifinals after the Mariners star hit a record 41 in the first round in front of his hometown fans.

Batting against Blue Jays manager John Schneider, Guerrero was the last semifinalist to swing and the first finalist, setting a final-round record for homers to top the mark Pete Alonso set when he beat Guerrero 23-22 in 2019.

With Guerrero catching his breath while watching, Arozarena hit against Tampa Bay field coordinator Tomas Francisco. Arozarena had 21 homers in his initial 2 minutes. He had 23 with 7 seconds left in his automatic 30 seconds of bonus time before lining and popping up on his final four swings.

Guerrero had 1 minute of bonus time, earning an additional

30 seconds because he twice reached 440 feet.

"Obviously, the power that he has was incredible," Arozarena said through a translator. "For me, I felt good going into that round. But also he was able to get a minute of bonus time. I only had the 30 seconds of bonus time."

Vladimir Guerrero Sr. won the 2007 derby while with the Los Angeles Angels, beating the Blue Jays' Alex Rios 3-2 in the final.

Arozarena had the most overall homers over the three rounds, 82 to Guerrero's 72, and the most distance at 33,077 feet. Arozarena overcame Luis Robert of the Chicago White Sox 35-22 in the semifinals. Robert hit the longest drive of the night, a 484-foot shot to left in the second round. That topped the high of 476 feet by Barry Bonds in the 2001 derby in Seattle.

Trying to become the young-

gest Derby winner at age 22, Rodríguez knocked out Alonso, a two-time champion who hit 21. Rodríguez beat Corey Seager 32-24 in the first round last year at Dodger Stadium, then knocked out Alonso 31-23 before losing to Juan Soto 19-18 in the final.

Arozarena beat Texas' Adolis García 24-17 in the opening pairing before a crowd of 46,952 at T-Mobile Park. García is the godfather to Arozarena's daughter, and the two jumped into each other's arms during warmups.

Robert knocked out Baltimore's Adley Rutschman 28-27 in the opening round. Rutschman hit 21 left-handed, and the switch hitter then turned around to the right side and hit six more right-handed during a 30-second bonus round. From Portland, Ore., Rutschman grew up attending Mariners games.

Strikeout numbers still high despite rule changes

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Major League Baseball has made the games faster, the bases bigger and defense a little bit harder.

Now, if it could only do something about those stubborn strikeouts.

"Just move the mound back to about — oh, I don't know — second base? Maybe fastballs only?" Arizona Diamondbacks outfielder Jake McCarthy said, laughing. "I just think these pitchers are really good."

"No one likes to strike out, but that's how it goes."

There's little doubt that MLB's expansive new rules package this season has been a success, particularly when it comes to speeding up the action. But the sport is also hunting for a little more offense these days and, to be honest, the league-wide offensive output of 2023 still looks pretty similar to 2022 in several areas.

Batting average is up modestly to .248 through Friday's games, rising from .243 last season. So is OPS, rising to .730 from .706. Stolen bases have also jumped substantially, thanks in part to a new rule that puts limits on pitcher disengagements from the

rubber.

But punchouts are again near an all-time high, with each team averaging about 8.7 strikeouts per game. The high came in 2019, when the average was 8.81, but that was before the National League joined the American League by adopting the designated hitter rule for good in 2022.

Even without pitchers at the plate, the whiffs are still coming in bunches.

"We all understand that this game is very difficult," Giants slugger J.D. Davis said recently. "Pitchers these days are even better than they were five, 10 years ago."

The good news is that hitting for average is starting to become slightly more in vogue. The poster child is Miami Marlins All-Star second baseman Luis Arraez, who's been flirting with a .400 batting average for a big chunk of the season. No MLB player has topped .400 since Ted Williams hit .406 for the Boston Red Sox more than 80 years ago.

So how is Arraez putting up those gaudy numbers? Well, one reason is he's simply making contact with the ball.

He struck out just 19 times in his first 357 plate appearances this season — numbers

more reminiscent of 1923 than 2023.

"I think guys are starting to be better at manipulating the barrel and getting to certain pitches and just not one groove swing," Marlins manager Skip Schumaker said. "I think there's a lot of teachers now that are teaching the game the right way and not just one way to hit."

The evolution of high strikeout numbers has been a decades-long process but has really sped up over the past 15 years. In 2018, strikeouts became more common than hits for the first time and that trend has held firm the past six seasons.

If there's going to be a drop in the strikeout rate in baseball, it appears it will have to happen organically.

The notoriously restrained sport has made a huge effort to modernize over the past few seasons — particularly with the pitch clock — and doesn't have much of an appetite for more seismic shifts on the field in the near future.

"I think there's some sentiment among the group that we made a lot of changes here," MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred said in June. "We ought to let the dust settle."

6 Wake players taken on Day 2 of MLB draft

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Baseball's amateur draft has been a fitting conclusion to a historic season at Wake Forest.

The Demon Deacons had six players drafted Monday, bringing their two-day total to nine. That's three more than the LSU team that knocked Wake Forest out of the College World Series and went on to win the national title.

LSU, of course, had the top two picks in the draft Sunday in Paul Skenes and Dylan Crews, but the Deacons showed off their depth on Day 2, when rounds 3-10 took place. Wake Forest pitchers Seth Keener (third round, White Sox), Teddy McGraw (third, Mariners) and Camden Minacci (sixth, Angels) were selected, along with catcher Bennett Lee (sixth, Ti-

gers), outfielder Tommy Hawke (sixth, Guardians) and shortstop Justin Johnson (10th, Royals).

Wake Forest reached the CWS for the first time since winning the national title in 1955. The Deacons were eliminated by LSU 2-0 in 11 innings in an epic pitching matchup between Rhett Lowder and Skenes. Lowder ended up as the seventh overall pick in this draft.

Higher education

The Arizona Diamondbacks, Baltimore Orioles, Colorado Rockies and St. Louis Cardinals have taken only college players so far. In fact, the Orioles have drafted only outfielders and right-handed pitchers, which could help a system that is heavy on hitting prospects at the moment.

On the mound

The Pittsburgh Pirates took Skenes at No. 1 overall, and they haven't stopped adding pitchers since. Nine of Pittsburgh's 11 picks so far have been pitchers, all but one from college.

The San Diego Padres have taken only two pitchers, high schooler Kannon Kemp in the eighth round and two-way player Tucker Musgrove of the University of Mobile in the seventh. San Diego has only had eight picks after losing its second- and fifth-rounders for signing free agent Xander Bogaerts.

Familiar names

Colorado drafted third baseman Kyle Karros of UCLA in the fifth round. He's the son of Eric Karros, who won National League Rookie of the Year hon-

ors with the Los Angeles Dodgers in 1992. The elder Karros was drafted in the sixth round in 1988.

Grand Canyon outfielder Homer Bush Jr. was taken in the fourth round by San Diego. Bush's father was also drafted by the Padres in 1991, although he spent most of his major league career with the Yankees and Blue Jays — he was dealt to Toronto as part of the trade that sent Roger Clemens to New York.

Will he or won't he?

Milwaukee used a sixth-round pick on high school shortstop Cooper Pratt, the No. 45-ranked prospect in the draft according to MLB Pipeline. The question now is whether the Brewers can get the Mississippi commit to sign instead of playing in college.

Svitolina ousts Swiatek, earns spot in Wimbledon semis

Associated Press

WIMBLEDON, England — Three months after returning from maternity leave, Elina Svitolina reached the Wimbledon semifinals by beating top-ranked Iga Swiatek 7-5, 6-7 (5), 6-2 Tuesday.

The 28-year-old Ukrainian gave birth to her daughter in October and returned to the WTA tour in April. She received a wild-card entry to the grass-court tournament one month after reaching the quarterfinals at the French Open.

"First of all I'm going to have a beer, probably," Svitolina said on court. "At the beginning of the tournament if someone would tell me that I will be in the semifinal and beating world No. 1, I would just say that they're crazy."

Swiatek, a four-time major champion, won her third French Open title last month but was playing in the Wimbledon quarterfinals for the first time.

At one point, Svitolina won 20 of 22 points against Swiatek on Centre Court, including 16 of the final 18 points in the first set.

"My forehand wasn't the best. I'll still work on it," Swiatek said. "But honestly, it's hard for me to, like, point (to) one thing what failed exactly. I think Elina was just overall

playing aggressively and giving it all in every shot."

Svitolina will next face Marketa Vondrousova for a spot in Saturday's final. It will be the Ukrainian player's second appearance in the Wimbledon semifinals. She lost to eventual champion Simona Halep at that stage in 2019.

"I'm just going to enjoy tonight and then get some treatment, get some massage, much needed and then just regroup and be ready for the next big battle," Svitolina said.

Svitolina has been ranked as high as No. 3 in the world and also reached the U.S. Open semifinals in 2019. She is currently ranked 76th. To reach the semifinals this year, she has beaten four Grand Slam champions — Venus Williams in the first round, Sofia Kenin in the third, Victoria Azarenka in the fourth and Swiatek in the quarterfinals.

Vondrousova won five straight games in the final set to beat fourth-seeded Jessica Pegula 6-4, 2-6, 6-4 on No. 1 Court. The left-handed Czech who reached the French Open final in 2019 trailed 4-1 in the third set but didn't lose another game after that.

"I'm just trying to stay in every game. It can change pretty quickly," Vondrousova said. "She got so much better in the second

set. She was pushing me today."

Pegula is now 0-6 in Grand Slam quarterfinals. The 29-year-old American was playing at this stage at Wimbledon for the first time.

Vondrousova had won only four matches on grass heading into the tournament at the All England Club. But she has won five in a row on the surface over the last eight days.

"My best result here was second round. It's amazing. I'm just loving grass now," Vondrousova said.

The victory for Vondrousova is her fourth over a seeded player at this year's Wimbledon tournament. She beat No. 12 Veronika Kudermetova in the second round, No. 20 Donna Vekic in the third round and No. 32 Marie Bouzkova in the fourth round.

Pegula was leading 3-1 in the third set when play was suspended so the roof over No. 1 Court could be closed with rain approaching. Pegula then held serve in the next game to lead 4-1 before Vondrousova took over.

In the men's quarterfinals, eighth-seeded Jannik Sinner beat Roman Safiullin 6-4, 3-6, 6-2, 6-2 on No. 1 Court.

Later Tuesday, seven-time Wimbledon champion Novak Djokovic was facing Andrey Rublev on Centre Court.

Wembanyama done playing for summer

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Victor Wembanyama's first, and likely last, Summer League is over.

The San Antonio Spurs said Monday that they have seen all they needed from the No. 1 pick in this year's draft and won't play him during their remaining games in Las Vegas.

Wembanyama's final numbers from two games: 36 points, 20 rebounds, eight blocks and three assists on 41% shooting from the floor. He played about 54 minutes.

The shutdown wasn't a surprise; the Spurs never planned for Wembanyama to play the entirety of Summer League, and now they'll have a chance to use the minutes he would have gotten to take a look at other players.

"I'm going to sit down with the Spurs to know what the next months are going to be like," Wembanyama said Sunday night after what became

his summer finale. "When to go on vacation, when to start back working out, where I'm going to practice, in San Antonio or somewhere else. I just know I've got two to three months — two to three great months — that are coming and they're going to change my life."

Shutting him down from games — San Antonio has either three or four games left in Las Vegas — starts what will be a needed break for the 19-year-old from France whose last professional season in his homeland started nearly a year ago. He was in the French playoffs up until a few days before the draft in June, and his schedule has been crazed since.

Put simply, the Spurs believe he needs a chance to rest and reset to get ready for training camp that starts in early October and then an 82-game regular season.

"In the past month, I think basketball wasn't even 50% of

my schedule," Wembanyama said. "I can't stand it. I know it's a special moment in my life, but I'm glad it's over. Honestly. I just want to hoop. I just want to work out, lift because this is my life. Obviously, every first pick is going to go through this. And it just makes me better for the future."

It has been a whirlwind few days in Las Vegas for the Spurs. Wembanyama's debut on Friday night had a circus-like atmosphere with a sold-out crowd and enormous attention; Sunday's game wasn't quite the same, but the crowd was still huge. And more big news came between those games on Saturday when Gregg Popovich's new five-year contract to remain coach and president of the team was announced.

As would be expected, the Popovich signing delighted Wembanyama.

"There's something great going on, starting," Wembanyama

said. "We kind of knew it was going to happen, but now it's, let's get it rolling. We can get started now."

Wembanyama took part in the NBA's required rookie transition program on Monday, where he spoke with NBA Commissioner Adam Silver — who has raved about the 7-foot-3½ star many times since first meeting him in Paris in January.

"I'm not sure if anything else I'd say could put more pressure on him, because there's already so much pressure on him and attention," Silver said Monday while speaking to the Associated Press Sports Editors convention in Las Vegas. "But it seems, at least initially, that he's well equipped to handle it."

Vegas is a showtown. Wembanyama put on a show, and the Spurs said it was enough. Now his focus shifts to his first real season.

Fitzgerald fired by Northwestern amid hazing allegations

Associated Press

EVANSTON, Ill. — Northwestern fired coach Pat Fitzgerald on Monday amid a hazing scandal that called into question his leadership of the program and damaged the university's reputation after it mishandled its response to the allegations.

Fitzgerald's dismissal completed a rapid fall from grace for the former All-American linebacker, the star of the 1995 Northwestern team that won the Big Ten and played in the Rose Bowl after years of losing. The 48-year-old Fitzgerald had been firmly entrenched at his alma mater, an annual fixture on any list of college coaches with the most job security.

"The head coach is ultimately responsible for the culture of his team," Northwestern President Michael Schill wrote in an

open letter to the university community. "The hazing we investigated was widespread and clearly not a secret within the program, providing Coach Fitzgerald with the opportunity to learn what was happening. Either way, the culture in Northwestern Football, while incredible in some ways, was broken in others."

Fitzgerald went 110-101 in 17 seasons as Northwestern's head coach. He led the Wildcats to Big Ten West championships in 2018 and 2020, plus five bowl victories. But they went 4-20 over his last two seasons.

Fitzgerald said in a statement provided to ESPN that he had instructed his attorney to "take the necessary steps to protect my rights in accordance with the law."

Schill wrote in his letter that athletic director Derrick Gragg

will announce "the leadership for this upcoming football season" in the next couple of days. The opener is Sept. 3 at Rutgers.

"I recognize that my decision will not be universally applauded, and there will be those in our community who may vehemently disagree with it," Schill wrote. "Ultimately, I am charged with acting in the best interests of the entire University, and this decision is reflective of that. The damage done to our institution is significant, as is the harm to some of our students."

Gragg was hired by Northwestern in June 2021. He got the job after Mike Polisky stepped down amid mounting criticism because he was named in a sexual harassment lawsuit against the Big Ten school by former Wildcats cheerleaders.

Fitzgerald had been serving a

two-week suspension after the school said Friday that an investigation led by attorney Maggie Hickey of law firm ArentFox Schiff did not find "sufficient" evidence that the coaching staff knew about ongoing hazing — though there were "significant opportunities" to find out about it.

Schill, who was the president of the University of Oregon before taking over Northwestern in September, said in his Monday letter that the investigative report will remain confidential. But he wrote that, during the investigation, 11 current or former players acknowledged the hazing within the program. "The hazing included forced participation, nudity and sexualized acts of a degrading nature, in clear violation of Northwestern policies and values," Schill wrote.