

## Atlantic Resolve gets contingency status

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — The idea of turning U.S. European Command's Atlantic Resolve campaign into a full-fledged contingency operation used to set off alarms in Washington, where concerns about provoking Russia were intense enough to land outspoken generals in the doghouse.

On Thursday, the Pentagon reversed course and announced EUCOM's 9-year-old Atlantic Resolve mission that has deployed thousands of troops over the years to defend NATO's eastern flank was reclassified as a contingency operation, which brings with it an array of new authorizations.

The change gives EUCOM more operational flexibility and includes added entitlements for reservists, who will receive the same benefits as active-duty personnel, the Pentagon said.

In the aftermath of Russia's initial 2014 invasion of Ukraine, a push was already underway by U.S. military officials in Europe to get the new Atlantic Resolve effort focused on countering Russia upgraded into a named military operation.

Those attempts were shot down repeatedly. The likely reason was angst about antagonizing Russia and ambivalence about a more robust military mission on the Continent, the former head of the Army in Europe said Friday.

"The (Obama) administration was super sensitive to anything that might be seen as provocative to Russia," retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges said. "(Former national security adviser) Susan Rice even told EUCOM for a while that I could not go to Ukraine without her approval, even though we had troops there training Ukrainian troops."

During his 2014-17 tenure as head of the Army in Europe, Hodges and then-EUCOM chief Gen. Philip Breedlove often were more outspoken than the Pentagon about the implications of Russia's armed takeover of Crimea from Ukraine and what it meant for security in Europe.

The idea of making Atlantic Resolve a contingency operation was already being advocated by Hodges.

"But we were consistently rebuffed by the (Joint Staff)," he said.

Nearly a decade later, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and ongoing occupation of the southern and eastern parts of the country forced the Pentagon to reconsider.

Because of the growing size of the mission, which has involved thousands of additional troops since the invasion began Feb. 24, 2022, more support is needed, Lt. Gen. Douglas Sims, director for operations at the Joint Staff, told reporters Thursday.

"Lastly, this reaffirms the unwavering support and commitment to the defense of NATO's eastern flank in the wake of Russia's illegal and unprovoked war on Ukraine," he said.

Hodges said the change amounts to a recognition by the Defense Department and the Joint Staff that Operation Atlantic Resolve needs to be higher on the military funding pecking order.

"This is a big deal," he said. "This will raise its priority, which will help it compete in the Pentagon's resourcing process with other requirements around the world."

Retired Brig. Gen. Timothy Daugherty, one of Hodges' deputies at the time, concurred, saying the changes could affect everything from troop awards to how military construction projects get carried out.

"The evolution makes competing for resources much cleaner and more sustainable on a longer basis," Daugherty said. "It is basically a separate bucket of money in the budgeting process."

## Biden: 3K reservists can be sent to support NATO, Ukraine

By DOUG G. WARE  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden signed an executive order Thursday that makes as many as 3,000 American reservists available to go to Europe in support of NATO efforts amid the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The purpose of the order, Biden said, is to better support Operation Atlantic Resolve, a mission that launched almost a decade ago after Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine.

"Since 2014, U.S. European Command has provided combat-credible forces for rotational deployment to Europe ... to demonstrate good commitment to NATO," Army Lt. Gen. Douglas Sims, director of operations for the Joint Staff, told reporters Thursday. "This reaffirms the unwavering support and commitment to the defense of NATO's eastern flank in wake of Russia's illegal, unprovoked war on Ukraine."

In Biden's order, he said the move making thousands of Reserve troops available is needed to back up American forces already involved in the defensive operation.

"Reserve mobilizations under this authorization are not to exceed 3,000 total members at any one time, of whom not more than 450 may be members of the Individual Ready Reserve," Biden said in a letter informing Congress of his order. "These Reserve component forces are to augment the active forces ... to enhance the United States' ability to sustain its heightened level of presence and operations."

The Pentagon stressed the order doesn't simply send 3,000 more troops to Europe, but rather it only makes reservists available to go if EUCOM decides they're needed. For example, Sims said commanders in Europe might decide a Reserve unit is better suited to handle certain tasks than active-duty troops who are already there.

Even before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the United States had put thousands of additional American troops in areas neighboring, or near, Ukraine — such as Germany, Poland and Romania — to support NATO's eastern flank. Biden's administration has also given Ukraine tens of billions of dollars in military aid at the same time, including a recent \$800 million package.

"The United States European Command is preparing to use new authorities in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve, in continuation of U.S. commitment to NATO collective security, peace and stability," Navy Capt. Bill Speaks, a spokesman for U.S. European Command, said Thursday. "This will not change current force posture levels in Europe."

The Pentagon also said Atlantic Resolve is now being designated as a "contingency operation," which is a move to add operational flexibility and troop benefits.

# Coast Guard leader: Lax mood on assault lingers

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard acknowledged Thursday that “pockets” of the service have retained a permissive attitude toward sexual assault years after the cover-up of sexual assault and harassment cases at the Coast Guard’s academy.

Adm. Linda Fagan, the service commandant, made the admission amid a barrage of questioning from a subpanel of the Senate Commerce Committee, which has oversight of the Coast Guard and learned last month of a six-year, clandestine inquiry into sexual assault at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn.

The probe found 62 incidents of rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment occurred at the academy or by cadets between 1988 and 2006 and discovered another 42 cases that were not properly investigated. The internal review, called “Operation Fouled Anchor,” was completed in 2020 but the service did not reveal it to Congress until CNN reported details of the inquiry.

“We failed the committee when we did not disclose in 2020,” Fagan said. “It is clear to me that we’ve got a culture in areas that is permissive and allows sexual assaults, ha-

arrassment, bullying, retaliation that’s inconsistent with our core values. It is not the work force that I want or expect and we have got work to do.”

Fagan took command last year, becoming the first woman in history to lead a military service. She told senators that she was aware of the academy investigation but did not realize the “totality” of it until reporters began asking questions.

The Coast Guard apologized last month for failing to investigate or discipline many of the accused, conceding “by not having taken appropriate action at the time of the sexual assaults, the Coast Guard may have further traumatized the victims, delayed access to their care and recovery, and prevented some cases from being referred to the military justice system for appropriate accountability.”

Fagan said the service is establishing a special prosecuting office that will remove sexual assault and harassment cases from the chain of command, aligning the Coast Guard with Defense Department policies.

The service also launched a 90-day “accountability and transparency review” and is continuing to invest in victim and survivor services in anticipation of more cases coming to light, Fagan said.

# Space Force general nominated by Biden to lead Space Command

BY MATTHEW ADAMS  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Space Force Lt. Gen. Stephen Whiting was nominated Tuesday by President Joe Biden to become the next leader of U.S. Space Command, replacing Army Gen. James Dickinson.

Along with Whiting, who now leads Space Operation Command, two other Space Force leaders were recommended for promotions by Biden, who submitted the nominations to the Senate.

If Whiting gets the new job, it will come with a promotion to the rank of general, and he will receive a fourth star.

Lt. Gen. Michael Guetlein also has been nominated for the rank of general and a fourth star. Guetlein, commander of the Space Systems Command, is expected to become the next vice chief of operations of Space Force, replacing Space Force Gen. David “DT” Thompson.

The White House also submitted the nomination of Lt. Gen. Philip Garrant, deputy chief of space operations for strategy, plans, programs and requirements, who will remain at the same rank but is expected to replace Guetlein as the commander of the Space Systems Command, which is based in Los Angeles.

# Intense flooding damages West Point residences

BY ROSE L. THAYER  
*Stars and Stripes*

More than 130 residents in on-base housing at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., requested maintenance in their homes last week because of damage caused by extreme flooding from storms that bombarded New York’s Hudson Valley.

Col. Anthony Bianchi, the West Point garrison commander, said Wednesday during a news conference that up to 20 of those homes are severely damaged with standing water and debris.

“We’re a lot better off than we thought we were initially,” he said of the storm that brought about 8 inches of rainfall in one day. “There is some significant damage though.”

Most of the damage was in the housing area, base officials said.

Balfour Beatty, the private company that manages housing for West Point, said it has sent maintenance employees from other properties in the region to assist, but some repairs can’t be assessed until the drying process is complete.

There are 742 homes occupied on post, the company said. Of those, 66 suffered flood damage, mainly to basements and crawl spaces, and 26 homes experienced roof leaks that have already been repaired.

Only one family has had to be temporarily moved from their home, the company said in a statement.

“We’re working very closely with West Point leadership and have multiple daily meetings with them to assess progress. Our team has been checking with each household to ascertain damage, address concerns, and answer questions,” Balfour Beatty said.

At least nine buildings on post were severely affected, with officials describing water intrusions, debris and broken air conditioning systems. Four roads were washed out, and base officials asked people to avoid traveling to the area, if possible.

Residents and base personnel also must navigate downed trees that left a significant amount of debris on roads and sidewalks. Work crews are also clearing debris from storm drains as the National Weather Service predicted heavy rain in the area through the weekend.

# Putin: Russia has 'stockpile' of cluster bombs

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview published Sunday that Russia has a “sufficient stockpile” of cluster munitions, and warned that Russia “reserves the right to take reciprocal action” if Ukraine uses the controversial weapons.

In his first comments on the delivery of cluster munitions to Ukraine from the United States, Putin said Russia has not used cluster bombs in its war in Ukraine so far. The use of cluster bombs by both Russia and Uk-

raine has been widely documented, including by The Associated Press and international humanitarian organizations, and cluster rounds have been found in the aftermath of Russian strikes.

“Until now, we have not done this, we have not used it, and we have not had such a need,” he said,

Rossiya TV reporter Pavel Zarubin published excerpts of the interview to his Telegram channel Sunday ahead of a scheduled broadcast Sunday night.

The Pentagon said Thursday that cluster munitions provided by the U.S. had arrived in Ukraine.

The munitions, which are bombs that open in the air and release scores of smaller bomblets, are seen by the U.S. as a way to get Kyiv critically needed ammunition to help bolster its offensive and push through Russian front lines. U.S. leaders debated the thorny issue for months, before President Joe Biden made the final decision last week.

Cluster bombs have long

been criticized by humanitarian groups, and some U.S. allies, because those used in previous conflicts have had a high “dud rate,” meaning that they often leave behind unexploded bomblets that can harm civilians long after a battle has ended.

Proponents have argued that Russia has already been using cluster munitions in Ukraine and that the weapons the U.S. is providing have been improved to leave behind far fewer unexploded rounds. Ukraine has promised to use them only away from densely populated areas.

## US, S. Korea respond to North's launch with drill

**BY DAVID CHOI**  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The U.S. and South Korean air forces conducted a bomber escort drill a day after North Korea fired an intercontinental ballistic missile that achieved a new flight record.

Three South Korean F-15K Slam Eagles flew alongside U.S. F-16 Fighting Falcons and a B-52H Stratofortress bomber over the Korean Peninsula, according to a news release late Thursday from the South's Ministry of National Defense.

Four U.S. F-16s accompanied the B-52H during the drill, 7th Air Force spokeswoman Maj. Rachel Buitrago said in an email Friday.

Aircraft tail markings from photos released by the ministry showed the F-16s were assigned to the 8th Fighter Wing at Kunsan Air Base and the B-52H was assigned to Barksdale Air Force Base, La.

B-52s from Barksdale arrived at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, on July 5 as part of a bomber task force mission, one of an ongoing series intended to project U.S. airpower in the region, Pacific Air Forces said in a news release Tuesday.

The joint air drill over South Korea was conducted “in a timely manner” and showcased the allies’ military capabilities and commitment to defend South Korea, according to the release.

The demonstration came a day after North Korea fired its second, solid-fueled Hwasong-18 ICBM, which flew 74 minutes, a record for the regime's missile program. It was fired around 10 a.m. Wednesday from the Pyongyang area and splashed into the East Sea, or Sea of Japan, 155 miles west of Okushiri Island, outside of Japan's exclusive economic zone.

The ICBM launch was condemned Wednesday at the NATO summit in Lithuania by South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and New Zealand Prime Minister Chris Hipkins.

“Even if North Korea continues to develop its nuclear and missile programs and threaten the use of nuclear weapons, it will only bolster the international community's resolve to achieve [the] complete denuclearization of North Korea,” said a joint statement from the four leaders.

## Japan: China, Taiwan sent vessels around its islands

**BY KEISHI KOJA**  
*Stars and Stripes*

Japan has lodged complaints with China and Taiwan for sending ships into waters around the Senkakus, a group of small islands it controls in the East China Sea.

The first complaint came after a Taiwanese survey vessel was spotted at 8:48 a.m. Wednesday about 113 miles north of Taisho Island, according to a Japanese coast guard news release. A country's exclusive economic zone usually extends 230 miles beyond the 12-mile territorial limit.

The vessel was extending a wire into the sea and appeared to be conducting surveys. The coast guard asked the vessel to cease its activities but received no answer.

The vessel retrieved the wire at 10:55 a.m. and headed to the north-northeast.

The following day, a pair of Chinese coast guard vessels made the country's 19th intrusion into area around the Senkakus.

Trailing a Japanese fishing boat, the Chinese ships approached Taisho Island from the southwest and south-south-

west and entered the 12-mile limit just before 5 a.m. Thursday, a Japanese coast guard spokesman told Stars and Stripes by phone Friday.

The two ships, which appeared to be unarmed, remained until 9:35 p.m. and 9:59 p.m., respectively, then departed to the east-northeast and west-northwest.

The Chinese ships were met by a larger contingent of Japanese coast guard vessels, according to the spokesman, who declined to provide the exact number. The Japanese ships positioned themselves between the Chinese vessels and Japanese fishing boats, warning the Chinese by radio and electronic message boards to leave the area.

Chinese vessels last appeared near the Senkakus on June 21.

Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs complained Wednesday to the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association, a ministry spokesman said. On Thursday, the ministry made protests to the Chinese Embassy in Japan and to officials in Beijing, a Japanese coast guard spokesman told Stars and Stripes by phone Friday.



# Pimp steered police to accused killer

*New York Daily News*

NEW YORK — A Long Island pimp's tip, coupled with chilling web searches and pizza crust DNA, steered authorities to serial killing suspect Rex Heuermann before his arrest in the notorious Gilgo Beach murders ended years of mystery in the long-cold case.

The unidentified pimp for murder victim Amber Lynn Costello didn't know the suspect's name, but described his car to authorities as a green Chevrolet Avalanche during a spring 2022 meeting with investigators — adding “you might want to look at him,” Suffolk County Police Commissioner Rodney Harrison told *The New York Daily News* in a Saturday interview.

“The turning point was the car,” said Harrison, who made the investigation a priority last year. “Once we got that car, who it connected to, that's when the investigation got legs.”

The pimp crossed paths with Heuermann in September 2010 during a planned robbery

of the now-accused murderer, but quickly backed off because the 6-foot-6, 270-pound suburban dad was “the size of a mountain,” said Harrison.

The pimp also described the serial killer suspect as “being into prostitutes.”

For more than a decade, Heuermann was hiding in plain sight: Walking from his Long Island home to catch the train and working in his Manhattan office, his gruesome secrets untold as the years passed without suspicion — much less an arrest.

But once police connected the vehicle to Heuermann, the investigation intensified, Harrison said. Court papers detail how investigators used cellphone site data to track the defendant's whereabouts during the times of the slayings, and discovered burner phones employed by Heuermann to arrange his meetings with the victims.

Heuermann's DNA was also found on a pizza crust pulled from the defendant's garage, and authorities linked the suspect to a hair found in a piece of burlap used to move

the corpse of victim Megan Waterman, officials said.

A review of Heuermann's online searches in the last 16 months revealed a terrifying litany of subjects, including the names of the four victims and the words “Long Island Serial Killer.”

“We had to treat him as a maniac,” said Harrison. “There are people who have a family, then go out and do all types of horrible things. That's what serial killers do. They lead two lives.”

The hulking 59-year-old suspect was finally arrested on a Manhattan street Thursday for the killings of three suburban sex workers in 2009 and 2010, with authorities saying charges in a fourth murder were likely.

Their remains were all discovered in Gilgo Beach, on Long Island, and Harrison would not rule out Heuermann as a suspect in the murders of another six women whose bodies were found in the remote stretch of the suburbs.

## No motive in shooting that killed ND police officer

*Associated Press*

FARGO, N.D. — A gunman opened fire on police and firefighters “for no known reason” as they responded to a traffic crash in North Dakota, killing one officer and wounding two others before another officer killed him, Fargo's police chief said Saturday.

A 25-year-old woman was also injured in the shooting Friday afternoon, but authorities did not say who shot her. The gunman

did not hit any firefighters, Chief David Zibolski said, but a fire truck was struck by gunfire.

Zibolski identified the shooter as Mohamad Barakat, 37, of Fargo, but provided few details about him or the shooting, citing officials' desire to protect the investigation.

He said he was confident authorities would eventually determine the motive.

“The first thing we always want to know in a situation like

this is, ‘Why?’ ” he said. “Why would somebody do this? What happened?”

Zibolski said officer Jake Wallin, a military veteran, was killed, and officers Andrew Dotas and Tyler Hawes were wounded. Officer Zach Robinson shot and killed the suspect, Zibolski said.

At the time of the shooting, Wallin, 23, of St. Michael, Minn., was in the field as an officer in training, having become a Far-

go police officer less than three months earlier. Wallin previously served in the Minnesota Army National Guard and was deployed to Afghanistan, Zibolski said.

Authorities were investigating what Zibolski called a “routine traffic accident” on a busy Fargo street when Barakat opened fire.

He did not appear to have been involved in the crash police were working, Zibolski said.

## Strike cancels flights in Italy, disrupting tourist season

*Associated Press*

ROME — Hundreds of flights across Italy were canceled Saturday, forcing travelers at the peak of tourist season to make alternate plans, after air transport unions went ahead with a planned work stoppage two days following a train strike that paralyzed rail service.

Summertime in Italy is often

the peak season for transport strikes, stranding commuters and tourists alike as unions press demands for better work contracts and conditions.

This year, the strikes are taking their toll amid a tourism boom.

National carrier ITA said it canceled 133 flights, most of them domestic but a few to Eu-

ropean destinations such as Madrid, Amsterdam and Barcelona. Low-cost airlines Ryanair and Vueling canceled dozens of other flights due to the strike from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Striking workers included pilots, flight attendants, baggage handlers and airport personnel.

The website of Naples' airport showed dozens of flights

canceled starting at 10 a.m., a similar scene at Rome's Leonardo da Vinci airport.

“Yeah, it got canceled. It was ITA Airways to Catania,” lamented Stefania Spatola from Philadelphia, who was traveling with 35 members of her family. “All our flights got messed up. It's horrible. It's really, really horrible.”

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Lisa Marie Presley died from bowel obstruction

**CA** LOS ANGELES — Lisa Marie Presley died from complications from bariatric surgery she had several years ago, authorities said last week.

The Jan. 12 death at age 54 of the singer, songwriter and heir of Elvis Presley was ruled as being from natural causes due to effects of a small bowel obstruction.

Additional details about what caused Presley's death were included in an autopsy report released by the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner-Coroner.

The report says the complication that Presley experienced is a common after bariatric surgery, which is a weight loss procedure.

Presley died at a Los Angeles hospital, where she had been rushed by paramedics responding to a 911 call of a woman in cardiac arrest at her home. No indication was made public at the time of what may have caused the medical issue.

### Salon owner probed over gender identity comments

**MI** TRAVERSE CITY — A northern Michigan city is investigating after a local hair salon owner posted on social media that anyone identifying as other than a man or a woman is not welcome at her business.

Christine Geiger's online posts have drawn criticism from Traverse City's mayor and other officials, who said they were looking into whether she was violating a municipal anti-discrimination ordinance.

Demonstrators chanted and

carried signs Wednesday outside the business, Studio 8 Hair Lab — Education & Beauty Supply.

In an interview, Geiger stood by her posts and said small-business owners should be free to serve whomever they wish.

"I just don't want the woke dollar. ... I'd rather not be as busy than to have to do services that I don't agree with."

A post last weekend on the salon's Facebook page, which is no longer available, read, "If a human identifies as anything other than a man/woman please seek services at a local pet groomer. You are not welcome at this salon. Period. Should you request to have a particular pronoun used please note we may simply refer to you as 'hey you.'"

### Murder conviction nixed over judge's relationship

**OK** OKLAHOMA CITY — An Oklahoma appeals court threw out a first-degree murder conviction because of a sexual relationship between the judge and a prosecutor in the case.

In a 3-2 decision, the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals last week ordered a new trial for defendant Robert Leon Hashagen III, who was sentenced to life in prison after being convicted of first-degree murder in 2021. Hashagen's attorneys later appealed after new evidence emerged of an undisclosed sexual relationship between the trial court judge, Timothy Henderson, and one of the prosecutors in the case.

The majority opinion found that "the undisclosed relationship violated Hashagen's due process rights."

Henderson resigned in March

2021 after three female attorneys came forward with allegations of sexual misconduct against him. Henderson was never charged and has described the sexual involvement with two of the women as consensual.

### Retailer penalized for selling out-of-state weed

**NM** SANTA FE — New Mexico has revoked the license of a marijuana retailer in Albuquerque for selling out-of-state cannabis in violation of state law, the state cannabis control division announced.

Regulators allege that the Paradise Exotics Distro cannabis store on a central shopping thoroughfare sold cannabis products imported from California and marked with a California stamp of origin. Representatives for the business could not immediately be reached by phone or social media.

New Mexico is among at least 21 states that have legalized recreational marijuana for adults, while a federal marijuana ban still precludes interstate cannabis trade or trafficking.

### 'Forever chemicals' lead to limits on river's fish

**NC** RALEIGH — North Carolina health officials formally recommended limits on eating certain fish caught from portions of the Cape Fear River due to health concerns from a substance within the family of "forever chemicals."

The state Department of Health and Human Services issued a consumption advisory for species of freshwater fish from

the middle and lower Cape Fear River south of Fayetteville to north of Wilmington because of exposure to what's called perfluorooctane sulfonic acid, of PFOS.

PFOS belongs within a chemical group called PFAS, or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, which do not break down in the environment. Studies have linked longterm PFAS exposures to several health effects for children and adults, including increased risks for certain kinds of cancer, according to the department.

The advisory recommends women of child-bearing age and children avoid eating avoid bluegill, flathead catfish, largemouth bass, redear and striped bass caught from the portions of the river, and that other adults limit consumption to just one meal annually from those species combined.

### Fire kills nearly every animal at wildlife center

**FL** MADEIRA BEACH — An early morning fire killed nearly all the animals at a wildlife center, officials said.

News outlets reported the fire broke out around 3 a.m. Thursday at the Alligator and Wildlife Discovery Center in Madeira Beach, near St. Petersburg on Florida's Gulf Coast.

Sonny Flynn, who owns the center, told WTSP that all of the mammals inside the building died and many of the reptiles were injured. Small mammals, lizards, amphibians, turtles and tortoises, fresh and saltwater marine life, and alligators were among the 250 animals at the center.

— From wire reports

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# British Open: McIlroy tries to end drought

Associated Press

So many players showed up at Augusta National with high hopes for the major championship season. In the 105 days between the opening rounds of the Masters and the British Open, so much hope has given way to a small measure of desperation.

The British Open, which returns to Royal Liverpool for the third time in the last 17 years, is the last chance this year to win a major.

"This is the last major for eight or nine months, and you don't know what's happening in 12 months' time," Adam Scott said with a wry smile, referring in part to so much chaos in golf with the battle-turned-partnership with Saudi-funded LIV Golf.

"It does go quickly, especially the way our schedule has shifted," Scott said. "Now this one is 'Glory's Last Shot,' although you can't use that punch line for The Open Championship. But it is."

No need reminding Rory McIlroy of that.

Still fresh is the sting from the U.S. Open at Los Angeles Coun-

try Club last month, when he trailed by just one shot going to the back nine on the final round and couldn't convert enough shots to overtake Wyndham Clark.

Even fresher might be getting links soil under his feet and remembering a year ago at St. Andrews when he shared the 54-hole lead, two-putted every hole and watched Cameron Smith outplay him to hoist the silver claret jug.

McIlroy won four out of 15 majors from the 2011 U.S. Open through the 2014 PGA Championship at Valhalla, and he has come up empty ever since. It's a remarkable drought for someone of his talent. He has won 18 times worldwide since his last major.

Throw in the fact McIlroy won his British Open in 2014 at Royal Liverpool, where there's a forecast of occasional showers throughout the week, and the expectations keep rising.

"I'm as close as I've ever been, really," McIlroy said at the Scottish Open, his tuneup for the final major of the year. He took a

one-shot lead into the final round at The Renaissance Club.

"My consistency in the performances, especially in the majors over the last couple years, is way better than it has been over the last few years," he said. "So I'm really pleased at that. But at the same time, having had a really good chance at St. Andrews, having a really good chance in LA a few weeks ago, yeah, I need to keep putting myself in those positions."

"Even though I'm not getting the wins, it's going to stand by me for whenever I get myself in position again."

Scottie Scheffler, the world's No. 1 player, is playing even more consistently well — two wins, including The Players Championship, and six consecutive finishes in the top 5, including the last two majors that he had a chance to win.

This is his last chance at a major this year, too. Ditto for players still searching for their first one, whether that's Patrick Cantlay or Xander Schauffele, Viktor Hovland or Rickie Fowler.

Still, this week at Royal Liverpool starts with one player. It's why Padraig Harrington smiled when he referred to McIlroy as a "person of interest" at the 151st British Open.

"He's got two things going for him — he can obviously win any week, and he's going to a golf course that's going to have good memories on and be comfortable on," Harrington said. "There's no doubt that pretty much everybody will look at the leaderboard to see how he's getting on."

This is the 13th time golf's oldest championship is at Royal Liverpool, which was missing from the rotation from when Roberto de Vicenzo won in 1967 to Tiger Woods winning in 2006.

The last two speak to fickle weather on the northwestern coast of England.

It was so brown and dry when Woods won in 2006 that he hit driver only one time. It was soft enough for McIlroy's victory in 2014 that the Open went to a two-tee start for the first time in its ancient history for the third round to avoid the heavy stuff.

## Analysis: Wimbledon champ Vondrousova hardly normal

Associated Press

WIMBLEDON, England — Marketa Vondrousova held four pieces of chocolate candy in her Wimbledon-winning left hand as she sat down with a half-dozen reporters for one of her last interviews of the evening.

A special treat, perhaps, to reward herself for becoming a Grand Slam champion at age 24?

Hardly.

"I like sweets, so I'm always eating them," Vondrousova said with a smile a few hours after beating Ons Jabeur 6-4, 6-4 at Centre Court on Saturday to become the first unseeded woman to win the title at the All England Club.

Some tennis players, it was pointed out, only allow themselves that sort of indulgence after a tournament finishes.

"No," came her reply, "I don't really care about this stuff. I also had McDonald's after, I think, (beating No. 4 Jessica Pegula in the

quarterfinals), so I'm just a normal person."

Hardly.

There is something rather unique about Vondrousova, a left-hander from the Czech Republic who was the calmer player, with the steadier strokes, for the 1 hour, 20 minutes it took to get past a higher-ranked and more experienced opponent under a retractable roof that was closed because of high wind.

"She played," Jabeur said, "maybe a perfect final for herself."

That might be so — one key statistic Saturday was that Vondrousova made 13 unforced errors, Jabeur 31 — but there is more to it. Now set to move up from No. 42 to a career-high No. 10 in Monday's WTA rankings, Vondrousova has announced herself as someone not to be taken lightly, a player with a mix of talent and moxie who might very well not be done appearing on her sport's biggest stages.

And what must make other players wary is that if Vondrousova could succeed on grass courts, her least-favorite and least-successful surface, she really should be someone to keep an eye on no matter what kind of tournament she enters.

As a teenager in 2019, also unseeded, Vondrousova made it all the way to the final of the French Open on red clay before losing to Ash Barty. Two years ago, she reached the final at the Tokyo Olympics on hard courts before losing to Belinda Bencic and settling for a silver medal. Add in what she just managed to do at Wimbledon on grass courts — eliminating five seeded players, including No. 6 Jabeur, who is now a three-time major runner-up — and anything is possible.

Consider this: Until going 7-0 over the past two weeks, Vondrousova's career record at the All England Club was 1-4.

That's three first-round losses and one second-round loss.



# Griner makes big return to WNBA All-Star Game

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Brittney Griner made an emphatic and emotional return to the WNBA's mid-season showcase event.

She scored 18 points, including her team's first six, and put down two dunks in the league's All-Star Game on Saturday night.

The sellout crowd roared when Griner was introduced and, clearly moved by the ovation, she tapped her chest over her heart with her right hand. There was no doubt that a year after being forced to miss this event while detained in Russia, Griner was the star of the show.

"To have that ovation and all those little memories that I can cherish now, it means the world," Griner said. "So it was no question I was going to come and play. They have never wavered in their support."

Griner led Team Stewart, captained by the New York Liberty's Breanna Stewart, to a 143-127 victory over Team Wilson, led by the Las Vegas Aces' A'ja Wilson. The 143 points and 270 combined points are both records for the

All-Star Game.

Team Stewart's Jewell Loyd of the Seattle Storm broke the All-Star Game scoring record with 31 points, setting the mark on a pass from Griner. Maya Moore and Kelsey Plum shared the previous record of 30 points. Loyd earned MVP honors for the game.

"I played hard because of my parents; I didn't get them a gift for their anniversary," Loyd said. "So I think this was acceptable. I hope it is."

Plum actually tied her own record with 30 points, one of four Aces competing for Team Wilson, who received loud ovations from the home crowd in pre-game introductions. Plum, who also had five assists, said sponsors pledged to donate \$1,000 to a Las Vegas charity for each basket and assist.

"So I was gunning," Plum said. "I mean 17 shots in 21 minutes is wild."

She raised \$16,000.

Griner, at this time last year, was being held in Russia on drug charges, sparking international

outrage that she was being wrongfully detained. The WNBA named her an honorary starter, with every player wearing her No. 42 jersey in the second half of last year's game.

This year, Griner was in the starting lineup — the only one wearing that jersey number — overshadowing almost everything that happened on the court.

Team Stewart made Griner the focal point from the beginning. She delivered a dunk with 3:50 remaining in the first quarter off an outlet pass from Stewart. Griner also had a dunk 25 seconds into the second half.

"I called my knees and talked to them and gave them a little pep talk," the 32-year-old Griner said of her dunks.

She displayed that same jumping ability afterward, leaping up on the riser for the postgame news conference.

Griner at one point in the first quarter challenged Team Wilson point guard Chelsea Gray of the Aces, but Gray drove past the nine-time All-Star from the Phoenix Mercury and dropped

in a reverse layup from high off the glass. It was one of the few plays that didn't work out for Griner.

At the first media timeout, Griner was shown on the video board as she sat on the bench with the words, "WELCOME BACK BRITTNEY GRINER" on the screen below her face.

Griner was among the players who wore microphones during the game, joking after missing a three-pointer that she "got something in my eye."

The game was played with a 20-second shot clock rather than the usual 24, two four-point spots on each side of the court were added and there were no free throws. The teams combined to hit 12 four-point shots.

New York's Sabrina Ionescu, representing Team Stewart, made all three of her attempts from four-point range in the first half, carrying over her extraordinary shooting from the previous day. Ionescu set a WNBA and NBA record with 37 of a possible 40 points in the three-point contest. She finished with 18 points.

# Truex weighs retiring vs. returning for another NASCAR season

Associated Press

LOUDON, N.H. — Martin Truex Jr. stood with his back to a table where hours earlier Kevin Harvick had been gifted a colonial musket from New Hampshire Motor Speedway in honor of the driver's final race at the track.

Harvick made his retirement call ahead of the Daytona 500 and has been feted with gifts and tributes throughout his last NASCAR season.

The 43-year-old Truex has yet to make a decision — at least, publicly — on if he'll return for another season at Joe Gibbs Racing or hang up the helmet and end a career that includes the 2017 NASCAR championship.

Truex has floated retirement before, only to be coaxed back to return for another year in the No. 19 Toyota. Truex is having fun again at the track and has two wins after he missed the playoffs last season.

Truex cracked "next question" when asked Saturday about retirement but conceded an announcement must be made soon, maybe

even this week.

Is that his timeline or JGR's? JGR would need to make crucial decisions on the driver, sponsorship and potentially a new team to put in place for 2024 should Truex retire.

"Probably more so their timeline than mine," Truex said.

Truex announced last June that he would return for a 19th season, so discussions for a potential replacement never got far with team owner Joe Gibbs. Without a top-tier free agent available at the end of this season, the team would likely look to Xfinity Series drivers John Hunter Nemechek or Sammy Smith to complete the four-car group. The team promoted Ty Gibbs this season to take Kyle Busch's spot after he left to drive for Richard Childress.

Truex understood the clock was ticking.

"I think about it a lot during the week but not at the racetrack," Truex said. "That's why I don't really talk about it much. I haven't made a decision yet, so no need to talk about it."

He opened the season with a win in the exhibi-

tion Busch Light Clash and has since won at Dover and Sonoma. Truex did everything but win last season, which was his downfall. He ran inside the top-10 in the standings through the entire regular season, only to miss a spot in the playoffs because NASCAR had a record-tying 19 different winners last season.

Truex is primed to end this season in championship contention — and maybe go out a winner.

## Rain, rain go away

With heavy rain in the forecast, New Hampshire could mark the third straight race shortened by weather.

William Byron won last week at Atlanta in a race sliced by 75 laps. Shane van Gisbergen won his NASCAR Cup Series debut at Chicago in a race called because of fading sunlight.

"I think if we start a race in the rain, we need to have a time limit or something," Harvick, the 2014 NASCAR champion, said. "The rain laps are so much slower and it just winds up taking all day."

# Messi officially signs with Inter Miami

Associated Press

Lionel Messi has finalized his deal to join Major League Soccer, and after years of planning and pursuing, Inter Miami has landed a global icon.

Messi's contract became official Saturday, a little more than five weeks after he declared that he would be coming to Inter Miami. The team was to introduce him Sunday night at its stadium in Fort Lauderdale, and the first home match of the Messi era could be as early as Friday in a Leagues Cup match against Cruz Azul.

A formal news conference is scheduled for Monday, and his first training session with his new club is expected Tuesday.

The club previously announced that Messi's deal will be for 2½ seasons and will pay him between \$50 million and \$60 million annually — putting the total contract value between \$125 million and \$150 million in cash alone.

"BIENVENIDO 10," the team posted Saturday on Twitter.

Welcome, Messi, indeed.

"We are overjoyed that the greatest player in the world chose Inter Miami CF and Major League Soccer, and his decision is a testament to the momentum and energy behind our League and our sport in North America," MLS Commissioner Don Garber said in a statement.

"We have no doubt that Lionel will show the world that MLS can be a League of Choice for the best players in the game."

It is, in many ways, an unusual marriage. Messi — still perhaps the biggest star in the game — is signing with a team that entered Saturday in last place in the MLS's Eastern Conference standings. It's a club in just its fourth season that plays in a temporary home that will seat only about 22,000 people when some rushed renovations like adding extra bleacher seats get completed.

Doesn't matter. Soccer royalty now plays for Inter Miami.

Messi arrived in South Florida on Tuesday following vaca-

tion, then started the process of physicals and paperwork Wednesday and the deal got finalized Saturday afternoon. The seven-time Ballon d'Or winner — the trophy given annually to the world's best player — is making his Miami move after two years with Paris Saint-Germain.

"I'm very excited to start this next step in my career with Inter Miami and in the United States," Messi said in a statement. "This is a fantastic opportunity and together we will continue to build this beautiful project. The idea is to work together to achieve the objectives we set, and I'm very eager to start helping here in my new home."

# Angels walk off in 10th thanks to error by Astros

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. —The Los Angeles Angels rallied from a six-run deficit in the seventh inning and a three-run deficit in the ninth before they walked off in the 10th on an unlikely Astros error.

The Halos can only hope their next win is a little bit less grueling than the 13-12 victory that snapped their six-game losing streak Saturday night.

Shohei Ohtani hit his major league-leading 33rd homer to key the Angels' ninth-inning rally, and rookie Trey Cabbage scored on rookie shortstop Grae Kessinger's throwing error in the 10th.

Kessinger threw wide of first base while attempting to turn an easy inning-ending double play on Taylor Ward's grounder. Cabbage scored in only his second major league game to set off a wild celebration for the Angels, concluding their second victory in 12 games in improbable fashion.

"To say that win was needed is an understatement," Angels manager Phil Nevin said.

Kessinger entered the game in

the bottom of the 10th after starting shortstop Jeremy Peña felt a right hamstring injury while batting in the top of the inning. Houston starter Framber Valdez also left the game with an apparent left calf injury in the seventh, but manager Dusty Baker said the team is hopeful both injuries were only cramps.

"They started hitting us all over the ballpark," Baker said. "You just hate to end the game like that. Just a bad, bad loss for us."

**Phillies 6-9, Padres 4-4:** Bryce Harper ended the longest homerless streak of his major league career in the second game, and host Philadelphia completed a doubleheader sweep of San Diego.

**Rays 6-4, Royals 1-2:** Luke Raley had a go-ahead single in the eighth inning, and visiting Tampa Bay completed a doubleheader sweep of Kansas City.

**Nationals 7-6, Cardinals 5-9:** Nolan Gorman hit a two-run double to break a fifth-inning tie, Alec Burleson homered and robbed Washington's Joey Meneses of a three-run drive as host St. Louis earned a split of two games.

**Cubs 10, Red Sox 4:** Cody Bellinger hit his eighth career grand slam in a six-run third inning, a day after homering twice, and host Chicago beat Boston.

**Yankees 6, Rockies 3:** Giancarlo Stanton homered for the fourth time in four games and reached 1,000 career RBIs by driving in four runs to power visiting New York.

**Orioles 6, Marlins 5:** Gunnar Henderson homered to start a two-run seventh-inning as host Baltimore rallied to win its seventh straight.

**White Sox 6, Braves 5:** Jake Burger's sixth-inning homer off Spencer Strider gave his team the lead, Andrew Benintendi drove in three runs with three hits and visiting Chicago held on in the ninth inning against Atlanta.

**Giants 3, Pirates 1:** Michael Conforto hit a tiebreaking RBI single in the eighth inning and visiting San Francisco won its fourth straight.

**Blue Jays 5, Diamondbacks 2:** Chris Bassitt (9-5) allowed two runs and seven hits in six innings for host Toronto against Arizona after Kevin Gausman was

scratched early because of discomfort in his left side.

**Rangers 2, Guardians 0:** Andrew Heaney rebounded from his worst start of the season and slumping Marcus Semien had his first multihit game in two weeks as host Texas got its seventh shutout of the season.

**Tigers 6, Mariners 0:** Kerry Carpenter homered twice, Michael Lorenzen allowed two hits in 6⅓ innings and visiting Detroit beat Seattle.

**Twins 10, Athletics 7:** Kyle Farmer had three hits against Oakland, including a go-ahead home run in the seventh inning, and visiting Minnesota won its second straight.

**Dodgers 5, Mets 1:** Mookie Betts went 4-for-4 with a home run and visiting Los Angeles won its sixth straight.

**Brewers 3, Reds 0:** Freddy Peralta combined with three relievers on a one-hitter, Christian Yelich homered on the game's first pitch and visiting Milwaukee shut out Cincinnati for the third straight game to take sole possession of first place in the NL Central.