

US adds firepower in the Middle East

By DOUG G. WARE

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is sending a warship and fighter jets, including F-35s and F-16s, to the Middle East to provide extra security amid a rise of threatening actions by Iranian forces there, defense officials said Monday.

The ship and the jets are being sent to the region near the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman to “defend U.S. interests” and “safeguard freedom of navigation,” said Sabrina Singh, Pentagon spokeswoman. The USS Thomas Hudner, a new Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, is the ship being deployed.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Army Gen. Michael Kurilla, who leads U.S. Central Command, decided extra security is needed near the key global shipping channel, she said.

“We have seen Iran continue to harass vessels in the Strait of Hormuz,” Singh said. “So

[they] felt it was appropriate to move more assets into the region.”

The Air Force already has A-10 Thunderbolts, also known as “Warthogs,” in the area, and they have been patrolling for several days since Iranian naval forces on July 5 attempted to seize a couple of oil tankers near the waterway, even opening fire on one of the vessels. Iran backed off after the U.S. Navy intervened and the ships continued through the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman.

“We are working to ensure that there’s adequate air cover, that there’s adequate maritime surface presence in order to deter Iran,” said a senior defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity and noted the F-16s began patrolling the area this past weekend. “We will see if it’s deterrent enough.”

U.S. military officials have said they are becoming increasingly concerned about recent maritime activity from Iran and its possible cooperation with Russia and Syria. Those

three countries are aligned in the ongoing Syrian civil war between Syrian Democratic Forces and others fighting the government forces of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

On Friday, a Russian surveillance plane hovered over a U.S. base in southeastern Syria trying to collect intelligence, U.S. defense officials said, and a Russian fighter jet intercepted an American MQ-9 drone over Syria in an “unprofessional” manner. Roughly 900 U.S. service members are based in Syria to support operations against Islamic State and train partner forces.

The U.S. military has said Iranian forces have harassed many commercial shipping vessels in the Strait of Hormuz in recent years, some of them carrying crude oil to international markets.

Iranian state television aired footage of the capture of a U.S.-bound oil tanker in the Gulf of Oman in April, claiming the ship had hit a fishing vessel.

Marine tours in Middle East will be smaller, shorter

By J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

Future Marine Corps deployments to the Middle East won’t look like those during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the top Marine general in the region said in a recent interview.

In lieu of the resource-intensive, multi-month tours that characterized the two decades of war, the Marines are going with smaller “episodic deployments,” said Maj. Gen. Paul Rock, head of Marine Corps Forces Central Command.

“We’ve adapted the way that we do business,” Rock said.

The missions would deploy U.S.-based Marines for short-term tours to support a specific need, Rock said.

Rock referred to a recent short-notice deployment of 17 Marines from the North Carolina-based 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit to Kuwait this spring as an example.

The Marines brought to the Middle East the L-MADIS counter-unmanned aerial system platform, known for knocking an

Iranian drone out of the sky in 2019, Rock said, confirming a previously unreported detail of the deployment.

They came under the tactical control of the Army’s Area Support Group Kuwait, which supplied them over the course of their 30-day tour, Lt. Col. L.L. Gilbert, a MARCENT spokesman, said last week.

The Marines and Central Command are having to maintain their missions with fewer troops and dollars as the U.S. focuses on potential threats from China and Russia.

With fewer resources in the Middle East, the Marines will have to partner more with other services for logistics and supply, said Joslyn Fleming, a defense policy researcher at the Rand Corp. and a Marine Reserve lieutenant colonel.

“What CENTCOM is having to grapple with is a lot of resource constraints,” Fleming said.

MARCENT recently had as many as 2,200 Marines assigned to it, Defense One reported in 2022. That number is down to about 200, said Gilbert, adding that troop

strength increases during training exercises.

In making up for their smaller numbers, the Marines say they are now working more closely with the Navy in particular.

That’s in line with changes the service is making worldwide, Rock said.

In 2020, a redesign of the service was announced. The transformation was expected to be completed by 2030, with the aim of readying the service for potential conflict with larger adversaries like China or Russia.

While two decades of wars in the Middle East brought the Marines into land conflicts, the so-called Force Design 2030 seeks to emphasize the Corps’ roots at sea.

The region is “fundamentally a maritime theater” due to the presence of key waterways such as the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab-al-Mandeb, Rock said.

The Marine presence flying over those waters now includes MQ-9 Reaper drones, Rock said, adding that the service is practicing long-range aerial targeting.

Officials say US soldier detained by North Korea

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — A U.S. soldier facing disciplinary actions fled across the heavily armed border from South Korea into North Korea, U.S. officials said Tuesday, becoming the first American detained in the North in nearly five years.

Two U.S. officials said the soldier was Pvt. 2nd Class Travis King, who had just been released from a South Korean prison where he'd been held on assault charges and was facing additional military disciplinary actions in the United States.

King, who is in his early 20s, was escorted to the airport to be returned to Fort Bliss, Texas. But instead of getting on the plane, he left and joined a tour of the Korean border village of Panmunjom, where he ran across the border.

At a Pentagon press conference Tuesday, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin did not name King, but confirmed that a U.S. service member was likely now in North Korean custody.

"We're closely monitoring and investigating the situation and working to notify the soldier's next of kin," Austin said, noting that he was foremost concerned about the troop's well-being. "This will develop in the next several days and hours, and we'll keep

you posted."

Details about King, including his hometown and what additional charges he faced, were not immediately available. It was also unclear how he managed to leave the airport while he was being escorted.

The American-led U.N. Command said he is believed to be in North Korean custody and the command is working with its North Korean counterparts to resolve the incident. North Korea's state media didn't immediately report on the border crossing.

Cases of Americans or South Koreans defecting to North Korea are rare, though more than 30,000 North Koreans have fled to South Korea to avoid political oppression and economic difficulties since the end of the 1950-53 Korean War.

Panmunjom, located inside the 154-mile-long Demilitarized Zone, has been jointly overseen by the U.N. Command and North Korea since its creation at the close of the Korean War. Bloodshed and gunfire have occasionally occurred there, but it has also been a venue for numerous talks and is a popular tourist spot.

Known for its blue huts straddling concrete slabs that form the demarcation line, Panmunjom draws visitors from both sides who want to see the Cold War's last frontier.

Russian jet flies close to US spy aircraft in Syria

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Russian fighter jet flew very close to a U.S. surveillance aircraft over Syria, forcing it to go through the turbulent wake and putting the lives of the four American crew members in danger, U.S. officials said Monday.

The officials said the incident, which happened just before noon EDT on Sunday, was a significant escalation in what has been a string of encounters between U.S. and Russian aircraft in Syria in recent weeks. The intercept by the Russian Su-35 impeded the U.S. crew's ability to safely operate their MC-12 aircraft, the officials said, calling it a new level of unsafe behavior that could result in an accident or loss of life.

In recent weeks, Russian fighter jets have repeatedly harassed U.S. unmanned MQ-9 drones, but the latest incident raised alarms because it endangered American lives.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details of a military operation, would not say how close the Russian jet got to the U.S. warplane. The MC-12, which is a twin-engine turboprop aircraft routinely used by special operations forces, was doing surveillance in support of operations against the Islamic State in Syria, the officials said.

Marines fire recruitment leaders at Parris Island

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

ATLANTA — The Marine Corps has removed the top leaders of its regiment that trains recruits at Parris Island, according to officials at the South Carolina base.

Col. Bradley Ward, who had commanded the regiment since July 2021, and his senior enlisted leader Sgt. Maj. Fabian Casillas were fired July 5 "for a loss of trust and confidence," Maj. Philip Kulczewski, a spokesman for Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, said Monday in a brief statement offering few details.

He did not provide any additional information about their dismissal, including whether there is an investigation into the

incidents that led to the firings.

"No other information is available at this time," Kulczewski said.

Ward and Casillas were replaced this month by Col. Christopher McArthur and Sgt. Maj. Michael Brown, according to the Parris Island website, which now lists them as the commander and senior enlisted leader for the Recruit Training Regiment.

Ward is a prior enlisted Marine, who joined the Corps in 1988 and commissioned a decade later as a logistics officer, according to his Marine biography.

Casillas enlisted in 1992 as a mechanic and had served multiple tours as a drill instructor, according to his service biog-

raphy. Casillas had also served a deployment to Afghanistan.

Kulczewski did not say Monday whether Ward and Casillas had been reassigned elsewhere in the Corps.

McArthur came to Parris Island this month after having served the previous three years as a strategic planner at Norfolk, Va., according to his biography.

Before that job, he served as the commander of a Parris Island recruit training battalion from May 2018 to June 2020.

Brown has been at Parris Island since 2019, serving first as a training battalion sergeant major and more recently as the base's support battalion sergeant major, according to his biography.

Russia targets port, calls it payback

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine said its forces shot down Russian drones and cruise missiles targeting the Black Sea port of Odesa before dawn Tuesday in what Moscow called “retribution” for an attack that damaged a crucial bridge to the Crimean Peninsula.

The Russians first sought to wear down Ukraine’s air defenses by firing 25 exploding drones and then targeted Odesa with six Kalibr cruise missiles, the Ukrainian military’s Southern Command said.

All six missiles and the drones were shot down by air defenses in the Odesa region and other areas in the south, officials said, though their debris and shock waves damaged some port facilities and a few residential buildings and injured an elderly man at his home.

The Russian Defense Ministry said its “strike of retribution” was carried out with sea launched precision weapons on Ukrainian military facilities near Odesa and Mykolaiv, a coastal city about 30 miles to the

northeast.

It destroyed facilities preparing “terror attacks” against Russia involving maritime drones, including a facility at a shipyard that was producing them, the ministry said. It added that it also struck Ukrainian fuel depots near the two cities.

It was not possible to verify the conflicting claims by both countries.

President Vladimir Putin blamed Ukraine on Monday for striking the Kerch Bridge, which links Russia with Crimea and was attacked in October 2022 and needed months of repairs. The bridge is a key supply route for the peninsula, which was illegally annexed by Moscow in 2014.

Ukrainian officials stopped short of directly taking responsibility, as they have done in similar strikes before, but Ukraine’s top security agency appeared tacitly to admit to a role.

Satellite images taken Monday by Maxar Technologies showed serious damage to both eastbound and westbound lanes of the bridge across the Kerch Strait on the part

nearest to the Russian mainland, with at least one section collapsed. The railroad bridge that runs parallel to the highway appeared undamaged.

The Russian military has sporadically hit Odesa and the neighboring region throughout the war, but Tuesday’s barrage was one of the biggest attacks on the area.

Ukrainian forces have been targeting Crimea with drones and other attacks. Kyiv has vowed to reclaim it from Russian control, arguing that the peninsula plays a key role in sustaining the Russian invasion and is a legitimate target.

The onslaught also came a day after Russia broke off a deal that had allowed Ukraine to ship vital grain supplies from Odesa during the war.

Moscow said the decision was in the works long before the bridge attack.

Even so, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov alleged, without offering evidence, that the specific shipping lanes and routes used for the grain transport under the deal were abused by Ukraine.

Nuclear-capable sub makes stop in S. Korea

BY DAVID CHOI

Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — A U.S. Navy nuclear ballistic missile submarine sailed into South Korea’s largest port on Tuesday for the first time in 42 years.

The USS Kentucky — one of 14 Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines in the fleet — arrived at Busan in another display of Washington’s commitment to defend Seoul, according to a news release from South Korea’s Ministry of National Defense on Tuesday.

The Kentucky’s arrival is an example of the U.S. military deterrence and shows the “overwhelming capabilities and readiness” of the U.S.-South Korean alliance against North Korea, National Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup said in the re-

lease.

The Kentucky was commissioned in 1991 and is homeported in Naval Submarine Base Bangor, Wash.

U.S. ballistic missile submarines make extended sea patrols and can carry up to 20 Trident II D-5 ballistic missiles that have a range of 4,000 miles, according to the Navy’s website.

Trident II D-5 missiles may carry W76 and W88 nuclear warheads, the latter capable of a 475-kiloton blast, according to the U.S. Department of Energy and the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Neither U.S. Forces Korea nor the Ministry of National Defense immediately responded to email and phone queries Tuesday about whether the Kentucky is armed with nuclear weapons.

Sailor ‘hits ground hard’ after stunt at air show

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

A member of the U.S. Navy Parachute Team, also known as the Leap Frogs, was injured during a performance over the weekend in Duluth, Minn., local media reported.

The sailor, who has not been identified, was performing a stunt at the Duluth Air and Aviation Expo, the Duluth News Tribune reported Sunday. Two sailors were attached during the jump; they separated and deployed their parachutes but one “hit the ground hard,” the newspaper reported.

Emergency responders treated the sailor before airlifting him to Essentia Health-St. Mary’s Medical Center in Duluth, where he was “in stable condition and being treated for his injuries,” the Expo said on its Facebook page Sunday.

“We are devastated that one

of the performers was injured and our thoughts and prayers are with him, his team and his family,” Expo president Ryan Kern said in the post. “Our safety and leadership team has an incident plan in place, everyone reacted instantly, and we were able to render care immediately.”

The Leap Frogs subsequently canceled their Sunday performance in light of an official investigation, the Expo said in its post, but the air show’s other scheduled events continued as planned. A Naval Special Warfare Command spokesperson confirmed the incident with the Duluth News Tribune, the paper reported Sunday.

“We appreciate the swift response by the event staff and emergency medical teams on site who provided immediate assistance,” the spokesperson said.

GOP proposes planting a trillion trees

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As House Speaker Kevin McCarthy visited a natural gas drilling site in northeast Ohio to promote Republicans' plan to sharply increase domestic production of energy from fossil fuels last month, the signs of rising global temperatures could not be ignored. Smoke from Canadian wildfires hung in the air.

When the speaker was asked about climate change and forest fires, he was ready with a response: Plant a trillion trees.

The idea — simple yet massively ambitious — revealed recent Republican thinking on how to address climate change. The party is no longer denying that global warming exists, yet is searching for a response to sweltering summers, weather disasters and rising sea levels that doesn't involve abandoning their enthusiastic support for American-produced energy from burning oil, coal and gas.

"We need to manage our forests better so our environment can be stronger," McCarthy

said, adding, "Let's replace Russian natural gas with American natural gas and let's not only have a cleaner world, let's have a safer world."

The Biden administration has also boosted exports of liquefied natural gas to Europe after Russia, one of the continent's largest suppliers of energy, invaded Ukraine. The Democratic president has also said that coal, oil and gas will be part of America's energy supply for years to come.

Scientists overwhelmingly agree that heat-trapping gases released from the combustion of fossil fuels are pushing up global temperatures, upending weather patterns around the globe and endangering animal species. But the solution long touted by Democrats and environmental advocates — government action to force emissions reductions — remains a non-starter with most Republicans.

Enter the idea of planting a trillion trees. A 2019 study suggested that planting trees to suck up heat-trapping carbon dioxide

from the atmosphere could be one of the most effective ways to fight climate change. Major conservation groups, and former President Donald Trump, who downplayed humanity's role in climate change, embraced the idea.

But the tree-planting push has drawn intense pushback from environmental scientists who call it a distraction from cutting emissions from fossil fuels. The authors of the original study have also clarified that planting trees does not eliminate "the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

Planting one trillion trees would also require a massive amount of space — roughly the size of the continental United States. And more trees could even increase the risk of wildfires by serving as fuel in a warming world.

"There is a lot of value to planting trees, but it is not a panacea," said Mark Ashton, a professor of forest ecology at Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

Abortion in Iowa legal again after judge blocks ban

Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — An Iowa judge on Monday temporarily blocked the state's new ban on most abortions after about six weeks of pregnancy, just days after Gov. Kim Reynolds signed the measure into law.

That means abortion is once again legal in Iowa up to 20 weeks of pregnancy while the courts assess the new law's constitutionality.

The new law prohibits almost all abortions once cardiac activity

can be detected, which is usually around six weeks of pregnancy and before many women know they are pregnant.

The Republican-controlled Legislature approved the measure in a rare, all-day special session last week, prompting a legal challenge by the ACLU of Iowa, Planned Parenthood North Central States and the Emma Goldman Clinic. Judge Joseph Seidlin held a hearing on the matter Friday, but said he would take the issue under ad-

visement — just as Reynolds signed the bill into law about a mile away.

Abortion providers said they scrambled last week to fit in as many appointments as possible before the governor put pen to paper, preemptively making hundreds of calls to prepare patients for the uncertainty and keeping clinics open late.

Reynolds swiftly put out a statement underscoring her intention to fight the issue all the way to the state Supreme Court.

"The abortion industry's attempt to thwart the will of Iowans and the voices of their elected representatives continues today," she said.

The ruling Monday does specify that while the law is temporarily paused, the state's Board of Medicine should proceed with creating rules for enforcement, as the law specifies. That way the guidance for health care providers would be well defined if the law were to be in effect in the future.

Cybersecurity program for smart devices announced

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration and major consumer technology players on Tuesday launched an effort to put a nationwide cybersecurity certification and labeling program in place to help consumers choose smart devices that are less vulnerable to hacking.

Officials likened the new U.S. Cyber Trust Mark initiative — to be overseen by

the Federal Communications Commission, with industry participation voluntary — to the Energy Star program, which rates appliances' energy efficiency.

"It will allow Americans to confidently identify which internet- and Bluetooth-connected devices are cybersecure," deputy national security adviser Anne Neuberger told reporters in a pre-announcement briefing.

Amazon, Best Buy, Google, LG Electronics USA, Logitech and Samsung are among industry participants.

Devices including baby monitors, home security cameras, fitness trackers, TVs, refrigerators and smart climate control systems that meet the U.S. government's cybersecurity requirements will bear the "Cyber Trust" label, a shield logo, as early as next year, officials said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Passenger crash-lands plane after pilot falls ill

MA BOSTON — A passenger of a small airplane took the controls and crash-landed on a Massachusetts island on after the pilot suffered a medical emergency, police said.

The crash happened near Martha's Vineyard Airport in West Tisbury, Mass. The 79-year-old male pilot suffered the emergency during the plane's final approach, Massachusetts State Police said.

State police said the crash "resulted in a hard landing outside the runway that caused the aircraft's left wing to break in half." Authorities did not name either person on the plane.

The pilot was then flown to a Boston hospital in life-threatening condition. The female passenger was uninjured.

4 hurt in crash during street race; 1 arrested

NM ALBUQUERQUE — A man has been arrested after a street-racing crash injured four pedestrians in Albuquerque, police said.

Albuquerque police said Abraham Corral Alvarez, 18, is facing three counts of vehicular homicide because three of the victims suffered serious, life-threatening injuries.

Police said the injured were bystanders at a food truck parked near the racing site.

According to witnesses, three vehicles were racing cars at high speeds when one of the vehicles struck the divider along a bus lane, causing the vehicle to leave the roadway.

Corral Alvarez was detained

by police, who said he allegedly was driving impaired. The drivers of the other cars involved in the street racing were being sought by police.

Group sues governor, others over TikTok ban

NY NEW YORK — A First Amendment group sued Texas Gov. Greg Abbott over the state's TikTok ban on official devices, arguing the prohibition — which extends to public universities — is unconstitutional and impedes academic freedom.

The complaint was filed by The Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, a free speech group in New York that's suing on behalf of a coalition of academics and researchers who study technology's impact on society.

The lawsuit said the state's decision to restrict access to TikTok on official devices, as well as on personal devices used to conduct state business, is comprising teaching and research. And more specifically, it said it was "seriously impeding" faculty pursuing research into the app.

Addiction center fires 2 after patient deaths

IN MISHAWAKA — Two leaders are out at an addiction treatment center after three deaths and calls by police to yank its license.

The executive director and director of nursing no longer work at Praxis Landmark Recovery, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation site for men near South Bend, the company told WNDU-TV.

Other senior managers "will supervise the facility around the clock," Landmark Recovery said in a statement released. "This ensures our patients stay safe during this time."

Three men have died since July 4 and another man was revived with multiple doses of Narcan, authorities said.

The St. Joseph County Police Department has asked state regulators to investigate the facility and revoke its license.

Pot farms back to work after pesticide concerns

WA SEATTLE — A big mound of fresh dirt sits at Terry Taylor's marijuana farm in the high desert of north-central Washington state. Each hole for a new plant gets filled with the clean soil.

Large swaths of recently installed landscape fabric cover the ground, and soon the dirt roads on his property will be covered in crushed rock to keep contaminated dust from covering the crops.

Taylor's pot farm is one of several getting back to business after state regulators halted their operations in April, citing product testing that turned up unacceptable levels of chemicals related to DDT, a pesticide banned half a century ago.

The affected growers haven't used the pesticide themselves, but they are located on a 5-mile stretch of former fruit orchards where it was applied heavily and remains in the soil.

Ex-officers at women's jail plead guilty to abuse

CA SAN FRANCISCO — Two former officers

of a federal women's prison in California pleaded guilty to multiple counts of sexual abuse.

Andrew Jones, a former cook supervisor at Federal Correctional Institution in Dublin, pleaded guilty to six felony charges of sexual abuse of three women he supervised, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

Nakie Nunley, a guard at the prison call center, pleaded guilty to four charges of sexual abuse and five lesser felonies of abusive sexual contact of five women. Both also pleaded guilty to making false statements to the government.

Bison gores woman in Yellowstone park

WY YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK — A bison gored and injured an Arizona woman in Yellowstone National Park.

The 47-year-old woman from Phoenix was walking in a field on the north side of Lake Yellowstone with another person when they saw two bison, park officials said. The people turned to walk away, and then one of the bison charged and gored the woman, injuring to her chest and abdomen. She was taken by helicopter to a hospital in Idaho Falls, Idaho.

Yellowstone requires people to keep at least 25 yards away from all large animals, including bison, elk, deer and moose, and at least 100 yards away from bears and wolves. Park officials do not know how far the patrons were from the animals.

It was the first known bison attack on a person in Yellowstone this year. Bison injured two people there in 2022.

— From Associated Press

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Surprises more likely at Women's World Cup

Associated Press

There could be some some surprises at the Women's World Cup.

Sure, the United States is still considered dominant, and those elite European teams have developed even more with the rise of competitive clubs. Then there's Brazil, which always seems on the verge of a breakout.

But an expanded field of 32 teams at the tournament starting Thursday in Australia and New Zealand means more players will see the international spotlight — and they no doubt want to prove they belong.

Consider Japan.

Back in 2011, Japan wasn't expected to make the semifinals, let alone the championship match. But the Japanese, reeling from the earthquake and tsunami that devastated their country earlier that year, rallied and beat the Americans on penalties after a 2-2 draw, and in the proc-

ess became the first Asian team to win soccer's top prize.

That was the last Women's World Cup that wasn't won by the U.S. The No. 1-ranked Americans aim to make it three in a row.

U.S. coach Vlatko Andonovski is well aware that other countries are catching up. He pointed to Zambia's exhibition victory over Germany in the run-up to the tournament.

"The top 10 have always been there. The world that is catching up is Wales, is Vietnam, is Zambia, Portugal. These are the countries that are catching up. The 7-0, 8-0 games are gone. And we can see that Germany plays against Zambia, loses 3-2. Those games are going to happen," Andonovski said. "And that's what we are preparing ourselves for, so we don't run into into a game like that with the mentality that it's gonna be easy. No game is gonna be easy. It doesn't matter who's in front of us."

Canada is considered among those top teams, particularly after winning the Olympic gold medal in Tokyo. But coach Bev Priestman suggested that growing parity means there are no givens.

"It could really throw up some surprises just on tournament football, you can lose group-stage games and then go on to win the thing. So yeah, it's tighter than it's ever been," Priestman said.

There are eight teams debuting at the tournament, including Ireland, Vietnam, Zambia, Haiti, Morocco, Panama, Portugal and Philippines. While most stand little chance against the likes of France or Sweden, there's always that hope.

And there's hope the international stage will help push federations to invest in more for the teams that don't traditionally have support.

"A lot of federations are slowly getting into the trend of being

better," South Africa forward Thembi Kgatlana said. "A lot of those girls in those countries have been professional athletes, so they have an idea of what it means to be a professional. And when they go back to the respective national teams, they are able to also help and say, 'Hey, we need this, we need that.' It kind of forces the national teams to also adapt into the trends of changing and becoming better."

The co-hosts are in action on the tournament's opening day, with New Zealand facing Norway in Auckland followed by Australia against Ireland in Sydney.

The U.S. opens against Vietnam on Saturday in Auckland, but because of the time difference, viewers in North America will watch on Friday.

The top two teams from each of the eight groups will advance to the knockout stage, which begins on Aug. 5. The championship game is set for Aug. 20.

Every player to be paid at least \$30K for first time ever

Associated Press

A group of players across the globe asked FIFA late last year to increase the prize money for this summer's Women's World Cup. There had been pleas from the women to boost those funds before, but this time it was different.

The players not only wanted a prize pool equal with the men's World Cup, they also sought a guarantee that a percentage of the prize money would go directly to the players themselves.

While it wasn't true equity with the men's World Cup, FIFA indeed raised the prize pool for the women's tournament by more than three times that of the 2019 event in France.

But more than that, soccer's governing body agreed in June that a chunk of those funds should be paid straight to the players — all 732 of them. Every player will earn at least \$30,000, with the amount increasing the further along that teams progress in the tournament. The 23 players in the title-winning squad will each get \$270,000.

That's significant for many of the players, who in some cases don't have club teams that

pay salaries, are semi-pros or even amateurs. FIFA released a report last year that said the average salary for female players was \$14,000 a year.

And not only that, the conditions the players will experience on the ground in Australia and New Zealand — such as travel and accommodations — are now equitable to those provided the men.

"We still have a ways to go, but having them direct the payments to players is huge — it's a life-changing thing for many of these players entering the tournament. Coming away with each player making \$30,000 is huge because usually that money goes to federations and those players don't see any, or much of that money," U.S. forward Alex Morgan said.

A \$152 million fund was set for the first 32-team Women's World Cup. The total covers prize money, team preparation and payments to players' clubs. That's a big boost from the 2019 Women's World Cup in France, which had a \$40 million fund, with \$30 million in prize money.

In contrast, the prize money pool for the

men's World Cup last year in Qatar was \$440 million. The nations that got knocked out after the group stage made \$9 million apiece.

FIFPRO, the global players union, backed the effort by 150 players from 25 nations — including the United States, Japan and Germany — to push FIFA for more equitable terms. The result was a letter to FIFA President Gianni Infantino dated Oct. 19, 2022. The Associated Press obtained a copy of the letter.

"It's really positive that we have shown them (the players) what's possible through their collective voice — through their collective action and the solidarity they have between each other — and this really intrinsic, inherent drive to want to push the women's game forward and create sustainable models for themselves and for the industry more broadly," said Sarah Gregorius, FIFPRO's director of global policy and strategic relations for women's soccer.

"It just shows what happens when players come together united behind very clear principles for change for themselves, but also a legacy for players to come," she added.

Truex breaks through at Magic Mile

Associated Press

LOUDON, N.H. — Martin Truex Jr. had just chewed up the competition to win at the same New Hampshire track where his dad won a regional stock car series race in 1994 when he clutched a 22-pound live lobster given to the winner and chomped on a claw.

"I'd ... sure like to throw him on the grill right now if you can find him," the younger Truex said later of the crustacean.

Maybe Truex can save the feast for a meal on the saltwater fishing boat the veteran driver says he's buying this week. Truex had long wanted one — when he didn't tag along as a kid with his mom and little brother to the racetrack, he worked on his dad's clamming boat — but the pull of another day at the race shop or the commitments of long NASCAR weekends always made him put it off.

Not now.

"I won't fish for lobster on my boat," Truex said, laughing. "I'll fish for fish. Tuna."

Sounds perfect for retirement.

Truex has few boxes left to check in his career. The latest came in yet another masterful Monday matinee when he won at New Hampshire Motor Speedway for the first time in 30 career Cup tries. The win did more than earn him a big meal — it triggered melancholy memories from his childhood at the same track where he watched his dad share space with some of racing's greats.

New Hampshire was where Truex saw Dale Earnhardt tinker with his carburetor under the hood of his car. It's where Truex got his first taste of the sights, smells and sounds of a NASCAR garage. It's where a few hours after the 43-year-old Truex led 254 laps in the No. 19 Toyota and won his third Cup race of the season, he pondered just how much longer he wanted to continue his NASCAR career.

Team owner Joe Gibbs wondered why Truex would give it up.

"I really felt like he's having such, I think, a great year, and I think he's having fun, and so I'm hoping that we get a good answer for us here," Gibbs said.

Time is ticking on a decision. Truex announced last June that he would return for 2023 and he hasn't made up his mind yet on 2024. Gibbs needs an answer. So do the sponsors and all other interested parties affected by Truex's decision.

"I think it is, though, very important for us to kind of have some pressure here because it's pressure for all of us," Gibbs said. "It's a huge deal for us."

Truex, the 2017 NASCAR Cup Series champion, said he was close to choosing.

He is still driving at an elite level and has stamped himself again as a serious contender for the Cup championship.

But the choice is much more complicated for Truex than making it about simply wins and losses.

"They deserve the very best driver, the guy that wants it

more than anyone else, and I've been that guy," Truex said. "I want to make sure that if I come back, I'm willing to do that. It takes a lot. It's not just show up at the track, drive the car, go home. It takes a lot. It takes a lot of commitment. It's a lot of travel. A lot of time missing things with family and friends and all those things that I've done for 25 years. Do I want to keep doing it and am I willing to sacrifice all those things again for my team?"

JGR hopes the answer is yes.

Truex led with 15 laps left when JGR teammate Christopher Bell, last year's New Hampshire winner, smacked the wall to bring out the eighth caution.

"We should have a company policy that says when one of your teammates is leading, don't crash by yourself," Truex said over the radio.

It really didn't matter for Truex. He pulled away off the restart with nine laps left and could taste victory.

Smith reflects on long year while returning claret jug

Associated Press

HOYLAKE, England — The chill Aussie vibe of Cameron Smith gave way to more emotion than he expected Monday while taking part in one of many royal and ancient traditions at the British Open.

As the defending champion, he had to return the claret jug.

"I was actually holding back some tears. A bit of a moment, I guess, that crept up on me," Smith said. "It wasn't hard to hand it back. I wasn't like, 'Not letting it go.' But it was a moment that I guess you don't think about, and then all of a sudden it's there. And you want it back."

Getting the jug back might be as difficult as getting back his parking spot at the TPC Sawgrass.

Smith lost that privilege that goes to The Players Championship winner when he chose to leave the PGA Tour for Saudi-funded LIV Golf, maybe not the biggest name to defect but the only reigning major champion at

the time.

It's all part of a long year that Smith feels went by so quickly.

His introduction of "champion golfer of the year" was still ringing in his head when he was asked about whether he was going to join LIV, his most uncomfortable moment.

And then lawsuits were filed. Smith joined LIV. He lost his parking spot and practice privileges at the home of the PGA Tour. He won the second event he played. He went home to Australia for the offseason. He played in three majors.

And now he arrives at Royal Liverpool with golf in an even more chaotic state than it was a year ago, with a framework agreement that has no details and a Senate hearing that revealed juicy documents but no real direction on how the PGA Tour and LIV Golf will coexist.

"I think golf is in a great spot," Smith said. "There's obviously a lot of things that are up in the air that no one really knows at the mo-

ment. I don't even think the guys that are trying to sort it out really know what this outcome is going to be like. Yeah, a lot of uncertainty but I'm optimistic that LIV will be around in the future."

For now what matters is winning back gold's oldest trophy, a feat no one has managed since Padraig Harrington won in 2007 at Carnoustie and 2008 at Royal Birkdale.

Monday brought a full day of practice on a links course that has been around for 154 years and is situated on the other side of the River Mersey from Liverpool. The day began with passing showers and ended with warm sunshine, perfect weather for a brand of golf that is fickle even on normal days.

Smith has done most of his talking with his play, and it was nothing short of brilliant last year when he shot 64 on the final day at St. Andrews to deny McIlroy and Cameron Young.

"It does seem like a long time ago, last year," Smith said. "I think it all went so quick for me."

Dodgers stop Orioles' 8-game winning streak

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Chris Taylor fouled off four straight pitches. Then Bryan Baker threw him one fastball too many.

Taylor hit a grand slam on an 0-2 pitch in the sixth inning, and the Los Angeles Dodgers rallied to beat Baltimore 6-4, snapping the Orioles' eight-game winning streak Monday night. Baltimore remained a game behind Tampa Bay atop the AL East.

"He threw me a bunch in a row and I was able to get to that one," Taylor said. "You can't cheat to it, because he's got slider and changeup as well. So you really are just trying to touch it. I think I was just able to kind of make the adjustment as he kept throwing them."

Los Angeles trailed 4-1 entering the sixth before Will Smith's RBI single. Baltimore starter Grayson Rodriguez left with men on first and second and nobody out, and for a moment it looked like Baker (3-3) might escape the jam when he induced two straight flyouts.

But after getting ahead 0-2 on Jason Heyward, Baker issued a walk to load the bases. After two foul balls made the count 0-2 on Taylor, the right-hander threw three fastballs around the plate. Following a couple more fouls, the Los Angeles shortstop hit a drive to center field for his 12th

homer of the year.

"It probably could have been in a better spot," Baker said. "Just a little bit too far out over to give him time to get to it."

Rangers 3, Rays 2: Aroldis Chapman got his first win since being traded to host Texas when pinch-runner Josh Smith scored on a wild pitch in the ninth inning by Tampa Bay's Pete Fairbanks.

Chapman (5-2), acquired from Kansas City last month, twice threw the fastest pitch for the Rangers in the Statcast era (since 2015) with 102.8 mph sinkers while striking out the side in the ninth.

All-Star rookie Josh Jung led off the bottom half with a double and was replaced by Smith, who went to third with two outs on Nathaniel Lowe's groundout. A 1-1 fastball from Fairbanks (0-3) to Mitch Garver went past catcher Christian Bethancourt, and Smith scored easily.

Angels 4, Yankees 3 (10): Shohei Ohtani tied the score in the seventh inning with his major league-leading 35th home run and pinch-hitter Michael Stefanić delivered a game-ending single in the 10th to lift host Los Angeles over New York.

The Angels trailed 3-1 when Ohtani hit a two-run drive off Michael King, then made a demonstrative flip of his bat. Ohtani has homered in three straight games

for the third time and surpassed his home run total last year.

Ohtani had three hits and increased his batting average to .306. He struck out in the ninth against Nick Ramirez (0-2), winced and grabbed at his back.

Guardians 11, Pirates 0: Josh Naylor homered, doubled and drove in three runs, and visiting Cleveland routed Pittsburgh to end a four-game skid.

Naylor's sixth-inning RBI double extended his hitting streak to eight games. He drove a sinker from Yohan Ramirez over the left-field wall in the seventh, the last of the Guardians' trio of two-run homers.

Mariners 7, Twins 6: Jarred Kelenic's two-run single capped host Seattle's big fifth inning against Minnesota All-Star Sonny Gray, and Eugenio Suárez added a two-run homer in the seventh.

The Mariners overcame a shaky first few innings on the mound from Logan Gilbert (8-5) to hand Gray his second straight loss and snap the Twins' three-game winning streak coming out of the All-Star break.

Red Sox 7, Athletics 0: Connor Wong hit a two-run double and singled in a run for a career-high three RBIs and visiting Boston beat Oakland for its eighth win in nine games.

Nick Pivetta (6-5) matched his

career high with 13 strikeouts over six innings of one-hit relief after replacing lefty opener Brennan Bernardino, who worked two innings. It was Pivetta's ninth career double-digit strikeout game and first of 2023.

Cardinals 6, Marlins 4: Nolan Arenado drove in four runs, Miles Mikolas threw six solid innings on two days' rest and host St. Louis extended Miami's skid to four games.

Mikolas (6-5) gave up three runs on seven hits in six innings. He threw three perfect innings Friday night against Washington in a game that was halted by rain.

Nationals 7, Cubs 5: Keibert Ruiz went 3-for-3 with a two-run homer and a double as visiting Washington beat Chicago.

Tigers 3, Royals 2: Matt Vierling capped a three-run eighth inning with a two-run double, and visiting Detroit sent Kansas City to its ninth loss in 11 games.

Giants 2, Reds 2 (8): Rain forced the suspension of the game between San Francisco and host Cincinnati with one out in the top of the eighth inning after a 1-hour, 55-minute delay.

The Giants had runners on second and third when the game was paused. It was scheduled to resume at 5:40 p.m. on Tuesday ahead of the regularly scheduled 7:10 p.m. game.

Cavaliers win NBA Summer League championship

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Isaiah Mobley had 28 points and 11 rebounds, and the Cleveland Cavaliers captured the NBA Summer League championship with a 99-78 victory Monday over the Houston Rockets.

It was the Cavaliers' first title since the Summer League went to a tournament format in 2013. Mobley was voted game MVP, more than making up for not being selected to the all-tournament team.

"I try to not worry about stuff I can't control," Mobley said. "Do I agree with it? No, but it is what it is. I'll take the championship all over it all day."

Sam Merrill scored 27 points, making 6 of 12 three-pointers, and Emoni Bates added 19 points for the Cavaliers (6-0).

Nate Hinton led Houston (5-1) with 18 points and 10 rebounds. Three other Rockets also scored in double figures: Cam Whitmore (14), Trevor Hudgins (13) and Fletcher Magee (10). Whitmore was chosen tournament MVP.

Mobley, a second-round pick in 2022, finished strong in Summer League. He put the Cavaliers in the title game by scoring 23 points and making the winning shot in overtime to beat the Brooklyn Nets 102-99 on Sunday.

Merrill, who was voted first-team all-tournament, has a history of playing well at the Thomas & Mack Center. His three-pointer with 2.5 seconds left gave Utah State the 2020 Mountain West tournament championship, one of the last shots in college basketball before the COVID-19 shutdown.

On Monday, the Cavaliers asserted control early by running out to a 17-4 lead. Houston went on a 19-4 run to cut the margin to 41-38 late in the first half.

But then Cleveland scored the first 11 points of the second half to take a 62-44 lead, and the outcome was never seriously in doubt after that.