

Navy admiral picked for next top officer

By **DOUG G. WARE**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Friday nominated Adm. Lisa Franchetti to be the Navy's next top officer, which would make her the first woman to be a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff if she is confirmed by the Senate.

"Franchetti will bring 38 years of dedicated service to our nation as a commissioned officer, including in her current role of vice chief of naval operations," Biden said. "She is the second woman ever to achieve the rank of four-star admiral in the United States Navy, and when confirmed, she will again make history as the first woman to serve as the chief of naval operations and on the Joint Chiefs."

Adm. Linda Fagan became commandant of the Coast Guard in June but the service is not part of the Joint Chiefs. The Coast Guard is operated by the Department of Homeland Security, not the Defense Department.

Franchetti, 59, joined the Navy in the mid-1980s and has held several commands, including the 6th Fleet, Naval Forces Korea, the USS Ross and multiple carrier strike groups.

She will succeed Adm. Michael Gilday as chief of naval operations — the highest-

ranking officer in the Navy and key adviser to the Navy secretary. Gilday retires Aug. 21.

A graduate of Northwestern University, Franchetti grew up in New York and was commissioned in the Navy in 1985. She's served on several ships and was once assistant to the Navy secretary. Franchetti has also attended the Naval War College in Rhode Island and earned a master's degree in organizational management.

Biden on Friday also nominated three other Navy leaders. He nominated Vice Adm. James Kilby to be vice chief of naval operations, Adm. Samuel Paparo as commander of Indo-Pacific Command, and Vice Adm. Stephen Koehler as commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

"[They] represent the best of the United States Navy. Together, these four highly decorated naval officers have extensive operational and command experience," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said. "I'm very proud that Adm. Franchetti has been nominated to be the first woman chief of naval operations and member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, where she will continue to inspire all of us."

However, when the Pentagon sent its official recommendation to the White House in June, Austin's top choice for the post was

Paparo, according to several news reports at the time.

Paparo, 58, has served in the Navy for close to 40 years and commanded Naval Forces Central, the 5th Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces in the past. He also holds numerous decorations, including the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star, Defense Superior Service Medal and Meritorious Service Medal. If confirmed, he would succeed Adm. John Aquilino as leader of Indo-Pacific Command.

It's not yet known, however, when Franchetti might formally ascend to the top Navy job. She joins a long list of military officers who have been promoted, but are unable to receive swift Senate confirmation due a block of the votes by Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala.

Tuberville has been singlehandedly blocking more than 200 military promotions over his opposition to a Pentagon policy that reimburses travel expenses for service members who must travel to another state for reproductive health care. The policy is the result of several states severely restricting or banning abortions in the past year.

Senate rules allow one senator to hold up what is usually an expedited confirmation process on the floor of the upper chamber.

Marines, more aircraft and ships deploy to Middle East

By **MATTHEW ADAMS**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The United States is deploying more aircraft, ships and troops to the Middle East to bolster security in the region amid a rise in threatening actions by Iranian forces, the Pentagon announced Thursday.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered the deployment of a portion of the Bataan Amphibious Readiness Group with a Marine Expeditionary Unit. The force includes Marines, the USS Bataan, an amphibious as-

sault ship, the USS Carter Hall, a dock landing ship, and associated personnel and equipment.

"These additional forces provide unique capabilities which, alongside our partner nations in the region, further safeguard the free flow of international commerce and uphold the rules based international order, and deter Iranian destabilizing activities in the region," said Army Gen. Michael "Erik" Kurilla, who leads CENTCOM.

In the past two years, Iran has attacked, seized or attempted seizure of nearly 20 internation-

ally flagged merchant vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, a key global shipping channel, CENTCOM said.

The move follows the Pentagon announcement last Monday that the USS Thomas Hudner, a new Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, and fighter jets, including F-35s and F-16s, were deploying to the region near the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman to defend U.S. interests.

"We have seen Iran continue to harass vessels in the Strait of Hormuz," Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh said last

Monday. "So [Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Kurilla] felt it was appropriate to move more assets into the region."

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

No signs that soldier, N. Korea conspired

By DOUG G. WARE
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — There are no indications yet that Army Pvt. Travis King's crossing into North Korea last week was planned or expected by the government in Pyongyang, the Pentagon said Thursday.

King, 23, crossed into the Demilitarized Zone — a section of land that separates North and South Korea — on Tuesday and hasn't been heard from since. The Army, Defense Department and other U.S. agencies are working to learn more about his whereabouts and safety and how he can be brought back to the United States.

"We don't know his condition, we don't know where he's being held, we don't know the status of his health," said Sabrina Singh, a Pentagon spokeswoman. "We know he is in custody of the

North Koreans, but beyond that ... I can't speak to that."

The Army has launched an investigation into King's disappearance and the top priority is to "bring him home," she said.

Instead of getting on a plane back to the United States on Monday as King was scheduled to do, he left the airport and eventually joined a civilian tour of the DMZ. During that tour, King sprinted across the DMZ and climbed into a van, raising questions about whether his swift actions could have been planned with North Korea, according to some news reports.

"We don't have any inclination of that at this time," Singh said. "We will let the investigation take its course."

The Pentagon and State Department are working to learn more about King's whereabouts, but Singh said U.S. offi-

cials have so far been unable to communicate directly with North Korea.

King — a cavalry scout with the Army's 1st Armored Division — spent six weeks in a South Korean prison for assault and was facing more administrative punishment in the United States, military officials have said. He was released from prison on July 10 and a few days later was booked on the flight back to his home station at Fort Bliss, Texas. Military escorts saw King to the airport's security checkpoint — the farthest point that they could go without a ticket — but did not actually see him get on the plane.

"I don't think there was any anticipation that he was going to not board his flight," Singh said.

Army investigators are also trying to piece together King's actions for multiple hours be-

tween the time that he left the airport and the moment he sprinted across the DMZ. Officials have said he joined a civilian tour of the border village of Panmunjom immediately before he crossed into North Korea.

Some of King's relatives have speculated the soldier might have decided to flee into North Korea because he was feeling overwhelmed by his legal problems and a possible discharge from the Army.

"I can't see him doing that intentionally if he was in his right mind," Carl Gates, King's maternal grandfather, told The Associated Press.

"I don't understand why he would do that, because it seemed like he was on his way back here to the United States," the soldier's uncle Myron Gates said. "He was on his way home."

N. Korea: US sub's visit may warrant nuke strike

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The presence of a nuclear-capable U.S. ballistic missile submarine in South Korea could meet the conditions set by North Korea for a preemptive nuclear strike, according to the regime's defense minister.

The USS Kentucky's arrival Tuesday in Busan could trigger Pyongyang's preemptive nuclear strike policy, Defense Minister Kang Sun-nam said in the state-run Korean Central News Agency on Thursday.

"I remind the U.S. military of the fact that the ever-increasing visibility of the deployment of the strategic nuclear submarine and other strategic assets may fall under the conditions of the use of nuclear weapons specified in

[North Korea's] law," Kang said in an article posted online by KCNA. "[North Korea's] doctrine on the use of nuclear weapons allows the execution of necessary action procedures in case a nuclear attack is launched against it, or it is judged that the use of nuclear weapons against it is imminent."

The Kentucky's port call is part of an agreement between President Joe Biden and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol to increase the "visibility of strategic assets on the Korean Peninsula" in light of North Korean threats, according to a statement from the two leaders in April.

North Korea has "misrepresented" the purpose of the Kentucky's visit, the South's Ministry of National Defense said in a news release Friday.

Italy might use shared Navy base for commercial flights

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Italian officials are considering using a military base in Sicily for commercial air flights, but it's unclear whether the plan would impact U.S. Navy operations on the shared installation.

Renato Schifani, the governor of Sicily, announced that the Italian Defense Ministry said it would be possible to use the base at Sigonella as an emergency alternative to a nearby international airport damaged in a recent fire, the Italian news agency Ansa reported Thursday.

The report did not say when commercial flights at the Italian base could begin, nor did it offer details such as how passengers would be transported to and

from the area.

The base, about 12 miles from Catania Airport, is shared with U.S. Naval Air Station Sigonella, which operates independently as a tenant of the Italian base.

Navy officials did not respond Friday to questions about potential effects to flight operations if commercial airline traffic uses the Italian side of the base.

Sicilian officials have been grappling with dozens of flight cancellations and delays during the summer tourist season since a fire damaged the main terminal at the airport on July 16.

In May, more than 1 million passengers traveled through the airport, according to assae-roporti.com.

Officials announced the terminal will remain closed until at least Monday, Ansa reported.

Probe: Faulty clutch caused fatal Osprey crash

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A mechanical failure of the clutch in an MV-22 Osprey caused the crash that killed five Marines in June 2022, a service investigation revealed Friday.

“It is clear from the investigation that there was no error on the part of the pilots and aircrew and nothing they could have done to anticipate or prevent this mishap,” the Marine Corps said in a statement. “They were conducting routine flight operations in accordance with applicable regulations when this catastrophic and unanticipated mechanical failure occurred.”

The report also ruled out any issues with weather, birds or other external factors. The investigation concluded there

should be no disciplinary actions or administrative actions against any Marines.

The Marine Corps had not previously released specifics about the crash that killed the Marines on June 8, 2022, during a training flight near Glamis, Calif., a remote desert area about 35 miles north of the border with Mexico and 50 miles west of Yuma, Ariz.

The crewmen who died were Capt. Nicholas Losapio, 31, Capt. John Sax, 33, Cpl. Nathan Carlson, 21, Cpl. Seth Rasmuson, 21, and Lance Cpl. Evan Strickland, 19.

“The loss of these five Marines is tragic and, while there will always be inherent risk in military aviation, we are working tirelessly to identify and mitigate risk across the V-22 plat-

form,” said Col. Brian Taylor, a program manager for the Ospreys.

The Osprey is a hybrid aircraft that takes off and lands like a helicopter, but during flight it can rotate its propellers to a horizontal position and cruise like an airplane. Versions of the aircraft are flown by the Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force.

The more than 400-page report found the cause of the crash was due to the failed engagement of aircraft’s dual clutch. When the clutch failed, the aircraft was then unable to thrust with the propeller on the right side of the Osprey. This caused “unrecoverable departure from controlled flight,” the service said.

A “hard clutch engagement” happens when the clutch in the

gearbox that connects one of aircraft’s two engines to the propeller rotor slips and then suddenly reengages, causing the aircraft to lurch.

The report said there were no direct witnesses to the accident, and due to the fiery crash, the data recorder was not recovered.

The investigation also found there have been 16 similar clutch problems with the Marine Ospreys in flight since 2010.

The clutch problem with Ospreys forced the V-22 joint program office in February to ground an undisclosed number of the aircraft across the military services. It was at that time that they began replacing a piece of equipment on the aircraft.

The office said Friday that it has eliminated the risk of a similar clutch malfunction by 99%.

Under bill, VA burial benefits for family to be permanent

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Burial benefits for family members who die before service members could be extended permanently under new legislation introduced by a bipartisan group of senators.

The measure would give the Department of Veterans Affairs lasting authority to bury the spouse or dependent child of an active-duty service member in a national cemetery and provide a memorial headstone or marker for cases in which remains are unavailable.

Such benefits have been provided for years on a temporary basis and are due to expire Oct. 1, 2024, without congressional action.

Sen. Gary Peters, D-Mich., described the bill as “common sense.” Peters, a former lieutenant commander in the Navy Reserve and a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, introduced the legisla-

tion alongside Sens. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, and Kevin Cramer, R-N.D.

“Service members and their families sacrifice immensely in service to our country,” Peters said in a statement. “The least that we can do is ensure they can remain together in their final resting place.”

The VA operates more than 100 national cemeteries across 42 states and Puerto Rico. Burial benefits for eligible spouses and children include perpetual care, inscription of the spouse’s or child’s name, and birth and death dates on the veteran’s headstone at no cost to the family.

The legislation, called the Keeping Military Families Together Act of 2023, has been endorsed by Paralyzed Veterans of America and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

The bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs for consideration.

Russian barrages damage Transfiguration Cathedral

Associated Press

ODESA, Ukraine — Russia struck the Ukrainian Black Sea city of Odesa on Sunday, keeping up a barrage of attacks that has damaged critical port infrastructure in southern Ukraine in the past week. At least one person was killed and 22 others wounded in the early morning attack, officials said.

Four children were among those wounded in the blasts, which severely damaged 25 landmarks across the city, including the historic Transfiguration Cathedral.

Russia has been launching repeated attacks on Odesa, a key hub for exporting grain, since Moscow canceled a landmark grain deal on Monday amid Kyiv’s grinding efforts to retake its occupied territories.

After the fires were put out at the Orthodox cathedral, volunteers donned hard hats, shovels and brooms to begin removing rubble, combing through to sal-

vage any artifacts.

“The destruction is enormous, half of the cathedral is now roofless,” said Archdeacon Andrii Palchuk, as workers brought documents and valuables out of the building, its floor inundated with water used by firefighters to extinguish the blaze.

Palchuk said the damage was caused by a direct hit from a Russian missile that penetrated the building down to the basement. Two people inside at the time of the strike were wounded.

“But with God’s help, we will restore it,” he said, bursting into tears.

A woman who came to help with the cleanup said she loved the cathedral “for its tranquility and grace.”

“When you enter this church, you feel like you’re beyond the world,” said Liudmyla, who gave only her first name. “I have a feeling that God, to protect apartments, took this pain, this explosion upon himself.”

National monument to be made in Till's honor

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden will establish a national monument honoring Emmett Till, the Black teenager from Chicago who was abducted, tortured and killed in 1955 after he was accused of whistling at a white woman in Mississippi, and his mother, a White House official said Saturday.

Biden will sign a proclamation on Tuesday to create the Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley National Monument across three sites in Illinois and Mississippi, according to the official. The individual spoke on condition of anonymity because the White

House had not formally announced the president's plans.

Tuesday is the anniversary of Emmett Till's birth in 1941.

The monument will protect places that are central to the story of Till's life and death at age 14, the acquittal of his white killers and his mother's activism. Till's mother's insistence on an open casket to show the world how her son had been brutalized and Jet's magazine's decision to publish photos of his mutilated body helped galvanize the Civil Rights Movement.

Biden's decision also comes at a fraught time in the United States over matters concerning

race. Conservative leaders have been pushing back against the teaching of slavery and Black history in public schools, as well as the incorporation of diversity, equity and inclusion programs from college classrooms to corporate boardrooms.

On Friday, Vice President Kamala Harris criticized a revised Black history curriculum in Florida that includes teaching that enslaved people benefited from the skills they learned at the hands of the people who denied them freedom. The Florida Board of Education approved the curriculum to satisfy legislation signed by Gov. Ron DeSan-

tis, a Republican presidential candidate who has accused public schools of liberal indoctrination.

"How is it that anyone could suggest that in the midst of these atrocities that there was any benefit to being subjected to this level of dehumanization?" Harris asked in a speech delivered from Jacksonville, Fla.

DeSantis said he had no role in devising his state's new education standards, but defended the components on how enslaved people benefited.

"All of that is rooted in whatever is factual," he said in response.

Dozens missing in flash floods in Afghanistan

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — Heavy flooding from seasonal rains in Afghanistan has killed at least 12 people and left dozens missing, according to a Taliban spokesman and local officials.

Government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said Sunday that about 40 people are

missing after the flash flooding late Saturday night in the Jalrez district of Maidan Wardak province, west of Kabul.

He added that all relevant authorities have been ordered to provide necessary assistance to the people in the affected areas.

The provincial governor's office in a statement said hundreds of homes are ei-

ther damaged or destroyed, and the missing people are believed to be under the rubble of collapsed homes.

The statement also said hundreds of acres of agricultural land were washed out and destroyed, and the highway between the capital Kabul and the central Bamiyan province is also closed due to the floods.

Voters could make Spain latest EU country to swing to right

Associated Press

MADRID — Voters in Spain braved soaring summer temperatures to cast ballots in a general election Sunday that could make the country the latest European Union member to swing to the political right.

Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez called the early election after his Spanish Socialist Workers Party and its far-left partner, Unidas Podemos, took a severe beating in local and regional elections in May. Sánchez has been Spain's head of government since 2018.

Most opinion polls have put the right-wing Popular Party, which won the May vote, ahead of the Socialists but likely needing the support of the extreme right Vox party to form a government.

Such a coalition would return a far-right force to the Spanish government for the first time since the country transitioned to democracy in the late 1970s following the nearly 40-year rule of dictator Francisco Franco.

A PP-Vox government would mean another EU member has moved firmly to the right, a trend seen recently in Sweden, Finland and Italy. Countries such as Germany and France are concerned by what such a shift would portend for EU immigration and climate policies.

Spain's two main leftist parties are pro-EU participation. On the right, the PP, led by Alberto Núñez Feijóo, is also in favor of the EU. Vox, headed by Santiago Abascal, is opposed to EU interference in Spain's affairs.

The election comes as Spain holds the EU's rotating presidency. Sánchez had hoped to use the six-month term to showcase the advances his government had made. An election defeat for Sánchez could see the PP taking over the EU presidency reins.

Sánchez was one of the first to vote, casting his ballot in a polling station in Madrid.

Commenting later on the large number of foreign media covering the election, he said: "This means that what happens today is going to be very important not just for us but also for Europe, and I think that should also make us reflect."

"I don't want to say I'm optimistic or not. I have good vibrations," Sánchez added.

The Socialists and a new movement called Sumar that

brings together 15 small leftist parties for the first time hope to pull off an upset victory. Sumar is led by second Deputy Prime Minister Yolanda Díaz, the only woman among the top four candidates.

Díaz called for everyone to vote, recalling that the freedom to vote didn't always exist in Spain.

"A lot is at risk," said Díaz after voting. "For people of my generation, they are the most important elections."

At stake is "waking up tomorrow with more rights, more democracy and more freedom."

The Interior Ministry said voter turnout at 6:00 p.m. local time stood at 53%, compared with 56% at the same point in the country's last national election, in November 2019.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Mom charged with trying to hire hitman to kill son

FL MIAMI — An 18-year-old Miami woman is accused of trying to hire a hitman to kill her 3-year-old son.

The woman appeared before a Miami-Dade County judge Wednesday following her arrest on charges of solicitation of murder and unlawful use of a communications device.

The woman visited a parody hit-for-hire website — intended to assist law enforcement — in an attempt to have the boy “taken away, far, far, far away and possibly be killed but ASAP,” Miami-Dade police said in a report. It said she was willing to pay \$3,000.

The woman listed wanting “to get something done once and for all” as the reason for hiring a hitman, the report said.

Police said she provided an address where the boy lives with his grandmother, a recent photo of him and her phone number when she made contact with the website.

A man who runs the website contacted Miami-Dade police and detectives tracked down the woman on Tuesday, using the IP address and phone number provided.

Souvenir seekers haunt ‘Beetlejuice II’ filming

VT EAST CORINTH — Souvenir hunters are haunting the “Beetlejuice II” movie set in Vermont.

State police are investigating two thefts, one of a large lamppost topped with a distinctive pumpkin decoration and the other a 150-pound abstract art piece taken from the vicinity of

a cemetery.

Someone bundled up the lamppost, covered it with tarp and fled at a high rate of speed in a pickup truck on July 14, while the theft near the cemetery took place several days later, state police said Thursday.

The sequel to the 1988 movie is filming in East Corinth, near the New Hampshire border.

Wife of suspect in serial killings files for divorce

NY MASSAPEQUA PARK — The wife of Rex Heuermann, charged in the deaths of three women whose remains were found along a Long Island beach roadway, filed for divorce Wednesday, her attorney said.

Asa Ellerup filed the complaint in Suffolk County Supreme Court. Her attorney, Robert Macedonio, declined any additional comment.

Meanwhile, authorities spent another day at the Massapequa Park home where the couple had lived, continuing their search of the premises.

Heuermann, an architect, was charged this month with murdering the three women, and is a suspect in a fourth death, a prosecutor said.

He has pleaded not guilty and remains in custody under suicide watch.

Alcohol sales now allowed at college sporting events

MI LANSING — A new state law allows alcoholic drinks to be sold at college sporting events in Michigan.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed legislation allowing liquor licenses to be issued to

sporting venues at public universities, including Michigan State in East Lansing and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

“Authorizing the legal sale of alcohol at sporting events will bring us on equal footing with other universities, help reduce the likelihood of binge drinking before games, and bring in a heck of a lot more revenue that we can use to improve the student experience,” Whitmer said in a statement.

Whitmer also signed legislation making liquor-to-go permanent, which is expected to generate revenue for restaurants and small businesses.

Pastor gets 18-month prison sentence for theft

NH CONCORD — A New Hampshire executive pastor has been sentenced to 18 months in prison for stealing about \$130,000 from his church to pay off gambling debts and make purchases.

Gregory Neal, of Barrington, 45, was sentenced in federal court Wednesday and ordered to pay back the Journey Baptist Church and the insurance company that covered a portion of the losses.

He pleaded guilty in April to one count of wire fraud.

“A man who abused his position of trust — as a leader of his church — and stole from his congregation to support his gambling habit has been brought to justice,” U.S. Attorney Jane Young said in a statement.

Prosecutors said that between January 2017 and March 2020, Neal made unauthorized withdrawals of the church’s

funds to pay off his debts and made unauthorized purchases with church credit cards.

His lawyer asked for a sentence of five years of probation to allow Neal to continue running his carpentry business so he can pay back the church and support his family.

Video shows judge on phone in murder trial

OK CHANDLER — A new judge in Oklahoma is facing scrutiny after courtroom video showed her scrolling through social media and texting on her cellphone throughout the murder trial for a man accused in the fatal beating of a 2-year-old, a newspaper reports.

Security video obtained by The Oklahoman shows Lincoln County District Judge Traci Soderstrom texting or messaging for minutes at a time during jury selection, opening statements and testimony in the trial for a man in the death of his girlfriend’s son. At one point, Soderstrom searched for a GIF, an animated image.

Soderstrom, 50, can also be seen checking Facebook during the trial, which began last month in Chandler, about 45 miles northeast of Oklahoma City, the newspaper reported.

Soderstrom was sworn in on Jan. 9 after being elected in November. Her four-year term expires in January 2027.

Soderstrom declined to comment to the newspaper because the verdict could still be appealed, saying judges are prohibited from discussing pending cases.

— From wire reports

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Angels weigh decision to trade Ohtani

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Angels fans rose and roared when Shohei Ohtani walked toward the dugout after a tumultuous Friday night on the mound. The Big A echoed with “M-V-P!” chants for the unique talent who has revolutionized baseball over the last six seasons in Orange County.

The chants and cheers had a melancholy note, however.

Most of those fans were aware this might be their final chance to thank him.

Ohtani’s future has been the talk of baseball all year long, and the forecast isn’t much clearer as the Los Angeles Angels reach the last 10 days before the MLB trade deadline. Ohtani is in the

final year of his contract before unrestricted free agency, and the Angels must decide whether to trade their generational superstar for a probable mother lode or risk the possibility of losing him for practically nothing in the winter.

Every serious Angels fan understands the stakes of the next several days — and of the next few months, if the Halos don’t trade Ohtani at the deadline. Ohtani also understands the nature of the current spotlight on him, but the major league home runs leader claimed he isn’t thinking about a potential farewell to his only major league team.

“That did not cross my mind at all,” Ohtani said through his translator Friday of the possibil-

ity he had just made his last home mound appearance for the Angels, who will be on the road next week. “Obviously, I’m a part of the Angels at this moment, and I feel like we’re in a decent spot to make a playoff run, so I just try not to really think about that.”

Ohtani said he has no assurances he won’t be traded, and he didn’t acknowledge any discussions about a contract extension. His representatives have previously said he’s likely to explore free agency, increasing the stakes of the Angels’ decision.

It seems Ohtani, his teammates and their fans are all waiting on a move — or no move at all — by Angels owner Arte Moreno

and general manager Perry Minasian.

“I’ve never really had any sit-down talks like that,” Ohtani said when asked if he had considered short-circuiting this whole drama by committing to the Angels before free agency. “I see Perry like once a week in the clubhouse, and we’ve never really had conversations about that.”

Strong arguments can be made on both sides of this debate, and the sheer volume of opinions on the topic has become noticeable even to Ohtani, whose ascetic lifestyle usually limits distractions. He wasn’t at his sharpest Friday night, but he earned his eighth mound win of the year.

O’Hearn’s pinch-hit single rallies Orioles over Rays

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Ryan O’Hearn had a pinch-hit RBI single in the ninth inning and the AL East-leading Baltimore Orioles rebounded after blowing a five-run lead to beat the Tampa Bay Rays for the second time in three days, 6-5 on Saturday.

The Orioles, who have won 11 of 14, took a one-game lead over the second-place Rays. Baltimore started July 6½ games behind Tampa Bay, which dropped to an AL-worst 4-13 in July.

Pinch-hitter Adam Frazier had a ninth-inning leadoff single off Pete Fairbanks (0-4), went to second on James McCann’s sacrifice bunt on a high-and-tight pitch and scored on O’Hearn’s liner to right.

Cionel Pérez (3-1) got the final out in the eighth, and Félix Bautista worked a perfect ninth to get his 27th save before a sellout crowd of 25,025 that included a large number of Orioles’ fans.

Mets 5-6, Red Sox 4-8: Tris-

ton Casas had his first career multihomer game, and Yu Chang and Jarren Duran also went deep off Max Scherzer in the nightcap as New York and host Boston split a doubleheader.

Grant Hartwig (3-1) picked up the win in the opener, while Boston’s Kutter Crawford (4-5) took the loss.

Dodgers 16, Rangers 3: Freddie Freeman hit two more home runs, Max Muncy and J.D. Martinez also went deep as NL West-leading Los Angeles dealt AL West-leading Texas its most lopsided loss of the season.

Yankees 5, Royals 2: DJ LeMahieu hit the go-ahead home run in the seventh inning, Gerrit Cole struck out 10 and host New York defeated Kansas City.

Pirates 3, Angels 0: Endy Rodríguez hit his first major league homer, five pitchers combined on a five-hitter and visiting Pittsburgh ended Los Angeles’ four-game winning streak.

Athletics 4, Astros 1: Jace Peterson hit a go-ahead two-run

single in the sixth, Zack Gelof hit his first major league home run in the seventh and host Oakland snapped a nine-game losing streak to Houston.

Cubs 8, Cardinals 6: Cody Bellinger drove in four runs and Nico Hoerner had three of host Chicago’s 15 hits in a win over NL Central rival St. Louis.

Reds 4, Diamondbacks 2: TJ Friedl, Matt McLain and Jake Fraley hit consecutive home runs in the sixth inning and host Cincinnati beat Arizona for its fourth straight win.

Rockies 4, Marlins 3: Nolan Jones hit a three-run homer in the seventh inning and Randal Grichuk hit a go-ahead RBI single in the ninth as visiting Colorado rallied from an early three-run deficit to beat Miami.

Mariners 9, Blue Jays 8: J.P. Crawford and Teoscar Hernández had two-run doubles as part of a five-run seventh inning, and host Seattle rallied to beat Toronto.

Guardians 1, Phillies 0: Rookie Tanner Bibee struck out eight in seven dominant innings

and Amed Rosario scored on a misplayed pop-up in the sixth in host Cleveland’s win over Philadelphia.

Nationals 10, Giants 1: CJ Abrams hit a two-run homer on his bobblehead night, Josiah Gray earned his first win since June 30 and host Washington routed San Francisco and moved into a position to complete its first series sweep since August 2021.

Brewers 4, Braves 3: Sal Frelick went 3-for-3, drove in the go-ahead run in the eighth inning and made two outstanding catches in his major league debut as host Milwaukee rallied to beat Atlanta.

Padres 14, Tigers 3: Luis Campusano had a homer among his four hits and visiting San Diego beat Detroit for the 4,000th victory in franchise history.

Twins 3, White Sox 2: Christian Vázquez drove in the tying run and Michael A. Taylor followed with an RBI single, all in the seventh inning, in host Minnesota’s win over Chicago.

Jamaica holds France to stunning draw

Associated Press

SYDNEY — Hervé Renard knows all about World Cup shocks. He also knows an early setback can be overcome in international soccer.

With that in mind, the France coach was not unduly concerned by his team's 0-0 draw with Jamaica on Sunday, which was one of the biggest surprises so far at the Women's World Cup.

Renard led Saudi Arabia to a famous win against Argentina at the men's World Cup in Qatar last year, before Lionel Messi's team rebounded and went on to lift the trophy for their country.

"I've already won competitions after drawing my first two games," Renard said. "Let's talk about the World Cup 2022. I don't think that we should be getting ahead of ourselves."

"There are lots of people, lots of teams that start with the fanfare and are not there come the final and others are maybe slow to get out of the starting blocks."

While there is no need for

France to panic, this was still an unexpected result for the fifth-ranked team in the world and one of the tournament favorites.

By contrast Jamaica is ranked 43rd and entered the tournament having lost all of its games at its World Cup debut in 2019 with a goal difference of -11.

"We always tell our players just don't worry about the rankings," said Jamaica coach Lorne Donaldson, who declared his country's first point ever in the competition as its greatest achievement in soccer.

"I think it is the No. 1 result I have seen men or women," he said. "I would put it there. If you go by the rankings you would say that result on this stage has to be No. 1."

Jamaica's players ran onto the field after the final whistle as if they'd been crowned world champions. It would have been a very different story had Kadidiatou Diani's 90th-minute header not struck the bar.

In a game of few chances,

Diani had France's best opportunities to score a winner, but could not find a breakthrough at the Sydney Football Stadium.

She forced a save from Jamaica goalkeeper Rebecca Spencer in the first half and saw another effort deflected wide.

Another header in the second half also went wide of the target before her late effort came back off the bar.

The French were expected to be too strong for Jamaica, but favorites have not had everything their way so far. The 2019 quarterfinalists were the latest to struggle against an underdog.

Australia needed a penalty to get a 1-0 win against Ireland, while European champion England also needed a spot kick to overcome Haiti 1-0. Nigeria held Olympic champion Canada 0-0.

"The French are used to having the upper hand during the opening games, but this is something that is going to change because things are getting a lot closer," Renard said. "We need

to keep our heads up high and we need to keep our confidence high."

Jamaica did well to disrupt a France team that struggled to put together fluid moves.

In one of France's few moments of quality in the first half, Diani saw a low effort bundled around the post by Spencer. From the resulting corner, Wendie Renard headed over from close range.

Kadidiatou was fractions away from giving France a half-time lead when firing from the edge of the area. Chantelle Swaby managed to get something in the way of the shot, which deflected narrowly wide with the keeper beaten.

After seeing another header go wide after the break, Kadidiatou almost came up with the decisive moment when hitting the bar.

On an otherwise joyous night for Jamaica, it may come to regret the red card for star forward Khadija Shaw, who will be suspended for the next game.

Early goal enough for Netherlands to edge Portugal

Associated Press

DUNEDIN, New Zealand — Stefanie van der Gragt scored on a header in the 13th minute, leading the Netherlands to a 1-0 win over Portugal at the Women's World Cup on Sunday as the 2019 finalists began their tournament run.

The Dutch defender gathered herself as teammate Sherida Spitse lofted a corner kick her way, then headed the ball across the goal into the far side of the net. An offside review delayed the celebration.

The goal by the 30-year-old van der Gragt, who plans to retire after the Women's World Cup, was the quickest first goal of the tournament. The Dutch controlled the tempo of the game — Portugal's first shot of the match didn't come until the

82nd minute.

"It's an important goal. I'm proud of the team and it's a good win. The first game is always the important game of the tournament and I think these three points are really good for us," van der Gragt said.

The meeting with the Netherlands, ranked No. 9 in the world, marked Portugal's first-ever tournament appearance.

On hand were 11,991 spectators, who were sheltered from the rain inside Dunedin's covered Forsyth Barr Stadium, known as the Glasshouse, which has a capacity of 25,947.

Though most of the crowd appeared to be Dutch fans, a small but vocal group of Portuguese supporters with flags and team apparel banged on drums throughout the game, the beat

echoing across the venue.

The Dutch victory raises the stakes for their upcoming rematch with the two-time defending world champion Americans, who beat Netherlands 2-0 in that 2019 final. A winner in that match will gain control of Group E and could very well wrap up a berth in the knockout stage.

Portugal failed to break through and become the first of the eight newcomers in the Women's World Cup to get a win.

Sweden 2, South Africa 1: Sweden produced a drab opening performance on a gloomy night of mist and rain in Wellington, New Zealand, but managed to fend off plucky South Africa.

South Africa caught Sweden off guard when Hildah Magaia scored in the 48th minute to take a shocking lead and threatening

to notch the first major upset of the tournament.

Sweden had dominated a scoreless first half with 71% of possession and eight corners.

Sweden looked lost after half-time and South Africa took advantage when Thembi Kgatlang dropped behind the defense and struck a high shot that keeper Zecira Musovic could only parry.

Sweden, which hadn't lost a World Cup group match since 2003 and was expected to ease past 54th-ranked South Africa, suddenly seemed in danger.

But Sweden got on the board in the 64th minute with Fridolina Rolfö's equalizer. Amanda Ilestedt then hit a perfect header from a corner with a minute left in regulation to help Sweden escape.

Harman leads British Open by 5 shots

Associated Press

HOYLAKE, England — The fascination with Brian Harman at the British Open has little to do with his golf so far. It's rare in Britain to hear tales of hunting turkey, learning to skin a deer at age 8 and packing wild game in the freezer for his family to eat.

One tabloid called him "Brian the Butcher." Another headline screamed, "I Shoot to Thrill."

Harman's only concern is bagging the biggest trophy of his career, and he stayed on target Saturday by overcoming an early wobble with a remarkably steady hand.

His 8-foot par putt on the last hole at Royal Liverpool gave him a 2-under 69 and allowed him to keep his five-shot lead, leaving him 18 holes away from becoming a major champion.

"I've thought about winning majors for my whole entire life," Harman said. "It's the whole reason I work as hard as I do and why I practice as much as I do and why I sacrifice as much as I do. Tomorrow, if that's going to come to fruition for me, it has to be all about the golf. It has to be execution and just staying in the moment."

He said he is most proud of making the FedEx Cup playoffs each of his 12 years on the PGA Tour, where he has two wins in 335 tournaments.

Sunday could change all that.

His lead remained five shots. Only the contenders changed on a wet day at the British Open.

Cameron Young, the runner-up at St. Andrews a year ago, showed superb touch from a pot bunker in front of the 18th green

that set up a tap-in birdie for a 66 and put him in the final pairing with Harman on Sunday.

"I feel like he's not someone to back down," Young said.

Equally daunting is the sight of Jon Rahm, finally getting rewarded with a 63 that he capped off just as Harman was starting. It was the lowest round by two shots ever recorded in an Open at Royal Liverpool, hosting the oldest championship for the 13th time.

"That's the best round I've played on a links course," Rahm said.

When it was pointed out that his idol, Seve Ballesteros, never shot 63 in a major, Rahm quickly replied, "I'd rather win three times and never shoot 63."

At least Rahm has a chance, which looked unlikely when he

began the third round in the rain and wind and was 12 shots out of the lead.

Harman was at 12-under 201 and he has history on his side. Jean Van de Velde is the last player to lose a five-shot lead in the final round of a major. That was in Carnoustie in 1999 and featured one of the most dumbfounding triple bogeys ever on the 72nd hole of a major.

The day was a big disappointment for so many others, starting with Rory McIlroy.

He opened with three birdies in five holes. But he didn't make birdie the rest of the way, and the finish was particularly painful. McIlroy missed birdie chances from 8, 12 and 10 feet.

McIlroy shot 69 and was nine shots behind, his hopes all but over.

Messi hits sensational winner in Inter Miami debut

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Some people paid hundreds of dollars to be able to say they were in the stadium for Lionel Messi's debut for Inter Miami. Some paid thousands for their seats. The team's owners committed well over \$100 million just to have a chance at moments like this.

So far, it looks like money well spent.

From the you-can't-make-this-up department, Messi capped the opening night with his new club by delivering the unforgettable. His magical left foot sent a free kick into the upper left corner of the net in the 94th minute Friday night, giving Inter Miami a 2-1 win over Mexican club Cruz Azul in a Leagues Cup match.

"What I saw was the goal," Messi said in an on-field interview amid the postgame celebration. "I saw the goal. I knew that I had to score."

He makes it sound so easy.

Made it look so easy, too.

The game's greatest active player — a seven-time Ballon d'Or winner and a World Cup champion — sent the ball over a wall of four Cruz Azul defenders for the winning goal, unquestionably the greatest moment in Inter Miami's brief history. Fireworks shot into the night sky, and play resumed for roughly a minute before the referee's whistle blew.

"It's a movie that we have seen before," Inter Miami coach Tata Martino said.

Messi was a showman throughout his debut for his Major League Soccer club. He waved at fans while he was seated on the bench. Waved at them while he was warming up. Waved at them while he was actually in the game.

And if that wasn't enough, he saved his best moment for the end. He watched the ball sail into the net, something he's done about 800 times before for club and country, then sprinted to

the right corner of the field and leaped into the arms of teammates.

The team's owners — David Beckham, Jorge Mas and Jose Mas — were waiting as he left the pitch; Jorge Mas planted a kiss onto the superstar's sweat-coated cheek. Some Cruz Azul players stood in silence and just watched; they'll have a story to tell, too, about how it took an incredible Messi moment to defeat them.

It took Inter Miami four years of planning and two years of actual pursuing to bring Messi to the club.

"Worth it," Beckham said earlier in the week.

How right he was.

"It's such a moment for this country," Beckham said. "It's such a moment for the league. And it's a very proud moment for us."

Nobody even left their seats when the halftime whistle blew. The reason: Messi was on the field. He warmed up for about 5

minutes during intermission with the other reserves before they all left for the locker room.

That's when the fans, finally, could put their phones down and take a breath. Temporarily, anyway. The wait was officially on: When was Messi coming in? He resumed warmups while the second half was getting under way, jogging around behind the end line near Miami's supporter section, and fans roared in delight when he gave them a wave.

And about eight minutes into the second half, the answer: It was Messi time.

Messi checked in early in the second half with Inter Miami leading 1-0. He hugged the player he was replacing, midfielder Benjamin Cremaschi, then trotted onto the field.

Had he missed the free kick, the game would have gone to a penalty shootout.

"It was the last play of the game and I wanted to score so I didn't go to penalties," Messi said.