

Bergdahl's desertion conviction vacated

Associated Press

FALLS CHURCH, Va. — A federal judge on Tuesday vacated the military conviction of Bowe Bergdahl, a former U.S. Army soldier who pleaded guilty to desertion after he left his post and was captured in Afghanistan and tortured by the Taliban.

The ruling from U.S. District Judge Reggie Walton in Washington says that military judge Jeffrey Nance, who presided over the court-martial, failed to disclose that he had applied to the executive branch for a job as an immigration judge, creating a potential conflict of interest.

Walton noted that former President Donald Trump had strongly criticized Bergdahl during the 2016 presidential campaign. Bergdahl's lawyers argued that Trump's comments placed undue command influence on Nance.

Walton rejected the specific argument surrounding undue command influence, but he said a reasonable person could ques-

tion the judge's impartiality under the circumstances.

Bergdahl was charged with desertion and misbehavior before the enemy after the then-23-year-old from Hailey, Idaho, left his post in Afghanistan in 2009. He said he was trying to get outside his post so he could report what he saw as poor leadership within his unit, but he was abducted by the Taliban and held captive for nearly five years.

During that time, Bergdahl was repeatedly tortured and beaten with copper wires, rubber hoses and rifle butts. After several escape attempts, he was imprisoned in a small cage for four years, according to court documents.

Several U.S. service members were wounded searching for Bergdahl. In 2014, he was returned to the U.S. in a prisoner swap for five Taliban leaders who were being held at Guantanamo Bay.

The swap faced criticism from Trump,

then-Sen. John McCain and others. Both Trump and McCain called for Bergdahl to face severe punishment.

In 2017, he pleaded guilty to both charges. Prosecutors at his court-martial sought 14 years in prison, but he was given no time after he submitted evidence of the torture he suffered while in Taliban custody. He was dishonorably discharged and ordered to forfeit \$10,000 in pay.

His conviction and sentence had been narrowly upheld by military appeals courts before his lawyers took the case to U.S. District Court, resulting in Tuesday's ruling.

The Justice Department declined comment on the ruling Tuesday.

Eugene Fidell, one of Bergdahl's lawyers, said he was gratified by the ruling and said Walton's 63-page opinion shows how meticulous he was in rendering the ruling.

Calls and emails to the immigration court in Charlotte, N.C., where Nance serves as an immigration judge, were not returned.

Spouses ask Senate leaders to end promotion block

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

Hundreds of military spouses are demanding Senate leaders find a way to end an Alabama Republican senator's single-handed blockade of more than 280 senior officer promotions.

Roughly 500 spouses in a petition delivered Monday on Capitol Hill blasted Sen. Tommy Tuberville's procedural hold on all general and admiral promotions as an "inappropriate and unpatriotic" political maneuver that harms the impacted officers and their families. Tuberville has blocked the Senate from confirming batches of general and admiral nominations by voice vote since February in protest of a Pentagon policy that reimburses service members for travel expenses incurred to seek certain reproductive health care banned in several states, including abortions, and allows them to use their personal leave to do so.

"No matter your political beliefs, we must agree that service members and military families will not be used as political

leverage," the Secure Families Initiative, a nonpartisan, nonprofit group that advocates for military spouses and families, wrote in the letter to Sens. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., the upper chamber's majority and minority leaders, respectively. "It's time to end this political showmanship and recommit to respect the service and sacrifice of those who pledge to defend this nation."

The group implored the Senate leaders to do all they could to convince Tuberville to drop his hold, work out political disagreements "outside the military space" and quickly confirm all the senior officer promotions that have been blocked. The growing list of promotions, which includes nominees for the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Army chief of staff, the Marine commandant and the Navy's chief of naval operations and other four-star positions, is expected to grow to more than 650 individuals by the end of the year.

The group said it also delivered the petition Monday to Tuberville's office. A spokesman for Tuberville declined to com-

ment Tuesday about the letter.

Tuberville, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has repeatedly maintained the Pentagon policy is illegal because it violates the Hyde Amendment, which bans any federal funding for abortions. The senator did not appear to change his position last week after a closed-door Capitol Hill briefing from Pentagon officials on his blockade's impact on the military.

Tuberville told reporters after the July 17 meeting that he had entered the briefing with an "open mind, to be convinced that this is affecting readiness." But he said Pentagon officials "gave a poor answer." The senator has said he would only drop the hold if the Pentagon ends the policy or if Congress votes to encode the travel reimbursements and leave the policy in law.

Senate Democrats disagreed with Tuberville's assessment of the briefing. Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., chairman of the Armed Services committee, said the Pentagon officials were convincing in their arguments that the policy in question is legal.

US: Freed Marine vet injured in Ukraine war

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A former U.S. Marine who was released from Russia in a prisoner swap last year has been injured while fighting in Ukraine, the State Department said Tuesday.

Trevor Reed was wounded several weeks ago, according to a person familiar with the situation who was not authorized to discuss the matter by name and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity. He has been taken to Germany for medical care, said State Department spokesman Vedant Patel.

U.S. officials said little about Reed's injury or presence in Ukraine beyond noting that his activities weren't on behalf of the U.S. government. But Reed's decision to take up arms during Russia's war with Ukraine potentially complicates U.S. efforts to

win the release of two other Americans still detained by Moscow, Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich and corporate security executive Paul Whelan. His fighting also risked a potentially dire scenario if he'd been captured and returned to Russian custody after the U.S. had worked to get him home.

"As I indicated, we have been incredibly clear warning American citizens, American nationals, not to travel to Ukraine, let alone participate in fighting," Patel said. "As you know, we are not in a place to provide assistance to evacuate private U.S. citizens from Ukraine, including those Americans who may decide to travel to Ukraine to participate in fighting."

The severity of Reed's injury was not immediately clear, but Patel said he was transported out of Ukraine by a non-government-

tal organization. He was taken to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, located near Ramstein Air Base, according to two U.S. officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

Reed was released from Russian custody in an April 2022 prisoner swap in exchange for a Russian pilot, Konstantin Yaroshenko, who'd been serving a 20-year federal sentence for conspiring to smuggle cocaine into the U.S.

Reed was arrested in the summer of 2019 after Russian authorities said he assaulted an officer while being driven by police to a police station following a night of heavy drinking. He was later sentenced to nine years in prison.

The Messenger was first to report Reed's injury.

3 Marines found dead in car near Camp Lejeune

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

Three Marines based at Camp Lejeune were found dead Sunday inside a car parked near the North Carolina base, military and local officials said Tuesday.

Pender County Sheriff's Office deputies who were responding to a missing person's report at about 9 a.m. found the three Marines dead inside a private vehicle at a gas station in Hampstead, N.C., the sheriff's office said Tuesday in a statement.

The Marine Corps identified the deceased individuals as three lance corporals, all assigned to Combat Logistics Battalion 2, which is part of 2nd Marine Logistics Group at Camp Lejeune.

Base officials identified the deceased Marines as Lance Cpl. Tanner J. Kaltenberg, Lance Cpl. Merax C. Dockery and Lance Cpl. Ivan R. Garcia. All three were motor vehicle operators responsible for driving

tactical vehicles.

"My deepest sympathy and condolences are extended to the family, friends and colleagues of Lance Cpl. Kaltenberg, Lance Cpl. Dockery and Lance Cpl. Garcia," Brig. Gen. Michael McWilliams, who commands 2nd Marine Logistics Group, said in the statement. "Our focus is on providing the necessary resources and support to those impacted by their tragic loss as they navigate this extremely difficult time."

The deaths are under investigation by the Pender County Sheriff's Office and the Naval Criminal Investigative Service is helping, according to the Marine Corps.

The sheriff's office provided few details in its news release, including how the Marines died. Police told the Port City Daily that foul play was not suspected in the deaths, the Wilmington, N.C.-based newspaper reported.

VA to probe if more cancers could be linked to burn pits

BY MATTHEW ADAMS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs will review whether three more types of cancers will be added to the list of conditions presumed to be caused by exposure to toxins from military burn pits, the agency announced Tuesday.

The department revealed it will conduct new studies to determine whether veterans with acute leukemias, chronic leukemias and multiple myeloma outside of the head and neck could have resulted from military service in Iraq, Afghanistan and Southwest Asia.

"We won't rest until we understand whether there's a connection between these deadly conditions and the service of our nation's heroes," VA Secretary Denis McDonough said.

The move is part of the VA's efforts to provide more health benefits to more veterans suffering from illnesses stemming from toxic exposure as a result of The

Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022, or PACT Act, which was signed into law by President Joe Biden almost a year ago.

The law seeks to provide an easier path to health care and benefits for veterans who served near open-air burn pits, which were used throughout the 1990s and the post-9/11 wars to burn garbage, jet fuel and other materials. Veterans diagnosed with cancer, respiratory issues and lung disease at young ages have blamed exposure to the toxic fumes from these pits, though the VA contended for years that there wasn't sufficient evidence to support their claims.

The PACT Act also expanded health care eligibility to post-9/11 combat veterans and added 23 conditions related to burn pits and other toxic exposures to the VA's list of service presumptions.

Army vet pleads guilty to \$106K disability theft

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

An Army veteran admitted to stealing more than \$100,000 in disability benefits after he was caught posting Instagram videos of his 800-pound leg presses, the Justice Department said.

Charles Adams, who bills himself on his website as a certified personal trainer, pleaded guilty Tuesday in federal court to theft of \$106,245 in government funds, court records show.

He faces up to 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. He was also ordered to return the money he stole.

As part of the deal, prosecutors dropped a charge of making false statements while applying for Social Security disability benefits.

Adams, 50, of Berkeley, Mo., told medical examiners that a condition prevented him from bending, squatting or lifting more than 25 pounds above his shoulders. Meanwhile, he was doing strenuous workouts, court documents said.

Adams' scheme started in 2017, when he applied for an increase in disability benefits, citing degenerative disc disease and arthritis connected to his military service, court filings stated. He told medical workers he had difficulty getting out of bed and could not stand for extended periods of time. Meanwhile, he posted videos to his Instagram account showing himself lifting heavy weights in late 2017 and 2018, investigators said. His workouts included deep squats and leg presses.

The Department of Veterans Affairs discontinued his benefits after determining his medical conditions were not as disabling as previously assessed, court documents said.

Stark contrast as 2 Koreas mark armistice anniversary

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — The truce that stopped the bloodshed in the Korean War turns 70 years old on Thursday and the two Koreas are marking the anniversary in starkly different ways, underscoring their deepening nuclear tensions.

North Korea has invited delegations from China and Russia as it prepares to stage huge celebrations with thousands of citizens who have rehearsed for months to commemorate the armistice it sees as a victory in the "Grand Fatherland Liberation War." The festivities are likely to be capped by a giant military parade in the capital, Pyongyang, where leader Kim Jong Un could showcase his most powerful, nuclear-capable missiles designed to target neighboring rivals and the U.S. mainland.

The mood is more somber in South Korea, where President Yoon Suk Yeol has invited dozens of foreign war veterans to honor the fallen soldiers of the 1950-53 conflict, which killed and injured millions and set the stage for decades of animosity among the Koreas and the United States.

Tensions between the rivals are at their highest point in years, as the pace of North Korean missile tests and U.S.-South Korean joint military exercises has intensified in a tit-for-tat cycle. The dueling military activities have been punctuated by verbal threats, including North Korean talk of preemptive nuclear strikes and U.S. vows to "end" Kim's regime in the event of such an attack.

The frictions provide a renewed reminder that the armistice has left the Korean Peninsula in a technical state of war. Through their 70 years of diplomatic ups and downs, the Koreas

have consistently seen each other as existential threats, which is essentially why the armistice was never replaced by a peace treaty as originally intended.

Managing tensions is now more complicated than ever as Kim continues to reject dialogue with the U.S. while aggressively expanding a nuclear arsenal he sees as his strongest guarantee of survival.

Kim is also pushing for deeper cooperation with authoritarian allies China and Russia, which are locked in their own confrontations with Washington over regional influence and the war in Ukraine, as he aims to counter U.S. efforts to tighten trilateral security cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo.

North Korean state media on Wednesday highlighted the arrival of a Russian delegation led by Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, who was greeted at Pyongyang's airport by senior North Korean officials including Defense Minister Kang Sun Nam. China's ruling Communist Party is also sending a mid-level official, Li Hongzhong, in hopes of further facilitating bilateral exchanges.

The Korean War was triggered by a North Korean sneak attack on the South. The North was backed by forces from the newly created People's Republic of China, which was aided by the then-Soviet air force. South Korea, the U.S. and troops from various countries under the direction of the United Nations fought to push back the invasion.

Thousands of people are expected to attend an armistice ceremony Thursday in South Korea's southern port city of Busan, which is the location of a cemetery honoring the U.N. soldiers killed during the war.

Army updates its grooming regulations on ponytails

By JEREMY STILLWAGNER
Stars and Stripes

Female soldiers may wear ponytails for at least another year, according to a recent message on grooming and appearance standards from the Army's personnel office.

The service loosened its hairstyle regulations in an April 2021 memo that permitted women to wear ponytails in all uniforms, within limits, rather than the previously mandated hair buns.

The same memo allowed female soldiers to wear stud earrings and lipstick and nail

polish in "non-extreme" colors, while donning the Army Combat Uniform. Troops may also wear highlights in their hair, provided the colors blend together and present a "professional and natural appearance."

The April 2021 memo by then-acting Secretary of the Army John Whitley set no expiration date for the changes. An Army Activities message, or "alaract," issued Sunday by Army deputy chief of staff for personnel Lt. Gen. Douglas Stitt says the regulations will expire June 28.

Sunday's message also states that sol-

diers may now have hyphens and diacritical accents on their nametapes.

The message also states that "potentially offensive wording" in the grooming regulations that describes hairstyles like "Mohawk, Fu Manchu, dreadlock, eccentric and faddish," will be removed when the next update is published. The Army typically publishes updates to the grooming and appearance regulation every few years.

All Defense Department service branches permit ponytails in uniform. The Navy was first to amend its regulations in 2018.

Biden's son pleads not guilty to tax crimes

Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. — President Joe Biden's son Hunter pleaded not guilty Wednesday to two tax crimes after a deal with federal prosecutors unraveled during a court hearing following the judge's concerns over the agreement.

Hunter Biden was charged last month with two misdemeanor tax crimes of failure to pay more than \$100,000 in taxes from over \$1.5 million in income in both 2017 and 2018, and he was expected to plead guilty after he made an agreement with prosecutors, who were planning to recommend two years of probation. That deal is now on hold.

But during the hearing Wednesday, there was a dispute in court over whether the initial agreement gave him protection against any future charges.

U.S. District Court Judge Maryellen No-reika, who was appointed by President Donald Trump, raised concerns about the language of the deal.

Biden had also been charged with possession of a firearm by a person who is a known drug user, a felony.

He had a Colt Cobra .38 Special for 11 days in October 2018. He had agreed to enter into a diversion agreement, which means that he would not technically plead guilty to the crime. As long as he adhered to the terms of his agreement, the case would be wiped from his record.

If not, the deal would be withdrawn. The charge carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison.

The overlapping agreements created confusion for the judge, who said the lawyers needed to untangle the issues before moving forward.

"It seems to me like you are saying 'just rubber stamp the agreement, Your Honor.' ... This seems to me to be form over substance," she said. She gave defense lawyers and prosecutors 30 days to explain why she should accept the deal.

The collapsed proceedings were a surprising development because the plea had been carefully negotiated over weeks and included a lengthy back-and-forth between Justice Department prosecutors and Biden's attorneys.

It was meant to clear the air for Hunter Biden and avert a trial that would have generated weeks or months of distracting headlines.

But the politics remain as messy as ever, with Republicans insisting he got a sweetheart deal and the Justice Department pressing ahead on investigations into Trump, the GOP's 2024 presidential primary front-runner.

Trump is already facing a state criminal case in New York and a federal indictment in Florida. But last week, a target letter was sent to Trump from special counsel Jack Smith that suggests the former president may soon be indicted on new federal charges.

Gynecologist gets 20 years in jail for abusing patients

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A gynecologist who sexually abused vulnerable and trusting patients for over two decades at prestigious New York hospitals cried before he was sentenced Tuesday to 20 years in prison by a federal judge who called his crimes unprecedented.

The sentence for Robert Hadden, 64, was a measure of vindication for hundreds of former patients who accused the doctor of molesting them during examinations but saw an earlier prosecution end with a plea bargain that spared him from jail.

Given his chance to speak Tuesday, Hadden stood, his hands folded before him, as he said there was "much I'd like to say" but that he had been advised by lawyers to keep his statement brief.

"I'm very sorry for all the pain that I have caused," the sobbing Hadden said before dropping his head down as he sat again. He then took off his

glasses and wiped tears from his eyes.

In statements over the past two days, Judge Richard M. Berman said the case was like none he'd seen before and involved "outrageous, horrific, beyond extraordinary, depraved sexual abuse." He noted that at least 245 women Hadden treated said they were abused.

The federal trial involved a smaller number of victims. Hadden was convicted of four counts of enticing women to cross state lines so he could sexually abuse them.

Nine victims testified at the trial, describing how Hadden molested them during gynecology treatments, starting in the late 1980s, at prominent hospitals, including Columbia University Irving Medical Center and NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital.

The Associated Press does not typically name victims of sexual assault unless they come forward publicly.

Typhoon Doksuri displaces thousands in Philippines

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Typhoon Doksuri lashed northern Philippine provinces with ferocious wind and rain Wednesday, leaving at least six people dead and displacing thousands of others as it blew roofs off houses, flooded low-lying villages and triggered dozens of landslides, officials said.

One landslide buried a house in Buguias town in Benguet province, killing a mother, her child and two other children and injuring two other people. In the nearby resort city of Baguio, a 17-year-old boy died when soil loosened by heavy rains buried his house, officials said.

In Isabela province, also in the north, a woman selling bread on a bicycle cart died when she was hit in the head by a falling coconut tree, a police report said.

The typhoon slammed into Fuga Island before dawn and later smashed into another is-

land in Cagayan province, where nearly 16,000 people were evacuated from high-risk coastal villages, and schools and workplaces were shut as a precaution as the storm approached Tuesday.

Tens of thousands of people were affected by flooding and other problems caused by the typhoon, which has a 435-mile-wide band of wind and rain, disaster response officials said.

Doksuri weakened slightly but remained dangerous with sustained winds of 109 mph and gusts of up to 133 mph.

It was blowing 59 miles west of the island town of Calayan off Cagayan on Wednesday night, forecasters said.

"Our northern coastal towns are being battered," Cagayan Gov. Manuel Mamba said Wednesday morning by telephone. "I'm receiving reports of tin roofs being blown away and flooding that could not drain out probably because of tidal surges coming in from the sea."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Guardian Flight ends copter services to city

ND WILLISTON — Guardian Flight has stopped its emergency helicopter services in Williston, and first responders in North Dakota's sixth-largest city have said they're noticing longer wait times for people with time-sensitive injuries who need quick care.

The company's helicopter had been primarily used to pick up patients up at the scene of emergencies on locations ranging from farms to oil fields, the city fire department's assistant chief, Corey Johnson, told The Bismarck Tribune.

An inability to fulfill flight requests due to weather and inflation was a contributing factor to the company's decision to end the service, said Nicole Michel, spokesperson for Guardian Flight's parent company, Global Medical Response. The company said there were other challenges, but it didn't list them.

First responders must now pick up certain patients in an ambulance while they wait 40 minutes for a helicopter to fly more than 100 miles from Minot's Trinity Health trauma center to Williston, Johnson said. After the parties meet at the Williston hospital, the helicopter will take the patient to Trinity.

Schools say Legislature needs to boost funding

PA HARRISBURG — Lawmakers should take action to address a judge's ruling that Pennsylvania's system of funding public schools violates the constitutional rights of students in poorer school districts now that the decision won't

be appealed, lawyers for the districts and groups that sued said Monday.

The lawsuit, filed in 2014, argued that Pennsylvania's system of paying for public schools is failing the poorest districts, and lawyers for the plaintiffs have contended that billions more dollars are necessary to meet the state's constitutional obligation.

While the judge agreed, she also did not direct the Legislature on how much state aid to distribute, or how. Lawyers for the plaintiffs — including six school districts, the NAACP and the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools — want lawmakers to comply with the judge's ruling.

Man charged with hate crime in parking killings

MD ANNAPOLIS — Maryland prosecutors have filed hate crime charges against a man accused of killing three people and wounding three more in a dispute over parking.

The three people shot to death were Latino; the man accused of shooting them is white. Their families have lived on the same street for years and have had a history of disputes, including allegations of racial slurs against one of the victims.

Charles Robert Smith, 43, had been charged with second-degree murder. Now he faces first-degree murder and hate-crime charges in the killings of Mario Mireles, his father Nicholas Mireles, and Christian Segovia, under an indictment returned by an Anne Arundel County grand jury on Friday, according to online court records.

The 42-count indictment also

includes six charges of attempted first-degree murder. Smith's initial court appearance was scheduled for next Monday.

Counselor admits to taking illegal benefits

MA BOSTON — An inmate counselor at a federal prison in Massachusetts received about \$140,000 in illegal benefits and loans through a wealthy prisoner in his care, federal prosecutors said.

William S. Tidwell, 49, of Keene, N.H., has agreed to plead guilty to bribery in violation of official duties, making false statements to a bank and identity theft, the U.S. attorney in Boston said Monday.

One of the inmates Tidwell supervised was what prosecutors described as an "ultra-high net worth" individual serving time for financial crimes.

That inmate, identified only as "Individual 1" in court documents, in 2018 directed a close friend and business associate to wire \$25,000 to a member of Tidwell's family, prosecutors said. Starting in 2019, Tidwell and the wealthy inmate entered into a property management agreement that resulted in \$65,000 in benefits to Tidwell, prosecutors said.

Boat slams into house at Lake of the Ozarks

MO LAKE OZARK — Eight people were hospitalized after a boat left the water and slammed into a house at Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri.

The 47-year-old driver of the boat was arrested on suspicion of boating under the influence but had not been charged as of Mon-

day morning.

The accident happened just before midnight Saturday in the main channel of the sprawling central Missouri lake, the Missouri State Highway Patrol said. The boat ran aground and struck a large house that sits near the water, badly smashing an exterior wall. The boat flipped over, ejecting everyone.

Police probing why dog was deployed on man

OH CIRCLEVILLE — An investigation has been launched into why an Ohio officer allowed his police dog to attack a truck driver who was surrendering with his hands raised, despite State Highway Patrol troopers urging the officer to hold the dog back.

The lengthy pursuit on July 4 and the ensuing attack were captured on a police body camera. Authorities said the chase began on state highway 35, when officers tried to stop a commercial semitruck that was missing a mud flap and had failed to stop for an inspection.

State troopers were called in to help with the chase, authorities said. The driver, Jadarrius Rose, 23, of Memphis, Tenn., who is Black, initially refused to get out of the truck and later defied directives to get on the ground, according to an Ohio State Highway Patrol incident report.

The body cam video shows an officer with the Circleville Police Department holding back the K9, and a trooper can be heard repeatedly yelling, "Do not release the dog with his hands up!" The officer deployed the dog, however, and it can be seen attacking Rose.

— From wire reports

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Rays falling behind after historic start

Associated Press

The slumping Tampa Bay Rays believe in themselves.

Baseball's best team for much of this season has seen a historic start give way to a July swoon that's loosened its hold on the top record in the American League.

The surging Baltimore Orioles won three of four between the division rivals over the weekend, taking over first place in the AL East and dropping the reeling Rays, who opened the year with 13 consecutive victories, two games off

the pace.

Tampa Bay entered July with a season-high 6½-game division lead but has stumbled to an AL-worst 5-14 record this month while sputtering offensively and weathering injuries that are testing the depth of their starting pitching.

The Rays haven't compiled one of the best marks in the majors over the last decade without being resourceful and resilient, though, which is one reason manager Kevin Cash is confident his team will rebound and finish strong as it aims for a fifth

straight playoff appearance.

"We're just a very talented team that is going through a tough spot right now," Cash said.

"I'm guessing every guy in there right now is feeling a sense of urgency of wanting to contribute and wanting to be that big swing or have that big swing that gets us going," Cash added after Sunday's 5-3 loss to the Orioles. "It's just not coming right now."

After winning two straight against last-place Kansas City coming out of the All-Star break,

the Rays dropped seven of eight to fall behind the Orioles. They've scored three or fewer runs 11 times in July, including five games with one run.

"The hardest part of this game is hitting. ... Our job is to just keep on working, try to stay positive," All-Star first baseman Yandy Diaz said through a translator.

"And we still have a lot of time. We still have about two months or so to go," Diaz added. "We're going to stay focused and stay positive, and I think we're gonna come out of it."

Astros top Rangers, pull within game of 1st in AL West

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Kyle Tucker and Martín Maldonado homered, rookie starter J.P. France worked seven solid innings and the Houston Astros beat the Texas Rangers 4-3 on Tuesday night.

The Astros (58-44) moved within a game of the AL West-leading Rangers (59-43).

Tucker's line-drive homer narrowly cleared the wall in right-center, giving Houston a 3-1 lead in the sixth inning.

In the seventh, Maldonado crushed a 93-mph fastball that nearly landed on the train tracks above left-center field, extending the Astros' lead to 4-1.

In the ninth, Astros closer Ryan Pressly allowed a two-run homer to Mitch Garver that traveled 420 feet to straightaway center field.

That cut Houston's lead to 4-3 before Pressly got Leody Taveras to fly out to the warning track in right field, securing his 24th save.

Mets 9, Yankees 3: Pete Alonso homered twice and drove in a season-high five runs, Justin Verlander (5-5) pitched six shutout innings and the visiting Mets beat the Yankees in their Subway Series opener.

Jeff McNeil had three RBIs and Francisco Lindor added three hits and three runs for the disappointing Mets (47-53), hoping for a big week that might persuade ownership not to sell at the Aug. 1 trade deadline.

Dodgers 8, Blue Jays 7 (10): James Outman doubled in the 10th inning to score Chris Taylor and host Los Angeles rallied past Toronto.

The Dodgers sent it to extra innings with four runs in the ninth. Taylor tied it on a two-run single with the bases loaded when Vladimir Guerrero Jr. dove but had the liner deflect off his glove, allowing both runs to score.

Reds 4, Brewers 3: Andrew Abbott (6-2) pitched six scoreless innings, Will Benson hit a two-run homer and visiting Cincinnati withstood Milwaukee's frantic ninth-inning comeback attempt.

Cincinnati reduced the Brewers' NL Central lead over the Reds to a half-game. The Brewers and Reds will have their final regular-season meeting Wednesday in the rubber match of the three-game series.

Giants 2, Athletics 1: Wearing Oakland green and gold and San Francisco orange and black, thousands of fans from both sides of the bay stood together to protest the visiting Athletics' planned move to Las Vegas.

Mike Yastrzemski hit a go-ahead double in the eighth after JJ Bleday tied it on a single in the top half of the inning against Tyler Rogers (4-4). Giants starter Alex Cobb struck out nine over six scoreless innings as host San Francisco took the Bay Bridge Series opener to snap a six-game losing streak.

Cubs 7, White Sox 3: Dansby Swanson homered twice and drove in four runs, and the visiting Cubs beat the crosstown White Sox for their fourth consecutive victory.

Guardians 5, Royals 1: Bo Naylor had his first career two-homer game and drove in three runs to help host Cleveland beat Kansas City and hand pitcher Zack Greinke (1-11) his 16th consecutive road loss.

Phillies 4, Orioles 3: Alec Bohm followed Bryson Stott's two-out, tying RBI double to right field in the ninth inning with a winning RBI single, rallying host Philadelphia past AL-leading Baltimore.

Red Sox 7, Braves 1: Nick Pivetta (7-5) pitched five scoreless innings of relief, Masataka Yoshida hit a two-run homer and host Boston overcame a triple play to beat Atlanta in a game delayed 1 hour, 40 minutes by rain and lightning.

Rays 4, Marlins 1: Tyler Glasnow (4-3) went seven strong innings, Brandon Lowe homered and host Tampa Bay beat Miami to improve to just 5-14 in July.

Angels 7, Tigers 6 (10): Shohei Ohtani had two walks and two runs, Mickey Moniak hit a tiebreaking RBI double in the 10th inning and visiting Los Angeles beat Detroit after blowing a four-run lead in the ninth inning.

Diamondbacks 3, Cardinals 1: Pinch-hitter Corbin Carroll had a two-run triple in a three-run rally in the eighth inning and host Arizona beat St. Louis to snap a five-game losing streak.

Nationals 6, Rockies 5: Joey Meneses hit a three-run homer in a four-run eighth inning and host Washington rallied to beat Colorado.

Mariners 9, Twins 7: Julio Rodríguez homered twice, including a two-run shot in a four-run eighth to tie it, and visiting Seattle rallied to beat Minnesota.

Padres 5, Pirates 1: Manny Machado, Juan Soto and Gary Sánchez homered to help host San Diego beat Pittsburgh.

Spain, Japan lock up knockout berths

Associated Press

AUCKLAND, New Zealand — As she has many times before, Jennifer Hermoso answered the call for Spain on Wednesday night.

She scored twice and assisted in her 100th international appearance to push La Roja past Zambia 5-0 on Wednesday, a victory that locked both Spain and Japan into the Women's World Cup knockout round.

Hikaru Naomoto and Aoba Fujino scored two minutes apart in the first half to lead Japan to a 2-0 victory over Costa Rica.

Spain and Japan are the first teams to clinch berths in the tournament's round of 16. They will play on Monday in Wellington to decide seeding.

"I'm very happy to be in the last 16, I'm proud of moments during the game," Spain coach Jorge Vilda said. "And I'm very

happy that Spain is a team of 23 football players. We saw that today."

Hermoso, Spain's all-time leading scorer, deposited a one-time header off a perfect cross from Alexia Putellas in the 13th minute. She then gathered a rebound and scored on an empty net in the 70th minute. The goal was initially wiped away for offside, then eventually confirmed after a lengthy review.

"Jenni is magic on the pitch. Her style of play is very different, she has a lot of experience, that's what she's good at. She had a great performance with two goals this match, and we're very happy," said Spain forward Salma Paralluelo.

Teresa Abelleira launched a 58-mph strike from well outside the box in the ninth minute and beat Eunice Sakala to the top side of the net, her second goal with the Spain national team.

Like Hermoso, Alba Redondo also scored twice, in the 69th and 85th minutes. Her first goal was an impressive run off of a long pass, while her second was on a rebound in front of an empty net.

Spain's attack benefited from facing Zambia's third-string goalkeeper. Sakala started Monday night after the starting goalie and her backup were injured and received a red card, respectively.

Barbra Banda registered Zambia's first shot on goal of the tournament in the eighth minute, a good chance to turn early momentum toward the Copper Queens. Spain's Misa Rodriguez saved the rolling shot.

Abelleira scored in the next minute, and Spain held a clear advantage through the rest of the match.

The game was played before 20,983 fans in chilly Eden Park,

the lowest attendance of the four games played so far in New Zealand's largest city.

Japan and Costa Rica kicked off in front of a sparse crowd of 6,992 in Dunedin, a huge differential from the high fan turnout in Auckland and Sydney — there were 117,000 combined at opening night in those cities. Attendance has dropped with each match in Dunedin from an initial high of 13,711.

Las Ticas kept the pressure high throughout the match, but the Japanese dominated with precision in ball handling and passes.

Mina Tanaka passed the ball to Naomoto, who dribbled past a Costa Rican defender before scoring on outstretched goalkeeper Daniela Solera in the 25th minute.

Fujino then snuck the ball in on an angle into the far left corner of the net.

Olympic champ Canada comes back to beat Ireland

Associated Press

PERTH, Australia — Conceding a goal directly from a corner kick against Ireland on Wednesday, Olympic champion Canada was in trouble in its second game of the Women's World Cup.

After a disappointing 0-0 draw with Nigeria in its opening match of the tournament, and with iconic forward Christine Sinclair on the bench, Canada's hopes of advancing from the group stage were under threat.

Up against a determined Ireland, an inspired Katie McCabe and torrential rain at Rectangular Stadium, the odds were stacking up against the Canadians.

But with the character of Olympic gold medalists, a touch of fortune and some help from the bench, Canada recovered.

Adriana Leon scored the de-

cisive goal early in the second half to complete a come-from-behind 2-1 win that moved her country to the top of Group B and within sight of the round of 16.

That hadn't looked like it would be the case when McCabe curled a fourth-minute corner into the back of the net to give Ireland the lead and its first ever goal at a World Cup.

Launching her kick from the right, it was too high for anyone to get a touch and drifted beyond the reach of Canada goalkeeper Kailen Sheridan before dipping under the bar.

It was a stunning strike and a contender for goal of the tournament.

"It's bittersweet. Of course it's nice to score and get us off to a good start, but it's results that matter in this game, at this level and in these type of tournaments," said McCabe, who was

named player of the match and was in tears after the final whistle. "I'm heartbroken for the girls and I felt we deserved something from the game."

Ireland, in its debut at the World Cup, was eliminated after back-to-back losses. The Irish lost to co-host Australia 1-0 in their opening match.

"To captain these girls is an absolute honor and an absolute privilege. I'm so proud of each and every single one of them. We've done so much to get here and it's about pushing on now," McCabe said.

After her team got off to an underwhelming start against Nigeria, Canada coach Beverly Priestman benched Sinclair, international soccer's all-time leading scorer, for the second game.

In her absence, Canada continued to struggle.

Vanessa Gilles wasted a

chance to even the score when she sent a shot over from close range as Ireland looked set to go into the break in front.

That was until Megan Connolly's own-goal in the fifth minute of added time at the end of the first half granted Canada a lifeline. Connolly got the slightest touch on Julia Grosso's cross to take the ball beyond Ireland keeper Courtney Brosnan.

It was a let off for Canada and Priestman responded by making three halftime substitutions, bringing on Sinclair, Sophie Schmidt and Shelina Zadorsky.

That depth of quality proved the difference, with Schmidt making a quick impact by providing the assist for Leon's goal in the 53rd.

Canada plays co-host Australia in Melbourne on Monday, while Ireland and Nigeria meet in Brisbane.

Messi scores two goals in first start

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Inter Miami co-owner Jorge Mas has one lasting memory from Lionel Messi's debut: the image of Messi running to embrace his family after delivering the game-winning free kick and cementing a new era for the club and Major League Soccer.

"That was for the fans. This community is hungry," Mas said.

Messi's follow-up performance Tuesday night against Atlanta United in the Leagues Cup showed the impact that one player — the right player — can have on an entire club.

Messi scored twice and had an assist in his first start for Miami, bringing his total to three goals in two games. Inter Miami had a 3-0 lead by half-time, the first such lead in club history.

"There's going to be a before and after Messi in football for this country," Mas said.

Miami went on to win 4-0. Messi exited in the 78th minute to a standing ovation, with many in the crowd wearing his

No. 10 jersey. Many also headed for the exits themselves once Messi was on the bench.

"With the type of player that he is, it's justified that this happens," Miami coach Tata Martino said. "I would have preferred that the public stayed and pay tribute to the entire team, but I can also understand it."

Miami swept its group and moved on to the round of 32 in the Leagues Cup, in which it will host a to-be-determined opponent.

In the eighth minute, Messi took a pass from his longtime Barcelona teammate Sergio Busquets, surged forward and sent a strike off the right post before tapping in his own rebound. Then, in the 22nd minute, Messi put Miami ahead 2-0 off a pass from Robert Taylor.

"Since those two have gotten here, the spirit has changed," Miami's DeAndre Yedlin said, referring to Messi and Busquets. "Obviously, guys are really excited. But I think just their presence gives everybody more confidence. And I think

also the teams that we're playing against now have a bit of fear in their eyes. When those two are on the field, you know you're in for a tough game."

Messi came off the bench in the 54th minute Friday night in Miami's first Leagues Cup match against Mexican club Cruz Azul. And he provided a moment fans had hoped for when the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner and World Cup champion for Argentina decided to take his talents to MLS. Messi converted the game-winning free kick in stoppage time in front of a crowd estimated at 21,000.

Yedlin had placed the skipper's armband on Messi when he checked in on Friday, but Messi entered Tuesday's match wearing the armband just below his right shoulder.

"He's my teammate now. He's our teammate," Yedlin said. "He's part of this team and he wants to win like everybody else. And he's been a joy to be around, obviously not just on the field. He's obviously an amazing talent but off the field

he really helps a lot of the younger guys, even older guys like myself."

Brazilian midfielder Gregore had been the club's captain before suffering a foot injury in March.

With Messi rightly commanding much of the attention from Atlanta's defenders, opportunities opened for other Miami players. Taylor scored in the 44th minute, then made it 4-0 in the 53rd after being set up by Messi.

"There's times when the coach prepares a certain game in a certain way, but these two players are so good at what they do that they create space," Martino said about Messi and Busquets.

Goalkeeper Drake Callender preserved the shutout when he stopped a penalty shot by Thiago Almada in the 86th minute.

"There are things that of course after review of the game that we can do way better," Atlanta coach Gonzalo Pineda said. "I think we also had some chances to score. ... We couldn't capitalize."

Chargers extend Herbert with 5-year, \$262.5M deal

Associated Press

Justin Herbert is set to become the NFL's highest-paid quarterback by annual salary, agreeing to a five-year, \$262.5 million extension with the Los Angeles Chargers on Tuesday.

Herbert's total value and \$52.5 million average per season surpasses the \$260 million, five-year extension (\$52 million average) Baltimore's Lamar Jackson signed three months ago. Herbert will get \$218.7 million guaranteed, which is second to the fully guaranteed \$230 million deal Deshaun Watson signed with Cleveland in 2022, a person close to the negotiations told The Associated Press.

The person spoke to The AP on the condition of anonymity because the Chargers did not release the financial details.

The team and Herbert agreed to the extension on the first day of training

camp. The Chargers' first practice will be Wednesday.

Herbert is the second member of the 2020 draft class to sign a big extension, after Philadelphia's Jalen Hurts signed a five-year extension worth \$255 million.

Herbert's contract also sets the playing field for the Cincinnati Bengals and Joe Burrow. Bengals owner Mike Brown on Monday said talks are ongoing.

Kansas City's Patrick Mahomes is in the third year of a 10-year contract worth \$450 million, the largest overall deal for a quarterback.

The 25-year-old Herbert — the sixth overall pick in 2020 — is the first quarterback in NFL history to begin his career with three consecutive seasons of at least 4,000 passing yards and is one of two players to throw 25 touchdown passes in each of his first three years.

Since entering the league, Herbert is second in the league in completions (1,316), third in passing yards (14,089) and sixth in TD passes (102).

Despite Herbert's numbers, he hasn't pushed the Chargers into the echelon of Super Bowl contenders. Los Angeles is 25-25, including the playoffs, with Herbert under center.

Last season, the Chargers went 10-7 and reached the postseason for the first time since 2018.

They blew a 27-point first-half lead and lost to Jacksonville 31-30 in the first round of the playoffs.

Herbert was set to enter the final year of his rookie contract and had a base salary of \$4.2 million for the upcoming season.

The Chargers picked up his fifth-year option for 2024 worth \$29.5 million.