

NATO will step up security in Black Sea

Associated Press

NATO said it was stepping up surveillance of the Black Sea region as Russia declared parts of its international waters were “temporarily unsafe” for navigation.

The announcement Wednesday came after a meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council, which was launched at a NATO summit in Lithuania earlier this month to coordinate cooperation between the military alliance and Kyiv.

“Allies and Ukraine strongly condemned Russia’s decision to withdraw from the Black Sea grain deal and its deliberate at-

tempts to stop Ukraine’s agricultural exports on which hundreds of millions of people worldwide depend. ... NATO and allies are stepping up surveillance and reconnaissance in the Black Sea region, including with maritime patrol aircraft and drones,” read the NATO statement.

The Kremlin doubled down on terminating the grain deal by attacking Ukrainian ports and declaring wide areas of the Black Sea unsafe for shipping.

Last week, Russia halted the wartime deal that allowed grain to flow from Ukraine to countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia where hunger is a

growing threat and high food prices have pushed more people into poverty.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the Black Sea Grain Initiative would be suspended until demands to get Russian food and fertilizer to the world are met.

The NATO statement criticized Moscow’s declaration that parts of the Black Sea’s international waters were “temporarily unsafe” for navigation. “Allies noted that Russia’s new warning area in the Black Sea, within Bulgaria’s exclusive economic zone, has created new risks for miscalculation and escalation,

as well as serious impediments to freedom of navigation,” the NATO statement said.

The suspension of the Black Sea Grain Initiative marks the end of an accord that the U.N. and Turkey brokered last summer to allow shipments of food from the Black Sea region after Russia’s invasion of its neighbor worsened a global food crisis. The initiative is credited with helping reduce soaring prices of wheat, vegetable oil and other global food commodities.

Ukraine and Russia are both major global suppliers of wheat, barley, sunflower oil and other food to developing nations.

‘UAP are in our airspace,’ former F-18 pilot tells lawmakers

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Two Navy veterans who claim to have seen unidentified aerial phenomena, better known as UFOs, joined a Pentagon whistleblower Wednesday to warn Congress that the sightings threaten national security and are being kept secret.

Ryan Graves, a former Navy F-18 pilot, and David Fravor, a retired Navy commander, described their encounters with strange, flying objects at a crowded hearing before the House Oversight Committee, which is leading a push by lawmakers to destigmatize reporting on such incidents and increase government transparency about potential alien life.

“As we convene here, UAP are in our airspace, but they are grossly underreported. These sightings are not rare or isolated, they are routine,” Graves said. “Parts of our government are more aware about

UAP than they let on, but excessive classification processes keep crucial information hidden.”

Graves said he first became aware of UAPs in 2014, after upgraded jet radar systems used by pilots stationed at Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach, Va., began detecting unknown objects. A pilot soon saw one in person, observing a floating “dark gray cube inside of a clear sphere” during a training mission about 10 miles off the Atlantic coast, Graves said.

There was no official acknowledgment of the incident, and it was never investigated, he said.

“If everyone could see the sensor and video data I witnessed, our national conversation would change,” Graves said. “If UAP are foreign drones, it is an urgent national security problem. If it is something else, it is an issue for science. In either case, unidenti-

fied objects are a concern for flight safety.”

The Pentagon last year established the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office to investigate reports of such phenomena, looking into more than 800 sightings. The government has attributed most of the reports to balloons, drones, birds, weather events and litter such as plastic bags, but many remain unexplained.

Graves estimates only about 5% of UAP sightings are being reported due to risk of professional repercussions. Most witnesses are commercial pilots who have seen UAPs at 40,000 feet “making inexplicable maneuvers, like right-hand turns and retrograde orbits or j-hooks,” Graves said. The pilots are primarily seeing dark gray or black cubes inside of clear spheres, he said.

Fravor, a retired commanding officer of the Navy’s “Black Aces” strike fighter squadron, told lawmakers that he saw a

white object shaped like a Tic Tac candy after launching his jet from the USS Nimitz in 2004. He spotted the object “moving very abruptly” off the California coast before rapidly climbing up to about 12,000 feet in the air, then disappearing and reappearing 60 miles away less than a minute later.

David Grusch, a former Air Force intelligence officer, alleged under oath Wednesday that the U.S. government has for decades maintained a program that collected and attempted to reverse engineer crashed UFOs. He came forward as a whistleblower last year and said he has suffered “very brutal” retaliation for his decision and fears for his life.

Sean Kirkpatrick, the director of the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office, told senators in April that there is “no credible evidence thus far of extraterrestrial activity, off-world technology or objects that defy the known laws of physics.”

US sends F-35 jets to patrol Middle East

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

A squadron of F-35 Lightning IIs, some of the Air Force's most advanced fighter jets, has arrived in the Middle East, where the planes will join patrols that aim to deter Iran from seizing oil tankers, the service said in a statement this week.

The jets will also be used in missions against the Islamic State in Syria, the 9th Air Force statement issued Wednesday said. The deployment comes amid a recent buildup of forces in the Middle East after U.S. claims of Iranian ship seizures at sea and Russian provocations in the air.

Last week, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced the deployment of the F-35s as well as F-16 fighter jets and the destroyer USS Thomas Hudner. A Marine expeditionary unit was also ordered to the Middle East last week, and a squadron of A-10 Thunderbolt II "Warthogs" arrived in March.

The role of these newly deployed addi-

tional forces is to "deter Iranian destabilizing activities in the region," Army Gen. Michael "Erik" Kurilla said last week.

Kurilla, the head of U.S. Central Command, was referring to U.S. claims that Iran has harassed ships in the key waterway known as the Strait of Hormuz.

The Pentagon says it has stepped up patrols over the strait. Iran has been accused by the United States of attacking, seizing or trying to seize nearly 20 internationally flagged merchant vessels over the past two years.

The F-35s, flown by the 421st Expeditionary Fighter Squadron out of Hill Air Force Base, Utah, will partner with A-10s and F-16s already there in monitoring the strait, the 9th Air Force statement said.

"The F-35's increased capacity and capability will allow the U.S. to fly in contested airspace across the theater if required," it said.

Some 900 American troops are deployed to fight ISIS, but the U.S. has accused Rus-

sia of harassing its drones in Syria and placing its aircraft and pilots there at risk.

On Sunday, a Russian fighter jet flying at close range fired flares at a U.S. drone and severely damaged its propeller, the Air Force said in a statement this week.

The White House said Wednesday that a second Russian aircraft had flown "dangerously close" to another U.S. drone in the skies over Syria this week, The Associated Press reported.

The U.S. has been saying since late February that Russia's fighter jets and surveillance drones are buzzing American bases in Syria and violating protocols developed to prevent conflict between the two countries, which back opposing factions there.

The U.S. previously deployed F-22 Raptor fighter jets to the Middle East in response to "increasingly unsafe and unprofessional behavior by Russian aircraft in the region," an Air Force statement said at the time.

Russian fighter jet hits US drone with flare over Syria

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Russian fighter jet fired flares and struck another U.S. drone over Syrian airspace on Wednesday, the White House said, in a continued string of harassing maneuvers that have ratcheted up tensions between the global powers.

It's the sixth reported incident this month, and the second in the past few days in which the United States has said Russian warplanes have flown dangerously close to American manned and unmanned aircraft, putting crews and the planes at risk and raising questions as to what the U.S. may need to do in response.

Two U.S. officials confirmed that the strike damaged the MQ-9 Reaper drone. The officials were not authorized to

publicly discuss the matter and spoke on condition of anonymity.

In the incidents over the past two days, Russian warplanes have fired flares that struck U.S. MQ-9 Reaper drones. On Sunday, the flares damaged a drone's propeller; on Wednesday, Russian-dropped flares hit a drone. In previous incidents, Russian jets have intercepted the U.S. planes at dangerously close distances, including one instance with a manned aircraft the U.S. said put the lives of the four American crewmembers at risk.

A senior Russian military leader blamed the U.S. for the latest incident, and charged that aircraft from the U.S.-led coalition in Syria violated deconfliction protocols with Russia 10 times in the past 24 hours.

Carbon monoxide poisoning blamed for Marine deaths

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

Carbon monoxide poisoning killed three Marine lance corporals found dead in a private vehicle Sunday morning near their home base of Camp Lejeune, local officials said Wednesday.

Lance Cpl. Tanner J. Kaltenberg, Lance Cpl. Merax C. Dockery and Lance Cpl. Ivan R. Garcia were found dead in the car at a gas station in Hampstead, N.C., at about 9 a.m. by Pender County Sheriff's Office deputies after receiving a report that one of the Marines was missing, according to the sheriff's office.

All three Marines were motor vehicle operators with Combat Logistics Battalion 2, Combat Logistics Regiment 2, 2nd Marine Logistics Group, ac-

cording to the Corps.

"I am saddened by the timeless and tragic death of these three young men, who served our country honorably," Pender County Sheriff Alan Cutler said Tuesday.

Deputies received a call just after 8 a.m. Sunday from a family member of one of the Marines alerting them he had not made it home to Oklahoma on a flight scheduled the previous day, the sheriff's office said.

The family member had spoken with a unit supervisor who had sent someone to try to find the missing Marine, according to the statement.

The missing Marine and the other two dead service members were found less than an hour later at the Speedway gas station in Hampstead, according to the sheriff's office.

Fighting in Ukraine's southeast intensifies

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Fierce fighting raged Thursday in southeastern Ukraine, where a Western official said Kyiv has launched a major push and Russian President Vladimir Putin said “hostilities have intensified significantly.”

Battles in recent weeks have taken place on multiple points along the over 600-mile front line as Ukraine wages a counteroffensive with Western-supplied weapons and Western-trained troops against Russian forces who invaded 17 months ago.

Putin praised the “heroism” with which Russian soldiers were repelling attacks in the Zaporizhzhia region of the southeast, claiming Moscow’s troops not only destroyed Ukraine’s military equipment but also inflicted heavy losses to Kyiv’s forces.

He insisted on state TV that Ukraine’s push in the area “wasn’t successful,” although it was not possible to independently verify his report. Putin was in St. Petersburg at a summit of African leaders.

Ukrainian troops have made only incremental gains since launching a counterof-

fensive in early June, and Putin has repeatedly claimed Ukraine has suffered heavy losses, without offering evidence.

Ukraine has committed thousands of troops in the region in recent days, according to a Western official who was not authorized to comment publicly on the matter.

It was unclear how the current effort differs from previous ones by the Ukrainian military to break through deeply entrenched Russian defenses. The Russian army has set up vast minefields to stymie Ukrainian advances and used combat aircraft and loitering munitions to strike Ukrainian armor and artillery.

Ukrainian authorities have kept operational details of the counteroffensive under wraps, and they have released scant information about its progress.

However, Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar said Wednesday that troops are advancing toward the city of Melitopol in the Zaporizhzhia region.

The seizure of Melitopol near the Sea of Azov would be a major success for Ukraine, which hopes to punch through the land cor-

ridor between Russia and the Crimean Peninsula, illegally annexed by Moscow in 2014. That could split Russian forces into two and cut supply lines to units farther west. Russia currently controls the whole Sea of Azov coast.

Russian military bloggers say that the latest Ukrainian push has focused on the village of Staromaiorske near an area separating Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia provinces. If the Russian defenses there collapse, it would open the way for the Ukrainian forces to push southward toward the coast.

The Institute of Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, reported that Ukrainian forces launched “a significant mechanized counteroffensive operation” in western Zaporizhzhia on Wednesday and “appear to have broken through certain pre-prepared Russian defensive positions.”

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, meanwhile, visited the city of Dnipro, along the Dnieper River to the north of Zaporizhzhia, meeting with military commanders to discuss air defenses, ammunition supplies and regional recruitment.

Poland official vows to protect border with Belarus

Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland — The European Union’s border with Russian ally Belarus has become more dangerous because of Russia’s military presence there, and securing the frontier is the Polish government’s top priority, Poland’s ruling party leader said Thursday.

Jaroslav Kaczynski, a deputy prime minister and head of the conservative Law and Justice party, made the comments while visiting the village of Koden on the EU’s border with Belarus. Later Thursday, Poland’s defense minister, Mariusz Blaszczak, met with

troops serving on the border, in Polowce.

Amid Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, thousands of Russia’s Wagner mercenaries have deployed to Belarus over the past month, and the Kremlin says it also has moved some of its short-range nuclear weapons into Belarus.

“We want to say it clearly: We are doing everything that is needed and that is sufficient for us to easily repel any potential provocations or aggressive undertakings,” from the Belarus side, Kaczynski said.

Last year, Poland’s right-wing government built a tall wall along the border with Belarus

aiming to stop a swelling wave of unauthorized migration from the Middle East and Africa that it said was organized by Minsk and Moscow in order to destabilize the EU.

Hundreds of additional Polish Border Guard and military forces were deployed to the border. Humanitarian organizations and the Border Guard in the region say that some unauthorized crossings are still taking place there.

Kaczynski called the migrant pressure an “attack” and said it is “continuing, to a much smaller degree,” but that it could worsen at any moment.

US economy grows at faster 2.4% rate in 2nd quarter

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. economy accelerated unexpectedly to a 2.4% annual growth rate from April through June, showing continued resilience in the face of steadily higher interest rates resulting from the Federal Reserve’s 16-month-long fight against inflation.

Thursday’s estimate from the Commerce Department indicated that the gross domes-

tic product — the economy’s total output of goods and services — picked up from the 2% growth rate in the January-March quarter.

Meanwhile, the number of Americans applying for jobless benefits slid last week to its lowest level in five months. U.S. applications for unemployment benefits fell by 7,000 to 221,000 for the week ending July 22, from 228,000 the week before, the Labor Department reported Thursday. That’s the fewest

since February.

Consumer spending slowed to a 1.6% annual rate, from 4.2% in the first quarter of the year, a likely consequence of higher borrowing costs. But business investment and state and local government spending grew faster.

In fighting inflation, which last year hit a four-decade high, the Fed has raised its benchmark rate 11 times since March 2022, most recently on Wednesday.

Biden looks to provide relief from extreme heat

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — With millions of Americans facing broiling heat across the Southwest, President Joe Biden on Thursday plans to announce new steps to protect workers, improve weather forecasts and make drinking water more accessible, the White House says.

He'll be joined by the leaders of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre described the heat wave as "a difficult time" and said Biden was treating climate change with "the urgency it requires."

The Democratic president is directing the Department of Labor to increase inspections of potentially dangerous workplaces such as farms and construction sites. He also wants heightened enforcement of heat safety violations.

As part of the initiative, the department will issue a hazard alert notifying employers and employees about ways to stay

protected from extreme heat, which has killed 436 workers since 2011, according to federal statistics.

The Biden administration plans to spend \$7 million to develop more detailed weather predictions to anticipate extreme weather like heat waves, plus \$152 million to boost drinking water infrastructure and climate resilience in California, Colorado and Washington.

The mayors of Phoenix and San Antonio, two cities that have suffered from the heat waves, are expected to participate in the White House event virtually.

Phoenix has seen at least 27 days in a row of temperatures exceeding 110 degrees Fahrenheit. Maricopa County, where the city is located, reported recently that there were 18 heat-associated deaths between April 11 and July 15. Another 69 deaths remain under investigation. There were 425 heat-associated deaths in the county last year.

San Antonio saw at least 15 straight days of 100-plus F. At least 13 deaths in Texas have been blamed on the extreme heat.

Trump wants Biden impeached; GOP quick to echo

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump wants to see President Joe Biden impeached, and the former president's allies in Congress and his 2024 GOP presidential rivals are eager to join that fight as his own legal challenges mount.

Trump's chief opponent, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, this week said the House Republicans "are absolutely within their rights" to consider an impeachment inquiry against Biden. Former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, also running for president, said Republicans would be "justified to do it." And House GOP leaders aligned with Trump are foreshadowing what's ahead.

"House Republicans will leave no stone unturned," said Rep. Elise Stefanik, of New York, the fourth-ranking House GOP leader and a top Trump ally, who is sometimes mentioned as a potential vice presidential pick.

This week, the prospect of impeaching Biden over the business dealings of his son, Hunter Biden, emerged from the far corners of the GOP's right flank to the mainstream in the Republican Party.

Speaker Kevin McCarthy announced on Fox News that the House may open an impeachment inquiry into Biden, and expanded on his plans at a Tuesday press event at the Capitol.

Behind closed doors Wednesday, however, the Republican speaker told GOP colleagues it's early in the impeachment process, and McCarthy acknowledged there's still much that is unknown about Joe Biden and whether he had any awareness or involvement in his son's business deals that would arise to an impeachable offense.

"The speaker went through what we know and what we don't know," said Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., a seasoned lawmaker and committee chairman.

"There's a lot we don't know — we don't know if any money went directly to President Biden or not," Cole said, explaining the message to the House GOP. "That's what they do the investigations about."

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., said McCarthy also told them if it comes to a Biden impeachment inquiry, he's going to ask that "you be with me on this."

Greene, a Trump ally backing impeachment, said no one rose during the private meeting to object.

McConnell freezes midsentence, briefly leaves press conference

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell briefly left his own press conference Wednesday after stopping his remarks midsentence and staring off into space for several seconds.

McConnell approached the podium for his weekly press conference and began speaking about the annual defense bill on the floor, which he said was proceeding with "good bipartisan cooperation." But he then appeared to lose his train of thought, trailing off with a drawn-out "uh."

The Kentucky senator then appeared to freeze up and stared vacantly for around 20 seconds before his colleagues in Republican leadership, who were standing behind him and could not see his face, grabbed his elbows and asked if he wanted to go back to his office.

He did not answer, but slowly walked back to his office with an aide and Wyoming

Sen. John Barrasso, a former orthopedic surgeon who is the No. 3 Republican in the Senate.

After sitting down in his office for several minutes, McConnell later returned to the press conference and answered questions from the press.

McConnell, 81, was out of the Senate for almost six weeks earlier this year after falling and hitting his head after a dinner event at a hotel.

He was hospitalized for several days, and his office later said he suffered a concussion and fractured a rib. His speech has sounded more halting in recent weeks, prompting questions among some of his colleagues about his health.

When he returned to answer questions, McConnell said he was "fine." Asked if he is still able to do his job, he said, "Yeah."

McConnell's office declined to say whether he was seen by a doctor after the episode.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Former Marine among 4 killed in a helo crash

AK ANCHORAGE — A helicopter crash in Alaska took the lives of a permanent expert from the Netherlands, a pilot who recently transitioned from the military to fly charter helicopters and two other scientists conducting field work in the North Slope, one of the remotest regions in the U.S.

Ronald Daanen, 51, and Justin Germann, 27, both from Fairbanks; Tori Moore, 26, of South Bend, Ind.; and pilot Bernard “Tony” Higdon, 48, of North Pole, Alaska, all perished last week when the 1996 Bell 206 helicopter they were in crashed into a lake while they were on a scientific mission.

The three passengers were employees of Alaska’s Department of Natural Resources, working in the Division of Geological & Geophysical Surveys.

Alaska search and rescue divers recovered the bodies of a helicopter pilot and three scientists Sunday in a shallow lake about 50 miles south of Utqiagvik — the northernmost city in the U.S., formerly known as Barrow.

Higdon became a full-time pilot in November, going to work for Maritime Helicopters. He previously worked in different capacities at Fort Wainwright in Fairbanks after serving more than 13 years as a military police officer with the U.S. Marine Corps.

Phish to play benefits for flood recovery efforts

VT BURLINGTON — Phish will play two special shows next month to benefit flood recovery efforts in

Vermont and upstate New York.

The band, which was formed in Vermont in 1983, says on its website that it will play at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center in New York on Aug. 25 and Aug. 26. The band said 100% of net proceeds from all concert and merchandise sales will be directed to a 2023 Flood Recovery Fund that’s part of a foundation it created in 1997. Phish “will support the many victims and their families, area businesses and nonprofits.”

Storms dumped up to two months’ worth of rain over a couple of days in parts of the region this month.

Ex-prison nurse convicted of assaulting 9 women

OR PORTLAND — A federal jury found a former nurse at Oregon’s women’s prison guilty Tuesday of sexually abusing nine women while they were in custody.

The jury reached its verdict in the case against Tony Klein, 38, after nearly two days of deliberations, Oregon Public Broadcasting reported.

Klein was convicted of 21 of the 23 federal charges he faced.

Jurors found he deprived the women of their constitutional right to not face cruel and unusual punishment while they served time at the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville. Seventeen women who testified during the two-week trial said Klein touched them inappropriately during medical appointments or as they worked cleaning the prison infirmary. Some said he forced them to have sex, while others said they believed they could face discipline if they refused his advances.

Klein worked at the facility from 2010 until resigning in 2018.

Man rescued, abandoned boat drifts to Hawaii

HI HONOLULU — A boat that washed ashore in Hawaii last week has been identified as belonging to a California mariner who ran into trouble while sailing from San Diego to Guadalupe, Mexico, seven months ago.

The U.S. Coast Guard confirmed the owner of the boat sent a distress call on Dec. 12, 2022, KHON-TV reported. He was rescued, and his boat was left behind.

After drifting thousands of miles, the boat found its way to Punaluu on Oahu’s windward coast, where it has been laying on its side on white sand and rocks. The 24-foot boat, which has a California sticker, has been stripped of its anchor, engine and much of its insides.

The Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources contacted the boat’s owner, who told the state he has no way to remove the vessel.

US: McDonald’s franchise violated child labor laws

LA NEW ORLEANS — A McDonald’s franchise that controls 12 restaurants in metro New Orleans violated child labor laws and has hired more than 80 minors in two states, the U.S. Department of Labor said Tuesday.

CLB Investments LLC in Metairie employed 72 workers who are 14 and 15 years old — allowing them to work longer and later than federal law permits at 12 restaurants, the department said in a news release.

The franchise received a \$56,106 civil penalty for the violations, the department said.

New Orleans Owner/Operator Chris Bardell said he’s committed to the safety of his people. “Since learning of these violations, I’ve introduced mandatory child labor law trainings for my restaurant managers and conducted regular audits to ensure we’re in compliance with labor regulations,” Bardell said in a statement.

Governor censured for using sheriff uniform

NV CARSON CITY — While Nevada Republican Gov. Joe Lombardo still faces a \$20,000 fine and a censure for wearing his sheriff’s uniform and badge in campaign materials — which a state board said violates a law prohibiting candidates from using government resources for their personal campaigns — he avoided nearly \$1.67 million in fines initially recommended.

Ross Armstrong, executive director of the Nevada Commission on Ethics, originally asserted Lombardo racked up 68 ethics law violations stemming from 34 social media posts. Each contained at least one of four images of Lombardo wearing his sheriff’s badge or uniform. Armstrong argued each post violated two state statutes.

But the commission ruled there was just one violation per image, not one for each time an image was used in campaign materials.

Lombardo served two elected terms as nonpartisan sheriff in Clark County. He resigned in January when he became governor.

— From wire reports

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Horan leads US to draw with Dutch

Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — Lindsey Horan is setting a feisty tone for the United States at the Women's World Cup.

Horan, the U.S. co-captain, steadied herself after an angry exchange with Dutch midfielder Danielle van de Donk and scored to give the United States a 1-1 draw with the Netherlands on Thursday.

Frustrated by the Netherlands' first half lead, Horan went from exasperation with van de Donk to elation for her tying goal in a span of just two minutes in the second half.

"To come from a goal down and have that momentum shift in the second half was incredible. I think no one was happy with our first-half performance, letting them have the ball a little bit too much, but we changed things, and how we responded," she said.

The tie keeps the United States atop the Group E standings, in front of the Netherlands

with a better goal difference, and in good position to advance to the knockout round. The Americans wrap up group play on Tuesday against Portugal.

The United States is seeking its third straight World Cup title but this time the squad is younger and less experienced than in previous tournaments. Fourteen players on the roster are making their World Cup debuts.

That's why Horan's leadership, and the example she sets on the field, are important.

Horan, playing in her second World Cup, was named co-captain along with Alex Morgan by coach Vlatko Andonovski before the tournament. When she and Morgan are on the field together, Horan gets the captain's armband.

In addition to the equalizer against the Dutch, she also scored in the team's 3-0 victory over Vietnam in the tournament opener.

"I think the captain's band has elevated what she already does," defender Julie Ertz said

about Horan. "I don't think she needed to change or be anything, because we looked at her as a leader."

Horan, 26, has always been a competitive player. But the battle with van de Donk — her teammate on French club Lyon — typifies her feistiness.

Horan seethed and cursed after getting knocked down by van de Donk and the two exchanged words, prompting the referee to step in and separate the pair.

Minutes later — after a calming reminder from Ertz that she was already carrying a yellow card from a previous match — Horan coolly scored on a header off Rose Lavelle's corner kick.

"Instead of crying about it, she just goes and makes a statement and basically shows everyone the direction the game was going to take," Andonovski said.

Horan shared a laugh and a hug with van de Donk following the match. The two even snapped a selfie.

"I don't think you ever want to get me mad because I don't react in a good way. I just want something more. I want to win more, I want to score more and I want more for my team," Horan said.

Horan grew up in Colorado and eschewed a scholarship to North Carolina to head overseas and play for Paris Saint-Germain for four seasons. In 2016 and vying for a spot on the U.S. Olympic team, she returned to the United States to play for the Portland Thorns of the National Women's Soccer League and was named the league's Most Valuable Player in 2018.

The Thorns loaned her to Lyon in 2022, and allowed her permanent transfer to the team in France's top division in June.

She's been a fixture on the U.S. national team since the 2016 Olympics in Brazil.

At the 2019 World Cup in France, Horan came off the bench for the team's first two knockout-round victories against Spain and the hosts

Oshoala seals Nigeria's upset win over Australia

Associated Press

BRISBANE, Australia — Asisat Oshoala had to watch from Nigeria's bench for an hour, desperate to get into the action, before getting a chance to unleash all her pent up energy against co-host Australia at the Women's World Cup.

The Barcelona striker entered the game in the 63rd minute and Nigeria took the lead two minutes later for the first time, 2-1. Within nine minutes, Oshoala scored a goal that sealed an upset victory, sparked her jersey-shedding celebration and left Australia in a must-win scenario for World Cup survival.

After losing 3-2, an Australian squad dealing with injuries to striker Sam Kerr and understudy Mary Fowler needs to beat Olympic champion Canada on Monday to control its own fate for a spot in the round of 16.

Nigeria and Canada opened with a 0-0 draw and both teams now have four points.

Australia has three from its opening 1-0 win over Ireland. Nigeria next faces winless Ireland, which is making its debut in the tournament.

Nigeria coach Randy Waldrum said he benched Oshoala at the start of the game to manage her long-term injury, but always intended to send her on when it was most needed.

"She's such a force physically," Waldrum said. "She can create problems — the third goal was massive. When we talked about her role — she's like any player, she wants to be on all the time — I said 'I just have a feeling, come on for the last 30 minutes and make a difference.'"

What a feeling.

The pivotal moment against the injury-plagued Australians was in the 72nd minute when Oshoala swooped on a defensive mix-up and beat three Matildas to the ball, sneaking a right-foot inside the near post from a tight angle.

She peeled off her jersey and sprinted to the right corner to celebrate scoring in three consecutive World Cups, getting a yellow card in the process.

"I'm so proud of these players. So many people didn't believe," Waldrum said. "Didn't believe in me, in the team."

"I told them after the match, keep believing."

That's something the Australians need now.

"This was a massive opportunity that we let slide," Steph Catley, who is leading the Matildas in the absence of Kerr, said in her post-match TV interview. "We created a lot of opportunities that we couldn't finish. We weren't patient enough, and we weren't clinical."

"(Nigeria) was great on the counter and they finished their chances," Catley added. "We've just got to move on as quickly as possible — on to Canada now. This is what World Cups are all about."

Angels acquire Giolito from White Sox

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — The Los Angeles Angels acquired right-handers Lucas Giolito and Reynaldo López from the Chicago White Sox on Wednesday night, signaling their determination to contend for a playoff spot with Shohei Ohtani.

The Angels traded two of their top minor league prospects — left-hander Ky Bush and catcher Edgar Quero — to the White Sox, who got a solid return for two talented veteran pitchers playing their final season before free agency.

Los Angeles announced the deal shortly after Sports Illustrated cited an unidentified source in reporting the Angels will not trade Ohtani, the 2021 AL MVP. Ohtani will be a free agent this winter, but the Angels are clearly pulling out all the stops to contend for their first playoff appearance in the two-way superstar's six major league seasons.

Giolito is the centerpiece of the deal for the Halos, who were eager to add an experienced starting pitcher. The Los Angeles-area native was among the top available names on the market as an impending free agent unlikely to re-sign with the White Sox.

Giolito is 6-6 with a 3.79 ERA this season in 21 starts for Chicago. His 131 strikeouts are

10th in the AL, and he has limited opponents to a .211 average in his last nine starts.

Giolito spent his past seven big league seasons in Chicago's rotation, winning 59 games. He was an All-Star selection in 2019, and he threw a no-hitter on Aug. 25, 2020. He has finished in the top 11 in AL Cy Young voting three times in his career.

"Gio's been a workhorse for us. I call him Mr. Consistency," White Sox manager Pedro Grifol said. "He's the same guy every single day. A great teammate. He gives us everything we've got. He's rooting for his teammates out on the bench. The Angels got a good guy. And they did in Lopey, too."

The Angels' six-man rotation has been inconsistent this season after a strong 2022 campaign, with even Ohtani having stretches of ineffectiveness. Giolito will join Ohtani, Tyler Anderson, Griffin Canning, Patrick Sandoval and Reid Detmers in the rotation.

The Angels (52-49) have won six of their last seven to move four games behind the Blue Jays for the final AL wild-card spot, although the Yankees and Red Sox are also ahead of Los Angeles.

López will be another tested, veteran arm in the Angels' bullpen. He is 2-5 with a 4.29 ERA and four saves in 43 appearances this

season, and he has made eight consecutive scoreless appearances.

Giolito and López were also traded together in December 2016, when they were sent from the Washington Nationals to Chicago along with Dane Dunning in exchange for Adam Eaton.

"Certainly not where any of us in the organization thought when this year started we would be come the trade deadline," White Sox general manager Rick Hahn said. "But clearly moves like these in terms of putting ourselves in the best position going forward are essential and we are certainly please to add Bush and Quero."

Bush, 23, was a second-round pick in 2021, and he is 1-4 with a 7.20 ERA while playing for two minor league teams this season. Quero is considered a future major league catcher, but his path to the show in Anaheim would be blocked by Logan O'Hoppe, who showed tremendous promise as a rookie early this season before a torn labrum sidelined him until next month.

"Quero is (among) the more highly regarded catching prospects in the game, at age 20, switch-hitting catcher who is one of the youngest players in Double-A," Hahn said.

Ukraine eases its boycott policy against Russians

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine has signaled it will no longer bar its athletes from competing against Russians who are taking part in sporting events as "neutral athletes," a significant easing of its boycott policy a year before the Paris Olympics.

A decree dated Wednesday says Ukrainian athletes and teams will only be required to boycott if competitors from Russia or Belarus are competing under their national flags or other symbols, or have signaled allegiance to either of those countries in another way.

The change in policy could smooth the way for Ukrainians to compete at next year's Paris Olympics. Ukraine athletes previously boycotted events that allowed Russians and Belarusians as "Individual Neutral Athletes,"

the preferred term of the International Olympic Committee.

It wasn't immediately clear how the decree would be implemented in practice, but at least one leading Ukrainian athlete competed against a "neutral" Russian competitor on Thursday.

Olympic champion Olga Kharlan competed against officially neutral Russian opponent Anna Smirnova at the world fencing championships — an Olympic qualifier — on Thursday in Milan, Italy, winning their bout 15-7. Smirnova refused to leave after the bout for more than 50 minutes, however, sitting on a chair on the fencing piste in an apparent protest because Kharlan refused to shake hands at the end.

Kharlan was later listed as excluded from the event in the tournament bracket. It was not immediately clear why. Smirnova was

not reinstated and Bulgarian fencer Yoana Ilieva, who Kharlan had been due to face next, advanced by walkover.

Another Ukrainian, Igor Reizlin, withdrew from his event at the same world championships when he was drawn to compete against a Russian in the men's epee tournament on Wednesday, before the decree was published.

The IOC favors allowing Russians and Belarusians to compete as "neutral athletes" without national symbols in Olympic qualifying events. The governing bodies of most Olympic sports have either adopted the IOC policy already or are working on plans to do so.

The IOC still recommends barring Russia and Belarus from team sports and excluding athletes who are contracted to the military or security forces.

The IOC — which initially recommended that sports bodies exclude Russian and Belarusian athletes on safety grounds last year — says it has not taken a final decision on allowing "neutral" Russian and Belarusian athletes at next year's Paris Olympics.

Ukraine had previously objected strongly to the policy, with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy saying in January that "any neutral flag of Russian athletes is stained with blood" and that Russia would exploit their presence for propaganda.

Ukrainian teams in fencing and judo already boycotted events which included Russians following last year's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. A government decree in April made that state policy as IOC-backed efforts to reintegrate Russian and Belarusian athletes gathered pace.

Support, confidence for Pack QB Love

Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — On the night before his first training camp workout as the Green Bay Packers' starting quarterback, Jordan Love received some advice from his four-time MVP predecessor.

Love said Wednesday that New York Jets quarterback Aaron Rodgers texted him the previous evening. When the Packers traded Rodgers to the Jets the week of the draft, it cleared the way for Love to take over as Green Bay's first-team quarterback.

"He said just be yourself, have fun, enjoy it," Love said. "It's obviously my time now, and he just said be yourself. And I mean, that's all you can do."

Love backed up Rodgers the last three seasons, just as Rodgers earned Green Bay's starting spot in 2008 after spending three years as Hall of Famer Brett Favre's backup.

Although Love has made only one career start, he believes his

three years of experience make him much more prepared than if he'd received this assignment as a rookie.

"He definitely has complete command of our offense," Packers coach Matt LaFleur said. "There's no doubt about it. He's put the work in."

Love also has the support of his teammates. Wide receiver Romeo Doubs said "we have the utmost confidence in him."

"We want Mr. Love to feel the love," running back Aaron Jones said. "That's going to bring up his confidence and I think that's just going to help him play even better."

Love took it upon himself to gather as many of those teammates together during the offseason.

After Love, Doubs and Jones worked out together in California before organized team activities and minicamp, they wanted to have a larger gathering leading up to training camp.

Jones said Love spearheaded

the project by inviting everyone. The collection of Packers to work out at Santa Ana, Calif., eventually grew to include receivers Christian Watson, Jayden Reed, Dontayvion Wicks and Jeff Cotton plus backup quarterback Danny Etling as well as Love, Doubs and Jones.

"Usually in the offseason you're throwing with other people that don't run the same routes that you run in your offense, things like that, so just being able to have that familiarity and build those connections with those guys was awesome," Love said. "We went bowling. We had a couple nice dinners out there. It was a good time to build those connections."

Love called himself the best bowler in the group and said he "almost had a 200 one game."

"Christian did say the lanes weren't good enough for him," Love said. "I guess he spins the ball so the lanes didn't have enough grip, supposedly. But I did win."

The trip wasn't merely to build camaraderie. Jones said the lessons from the California trip are paying off in practice.

"We're in meetings and coach LaFleur is asking the young receivers questions, and they're able to answer with confidence because we just went over it in California," Jones said. "And Jordan's there with them and he can tell them why we're running that play, what we're looking for on that play and what we're trying to accomplish."

That's just one example of how Love is preparing for his new assignment by trying to be the best version of himself. That's the guidance he's received over and over, whether it be from Rodgers or any of his current teammates.

"That's kind of been the message from everybody," Love said. "Just be yourself. Don't try to be anybody else. Don't try to be Aaron. Just be yourself. And that's kind of what I'm trying to do."

Source says Big 12 set to add Colorado from Pac-12

Associated Press

If Colorado is ready to leave the Pac-12, the Big 12 is ready to welcome the Buffaloes back to the conference they left 12 years ago.

Big 12 presidents and chancellors voted unanimously Wednesday night to accept Colorado as a new member, clearing the way for the school to leave the Pac-12 and rejoin its former league, a person with knowledge of the meeting told The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because the Big 12 was not making its expansion plans public. ESPN first reported the vote.

Colorado still needs to go through a formal process and officially apply for membership. The university's board of regents had a special meeting scheduled for Thursday after-

noon with athletics operations on the agenda.

Big 12 Commissioner Brett Yormark has spoken for months about his desire to expand the conference and add schools in the Mountain and Pacific time zones. A second person familiar with the Big 12's expansion aspirations, also speaking on condition of anonymity, told AP the school and league have been in contact for more than a month about a potential departure from the Pac-12; the person said it was unclear if Colorado had come to a decision.

A Colorado departure could lead to more defections from the Pac-12, which has seemed vulnerable to more poaching after losing USC and UCLA to the Big Ten and with negotiations for a new media rights contract dragging on. Current deals with

ESPN and Fox expire after this school year.

The Los Angeles schools are in their last go-round as Pac-12 members this year and it could be Colorado's, too. With contractual agreements running out, the Buffaloes would be positioned to rejoin the Big 12 in 2024; the league last year came to an agreement with ESPN and Fox on a six-year extension worth more than \$2 billion.

Pac-12 Commissioner George Kliavkoff had said at football media days last week that the 10 remaining members were committed to staying together. Text messages to Kliavkoff and Colorado athletic director Rick George were not returned.

Colorado was an original member of the Big 12 in 1996, and joined the Pac-12 in 2011. The Buffaloes' football team has

had only one winning record over a full season since joining the Pac-12, and went 1-11 last year, leading to the hiring of former NFL star Deion Sanders.

The Big 12 has 14 members this year, but Texas and Oklahoma are leaving for the Southeastern Conference next year. The second person familiar with the Big 12's discussions said the conference would ideally like to expand to 16 schools with Arizona, Arizona State, Utah and Colorado all coming over from the Pac-12 to create a Western wing of the league.

Big 12 leadership has also discussed the possibility of trying to add UConn, which won the men's NCAA basketball tournament earlier this year, and Gonzaga, a basketball powerhouse that does not have a football team, the person said.