

NATO summit kicks off in Washington

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

Top defense chiefs from the Baltic states said Tuesday that NATO allies need to increase military spending levels beyond the alliance's long-standing 2% of each country's gross domestic product, arguing huge capability gaps demand a larger investment from all member states.

Their comments, made on the sidelines of NATO's three-day Washington summit now underway, could be a point of contention between Eastern European members and others inside the security pact who are still struggling to reach lower alliance targets.

"Our voice here is very clear, 2% is not enough. ... We have a huge shortage in capability," Estonian Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur said, speaking at an event hosted by Politico.

Along with the United States and Poland, the Baltic states are top military spenders in NATO

based on GDP percentages.

In Washington, the push this week to boost defense spending will be high on the agenda along with how to deliver more support to Ukraine in its war against Russia.

But political dynamics and the upcoming U.S. presidential election are also factoring into discussions.

With former President Donald Trump leading in the polls after President Joe Biden's debate performance two weeks ago, the implications of a potential Trump return have allies talking.

While Biden has long been viewed as a NATO booster, dating to his decades in the Senate, Trump took a more transactional approach to relations with allies that upended diplomatic norms.

The prospect of a second Trump term has caused a panic among some security analysts fearful that he will seek to pull the U.S. out of NATO, which is

marking its 75th anniversary.

Trump, who spent much of his tenure questioning the worth of NATO and has expressed unwillingness to help defend some allies should they come under attack, also has spoken of reducing the number of U.S. forces in Europe.

The three countries that make up the Baltics are on the front line and most exposed to potential Russian aggression. In those nations, American troops are seen as the centerpiece of NATO's security architecture. Yet defense ministers from Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia each expressed confidence that if Trump is reelected, NATO will remain secure.

"The United States is indispensable for us," said Andris Spruds, the Latvian defense minister. "But we believe NATO is also indispensable for the United States."

Spruds credited Trump for making an issue of insufficient European defense spending.

"Trump was right on raising the voice [on] 2%," he said.

In 2014, allies agreed all alliance members should hit the 2% mark by 2024. At the time, only three allies hit that target. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Friday that 23 of NATO's 32 members are on pace to reach the 2% threshold this year, including Germany, which has faced intense criticism over the years for not investing enough money in its defense.

Spruds also noted during Trump's tenure, the number of U.S. troops in Europe increased, including in his country, despite his anti-NATO rhetoric.

"Look at deeds rather than words," he said.

Lithuanian Defense Minister Laurynas Kasciunas echoed that outlook.

"The U.S. presence in Europe is crucial to us," he said. "We don't see a safe and secure Europe without the U.S. presence."

Sentinel missile cost increases to nearly \$141 billion

By MATTHEW ADAMS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Cost projections for the Air Force's new Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile have grown to about \$140.9 billion, or 81% more than originally forecasted four years ago.

"There are reasons for this cost growth, but there are also no excuses," William LaPlante, the Defense Department's undersecretary for acquisition and sustainment, told reporters Monday. "We fully appreciate the magnitude of the cost,

but we also understand the risks of not modernizing our nuclear forces and of not addressing the very real threats we confront."

The Sentinel is meant to replace the LGM-30G Minuteman III, as part of a broader effort to revamp the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

The Air Force notified Congress on Jan. 18 that the new missile would cost 37% more than expected and take about two years longer than planned to build and deploy.

Under the Nunn-McCurdy

Act, established during the 1980s, significant cost overruns in a major Pentagon acquisition program require the defense secretary to report the breach to Congress.

A critical Nunn-McCurdy breach occurs when the cost increases by 25% of the current baseline or 50% of the original estimate.

In addition to the latest cost projection, LaPlante rescinded the Sentinel's Milestone B approval, which would have allowed the new missile to move forward to the full engineering

and manufacturing development phase. He instead directed the Air Force to come back with a plan to restructure the program.

"Preserving schedule will be a key consideration during this restructuring. But a delay of several years is currently estimated," LaPlante said.

Andrew Hunter, assistant secretary of the Air Force for acquisition, technology and logistics, told reporters that the service expects the process for developing the new program to take 18 to 24 months.

Commander relieved after soft grounding

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The Navy has relieved a commanding officer with more than 30 years of service in connection with his ship running aground in May as it attempted to leave a port in Africa.

Capt. Lenard Mitchell, Gold crew commander of the expeditionary sea base USS Hershel “Woody” Williams, was relieved by Vice Adm. Thomas Ishee due to a lack of confidence in his ability to command, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet said in a statement Monday.

The Navy did not say exactly when Mitchell was removed but said sufficient evidence emerged

during its investigation into the “soft grounding” that warranted relieving him of command. The investigation is ongoing, according to the statement.

Woody Williams grounded at about 1 p.m. on May 9 as it was leaving the port of Libreville, Gabon, to take part in the Obangame Express exercise in the Gulf of Guinea. There were no injuries or major damage, and the ship eventually broke free at high tide about four hours later.

But the ship languished outside the port for more than a week waiting for an inspection before eventually getting underway. The ship wasn’t able to participate in the exercise as planned.

Woody Williams is one of the

few U.S. naval ships with missions primarily in Africa, where rivals China and Russia have made their own inroads. The ship plays a part in broader U.S. government efforts to build partnerships in a region America considers vital to its national security interests.

Mitchell, of Canton, Miss., enlisted in the Navy in 1990. His previous assignments include executive officer and later commanding officer of the littoral combat ship USS Little Rock.

He was named commanding officer of Williams’ Gold crew in November 2022. In May, Mitchell told Stars and Stripes the current deployment would be his last as he planned to retire.

Mitchell has been temporarily assigned to Commander, Naval Surface Forces Atlantic. Capt. Michael Concannon will assume duties as interim commanding officer, the Navy said.

Woody Williams is deployed to the U.S. Naval Forces Africa. Its homeport is at Naval Support Activity Souda Bay on the Greek island of Crete.

The ship operates with a hybrid crew of 100 sailors who manage flight and other operations, and 50 civilian mariners responsible for navigation and maintenance. To sustain its presence, Woody Williams is manned by two separate crews, dubbed Blue and Gold, which rotate five-month deployments.

Seawall work starts at airfield site on Okinawa

By BRIAN McELHINEY
AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP SCHWAB, Okinawa — Japan’s government this week began preliminary work on a seawall at the site of a long-delayed airfield for the Marine Corps.

Contractors on Monday drove test piles into the soft seabed of Oura Bay, Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said during a news conference. The test piles will prepare the site for steel pipes that support the seawall, he said.

“It is necessary to drive test piles before starting the seawall construction, to be able to conduct it safely and smoothly,” Hayashi said.

A floating crane used to drive the test piles into the seabed worked in the bay Tuesday. The Okinawa Defense Bureau did not respond Tuesday to a phone call seeking comment.

The bureau told the prefecture’s Seashore Disaster Preven-

tion Division that the vessels would enter the bay July 1, but the actual work appeared to have begun Monday, a division spokesman said Tuesday. Some Japanese officials may speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

The division asked the defense bureau to refrain from starting work at Oura Bay until discussions were complete. However, driving the test piles is “not subject to the detailed design discussions because it is not part of the seawall constructions,” Hayashi said.

The airfield being constructed on Camp Schwab on reclaimed land is meant to replace Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, located in densely populated Ginowan city. The U.S. and Japanese governments agreed to move the base in 1996, but construction of the new site in the Henoko area has been repeatedly delayed by the Okinawa prefectural government.

Japan-Philippines pact lets forces train in either nation

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Japan and the Philippines signed a key defense pact Monday allowing the deployment of Japanese forces for joint military exercises, including live-fire drills, to the Southeast Asian nation that came under brutal Japanese occupation in World War II but is now building an alliance with Tokyo as they face an increasingly assertive China.

The Reciprocal Access Agreement, which similarly allows Filipino forces to enter Japan for joint combat training, was signed by Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro and Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa in a Manila ceremony witnessed by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. It would take effect after ratification by the countries’ legislatures, Philippine and Japanese officials said.

Kamikawa called the signing of the defense agreement “a groundbreaking achievement”

that should further boost defense cooperation between Japan and the Philippines.

“A free and open international order based on the rule of law is the foundation of regional peace and prosperity,” she said. “We would like to work closely with your country to maintain and strengthen this.”

Kamikawa and Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara later held talks with their Philippine counterparts on ways to further deepen relations.

The defense pact with the Philippines is the first to be forged by Japan in Asia. Japan signed similar accords with Australia in 2022 and with Britain in 2023.

Under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, the Japanese government has taken steps to boost its security and defensive firepower. It’s doubling defense spending in a five-year period to 2027 in a move to bolster its military power and make Japan the world’s third-biggest military spender.

Beryl leaves hot misery, millions without power

Associated Press

HOUSTON—Many of the millions left without power when Hurricane Beryl crashed into Texas, killing several people and unleashing flooding, now face days without air conditioning as dangerous heat threatens the region Tuesday.

A heat advisory was in effect through Wednesday in the Houston area and beyond, with temperatures expected to soar into the 90s and humidity that could make it feel as hot as 105 degrees. The widespread loss of power, and therefore air conditioning, could make for dangerous conditions, the National Weather Service said.

More than 2.3 million homes and businesses around Houston lacked electricity Tuesday morning, down from a peak of over 2.7 million on Monday, according to PowerOutage.us.

“Houstonians need to know we’re working around the clock so you will be safe,” Houston Mayor John Whitmire said Monday, urging residents to also know the dangers of high water, to stay hydrated and to check on their neighbors.

Beryl has been blamed for at least seven deaths — one in Louisiana and six in Texas, officials said.

The storm weakened after making landfall, and late Tues-

day morning it was a post-tropical cyclone centered over northeastern Arkansas, moving northeast with maximum sustained winds near 30 mph, the weather service said. Its strength wasn’t expected to change much in the next two days.

The storm is forecast to bring heavy rains and possible flash flooding from the lower and mid-Mississippi Valley to the Great Lakes into Wednesday, the weather service said.

A flood watch was in effect for parts of Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan. A few tornadoes were possible in Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana and

Ohio, forecasters said.

Beryl came ashore in Texas as a Category 1 hurricane, far less powerful than the behemoth that tore a deadly path through parts of Mexico and the Caribbean. But its winds and rains still knocked down hundreds of trees that had already been teetering in saturated earth and stranded dozens of cars on flooded roads.

Beryl’s rains pounded Houston and other areas of the coast Monday, closing streets that had already been washed out by previous storms. Houston officials reported at least 25 water rescues by Monday afternoon, mostly for people with vehicles stuck in floodwaters.

Sen. Menendez’s response to bribes ‘wildly abnormal’

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A prosecutor accused Sen. Bob Menendez on Tuesday of engaging in “wildly abnormal” behavior in response to bribes during a closing argument at the Democrat’s New York City corruption trial.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Paul Monteleoni made the accusation as he continued a summation he began a day earlier before a Manhattan federal court jury.

Menendez, 70, has pleaded not guilty to charges that he accepted bribes including gold and hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash from 2018 to 2022 from three New Jersey businessmen who wanted his help in their business ventures.

His trial entered its ninth week Monday. His lawyer was expected to begin a closing argument on the New Jersey senator’s behalf later Tuesday.

Menendez is on trial with two of the businessmen — Wael Hana and Fred Daibes. Hana, who prosecutors have said enlisted Menendez to help him gain and protect a monopoly on the certification of meat exported from

the United States to Egypt, and Daibes, an influential real estate developer, have also both pleaded not guilty. A third businessman pleaded guilty and testified at the trial.

Early Tuesday, Monteleoni highlighted what he described as Menendez’s attempt to influence former New Jersey Attorney General Gurbir Grewal in early 2019 to drop a criminal case on behalf of one of the bribe-paying businessmen with a false claim investigators were discriminating against Hispanic truckers.

Grewal, now head of enforcement for the Securities and Exchange Commission, testified during the trial that he firmly rejected Menendez’s efforts to intervene in criminal probes by directing him to tell a New Jersey defense lawyer already involved in the case to register any complaints with a judge or the trial team.

The encounters with Grewal were cited by Monteleoni as examples of things Menendez did that the prosecutor said “were wildly abnormal.”

Baldwin’s manslaughter trial begins with selection of jury

Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. — Alec Baldwin’s trial in the shooting of a cinematographer is set to begin Tuesday with the selection of jurors who will be tasked with deciding whether the actor is guilty of involuntary manslaughter.

Getting chosen to serve in a trial of such a major star accused of such a major crime would be unusual even in Los Angeles or Baldwin’s hometown of New York. But it will be essentially an unheard-of experience for those who are picked as jurors in Santa Fe, N.M., though the state has increasingly become a hub of Hollywood production in recent years.

Baldwin and his wife, Hilaria, arrived at the courthouse Tuesday with at least one of their youngest children. The couple have several children, with the youngest set to turn 2 in September.

Baldwin, 66, could get up to 18 months in prison if jurors unanimously decide he committed the felony when a revolver he was pointing at cinematographer Hilaria Hutchins went off, killing her and wounding director Joel

Souza during a rehearsal for the Western film “Rust” in October 2021 at Bonanza Creek Ranch, some 18 miles from where the trial is being held.

Baldwin has said the gun fired accidentally after he followed instructions to point it toward Hutchins, who was behind the camera. Unaware the gun contained a live round, Baldwin said he pulled back the hammer — not the trigger — and it fired.

The star of “30 Rock” and “The Hunt for Red October” made his first appearance in the courtroom Monday, when Judge Mary Marlowe Summer, in a significant victory for the defense, ruled at a pretrial hearing that Baldwin’s role as a co-producer on “Rust” isn’t relevant to the trial.

The judge has said the special circumstances of a celebrity trial shouldn’t keep jury selection from moving quickly, and that opening statements should begin Wednesday.

“I’m not worried about being able to pick a jury in one day,” Marlowe Summer said. “I think we’re going to pick a jury by the afternoon.”

Intense bombing by Israel shakes Gaza City

Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — Heavy Israeli bombardment shook Gaza City on Tuesday as thousands of fleeing Palestinians searched for shelter and medical facilities were forced to shut down in the latest offensive in the territory's north.

Israel's new ground assault in Gaza's largest city is its latest effort to battle Hamas militants regrouping in areas the army previously said had been largely cleared.

Much of Gaza City and urban areas around it have been flattened or left a shattered landscape after nine months of fighting. Much of the population fled earlier in the war, but several hundred thousand Palestinians remain in the north.

"The fighting has been intense," said Hakeem Abdel-Bar, who fled Gaza City's Tuffah district to the homes of relatives in another part of the city. He said Israeli warplanes and drones were

"striking anything moving" and that tanks had moved into central districts.

There was no immediate word on casualties. Families whose relatives were wounded or trapped were calling for ambulances, but first responders could not reach most of the affected districts because of the Israeli operations, said Nebal Farsakh, a spokesperson for the Palestinian Red Crescent.

"It's a dangerous zone," she said.

After Israel on Monday called for an evacuation from eastern and central parts of Gaza City, staff at two hospitals — Al-Ahli and the Patients Friends Association Hospital — rushed to move out patients and shut down, the United Nations said. Farsakh said all three medical points run by the Red Crescent in Gaza City had closed.

The Israeli military on Tuesday said it had told hospitals and other medical facilities in Gaza

City that they did not need to evacuate. But hospitals in Gaza have often shut down and moved patients at any sign of possible Israeli military action, fearing raids.

In the past nine months, Israeli troops have occupied at least eight hospitals, causing the deaths of patients and medical workers along with massive destruction to facilities and equipment. Israel has claimed Hamas uses hospitals for military purposes, though it has provided only limited evidence.

Israel's campaign in Gaza, triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, has killed or wounded more than 5% of Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians, according to the territory's Health Ministry, and has driven almost the entire population from their homes. Many have been displaced multiple times. Hundreds of thousands are packed into sweltering tent camps.

Israeli airstrikes in the central town of Deir al-Balah and nearby refugee camps on Tuesday killed

at least 14 people, including four children and a woman, according to officials at al-Aqsa Martyrs and al-Awda hospitals, where casualties were taken. One of the strikes hit a police station in an outdoor market in the Nuseirat refugee camp, killing four people and wounding two dozen, half of them women and children.

The Israeli military has said it had intelligence showing that militants from Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad group were regrouping in central Gaza City. Israel accuses Hamas and other militants of hiding among civilians. In Shijaiyah, a Gaza City neighborhood that has seen weeks of fighting, the military said it had destroyed 3 miles of Hamas tunnels.

Hamas has warned that the raids in Gaza City could lead to the collapse of talks over a cease-fire and hostage release. Israel and Hamas had appeared to narrow the gaps in recent days, with the U.S., Egypt and Qatar mediating.

Rescuers sift through rubble at Kyiv hospital

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Rescuers searched the rubble at a children's hospital Tuesday for more dead and wounded, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, a day after Russian missiles slammed into the facility and cities across the country in a massive daytime barrage. The death toll from the strikes rose to 42, officials said.

Zelenskyy said on the social platform X that 64 people were hospitalized in the capital, as well as 28 in Kryvyi Rih and six in Dnipro — both cities in central Ukraine.

It was Russia's heaviest bombardment of Kyiv in almost four months and one of the deadliest of the war, hitting seven of the city's 10 districts. The strike on

the Okhmatdyt children's hospital, which interrupted open-heart surgery and forced young cancer patients to take their treatments outdoors, drew an international outcry.

The 10-story hospital, Ukraine's largest medical facility for children, was caring for some 670 patients at the time of the attack, Okhmatdyt's Director General, Volodymyr Zhovnir, said Tuesday. The missile hit a two-story wing of the hospital.

Russia denied responsibility for the hospital strike, insisting it doesn't attack civilian targets in Ukraine despite abundant evidence to the contrary.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, meanwhile, was hosting India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Moscow.

Trump back on trail as deadline nears for VP pick

Associated Press

MIAMI — Former President Donald Trump was back on the campaign trail Tuesday, rallying voters in his home state at his flagship golf resort in a celebratory mood as Democrats face tough calls over President Joe Biden's reelection chances.

Trump is nearing a deadline to announce his running mate but appears in no rush as much of the attention is still centered on questions about Biden's ability to govern for another four-year term. Some Democrats have started calling for Biden to step down as their presumptive nominee following his dismal debate performance last month.

Both Biden, 81, and Trump, 78, are at least two decades older than most American presidents have been, according to

the Pew Research Center, which said the median age for all U.S. presidents on their first inauguration is 55 years old. But that has not stopped Trump from arguing he is stronger than Biden, who repeatedly stumbled, paused and could not complete sentences at times during the June 27 debate. Trump was criticized by Democrats for making false statements during the debate about the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol and suggesting immigrants entering the U.S. illegally were taking so-called "Black jobs" and "Hispanic jobs."

The leadership crisis among Democrats has perhaps given Trump a reason to wait for his VP announcement so as to not draw attention away from Biden's woes.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Small plane lands on highway; no one is hurt

NV CARSON CITY — The pilot of a small plane made an emergency landing safely on a highway in northern Nevada after running out of fuel, authorities said Saturday.

No vehicles were hit, and none of the three people on board the aircraft were injured when the aircraft landed Friday afternoon on U.S. Highway 50 about 15 miles east of Carson City, the Nevada State Police Highway Patrol said.

The eastbound lanes were temporarily blocked while the plane was loaded onto a truck for transport.

The Federal Aviation Administration will investigate the incident involving the Aero Commander 500.

Man charged after gift of fireworks caused blaze

NY LEVITTOWN — A New York man was charged with arson after giving an 11-year-old child fireworks that set a shed and two homes on fire on Independence Day, police said.

The Nassau County Police Department on Long Island said Karamjit Singh, 33, told the child to light the fireworks Thursday morning outside his home in Levittown, but they malfunctioned and set a shed on fire. The blaze then spread to Singh's home and a neighboring house in the suburban neighborhood, causing extensive damage.

Images captured by local media showed thick smoke billowing from the fire and the side of one of the homes burned

away to expose its wooden studs. Charred debris was strewn across the yard.

No injuries were reported. Singh was arrested without incident and the child was released to a family member, police said.

Climatologist sees 'very active' hurricane season

LA BATON ROUGE — Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry recently announced that Jay Grymes, the chief meteorologist for WAFB-TV in Baton Rouge, will serve as the new state climatologist.

Among responsibilities in his role, Grymes will be tasked with monitoring Louisiana's climate and archiving data.

The position is especially important in a state that consistently faces threats during hurricane seasons, officials said.

During a press conference, Grymes said Louisiana will likely feel the impacts of a named storm this hurricane season, which goes until November.

"[Hurricane] Beryl is not going to be a threat for Louisiana, but this is going to be a very active season," Grymes said.

Employing the state climatologist through the Governor's Office "ensures one concise weather voice coming from the state. This is especially important with the unpredictable weather Louisiana routinely experiences," Landry said.

2 horses that ran onto freeway killed by vehicles

CA LOS ANGELES — Two horses were struck and killed by passing vehicles late Tuesday after they ran onto a Los Angeles freeway,

authorities said.

Other drivers saved a third horse and helped the animal over to the freeway's shoulder to avoid getting hit, according to the California Highway Patrol.

CHP Officer Josh Greengard told the Southern California News Group that the horses all had "equestrian-style property" and likely came from a nearby ranch.

The CHP received multiple calls reporting the horses running in the freeway's lanes of traffic around 9 p.m. Tuesday, the agency said. Subsequent calls reported that two of them had been struck by vehicles.

One of the vehicle's occupants suffered minor injuries.

Lawmakers eye expanding scope of sexual offenses

MA BOSTON — A bill that would expand the scope of certain sexual offenses under Massachusetts law perpetrated by a health care provider or a member of the clergy is making its way through Beacon Hill.

The bill also would add rape of a patient or client by a health care provider, indecent assault and battery on vulnerable persons in law enforcement custody, and indecent assault and battery on a patient or client by a health care provider to definitions related to sexual offenders.

The Massachusetts House approved the bill last week.

The bill would establish that anybody who holds themselves out to be a health care provider or clergy member, and who commits an indecent assault and battery on a patient, client or individual during diagnosis, counseling, or treatment could

be punished by imprisonment for no more than 5 years, or by imprisonment for no more than 2½ years in a correctional.

The bill also would establish that a patient or client would be deemed incapable of consenting to contact of a sexual nature when that consent was procured by a false claim that the act was for a legitimate medical or treatment purpose.

New parents would get \$1K under 'baby bonus'

MD BALTIMORE — A group of Baltimore teachers is asking voters to approve a program that would give \$1,000 to new parents in the hopes of reducing childhood poverty starting from birth.

The "baby bonus" will appear on the ballot for city residents in November, after supporters secured the necessary 10,000 signatures to bring the question to voters. Their recent campaign relied on extensive canvassing efforts and a cute logo: a flying cartoon stork with a bag of money in its beak.

The proposal is loosely modeled on a program implemented this year in Flint, Mich., where women receive \$1,500 during mid-pregnancy and \$500 per month for the first year after giving birth.

Countries in Europe and Asia have experimented with larger cash payments, but those programs are meant to encourage more people to have more kids, not address child poverty.

The issue is particularly urgent in Baltimore, where an estimated 31% of school-aged children are experiencing poverty, according to census data.

— From wire reports

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Hurdlers ready for Olympic showdown

Associated Press

The two greatest women's hurdlers of their era have been plotting, planning and training and — whether by design or by happenstance — mostly avoiding each other for the past two years.

If things go right for them, Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone of America and Femke Bol of the Netherlands are headed for what would be only their third career showdown at the Paris Olympics.

It's hard to see what could prevent them from lining up in the final on Aug. 8, though for months leading into this matchup, each racer threw something of a smokescreen around their plans. McLaughlin-Levrone spent most of the last two years running 400 and 200 sprints, while also mixing in some short hurdles. Bol was a 400 sprinter, too; she won world indoor championships in March.

Then, starting at the European championships last month, both racers ended the speculation and shared their intent to stick with what they did best —

the 400 hurdles. And, as if to show the game is truly back on, McLaughlin-Levrone lowered her world record, to 50.65 seconds at the U.S. Olympic trials last weekend. It was just her fourth 400-hurdles race of 2024.

"I think I just wanted to focus on one" event, McLaughlin-Levrone said last week after breaking the record. "I like to hone in on one thing and do it to the best of my ability. I think that's why we chose the 4-hurdles and I'm grateful we did that. I think today was a good testament to that, and knowing there's still work to do."

That's a daunting thought for Bol, who has lost both times she's lined up against McLaughlin-Levrone — the first time at the Tokyo Olympics, then again at the 2022 world championships. Even so, Bol comes in as the reigning world champion, in part because McLaughlin-Levrone missed last summer with injuries.

"It's great she's there and it'll always be exciting and it will always bring some nice, like, nerves," Bol said after winning

the European championships in 52.49 in what was only her third 400 hurdles race of 2024. "But at the same time, I'm always really focused on myself. I will just try to be a better athlete. I hope it will bring something nice for me to be battling with her."

The first time they battled, Bol finished third behind McLaughlin-Levrone and Dalilah Muhammad, the 2016 Olympic champion who did not make this year's squad. Bol's time — 52.03 seconds — would have been the world record had she run it six months earlier. Instead, she was .57 seconds slower than McLaughlin-Levrone, who set the world record that day at 51.46.

"I just went out like crazy for the first 300 to be with them," Bol said that day. "And I died a bit."

It was much the same story the next year at worlds when McLaughlin-Levrone won again, set the world record again, and Bol finished second, but was 1.59 seconds behind.

"She was so far in front at the end, I was almost doubting if I

really had a good race," Bol said after that one. "Then, I saw the time and I thought, 'Wow, that explains a lot.'"

Bol's personal best is 51.45 seconds. It came last July, only a few weeks before she went to Budapest to win the 2023 world championships.

Hurdling great Edwin Moses thinks McLaughlin-Levrone could go under 50 seconds in Paris — a time that felt unthinkable as recently as 24 months ago. And yet, he still thinks there's a chance that McLaughlin vs. Bol could be as interesting as McLaughlin vs. the clock. The times Moses looks at are their personal bests in the 400 flat: McLaughlin-Levrone 48.75, Bol 49.17.

"If Femke was a 50 or a 49.8 or 49.5 girl, that's one thing," Moses said. "But I could see a scenario where they're even off the eighth hurdle, and then running to the finish line, and then it's a matter of who makes an error, who has to alternate their steps, who has to run 15 steps (between hurdles) instead of 14."

Medvedev ousts No. 1 Sinner in Wimbledon quarters

Associated Press

LONDON — Top-seeded Janik Sinner was treated by a trainer and left the court during the third set, seemingly surged in the fourth and then faltered again in the fifth, eventually losing to Daniil Medvedev 6-7 (7), 6-4, 7-6 (4), 2-6, 6-3 in the Wimbledon quarterfinals on Tuesday.

"It's always tricky, because you want to play more points to make him suffer a little bit more — in a good way — and at the same time, you know that he at one point is going to say, 'OK, I cannot run anymore so I'm going to go full power,'" the fifth-seeded Medvedev said. "And that's what he did."

It was not immediately clear what was wrong with Sinner, who had his heart rate checked while sitting on the sideline before heading to the locker room. The 22-year-old from Italy returned after about 10 minutes and resumed playing, but lost the first game back at love.

After getting broken by 2021 U.S. Open champion Medvedev to fall behind 2-1 in the third, Sinner requested medical attention and leaned back in his chair at Centre Court. He rested his head in a hand at one point while speaking with the trainer before they headed toward the locker room.

During a later changeover, Sinner draped a towel over his

head. While he did regain his usual verve, particularly on his booming forehand, and pushed the match to a fifth set — the 36th this fortnight and the most at any Grand Slam tournament in the Open era, which dates to 1968 — Sinner could not get over the line.

"He was not feeling that good ... and then he started playing better," Medvedev said.

Medvedev began finding the space to deliver more winners, compiling 13 in the closing set alone, and broke for a 3-1 lead, then held for 4-1 and was on his way back to the semifinals.

The Russian lost to eventual champion Carlos Alcaraz at that stage in 2023 and will meet him

again: Alcaraz beat Tommy Paul 5-7, 6-4, 6-2, 6-2.

In the women's quarterfinals, Donna Vekic reached the final four at a major for the first time in her 43rd Slam, defeating qualifier Lulu Sun 5-7, 6-4, 6-1.

"I felt like I was dying out there, the first two sets. But I just kept going, hoping to have a chance and it came in the end," Vekic said in an on-court interview.

Vekic now faces No. 7 Jasmine Paolini or No. 19 Emma Navarro, who were scheduled to play each other later Tuesday.

Sinner carried a nine-match winning streak into Tuesday, including a grass-court title at Halle, Germany, last month.

Bradley chosen as Ryder Cup captain

Associated Press

Keegan Bradley is assured of making another Ryder Cup team, this time as the U.S. captain. The PGA of America announced his selection on Monday after months of talking with Tiger Woods about taking the job.

The PGA of America released the news on Instagram after word began to leak during the day that Bradley, who has played on only two Ryder Cup teams and never was an assistant captain, was chosen to lead the 2025 matches at Bethpage Black in New York.

Bradley already was in New York going through media training, with a news conference to introduce him set for noon Tuesday at the NASDAQ building. At age 38, he will be the youngest American captain since Arnold Palmer was a playing captain in 1963 at East Lake.

Sports Illustrated was first to report that Bradley would be the next captain.

Woods was the first choice of the Ryder Cup committee and had been in negotiations for months about what the job would entail and whether he had time to fulfill the duties, many of

them involving promotion of the event.

While he plays only a limited schedule, Woods is the vice chairman of the commercial PGA Tour Enterprises board as it tries to hammer out an investment deal with the Saudi backers of rival LIV Golf.

He was a playing captain for the 2019 Presidents Cup when the Americans won at Royal Melbourne, and he served as an assistant Ryder Cup captain at Hazeltine in 2016.

"I'm dedicating so much time to what we're doing with the PGA Tour. I don't want to not fulfill the role of the captaincy if I can't do it," Woods had said in May at the PGA Championship.

Once Woods wasn't an option, the PGA of America went for some local flavor with Bradley. He is a New England native who played his college golf at St. John's.

"Keegan's past Ryder Cup experience, strong relationships and unwavering passion for this event will prove invaluable as he guides the U.S. team over the next year-and-a-half," PGA of America President John Lindert said. "We are confident that with Keegan at the helm, the

2025 U.S. Ryder Cup team will compete at Bethpage with the same confidence and determination that has defined his career."

Bradley has six PGA Tour victories, including the 2011 PGA Championship. Two of those victories came last season, and Bradley figured it might be enough for him to make another Ryder Cup team. He was devastated when U.S. captain Zach Johnson overlooked him with his four captain's picks, going with Rickie Fowler, Justin Thomas, Jordan Spieth and Brooks Koepka.

The prototype of Ryder Cup captains typically is a player just outside the prime of his career, usually in the mid-40s. And ever since players gained a stronger voice in selecting captains after the 2014 matches, the model has been for future captains to first serve as assistants at the Ryder Cup or Presidents Cup.

The template also is for the immediate past captain — Johnson in this case — to be an assistant at the next Ryder Cup. With so much outside-the-box thinking on the Bradley selection, it was not immediately clear if that was still true.

Bradley last played in the Ryder Cup at Gleneagles in Scotland in 2014, when Tom Watson benched him and Phil Mickelson for both Saturday sessions in another European victory.

Bradley made his Ryder Cup debut at Medinah in 2012, teaming with Mickelson to go 3-0 before losing to Rory McIlroy in singles in what turned out to be a European victory, the largest comeback by a visiting team.

He famously did not unpack his bag from the 2012 matches and said he would not open it until he was on a winning team. Now he might get that chance.

"My passion and appreciation for golf's greatest team event have never been stronger," Bradley said in a news release. "The Ryder Cup is unlike any other competition in our sport, and this edition will undoubtedly be particularly special given the rich history and enthusiastic spectators at this iconic course. I look forward to beginning preparations for 2025."

This is the latest the Americans have selected a captain in more than 30 years. It was never supposed to take this long or be this complicated.

Hurley gets \$50M deal at UConn after passing on LA

Associated Press

STORRS, Conn.—UConn and men's basketball coach Dan Hurley have agreed to a six-year, \$50 million contract through the 2029-30 season that makes him one of the nation's highest paid college coaches nearly a month after he turned down a lucrative offer to coach the Los Angeles Lakers.

Hurley, who passed on guiding the storied NBA club to return to the two-time defending NCAA champions, can also earn more through performance-based incentives, a Monday release from the school stated. He

will receive \$6.375 million next season in addition to his \$400,000 base annual salary, which includes compensation from speaking, consulting and media obligations.

The agreement, which includes a \$1 million annual retention bonus, will be covered by increased ticket sales revenue and donations from the Husky Athletic Fund, the release added. It replaces the six-year, \$32.1 million agreement reached in June 2023 after Hurley won his first national championship with UConn.

Hurley — 141-58 in six sea-

sons with the Huskies and 292-163 overall entering his 15th as a Division I head coach — acknowledged that the Lakers' six-year, \$70 million offer was "obviously tempting." He was also mentioned as a candidate for the Kentucky coaching vacancy after John Calipari left for Arkansas. But Hurley reiterated last month that he belongs at UConn and stated in the release that "it's an honor" to coach and represent the school and is proud of what the program has rebuilt for fans and other supporters.

He added: "We will continue

to obsessively pursue championships and historic success, while continuing to develop great young men. Bleed Blue!"

UConn President Radenka Maric called Hurley the nation's best men's basketball coach and said he was delighted Hurley will continue to call it home. Athletic director David Benedict praised Hurley and wife Andrea for pouring themselves into rebuilding the program and added the contract recognizes the "immense" effort that has produced the results and the dedication it will require for the program to sustain it.

Keller gets 10th win as Pirates beat Mets

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Mitch Keller pitched eight innings for his 10th win of the season, Joshua Palacios' home run capped a five-run sixth inning and the Pittsburgh Pirates beat the New York Mets 8-2 on Monday.

Keller (10-5) allowed two runs and seven hits in a 107-pitch outing while striking out six and walking none. He is the first Pirates pitcher to have double-digit victories before the All-Star break since Gerrit Cole in 2015 and Pittsburgh earned a split of the four-game series.

The performance came a day after Keller did not get selected to the All-Star Game. That decision rankled Pirates manager Derek Shelton.

"That was an All-Star performance," Shelton said. "He's 10 wins before the break with another start to go. He made one

bad pitch in eight innings and it was hot and he had to sit through two long innings. If that's not an All-Star, I'm hard-pressed to see what is."

It was the 49th consecutive start that Keller pitched at least five innings, the longest current run in the major leagues.

"I thought we had a really good game plan going in, (catcher) Joey (Bart) and I," Keller said. "Just tried to attack the zone and fill it up as much as possible, be on the aggression. Good things will happen if you do that."

Cardinals 6, Nationals 0: Paul Goldschmidt and Alec Bursleson homered, Miles Mikolas pitched into the seventh inning and visiting St. Louis beat Washington.

Bursleson drove in three runs for the Cardinals, who took three of four games in the series and have won six of eight over-

all. St. Louis is 33-18 since Mother's Day, good for second-best in the majors behind Cleveland (32-16).

Tigers 1, Guardians 0: Jake Rogers led off the eighth inning with a double and broke a scoreless tie on an error, helping host Detroit outlast Cleveland.

Guardians shortstop Brayan Rocchio was charged with the error when Mark Canha's grounder got under his glove, allowing Rogers to score from third after advancing on Wenceel Perez's single.

Reds 6, Rockies 0: Rece Hinds homered and doubled in his major league debut, Andrew Abbott (9-6) pitched seven innings of three-hit ball and host Cincinnati beat Colorado.

All-Star shortstop Elly De La Cruz had an RBI double and scored twice. He also stole two bases in the first inning, giving him 45 this season to pass Billy

Hamilton for the most in Reds history before the All-Star break.

Rangers 9, Angels 4: Corey Seager extended his hitting streak to 13 games with a 457-foot, two-run homer, Nathaniel Lowe had three hits and Texas' offense remained hot in a victory over host Los Angeles.

Twins 8, White Sox 6 (11): Brooks Lee and Manuel Margot drove in runs in the 11th inning and visiting Minnesota topped Chicago.

The Twins won their third straight and improved to 8-0 against the major league-worst White Sox this season

Braves 5, Diamondbacks 4 (11): Sean Murphy hit a tying homer with two outs in the ninth inning and Marcell Ozuna drove in the decisive run with a sacrifice fly in the 11th as visiting Atlanta rallied past Arizona for its third straight victory.

Steelers' Sutton suspended 8 games for conduct violation

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The NFL has suspended Pittsburgh Steelers safety Cam Sutton for the first eight games of the 2024 season for violating the league's personal conduct policy.

The league announced the decision Monday, stipulating Sutton — who will not be paid during the suspension — would be eligible to apply for reinstatement on Oct. 29.

The discipline stems from Sutton's involvement in an alleged domestic violence dispute in Florida in March.

Sutton eventually surrendered to authorities and entered a pretrial diversion program in April after the charges were reduced from a felony to misdemeanor battery. His agreement with prosecutors required Sutton to take a mental health evaluation.

The NFL did its own investigation into the incident, leading

to the suspension.

The Detroit Lions cut Sutton immediately after an arrest warrant was issued. He found a lifeline in Pittsburgh, where he played for the first six seasons in the league from 2017-22.

Women's coach Hayes evades salary question

NEW YORK — U.S. women's coach Emma Hayes sidestepped a question on whether she should get a raise if a high-priced star such as Jürgen Klopp is hired to replace Gregg Berhalter with the American men.

Berhalter has a contract through the 2026 World Cup. U.S. Soccer Federation sporting director Matt Crocker has not spoken with media about Berhalter's status since the team's first-round elimination last week in the Copa America.

"My focus today is on preparing our team for our training

camp this week. I have to think about that and I have to think about performing first and foremost, myself with this team, this Olympics," Hayes said at a news conference Monday with U.S. men's Olympic coach Marko Mitrovic. "I think with regards to matters relating to the men's team and gender equity, they're not questions for now or for me, knowing that my absolute focus is on the preparation this week."

Berhalter earned \$2,291,136 in 2022, including \$900,000 in bonuses for the Americans' qualifying for the World Cup and reaching the second round, according to the USSF's 2022 tax filing.

Hayes' predecessor as U.S. women's coach, Vlatko Andonovski, had a base salary of \$396,089 in 2022 and also earned \$15,000 in bonuses. Andonovski quit last August after the Americans were eliminated

in the second round of the Women's World Cup.

Gymnast Dunne returns for fifth season at LSU

BATON ROUGE, La. — Gymnast Livvy Dunne will return for a fifth season at LSU, saying on social media she's "not Dunne yet." The decision brings back one of college sports' most marketable athletes to a Tigers program coming off its first national championship.

Dunne, 21, read a statement in a video montage posted on Instagram and X on Monday in which the All-American says, "No matter how many opportunities come my way off the mat, there's just something about LSU" and being part of a squad that made school history.

The Hillsdale, N.J., native is one of the top earners in name, image and likeness compensation and has a massive social media following.