

Trump set to accept GOP nomination

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Donald Trump takes the stage Thursday at the Republican National Convention to accept his party's nomination again and give his first speech since he was cut off mid-sentence by a flurry of gunfire in an assassination attempt at a rally in Pennsylvania.

Trump's address will conclude the four-day convention in Milwaukee. He appeared each of the first three days with a white bandage on his ear, covering a wound he sustained in the Saturday shooting.

Trump has said the shooting led him to change his RNC speech, from what was going to be "a humdinger" made up largely of attacks on President Joe Biden to one more focused on bringing the country together.

"Honestly, it's going to be a whole different speech now," Trump told the Washington Examiner.

Trump wrote the speech, and it is expected to be more personal than his usual comments, according to two people familiar with the planned remarks who were not authorized to speak publicly. He is also expected to lay out a stark contrast with the Democrats' policies, according to one of the people.

His moment of survival has shaped the week, even as convention organizers insisted they would continue with their program as planned less than 48 hours after the shooting. Speakers and delegates have repeatedly chanted "Fight, fight, fight!" in homage to Trump's words as he got to his feet and pumped his fist after Secret Ser-

vice agents killed the gunman. And some of his supporters have started sporting their own makeshift bandages on the convention floor.

Speakers attributed Trump's survival to divine intervention and paid tribute to victim Corey Comperatore, who died after shielding his wife and daughter from gunfire at the rally.

"Instead of a day of celebration, this could have been a day of heartache and mourning," Trump's vice presidential pick, Ohio Sen. J.D. Vance, said in his convention speech Wednesday.

In his first prime-time speech since becoming the nominee for vice president, Vance spoke of growing up poor in Kentucky and Ohio, his mother addicted to drugs and his father absent, and of how he later joined the military and went on to the high-

est levels of U.S. politics.

Vance introduced himself to a national audience Wednesday after being chosen as Trump's running mate, sharing the story of his hardscrabble upbringing and making the case that his party best understands the challenges facing struggling Americans.

Speaking to a packed arena at the Republican National Convention, the Ohio senator cast himself as a fighter for a forgotten working class, making a direct appeal to the Rust Belt voters who helped drive Trump's surprise 2016 victory and voicing their anger and frustration.

"In small towns like mine in Ohio, or next door in Pennsylvania, or in Michigan, in states all across our country, jobs were sent overseas and children were sent to war," he said.

Troubled Gaza aid pier mission comes to an end

BY MATTHEW ADAMS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military pier used off the coast of Gaza intermittently during the last few months to transport humanitarian aid into the war-torn enclave will cease to operate, the Pentagon announced Wednesday.

"The temporary pier has achieved its intended effect. Now that that maritime surge mission was successful, it's now transitioning from a temporary pier in Gaza to a port in Ashdod, Israel," said Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, deputy commander of U.S. Central Command, which oversees military operations in the Middle East.

As the humanitarian mission shifts, Cooper said the new hybrid method of delivering aid from Cyprus to the port of Ashdod to North Gaza has been utilized for the past few weeks. He said more than 1 million pounds of aid was delivered into Gaza through this route in the last several weeks.

The floating pier — known as Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore, or JLOTS — was meant to provide another way to deliver aid to Gaza. Health officials have warned for months that millions of Gazans face extreme hunger as Israel continues its war against the Hamas militants who launched a surprise assault in October from the enclave.

The JLOTS operation was first announced March 7 during President Joe Biden's State of the Union address. The following day, Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, the top Pentagon spokesman, said the temporary pier would be operational within about 60 days.

But poor weather conditions and concerns about onshore security plagued the operation.

The pier has been at the port of Ashdod since it was removed at the end of June due to bad weather.

Aid operations using the pier began May

17, but the Pentagon announced less than two weeks later that it would be removed for repairs after suffering damage from rough seas and bad weather. It became operational again June 7. Cooper told reporters at the time that the issue with the pier was "solely from unanticipated weather."

A week later, CENTCOM again announced the pier was being temporarily removed due to high seas. It was reattached June 19 before being removed for the final time.

Security concerns also disrupted the distribution of aid. The United Nations suspended deliveries from the pier on June 9, a day after the Israeli military used the area around it for airlifts after a hostage rescue that killed more than 270 Palestinians. U.S. and Israeli officials said no part of the pier was used in the raid. However, U.N. officials said any perception in Gaza that the project was used might endanger aid work, The Associated Press reported.

Damaged turbine a factor in Stennis delays

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

A damaged steam turbine generator is contributing to the delayed maintenance of the USS John C. Stennis as the aircraft carrier undergoes its midlife overhaul, service officials said.

The unplanned repairs to one of the ship's eight steam turbine generators pushed the ship's maintenance back by 14 months to October 2026, Naval Sea Systems Command spokesman Alan Baribeau said. The same problem was discovered when overhauling the USS George Washington, he said.

Steam turbine generators convert heat from nuclear reactors into mechanical energy and electricity, acting as a power plant to keep the warship's many systems running.

The Stennis entered HII's Newport News Shipbuilding site

in Virginia in May 2021 for maintenance. Aircraft carriers are overhauled after about 25 years to extend their lifespans to a cumulative 50 years. The overhauls incorporate upgrades to propulsion equipment, infrastructure and electronic systems, as well as refueling the carrier's nuclear reactors.

"Each refueling and complex overhaul work package includes planned inspections and routine refurbishment of the eight turbine generators. These inspections on both George Washington and John C. Stennis revealed one generator on each ship with significant damage (beyond 'normal wear and tear') that resulted in unplanned growth work and contributed to schedule extensions on both ships," Baribeau said.

The turbine damage, he said, contributed to the majority of the

Stennis' overall schedule delay.

Overhauls for Nimitz-class carriers typically take about four years. The Navy estimates the Stennis overhaul will take about 5½ years. The USS George Washington, which was delivered to the Navy in 2023, took six years.

Receiving material late and labor challenges are also contributing factors to the Stennis overhaul delays, as was the case for the Washington, Baribeau said.

The Navy is conducting a study to review and better identify consistent overhaul issues. The goal of the study, Baribeau said, is to improve contracts so the shipbuilder can better plan and procure material to minimize schedule impacts.

Additionally, the Navy has worked to improve budget estimates for the USS Harry S. Tru-

man overhaul based on an assessment of previous labor hours.

"Improved budgeting, advance planning and material procurement are expected to result in improved execution performance on future refueling and complex overhauls," Baribeau said.

HII's Newport News Shipbuilding was awarded a \$913 million contract for the advanced procurement for refueling and overhaul of the Truman, the Pentagon announced in January. The advanced procurement work is set to be completed in 2026. The announcement did not set a time frame for the Truman to arrive at Newport News.

In the meantime, the Navy asked for additional funds through fiscal 2026 to provide off-ship housing for Stennis sailors.

US, Japan, S. Korea military leaders meet, laud alliance

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — The highest-ranking military officers from the U.S., Japan and South Korea gathered here Thursday to talk cooperation amid rising challenges from China, North Korea and Russia.

The meeting marked the second trip to Japan since November for Air Force Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown after becoming chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"I expect that the three of us sitting here in Tokyo today sends a message to the regional threats, but also globally on the strength of the relationship, our alliance and the work that we do," Brown told reporters while sitting next to his Japanese and South Korean counterparts at Camp Ichigaya, headquarters of Japan's Ministry of Defense.

Alongside him were Japanese Joint Staff chief of staff Gen. Yoshihide Yoshida and South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Adm. Kim Myung-soo.

The trio were joined by the head of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Adm. Samuel Paparo; U.S. Forces Japan commander Lt. Gen. Ricky Rupp; and U.S. Forces Korea commander Gen. Paul LaCamera.

Chinese aggression in the East and South China seas, North Korean missile tests and Russia's invasion of Ukraine are among the challenges faced by the three democracies.

The United States has long encouraged its allies to cooperate on security, but those efforts have been frustrated by historical disputes stemming from Japan's rule over Korea before and during World War II.

Sobriety checks to continue for Marines based in Japan

By BRIAN McELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Marine Corps plans to continue outgoing sobriety checks Friday and Saturday at all Japan installations and increase off-base patrols as a response to discontent on Okinawa over two service members' indictments for alleged sexual crimes.

The service is expected to announce Friday that it will continue at least one more weekend of "enhanced" gate checks that began July 12 and 13. Those checks include Breathalyzer tests for service members and civilians leaving Marine bases in Japan by vehicle or on foot, Marine Corps Installations Pacific spokesman Capt. Brett Dornhege-Lazaroff said by phone Thursday.

Breathalyzer tests may be ran-

domized if traffic delays grow too long, he said.

Gate sentries will check for liberty tier cards and liberty buddies where required and make sure people understand the liberty orders, Dornhege-Lazaroff said.

Random incoming and outgoing gate checks will increase throughout the week, along with patrols in popular nightlife areas such as Gate 2 Street outside Kadena Air Base and Kokusai Street in Naha, he said.

The commander of III Marine Expeditionary Force, Lt. Gen. Roger Turner, is working to make liberty rules for Marines on Okinawa apply to all service branches on the island, Dornhege-Lazaroff said Tuesday.

No change in liberty policy has been announced, thus far.

Dems make fresh push for Biden's exit

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former President Barack Obama has privately expressed concerns to Democrats about President Joe Biden's candidacy, and Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi privately warned Biden that Democrats could lose the ability to seize control of the House if he didn't step away from the 2024 race.

Pelosi also showed Biden polling that he likely can't defeat Republican Donald Trump, according to people familiar with the matter who insisted on anonymity to discuss it.

Obama has not spoken directly to Biden, two other people said. He has conveyed to allies that Biden needs to consider the viability of his campaign but has also made clear that the decision is one Biden needs to make.

Time racing, Democrats at the highest levels are making a criti-

cal push for Biden to reconsider his reelection bid, as unease grows at the White House and within the campaign at a fraught moment for the president and his party.

Biden has insisted he's not backing down, adamant he's the candidate who beat Trump before and will do it again. Pressed about reports Biden might be softening to the idea of leaving the race, his deputy campaign manager Quentin Fulks said Thursday: "He is not wavering on anything."

In recent days the president has become more committed to staying in the race, according to another person familiar with the matter.

But influential Democrats from the highest levels of the party apparatus, including congressional leadership headed by Senate Majority Leader Chuck

Schumer and House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, are sending signals of concern. Some Democrats hope Biden will assess the trajectory of the race and his legacy during this pause.

Using mountains of data showing Biden's standing could wipe out the ranks of Democrats in Congress, frank conversations in public and private and now the president's own time off the campaign trail after testing positive for COVID-19, many Democrats see an opportunity to encourage a reassessment.

If Democrats are seriously preparing the extraordinary step of replacing Biden and shifting Vice President Kamala Harris at the top of the ticket, this weekend will be critical to changing the president's mind, other people familiar with the private conversations said.

One said it's now or never

ahead of a planned virtual roll call to nominate the party's choice in early August, ahead of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Over the past week, Schumer and Jeffries, both of New York, have spoken privately to the president, candidly laying out the views of Democrats on Capitol Hill, including Democrats' concerns.

Separately, the chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, Rep. Suzan DelBene of Washington, spoke with Biden last week armed with fresh data. The campaign chief aired the concerns of front-line Democrats seeking election to the House.

And Wednesday, California Rep. Adam Schiff, a close ally of Pelosi, called for Biden to drop his reelection bid, saying he believes it's time to "pass the torch."

Democrats mull expelling Menendez from Senate

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Sen. Bob Menendez has shown no sign he will voluntarily resign from the Senate following his conviction on bribery charges, leaving Democratic senators contemplating an expulsion effort to force him from office.

While Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat, has six months remaining in his term, Democrats have made clear they don't want him in office any longer. Within minutes of the guilty verdict on Tuesday, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer called for his resignation and New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, who would name Menendez's replacement, said that the Senate should expel Menendez if he refused to step down.

Expulsion, which requires a two-thirds majority, is an exceedingly rare step in the Senate. The last time it was even seriously considered by the chamber was

almost 30 years ago, and only 15 senators — almost all during the Civil War — have ever been expelled.

Still, senators are preparing to make the push.

"He must stand up now and leave the Senate. He must do that, and if he refuses to do that, many of us, but I will lead that effort to make sure he is removed from the Senate," Sen. Cory Booker, New Jersey's other Democratic senator, told MSNBC late Tuesday.

"That is the right thing to do. That is the just thing to do."

After a jury found Menendez, 70, guilty of accepting bribes of gold and cash from three New Jersey businessmen and acting as a foreign agent for the Egyptian government, the senator did not comment on his political plans in brief remarks as he left the courthouse. But he vowed to appeal the verdict.

Biden tests positive for COVID-19 while on trail

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — President Joe Biden tested positive for COVID-19 while traveling Wednesday in Las Vegas and is experiencing "mild symptoms" including "general malaise" from the infection, the White House said.

Press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Biden will fly to his home in Delaware, where he will "self-isolate and will continue to carry out all of his duties fully during that time."

The news had first been shared by UnidosUS CEO Janet Murguía, who told guests at the group's convention in Las Vegas that the president had sent his regrets and could not appear because he tested positive for the virus.

Dr. Kevin O'Connor, the president's physician, said in a note that Biden, 81, "presented this afternoon with upper respirato-

ry symptoms, to include rhinorrhea (runny nose) and non-productive cough, with general malaise." After the positive COVID-19 test, Biden was prescribed the antiviral drug Paxlovid and has taken his first dose, O'Connor said.

Biden was slated to speak at the UnidosUS event in Las Vegas on Wednesday afternoon as part of an effort to rally Hispanic voters ahead of the November election. Instead, he departed for the airport to fly to Delaware, where he had already been planning to spend a long weekend at his home in Rehoboth Beach.

Biden gingerly boarded Air Force One and told reporters traveling with him, "I feel good." The president was not wearing a mask as he walked onto Air Force One.

Biden last tested positive for COVID-19 twice in the summer of 2022.

Families of troops killed in Kabul criticize Biden

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Relatives of some of the 13 American service members killed during the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan appeared on stage at the Republican National Convention on Wednesday in an emotional moment that revived one of the low points of President Joe Biden's presidency.

Many of the Gold Star families have criticized Biden for never publicly naming their loved ones. On stage Wednesday, one of the family members named each of the 13 service members, and the crowd echoed back each name as it was read aloud.

"Joe Biden has refused to recognize their sacrifice," Christy Shamblin, the mother-in-law of Marine Sgt. Nicole Gee, told the crowd. "Donald Trump knew all of our children's names. He knew all of their stories."

The crowd chanted "Never for-

get!" and "U.S.A.!" as Trump and the entire convention hall stood.

The display on the RNC's third day was an implicit response to Biden's repeated rebukes of Trump and his allegations that the former president doesn't respect veterans. Biden has often brought up a claim by retired Gen. John Kelly, who was Trump's chief of staff, that Trump referred to slain World War II soldiers as losers and suckers. Trump denies the allegation.

"President Biden cares deeply about our service members, their families, and the immense sacrifices they have made," Adrienne Watson, a National Security Council spokesperson, said in a statement. "That's why the President attended the dignified transfer of the 13 brave service members who lost their lives in Afghanistan on August 26, 2021; as well as, of the three who lost their

lives in Jordan earlier this year. As he said then and continues to believe now: Our country owes them a great deal of gratitude and a debt that we can never repay, and we will continue to honor their ultimate sacrifice."

The U.S. service members and 60 Afghans were killed by a suicide bombing at the Kabul airport in August 2021 as the U.S. worked feverishly to evacuate Americans and Afghans who helped the West during two decades of war.

The parents and loved ones of those service members have been in the political spotlight ever since, appearing before congressional hearings and doing news interviews.

Republicans have claimed that Biden's decision to remove U.S. soldiers after the two-decade war in Afghanistan was a strictly political move. But the agreement for the U.S. to withdraw from Af-

ghanistan was signed by Trump's administration in February 2020. The deal called for American troops to be out by May 2021, but Trump left office that January without leaving a plan in place for the actual withdrawal of forces.

Several months before the peace deal with the Taliban was signed in Doha, Qatar, Trump had contemplated inviting the Taliban leadership to Camp David in Maryland to sign an agreement. Those plans, which were vehemently objected to by senior military officials, were put on hold after a Taliban attack that killed a U.S. soldier.

Criticism of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan resonates with voters across party lines. Former Biden supporters, such as former New Hampshire House Speaker Steve Shurtleff, have cited the botched withdrawal as one reason why he wants Biden to step aside.

Leaker Teixeira also will face military court-martial

Associated Press

BOSTON—Massachusetts Air National Guard member Jack Teixeira, who pleaded guilty in March to federal criminal charges for leaking highly classified military documents, will now face a military court-martial.

Teixeira admitted to illegally collecting some of the nation's most sensitive secrets and sharing them on the social media platform Discord. He is facing military charges of disobeying orders and obstructing justice.

The U.S. Air Force said in a statement Wednesday that he will be tried at Hanscom Air Force Base in Massachusetts but no date has been set.

At a May hearing, military prosecutors said a court-martial is appropriate given that obeying orders is the "absolute core" of the military. But Teixeira's lawyers argued that further action

would amount to prosecuting him twice for the same offense.

Teixeira, who was part of the 102nd Intelligence Wing at Otis Air National Guard Base in Massachusetts, worked as a cyber transport systems specialist, essentially an information technology specialist responsible for military communications networks.

Teixeira was arrested just over a year ago.

He pleaded guilty on March 4 to six counts of willful retention and transmission of national defense information under a deal with prosecutors that calls for him to serve at least 11 years in prison. He's scheduled to be sentenced in that case in September.

The leak exposed unvarnished secret assessments of Russia's war in Ukraine, including information about troop movements and the provision of supplies and equipment to Ukrainian troops.

Sailors help save passengers on disabled boat in Mediterranean

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Quick action by Navy sailors on routine patrol in the eastern Mediterranean Sea helped save the lives of 30 people stranded on a boat adrift for days.

Sailors assigned to Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 79 spotted people indicating distress aboard the vessel Tuesday during flight operations and reported the sighting to the destroyer USS Bulkeley, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet said in a statement Wednesday.

While working with the Joint Rescue Coordination Center, Bulkeley requested that a nearby commercial ship, Seaways Sabine, help the stranded single-engine inflatable small boat.

Crew members from Seaways Sabine ultimately found

31 people aboard the boat, three of whom needed medical attention, according to the statement.

Corpsmen from Bulkeley traveled by boat to the commercial vessel to offer medical assistance to the three unresponsive people. One died following an extended period of CPR, the Navy said.

The other two people were in stable condition and taken to the nearest suitable port by the merchant ship. The remaining 28 passengers on the boat were being taken by Seaways Sabine to Port Sidi Kurayr, Egypt, the Navy said.

"This incident, while unfortunate, underscores our Navy's ability to respond to those in need and showcases the readiness and capabilities of our team," said Cmdr. Arturo Trejo, commander of Bulkeley, one of four destroyers deployed to Naval Station Rota in Spain.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

County to pay \$7M after man killed while jailed

MI DETROIT — A Detroit-area county agreed to a \$7 million settlement in the death of a man who was severely beaten by another man while in jail for a misdemeanor.

Separately, a federal prosecutor announced Monday that the Wayne County jail has agreed to improve how it serves people with disabilities and mental health needs.

“Wayne County has a long and troubled history of providing inadequate services to inmates who have disabilities,” U.S. Attorney Dawn Ison said.

Thomas Carr, 53, died a year ago after suffering severe head injuries while serving a brief sentence for drunken driving. He was attacked in his cell by a man who was being held on domestic violence charges and had a history of mental health problems.

Attorneys for Carr’s family said jail staff knew the cellmate was a risk but did not house him in a mental health unit or segregate him from others, The Detroit News reported.

At the time, the sheriff’s office, which operates the jail, said there was a “staffing emergency” in July 2023.

Ex-detective convicted in coerced confession case

PA PHILADELPHIA — A former Philadelphia homicide detective accused of beating a murder suspect to obtain a confession and then lying about it in court has been convicted of obstruction and perjury charges.

Prosecutors said they would

seek a prison term for James Pitts, 53, when he’s sentenced on Oct. 4. Pitts, who maintains his innocence, declined comment after the verdict was handed down Tuesday.

The charges Pitts faced stemmed from the case of a man exonerated in the killing of a jewelry store owner after spending nearly 11 years in prison. Obina Oniyah was convicted in 2013 for the 2010 murder of William Glatz during a robbery. Glatz and one of the two armed robbers were killed during the exchange of gunfire.

Prosecutors have said Oniyah was convicted largely on the strength of a confession taken by Pitts. But the man maintained before, during and after the trial that Pitts had beaten him and threatened him to get him to sign a false statement.

A photogrammetry expert examined video from the robbery and concluded that Oniyah was far taller than the remaining gunman in the robbery — 6-foot-3-inches compared to no taller than 5-foot-11-inches, the expert said. He was exonerated in May 2021.

5 musket balls found, likely fired in Revolutionary War

MA CONCORD — Nearly 250 years ago, hundreds of militiamen lined a hillside in Massachusetts and started firing a barrage of musket balls toward retreating British troops, marking the first major battle in the Revolutionary War.

The latest evidence of that firefight is five musket balls dug up last year near the North Bridge site in the Minute Man National Historical Park in Concord. Early analysis of the balls — gray with sizes ranging from

a pea to a marble — indicates colonial militia members fired them at British forces on April 19, 1775.

“As soon as they pulled one of them out of the ground, there was kind of a ‘look what I have,’” said Minute Man park ranger and historic weapons specialist Jarrad Fuoss, who was there the day the musket balls were discovered.

Musket balls were previously found in the historic park of about a thousand acres outside Boston, which marks a series of opening battles of the American Revolution.

The latest discoveries are the most ever found from that fight. The event led to the conflict escalating and was later dubbed the “shot heard round the world” by Ralph Waldo Emerson in his 1837 poem “Concord Hymn.”

2nd man pleads not guilty in electrical grid attacks

OR PORTLAND — A second Washington state man has pleaded not guilty to federal charges accusing him of damaging power substations in Oregon in 2022.

Tacoma resident Zachary Rosenthal, 33, pleaded not guilty in federal court in Portland on Tuesday to three counts of damaging an energy facility.

On Nov. 24, 2022, Rosenthal is accused of damaging the Ostrander Substation in Oregon City; four days later, he’s accused of damaging the Sunny-side Substation in Clackamas, according to the indictment.

Nathaniel Cheney, of Centralia, Wash., pleaded not guilty in April in connection with the attacks. He was released from custody on conditions with a

trial scheduled to begin in August.

A second indictment unsealed Tuesday also charges Rosenthal with stealing two dozen firearms from a federal firearms licensee in January 2023 in the Portland area and illegally possessing firearms as a convicted felon.

He also pleaded not guilty to those charges. Rosenthal was detained pending further court proceedings.

Neo-Nazi leader charged in poisoned candy plot

NY NEW YORK — The leader of a neo-Nazi extremist group based in Eastern Europe has been charged with plotting to have an associate dress up as Santa Claus and hand out poisoned candy to Jewish children in New York City to sow terror, prosecutors said Tuesday.

Michail Chkhikvishvili, a 21-year-old man from the Republic of Georgia, was indicted on four charges, including soliciting hate crimes and acts of mass violence, according to a statement from the U.S. Department of Justice. He allegedly leads the Maniac Murder Cult, which prosecutors said is an international extremist group that adheres to a “neo-Nazi accelerationist ideology and promotes violence and violent acts against racial minorities, the Jewish community and other groups it deems ‘undesirables.’”

Chkhikvishvili was arrested after he tried to recruit an undercover law enforcement officer to join his group and commit violent crimes such as bombings and arsons, according to court documents.

— From wire reports

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Curry leads US men to rout of Serbia

Associated Press

Stephen Curry was relatively quiet offensively during the U.S. Olympic team's first two exhibitions before the Paris Games.

He got a lot more assertive on Wednesday with his official Olympic debut less than two weeks away.

Curry scored 24 points, Bam Adebayo added 17 and the United States beat Serbia 105-79 to improve to 3-0 in its five-game slate of exhibitions in advance of the Paris Olympics.

Anthony Davis finished with seven points, six rebounds and six blocks, helping to lead a U.S. defensive effort that limited Serbia throughout. Anthony Edwards had 16 points, and LeBron James added 11.

Curry scored the first nine points for the U.S. in a flurry that James said was by design.

"We drew it up for that particular reason, to get him going," James said. "He sees one go

through the hoop, you see what it opens up for the rest of his game, for the rest of the game for all of us. He set the tone."

The U.S. led by as many as 31 points in the last of a pair of warm-up games in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The Americans go to London to play two more tuneups before heading to France. The first is Saturday against South Sudan, followed by a matchup with Germany on Monday at London's O2 Arena.

U.S. coach Steve Kerr likes the progress his team has made and said its ability to overwhelm teams with different defensive looks will be vital.

"I think the identity of the team is our depth, the strength of the team is the depth," Kerr said. "If we can play in 4- or 5-minute bursts of intense defense, hitting bodies, rebounding, being physical, then it makes sense to play that way. We'll see if we can keep doing it."

The U.S. had an uneven start before using a 16-2 run in the second quarter to take a 56-42 advantage and led 59-45 at half-time.

Nikola Jokic had 16 points and 11 rebounds for Serbia. Aleksa Avramovic added 14 points. Serbia was playing its second game in two days, coming off a loss to Australia on Tuesday in which it rested captain Bogdan Bogdanovic.

Serbia was without Bogdanovic for the second straight game as it struggled offensively, shooting just 41% (29 of 71). The U.S. also held a 30-21 rebounding edge. Adebayo and Davis combined for 14 rebounds.

"Bam and AD together are really something," Kerr said. "Just the switching, but they can also protect the rim and be in a drop if we go to that coverage."

After nearly squandering a big lead in its narrow victory over Australia on Monday, there

was no such letdown for the U.S. this time.

The Americans led by 25 after three quarters and quickly increased it to 30 in the final quarter.

Lineup shuffle

The U.S. used its third different starting lineup, going with Curry, Jrue Holiday, Jayson Tatum, LeBron James and Joel Embiid.

The only constants over the three exhibitions have been Curry, James and Embiid.

One of the reasons Embiid's presence on the roster was a desire for the U.S. coaching staff this cycle was to counter bigger teams like Serbia, which features a trio of 7-footers.

Embiid's conditioning still isn't at its peak. But he was active on both ends, finding cutters on the offensive end and being an active deterrent in the lane on defense.

Tokyo champ Harrison traverses troubled waters

Associated Press

Nevin Harrison's dreams came true in Tokyo when she won the inaugural Olympic women's canoe sprint 200 at age 19.

Much of what followed the American's gold-medal moment has seemed more like a nightmare.

The Seattle native fought through chronic lower back pain that made it hard for her to get out of bed at times last summer. She has dealt with a hamstring injury and had issues with her previous coach. As her results fell short of boosted expectations, she said some questioned if she would be a one-hit wonder.

"Once you have a big accomplishment like that, it becomes everybody's business instead of just yours," she said.

She said a sports psychologist helped her, and now she's back

and ready to go for the Paris Olympics with a new coach in Joseph Harper. She said she wants to do this right.

"There was no other person that was going to get me to where I wanted to be," said Harrison, now 22. "And if I continued in that negative headspace and really was just a complete mess, that I wasn't going to reach my goals. And then I was going to kind of waste all this time chasing after something that I was blowing for myself."

Doing it right, she believes, includes making another run at gold. She wants to do it again, with the benefit of the wisdom she's gained in the past three years.

"I think a good motivator is knowing the feeling of how it feels to win a gold," she said. "It's not like, 'It would be so amazing to do that.' It's like, I know exactly how that felt, and

that's exactly how I want to feel again. So it's kind of like knowing the feeling that I'm searching for, which is helpful."

Harrison said the lead-up to this Olympics is much different. She said there is more pressure this time, but she's learned to embrace the attention.

Harper said Harrison became a victim of her success. She knocked off Canada's Laurence Vincent Lapointe, a multiple-time world champion, to win in 2021. Harper said Harrison's upset motivated the competition.

"She raised the bar so high with her performance in Tokyo that it's her fault that it's not as easy as it was," Harper said. "I'm not saying it was easy, but it's her fault that all the other girls in the world are now trying to get to the bar that she raised too. And a lot of them have reached these newer heights."

Harper said Harrison remains among the world's best because of her power and explosiveness, coupled with a rare work ethic.

It hasn't been all bad for Harrison since winning the gold — she won the world championship in the 200 sprint in 2022, qualified for the U.S. Olympic quota spot by finishing fourth at the 2023 world championships and won the U.S. Olympic trials in March.

Harper said Harrison knows how to "turn on the game face" and believes she is a threat in Paris.

"She's very, very determined that way," he said. "Like, second place is not an option for her. I think a common theme of all the greats in all the different sports is people say that athlete hates to lose. Nobody likes to lose. But the greats hate to lose with a passion."

Police seal off Seine before Olympics opener

Associated Press

PARIS—A special kind of iron curtain came down across central Paris on Thursday, with the beginning of an Olympic anti-terrorism perimeter along the banks of the River Seine sealing off a miles-long area to Parisians and tourists who hadn't applied in advance for a pass.

The words on many lips were "QR code," the pass that grants access beyond snaking metal barriers that delineate the security zone set up to protect the Olympic Games' opening ceremony July 26.

"I didn't know it started today," said Emmanuelle Witt, a 35-year-old communications freelancer who was stopped by police near the Alma bridge while biking across town. She desperately went on her phone to fill out the online form to get her QR code, unaware that the vetting process could take several days.

Those with the precious code

—either on their phones or printed out on pieces of paper — passed smoothly past police checkpoints at gaps in the barriers taller than most people.

Those without got mostly turned away — with no amount of grumbling and cajoling making officers budge.

"That's too much, that's over the top, that whole thing is a pain," grumbled Nassim Bennamou, a delivery man who was denied access to the street leading to Notre Dame Cathedral on his scooter.

"Even the GPS is confused, I have no idea how I'm going to work today," he added.

While authorities announced the code system last year and have been meeting with local residents for months to explain the restrictions, not everyone was aware. Officers patiently explained to visitors without the pass how to reach iconic Paris monuments without going through the restricted zone.

"We had no idea we needed a QR code," said Takao Sakamoto, 55, who was denied access to the Eiffel Tower near the Bir Hakeim Metro station. Visiting from Japan with his wife, he took a photo of the tower from a distance, behind fences and police cars. "That will do," Sakamoto remarked with despair.

On the other hand, visitors who were lucky enough to come across officers who leniently let them pass without QR codes and others who'd equipped themselves with them were treated to the sight of near-empty riverside boulevards that, in normal times, heave with traffic.

"There's no one around!" sang a happy cyclist on a street he had largely to himself. With police seemingly everywhere, another man walking past a riverside café with fewer than usual customers loudly quipped: "You can leave your money and cell phones on the tables, there's definitely no thieves!"

"It's surreal, it really feels like we're the only ones here," said Sarah Bartnicka from Canada. Enjoying a morning jog with a friend, the 29-year-old took a selfie with a police officer on the deserted Iéna bridge to capture the moment.

Paris has repeatedly suffered deadly extremist attacks, most notably in 2015. Up to 45,000 police and gendarmes as well as 10,000 soldiers are being deployed for Olympic security.

"I understand why they're doing this," said Carla Money, a 64-year-old American who managed to pass the barriers with her family.

The perimeter went into effect early Thursday morning and will last through the ceremony. As an exception, Paris has decided to hold the opening of its first Games in a century on the river rather than in a stadium, like previous host cities. Most of the river security measures will be lifted after the show.

Olympic tennis players back on clay after grass at Wimbledon

Associated Press

PARIS — The competition surface doesn't change for most Olympic sports. A pool's a pool. A track's a track. A wrestling mat's a mat. And so on. Tennis? That's a whole other story, with tournaments contested on clay, hard or grass courts — and now there's a shift for the Paris Games.

For the first time in more than 30 years, the tennis competition at an Olympics will be held on red clay, which means players who recently made the adjustment from the dirt at the French Open in early June to grass at Wimbledon in early July will need to reverse course again in short order.

The "terre battue" at Roland Garros used for the French Open hosts Olympic matches starting July 27 — two weeks after Wimbledon wrapped up with singles titles for Barbora Krejčíková of the Czech Republic and Carlos Alcaraz of Spain — and the transition back to that site is more concerning to some athletes than others.

"That'll definitely be interesting. But everyone's kind of doing it. We'll all be in the same boat," said Jessica Pegula, an American ranked in the top 10 who is expected to play

singles, women's doubles with U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff and perhaps mixed doubles, too. "I usually don't struggle too much with switching. And I like how the courts play there. It might be easier than some other places we play on clay. When the weather is warm in Paris, it plays pretty true. There's a good speed. There's not a lot to get used to."

For her, maybe.

"It's going to be the first time for me, going from grass to clay," said Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan, the 2022 Wimbledon champion and a semifinalist there this month. "It's not easy. Physically, it's not easy, (or) mentally."

One additional factor on some players' minds: There will be another brief turnaround after the Olympics to prepare for the move to the hard courts ahead of the U.S. Open, which starts in late August. That's less than a month after the medals are awarded in France.

"It's awful for the schedule," said Taylor Fritz, Pegula's teammate for the United States and someone who just reached the quarterfinals at the All England Club. "It makes absolutely no sense. It screws everything up, for sure."

Tennis becomes a different sport, in some key ways, depending on where it's being played.

"You have to adapt to it. ... It's going to be weird, obviously, going back on the clay quickly," said Cam Norrie, who will represent Britain at the Olympics, "but we're changing surface and changing variables all the time."

Clay is softer and slower, which can dull the power on serves and groundstrokes and create longer exchanges, putting a premium on stamina, while the grittiness can magnify the effect of heavy topspin. Grass is speedier and balls bounce lower. Hard courts tend to produce truer, midrange bounces and will generally reward those who go for point-ending shots.

The biggest difference among them might be the footwork. Clay requires sliding. Grass is more about choppy steps, to avoid slipping. Hard courts generally do not cause as many falls as either of the others.

"For a clay-court player, the adjustment's not that hard," 1989 French Open champion Michael Chang said. "For (people) that have grown up playing on the surface, you just know the surface so well."

Some MLB stars need surge before free agency

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Pete Alonso's disappointing performance in this year's Home Run Derby wasn't a particularly big deal for the future of his big-league career.

His play over the next three months could be a different story. The 29-year-old is one of the most coveted free agents in Major League Baseball for the upcoming offseason and could make himself a lot of money — or potentially lose a lot of it — depending on how he plays in the second half of the season.

Alonso played in his fourth All-Star game on Tuesday night, making the National League team despite a relatively lackluster first half. He's hitting .240 with 19 homers and 51 RBIs and a career-low .772 OPS. Those numbers might be pretty good for most players, but for a man who wants to hit the market as one of the game's elite players, it's not up to his standards.

Alonso said he's not worried

about his personal situation. He just wants to play well so his New York Mets make the playoffs — which would happen if the season ended with the first half.

"I don't dwell on it at all because I'm just focused on winning games and I'm just really focused on doing what I can every single day to help the team in a positive way," Alonso said. "I'm honestly just focusing on performing and doing the best I can to help my team win. I'm just focused on the season at hand."

Here are a few other potential free agents who are looking to raise their stock in the second half:

1B Paul Goldschmidt, Cardinals: Does the 36-year-old slugger have anything left in the tank for another contract? He was the National League MVP in 2022, but has regressed in a hurry since that point. The first baseman is hitting just .230 with 13 homers, 37 RBIs and a ca-

reer-low .664 OPS.

3B Alex Bregman, Astros: The 30-year-old has bounced back somewhat from a very slow start, posting a .256 average, 12 homers and .730 OPS through 92 games. But those numbers are still below his career averages. A big second half would help ease fears that he's on the downhill side of his career.

OF Juan Soto, Yankees: His first half hasn't been a problem. Far from it. The 25-year-old was one of the game's best players in the first half of the season, batting .295 with 23 homers and a robust .985 OPS. He's been worth 5.0 WAR through 94 games. But if he can continue this pace, or even push it forward slightly, the bidding war in the upcoming offseason could be close to the Ohtani-style extravaganza of last offseason.

SP Walker Buehler, Dodgers: The two-time All-Star returned earlier this year from his second Tommy John surgery and

things haven't gone particularly well. The right-hander is 1-4 with a 5.84 ERA through eight starts, averaging just more than four innings per start. He was one of the game's elite pitchers in 2021 and doesn't turn 30 until later this month, but it's fair to wonder if he'll ever be the same.

Wild card races

Nearly 100 games into this season, there are still 25 teams with legitimate playoff aspirations.

The National League wild card race is shaping up to be particularly tight. The St. Louis Cardinals (50-46), New York Mets (49-46), Arizona Diamondbacks (49-48), San Diego Padres (50-49), Pittsburgh Pirates (48-48), San Francisco Giants (47-50), Cincinnati Reds (47-50) and Chicago Cubs (47-51) are separated by just four games in the standings.

The Cardinals and Mets would make the playoffs if the season ended today.

Changing weather can have major impact on British Open

Associated Press

TROON, Scotland — Justin Thomas made his British Open debut at Royal Troon eight years ago, and it taught him everything he needs to know about what can make this major so maddening.

It had nothing to do with gorse bushes or pot bunkers. It was about weather and tee times.

"I was in the bad one," Thomas said.

By that he meant the bad side of the draw, and it's part of the charm — or curse — of the Open.

It was fairly benign in the opening round at Royal Troon in 2016, all the way through Friday morning until 30 mph wind and a driving rain made players in the afternoon feel they were on a different course than those who played early.

So severe was the change in weather that the leading 14 players going into the weekend, including Henrik Stenson and Phil Mickelson, came from one side of the draw.

"I've never in my life grinded so hard to finish 50th," Thomas said. "I shot 77 and made the cut by one. The worst part was Saturday

and Sunday. The morning was the worst and you couldn't gain any ground."

Summer daylight hours in the United Kingdom enable players to start off one tee for the entire day. Justin Leonard hit the opening tee shot on Thursday at 6:30 a.m. Sam Horsfield was the last to play, teeing off at about 4:30 p.m.

That allows the weather to play a massive role. That happens elsewhere, but it is more pronounced in links golf. Sometimes the worst of it is in the morning, as in 2008 when Rich Beem and Sandy Lyle walked off Royal Birkdale after nine and 10 holes, respectively.

The forecast for the start of the 152nd Open was for off-and-on rain during the day with gusts in the 20 mph range early in the afternoon — about the time Rory McIlroy and Jon Rahm finished their rounds — and then easing late. And then more gusts Friday afternoon.

It's worth noting the forecast seems to change by the day. No one will really know until they're in the clear, or feeling like they are being blown into the Irish sea.

In recent times, Louis Oosthuizen caught the good side of the draw in St. Andrews. It was relatively calm all of Thursday — McIlroy opened with a 63 in 2010 — and then the wind became so fierce in the afternoon that McIlroy shot 80.

Oosthuizen finished his 65-67 start right before the wind came through. His name stayed atop the leaderboard for 11 hours that day and he led by five when it was over and wound up winning by seven shots. Good golf and a good draw go a long way.

"It's part and parcel of the Open. There's always good draws and bad draws," Tommy Fleetwood said. "Generally if you get unlucky and there is a good side and a bad side, that's wiping out half the field already. The good news is if you're on the good side. That's half of them gone and you only have to beat half the field.

"But that's always been part of the Open and that's the beauty of it," he said. "You have to be ready for whatever the conditions bring, along with the golf course. It's very important to embrace what can happen."