

Harris hits mark for Democratic delegates

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Vice President Kamala Harris has secured the support of enough Democratic delegates to become her party's nominee against Republican Donald Trump, according to an Associated Press survey, as top Democrats rallied to her in the aftermath of President Joe Biden's decision to drop his bid for reelection.

The quick coalescing behind Harris marked an attempt by the party to put weeks of internecine drama over Biden's political future behind them and to unify behind the task of defeating Trump with just over 100 days until Election Day. Prominent Democratic elected officials, party leaders and political organizations quickly lined up behind Harris in the day after Biden's exit from the race, and her campaign set a new 24-hour record for presidential donations Monday.

Several state delegations met

late Monday to confirm their support for Harris, including Texas and her home state of California.

By Monday night, Harris had the support of well more than the 1,976 delegates she'll need to win on a first ballot, according to the AP tally. No other candidate was named by a delegate contacted by the AP.

California state Democratic Chairman Rusty Hicks said 75% to 80% of the state's delegation were on a call Tuesday and they unanimously supported Harris.

"I've not heard anyone mentioning or calling for any other candidate," Hicks said. "Tonight's vote was a momentous one."

Still, the AP is not calling Harris the new presumptive nominee. That's because the convention delegates are still free to vote for the candidate of their choice at the convention in August or if Democrats go through with a virtual roll call ahead of that gathering in Chicago.

Harris, in a statement, responded to the AP tally, saying she is "grateful to President Biden and everyone in the Democratic Party who has already put their faith in me, and I look forward to taking our case directly to the American people."

Worries over Biden's fitness for office were replaced by fresh signs of unity after a seismic shift to the presidential contest that upended both major political parties' carefully honed plans for the 2024 race.

Speaking to campaign staff in Wilmington, Del., Harris acknowledged the "rollercoaster" of the last several weeks, but expressed confidence in her new campaign team.

"It is my intention to go out and earn this nomination and to win," she said. She promised to "unite our Democratic Party, to unite our nation, and to win this election."

She quickly leaned into the themes that will be prominent in her campaign against Trump

over the coming 100 days, contrasting her time as a prosecutor with Trump's felony convictions — "I know Donald Trump's type," she said — and casting herself as a defender of economic opportunity and abortion access.

"Our fight for the future is also a fight for freedoms," she said. "The baton is in our hands."

The president called into the meeting from his home in Rehoboth Beach, Del., where he is recovering from COVID-19, to lend his support to Harris. He planned to talk about his decision to step aside in an address to the nation later this week.

"The name has changed at the top of the ticket, but the mission hasn't changed at all," Biden said in his first public remarks since announcing his decision to step aside, promising he was "not going anywhere" and plans to campaign on Harris' behalf.

Biden said of his decision, "It was the right thing to do."

Officers in Maine shooter's unit punished for failures

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

The Army punished three officers for mishandling Sgt. 1st Class Robert Card's mental health case in the months before he killed 18 people in Maine, yet a service investigation found the military could have done little to stop his shooting spree.

The Army Reserve Command investigation published Tuesday found multiple failures and miscommunications in Card's chain of command in the months before the reservist committed the mass killing Oct. 25, 2023. While the 115-page re-

port largely cleared the Army of blame for events that led to Card's attack on a bar and bowling alley in the town of Lewiston and his suicide, it recommended the Army Reserve review and update its mental health policies.

Lt. Gen. Jody Daniels, who leads Army Reserve Command at Fort Liberty, N.C., said Monday that the service could not compel Card to seek mental health treatment or remove his weapons while he was not on official military orders.

She said other agencies, such as local law enforcement, might

have been able to do more to stop Card, but the Army Reserve could not.

"We're doing the best that we can in terms of understanding what did transpire and then make changes for the future," Daniels told reporters at the Pentagon after accepting the findings of the report. "Whether it could have been avoided is anyone's hindsight at this point."

A separate investigation by an independent commission in Maine found in March that Card was in the middle of a psychotic episode in the weeks leading up

to the shootings, and local police had probable cause to begin a "yellow flag" process and should have sought a judge's permission under state law to confiscate Card's personal firearms temporarily.

The officers — whose names and ranks were redacted in the report and who Daniels declined to name Monday — faced punishment that would likely halt them from future promotions, essentially ending their Army careers, the general said. She declined to provide more specific details about the punishment.

Romance may be central in bribery case

The Washington Post

A career Pentagon official who had a romantic relationship with a married four-star admiral could become a key government witness against him, according to his lawyer and court filings in a high-profile U.S. military corruption case that accuses the admiral of steering work to a New York company in exchange for post-retirement employment.

The woman is the only uncharged person who attended a key lunch meeting in July 2021, where prosecutors allege the Navy's former second-highest-ranking officer, Adm. Robert P. Burke, 62, agreed with two executives to award a sole-source contract and help win further Navy business for their company in exchange for a \$500,000-a-year job and stock options after he retired.

In a court filing calling attention to the relationship, attorneys for the two executives charged with bribery and conspiracy to commit bribery with Burke say he misled them into believing his romantic partner was there to vet the propriety of the deal, and claimed he had also previously discussed promoting their technology services firm, Next Jump, in the presence of other defense officials.

Three months before the lunch meeting, Burke had broached the idea in the presence of another "high-ranking DOD official" of acting as an "ambassador" for the firm seeking government business while he was the Navy's top commander in Europe and Africa, the executives' filing said. There would be no problem with strict Pentagon revolving-door ethics rules meant to prevent conflicts of interest, he assured them, because Next Jump was not technically "a defense contractor," because it provided executive leadership

training, not warfighting material such as weapons or parts, the filing said.

The earlier meeting and his relationship with a key potential witness to the forging of the alleged bribery scheme were disclosed Friday in a court filing by Next Jump co-chief executives Charlie Kim, 50, and Meghan Messenger, 47. All three defendants have pleaded not guilty, questioning the logic of offering a \$500,000-a-year job for what was ultimately a \$355,000 sole-source award, and denying that Burke's other actions for future business warrant his becoming only the second and senior-most U.S. admiral to be charged with committing a federal crime while on active duty.

Seeking to be tried separately, the executives' defense argues that Burke's statements in the presence of other officials show they relied in good faith on his assurances that their actions were proper, even as they implicated the admiral and raised questions over Navy leadership's contracting culture.

The Burke prosecution is focused on one transaction, but its emerging details reflect the challenges the Navy has faced in recent years in combating reported command failures and corruption. Burke helped lead its response while serving as chief of naval personnel from 2016 to 2019, and vice chief of naval operations from 2019 to 2020, before retiring in summer 2022 as commander in Europe.

Over that span, the Navy managed the fallout of the worst corruption scandal in its modern history, involving disgraced defense contractor Leonard "Fat Leonard" Francis. It met escalating complaints of sexual harassment and sexual assault in the ranks. And it experienced two deadly warship

collisions that killed 17 sailors and exposed leadership, readiness and training breakdowns, two months apart in 2017.

Burke has said he contacted Next Jump after the wave of scandals to address a crisis of ethics and leadership. The e-commerce firm founded by Kim — whose Perks at Work has evolved into the world's biggest employee discounts program — was lauded in a 2016 book by Harvard Business School researchers for its human development, and it was trying to convert its nonprofit training program for organizations into a second business line, starting with the Navy.

Now, Burke and Next Jump's leaders face questions of their own practices and judgment. Friday's defense filing, for example, suggests that if there was a bribery conspiracy, the alleged plotters appeared to hardly keep it a secret.

Recapping the July 2021 lunch meeting in an email to Next Jump personnel shortly afterward, Kim wrote that they "talked equity salary etc.," and Burke potentially joining the company the following year, according to joint filings by Kim attorney William A. Burck for both executives. "While Burke indicated that he wanted to resign from the Navy 'next week,' [Kim and Messenger] preferred that he stay with the Navy as he would continue to help them navigate the contract process," Kim told colleagues, according to the filing.

The defense does not name the woman with Burke at the meeting. An indictment returned May 30 identified her only as "Person 3," a civilian Navy employee and companion of Burke. The admiral described her to the executives as a colleague who worked in the Office of the Under Secretary of the Navy, and she "actively par-

ticipated" in talks over potential terms, the filing said.

Kim and Messenger did not know and "had no reason to believe the senior Naval official was also Burke's 'companion' because they knew that Burke was married to a different woman," the filing added.

At the earlier meeting, in April, Burke was joined by a different "high-ranking" defense official whose name was redacted, the filing said. The admiral said he wanted to be the company's ambassador "immediately," the executives said, and the second official told them later that she would follow up with information regarding conflict-of-interest rules for top Navy officials such as Burke, who was one of only nine four-star Navy admirals when he retired in 2022, the filing said.

Kim and Messenger gave detailed updates to more than "70 sophisticated [Next Jump] investors" about their job talks with Burke and his ability in the government to send them contracts, the filing said.

That could be valuable evidence against Burke, but their lawyers offered it as proof that the executives lacked corrupt intent or understanding that they were doing wrong. They also argued that a jury could unfairly hold Burke's relationship while he was married and lies to the Navy against them.

Burke attorney Tim Parlatore said the admiral's intimate relationship with Person 3 occurred while he was in the beginning stages of a divorce.

Burke did not ultimately divorce his wife, the couple reconciled, and they remain married, Parlatore said.

"We disagree with the factual basis of these papers but agree that a severance is appropriate," Parlatore said. Burke and his wife declined to comment.

US military unveils new Arctic strategy

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department is working to modernize early warning systems and build a communication network in the Arctic as warmer weather opens more waterways and allows Russia and China to threaten stability in the region.

“Climate change and the resulting shifts in the operating environment require us to rethink how we best protect our warfighters and prevent conflict. This transformation affects how we support our allies and partners, and it impacts our ability to deter and, if needed, defeat our adversaries. And that’s exactly what this new Arctic strategy takes into account,” said Kathleen Hicks, the deputy defense secretary.

The U.S. will take a “monitor and respond” approach by enhancing the Joint Force’s Arctic technology, engaging with allies and partners, including local authorities and Alaskan native tribes, and being more present in the Arctic region, according to the 2024 Arctic Strategy released Monday by the Penta-

gon.

The 18-page document includes efforts to update long-range early warning systems and tracking sensors and maritime surveillance systems for the North American Aerospace Defense Command, as well as conduct independent and joint military operations in the region.

The strategy comes as the Arctic warms three times faster than the rest of the planet. The Arctic could experience its first practically ice-free summer by 2030, according to the Defense Department. Melting sea ice opens the possibility of new shipping lanes and greater access to undersea natural resources that Russia has been looking to exploit.

Russia, the largest of the eight Arctic nations, has built up military infrastructure in the region and has a clear route to the U.S. through the Arctic. Russia’s Arctic access, the document reads, could be used to constrain the ability of the United States to respond to crises in Europe and the Indo-Pacific regions.

Additionally, China declared

itself a “near-Arctic state” in 2018, signaling interest in the region. Russia and China have been collaborating on development in the Arctic, as well as conducting joint training exercises for years, raising U.S. and NATO concerns.

“We must have a strategy that ensures our military readiness in the face of these changes, ensuring our ability to quickly respond to threats in the region and to the overall demands they place on our force,” Hicks said.

The 2024 strategy, she said, works to that end.

Iris Ferguson, the deputy assistant secretary for Arctic & Global Resilience, described the strategy as being “action oriented,” which she said distinguishes it from prior Arctic strategies.

“We unpack where we need to sustain our investments, especially in critical capabilities. What do we have to see? How do we communicate? Do we have the right equipment to operate in the region? My office exists to champion these capabilities, which are vital to the successful implementation of our strategy,” Ferguson said.

To better monitor the High North, the Defense Department will modernize its long-range aerospace and maritime surveillance systems. The Pentagon is also researching options for new space-based missile-warning and observational systems and assessing ways to improve ground-based sensors to complement existing NORAD capabilities. Hicks estimated the Defense Department had invested \$43 million in ground-based sensors in recent years.

A lack of satellite coverage in the Arctic has challenged the establishment of communications that would facilitate tactical and strategic communications, the strategy reads. To combat this, the Pentagon has contracted Starlink, SpaceX and OneWeb to provide services for satellite communications terminals. Connecting terminals to satellite constellations will be tested in the summer of 2025, Ferguson said.

The Defense Department is also investing in cold weather equipment and mobility for Arctic-based troops living and working in the austere environment.

Incidents on Okinawa prompt a new USFJ initiative

By BRIAN McELHINEY
AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — U.S. Forces Japan and the Japanese government are planning a “new forum of cooperation” with Okinawa’s leaders and community members in response to two U.S. service members’ recent indictments on sexual assault charges.

The forum will “serve as a venue for the constructive exchange of ideas in the pursuit of shared goals,” USFJ commander Lt. Gen. Ricky Rupp said in a statement posted on USFJ’s website and social media accounts Monday evening.

“Recently, there have been

allegations of misconduct that stand in opposition to who we are, what we stand for, and our commitments to the U.S.-Japan Alliance,” he wrote. “These incidents overshadow the friendship and professionalism we exhibit daily and do not reflect the intentions or actions of the preponderance of U.S. service members who serve honorably in this country.”

The forum will aim to “foster productive dialogue between U.S. forces leadership and local communities in Okinawa,” USFJ spokeswoman Lt. Col. Mindy Yu told Stars and Stripes in an email Tuesday.

“At this time, the structure and composition of the forum is

still in the early stages of discussions with the Government of Japan,” she wrote.

Details on the forum are yet to be determined, Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said at a news conference Tuesday.

“We will fully cooperate to facilitate a constructive exchange of ideas with the local community to achieve bilaterally shared goals, including the prevention of crimes and accidents involving U.S. service members and their civilian components,” he said.

Rupp said he is meeting this week on Okinawa with U.S. commanders and service members to reinforce his expecta-

tions and to “solicit feedback.”

USFJ is reviewing current liberty policies “with the aim of fostering consistent policies across U.S. forces in Okinawa,” the post states.

“Lt. Gen. Rupp is traveling to Okinawa and other regions in Japan this week to meet with component leaders, installation commanders and service members to assess possible updates to ensure service members maintain the high standards expected of them,” Yu wrote in her email.

III Marine Expeditionary Force acknowledged questions emailed by Stars and Stripes but had not responded by close of business Tuesday.

Secret Service chief steps down amid scrutiny

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The director of the Secret Service said Tuesday that she is resigning following the assassination attempt against former President Donald Trump which unleashed intensifying outcry about how the agency tasked with protecting current and former presidents could fail in its core mission.

Kimberly Cheatle, who had served as Secret Service director since August 2022, had been facing growing calls to resign and several investigations into how the shooter was able to get so close to the Republican presidential nominee at an outdoor campaign rally in Pennsylvania.

“I take full responsibility for the security lapse,” she said in an

email to staff, obtained by The Associated Press. “In light of recent events, it is with a heavy heart that I have made the difficult decision to step down as your director.”

Cheatle’s departure was unlikely to end the scrutiny of the long-troubled agency after the failures of July 13, and it comes at a critical juncture ahead of the Democratic National Convention and a busy presidential campaign season. Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have promised continued investigation, along with an inspector general probe and an independent and bipartisan effort launched at President Joe Biden’s behest that will keep the agency in the spotlight.

“The scrutiny over the last week has been intense and will continue to remain as our operational tempo increases,” Cheatle said in her note to staff.

Cheatle’s resignation comes a day after she appeared before a congressional committee and was berated for hours by both Democrats and Republicans for the security failures. She called the attempt on Trump’s life the Secret Service’s “most significant operational failure” in decades and said she took full responsibility for the security lapses, but she angered lawmakers by failing to answer specific questions about the investigation.

At the hearing Monday, Cheatle remained defiant that she was

the “right person” to lead the Secret Service, even as she said she took responsibility for the security failures. When Republican Rep. Nancy Mace suggested Cheatle begin drafting her resignation letter from the hearing room, Cheatle responded, “No, thank you.”

Cheatle acknowledged Monday that the Secret Service was told about a suspicious person two to five times before the shooting at the rally.

She also revealed that the roof from which Crooks opened fire had been identified as a potential vulnerability days before the rally. But she failed to answer many questions about what happened, including why there were no agents stationed on the roof.

Stewart pushes VA to help vets exposed to uranium

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Comedian Jon Stewart is pressing the Biden administration to fix a loophole in a massive veterans aid bill that left out some of the first U.S. troops who responded after the Sept. 11 attacks and got sick after deploying to a base contaminated with dangerous levels of uranium.

Special operations forces deployed to Karshi-Khanabad, or “K2,” in Uzbekistan about three weeks after the 2001 attacks. K2 was a former Soviet air base U.S. forces used to strike Taliban targets inside Afghanistan in the earliest days of the war. The base was a former chemical weapons processing site and littered with Soviet-era debris, including demolished bunkers, missile parts and highly radioactive uranium powder, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press.

It’s not clear why uranium powder was on the ground or how it got there. But it’s worrying those who served at K2.

Thousands of K2 veterans in the years since have reported complex medical conditions, some of which are known to be connected to radiation exposure.

“Imagine you’re stationed inside the meth lab on ‘Breaking Bad,’” Stewart said in an interview with the AP. “These guys were exposed to a toxic soup of basically an exploded chemicals and nuclear weapon facility.”

A massive veterans aid bill called the PACT Act that was signed into law by President Joe Biden in 2022 addressed many of the health issues facing K2 veterans. But it didn’t include coverage for radiation exposure at K2.

K2 veterans have pressed the Department of Veterans Affairs for help for years, but so far the VA has not acted. The agency has said it is still studying the issue and looking to the Pentagon for additional information before it determines whether to add radiation exposure as a condition K2 service members can get coverage for.

Wildfires plague West amid torrid heat wave, high winds

Associated Press

RIVERSIDE, Calif. — At least a half-dozen homes lay in ruins Monday after one of many dangerous wildfires in the West suddenly swept into a Southern California neighborhood during a blistering heat wave.

Six homes were ravaged and seven damaged when the fire sparked by fireworks erupted Sunday afternoon in a hilly area of Riverside, a city about 60 miles east of Los Angeles, authorities said at a media briefing Monday evening.

The blaze scorched just under a square mile.

Resident Noel Piri and his wife were away when they got a call about a fire in the neighborhood, rushed home and rescued their dog. Unfortunately, their house was in flames when firefighters arrived, The Press-Enterprise reported.

“It was kind of sad to see the house was gone,” Piri told the newspaper after rummaging through the remains of the newly remodeled house.

Riverside hit 102 degrees Sun-

day amid a heat wave that has been largely focused on the interior of California and is expected to last through much of the week.

Many other fires were also burning throughout the state, including one that started Saturday and rapidly expanded to more than 4 square miles on the border of Lake and Colusa counties, northwest of Sacramento. Containment reached 25% on Monday.

More than two dozen fires were also burning in the Pacific Northwest and Idaho, where lightning ignited more blazes in Oregon over the weekend amid extremely dry and hot conditions.

The largest blazes were active in rural areas of eastern Oregon and Washington, and smoke was impacting air quality in those places as well as into Idaho.

Authorities evacuated the town of Huntington, Ore., with a population of about 500, and temporarily closed a stretch of Interstate 84 late Sunday after thunderstorms caused a massive smoke column to collapse.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man dies after diving into river to save boys

NJ HAMILTON TOWNSHIP — A man who dove into a southern New Jersey river and rescued two children who were struggling to stay afloat has died after he disappeared underneath the water, authorities said.

Pablo Hernandez Cruz, 49, of Mays Landing, was at the Weymouth Furnace park in Hamilton Township on Wednesday when he saw two boys, ages 8 and 12, in distress in the Great Egg Harbor River, Atlantic County officials said. Swimming is not allowed in the river due to potentially hazardous conditions, such as deep water spots and strong currents.

Cruz quickly helped get both boys to safety where they were helped by good Samaritans, but he was then pulled under the water and disappeared. He was found a short time later and was taken to a hospital where he was pronounced dead.

Stabbing at airport forces evacuation

FL MIAMI — A man stabbed a woman at Miami International Airport Saturday night, setting off fears an active shooter was in the terminal as hundreds of other travelers were evacuated as a precaution, authorities said.

The woman was stabbed around 11:30 p.m. in Terminal J outside the secure area. Detective Angel Rodriguez, a spokesman for the Miami-Dade Police Department, said the man also tried to throw the woman over a railing, but she was able to get away. Officers recovered the weapon as they arrested the

man without incident, he said.

Rodriguez called it an “unprovoked altercation,” but police have not said if the two knew each other. The woman was hospitalized in critical condition with several knife wounds, police said.

Rodriguez said the arrival of responding officers confused some travelers, who thought there was an active shooter.

Pastor vows to rebuild church after blaze

TX DALLAS — The leader of a historic church in downtown Dallas nearly destroyed by a fire told congregants Sunday that they will rebuild the iconic structure.

Services for First Baptist Dallas were held at the nearby Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center, where senior Pastor Robert Jeffress said they will rebuild the sanctuary, which now appears as a charred shell, with its stained glass windows ruined and virtually everything inside its brick walls destroyed.

Jeffress added that insurance will cover the costs to rebuild.

No injuries were reported after the blaze broke out Friday evening in the Texas Historic Landmark, a Victorian-style red brick church built in 1890. It took firefighters about three hours to contain the blaze.

Miss Kansas goes viral for calling out abuser

KS WICHITA — A newly posted video of Miss Kansas calling out her domestic violence abuser from the stage the night she was crowned is whipping up a maelstrom of support on social media.

Alexis Smith, who works

overnight shifts as a cardiothoracic intensive care nurse in Wichita, was crowned Miss Kansas on June 8, but posted the video of her on-stage comments just last week on the platform now known as X. Her comments are resonating with thousands in part because she called out her own abuser from the stage while she said the perpetrator was sitting in the audience.

“My vision as the next Miss Kansas is to eliminate unhealthy and abusive relationships,” Smith said during the interview portion of the pageant last month. “Matter of fact, some of you in this audience saw me very emotional because my abuser is here today. But that’s not going to stop me from being on this Miss Kansas stage and from representing as the next Miss Kansas.”

Smith just recently started her reign and began raising concerns about the issue in interviews and social media posts.

Hemingway fans mark author’s 125th birthday

FL KEY WEST — Ernest Hemingway spent the 1930s in Key West, Fla., and more than six decades after his death, fans, scholars and relatives continue to congregate on the island city to celebrate the author’s award-winning novels and adventure-filled life.

Hemingway Days started in 1981 with a short-story competition and a look-alike contest. This year’s celebration concluded Sunday on the 125th anniversary of Hemingway’s birth on July 21, 1899.

As a novelist, short-story writer and journalist, Hemingway’s spot in the pantheon of American literature is undenia-

ble and his legacy permeates the culture and character of Key West.

The look-alike group has evolved over the years into a service organization with hundreds of members around the world that has funded more than \$350,000 in scholarships for Florida Keys students. The organization also sponsors a youth baseball team in Cuba, where Hemingway moved after leaving Florida.

Businesses get money to rebuild from storms

ME PORTLAND — Maine is providing more than \$21 million in grants to help dozens of waterfront communities rebuild from a series of devastating storms this past winter.

The storms brought flooding and power outages to the Northeast, and were particularly damaging to coastal areas in Maine that support industries such as shipping and fishing. State officials tallied about \$70 million in damage.

Sixty-eight working waterfronts in Maine will share from a pool of \$21.2 million in grants, Democratic Gov. Janet Mills said on Monday. The money is part of \$60 million in state funding approved this spring that was the largest investment in storm recovery in Maine history, officials said.

The state made the rebuilding money available to owners of waterfront infrastructure that served at least 10 commercial fishermen or aquaculturists. Grant applicants were able to request up to \$2 million for design, permitting and construction, officials said.

— From Associated Press

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Ledecky still motivated 12 years later

Associated Press

For Katie Ledecky, burnout seemingly doesn't exist.

Sure, there are times when it all gets a bit monotonous, staring at that black line at the bottom of the pool, turning lap after interminable lap with nothing on the line.

Yet, a dozen years after she burst on the scene with a surprising gold medal at the London Olympics, Ledecky keeps finding ways to enjoy swimming as much as ever.

The times may not be quite as fast. But the ultimate payoff is staying on top year after year, Olympics after Olympics, even as other swimmers struggle to deal with the mental and physical demands of a grueling sport that only provides once-every-four-years gratification.

"I pride myself on that consistency," the 27-year-old Ledecky said. "I challenge myself to stay consistent. Yeah, I mean sometimes it can be tough feeling like you're not having a breakthrough. But to be really consistent is something I'm really happy with. I've learned to just really enjoy each day of training and take in every moment and just appreciate the fact that I've been able to

have this long of a career, stay injury free, stay pretty healthy, be able to do this for this many years."

Perhaps the greatest freestyle swimmer in history, Ledecky heads to her fourth Olympics in a familiar role.

A gold-medal favorite. The focus of so much attention. The template for sustained excellence.

"Such a big influence," said fellow American swimmer Erin Gemmell, who has looked up to Ledecky much of her life and will be joining her as an Olympic teammate. "I don't think I would really be here if it weren't for her."

Gemmell's father used to coach Ledecky. Young Erin once dressed up as Ledecky for Halloween. They've spent so much time together at the pool, Gemmell has had a unique perspective on Ledecky's tedious brilliance.

"It's really special to be able to be that close to someone who is so inspirational, getting to see the day-to-day work that they put in," Gemmell said. "It makes it seem more achievable, in a way, being so close. It makes them seem a lot more human."

Ledecky isn't as dominant as she once

was, but she'll definitely be the swimmer to beat in the two longest freestyle events, covering 800 and 1,500 meters. She already has six individual gold medals, the most of any female swimmer in Olympic history.

"Every athlete, as they get older, has to learn new ways to set goals, learn new ways to evaluate the results," Ledecky said.

In many ways, she's still driven by her very first Summer Games, where she burst on the scene at 15 with a gold medal in the 800 freestyle. She provides further perspective on that experience in her new book, "Just Add Water, My Swimming Life."

"I wanted to get back to that level, prove that I wasn't just a one-hit wonder," Ledecky said. "At the same time, I reminded myself that anything more than that is just like icing on the cake, the cherry on top, because, I just never thought I'd make it to that one Olympics."

All these years later, after all those trips to the top of the medal podium, she feels much the same way.

"That's the perspective that I've be able to maintain and that keeps me focused," Ledecky said.

France's Marchand may be swimming's brightest star

Associated Press

Most of the big stars from the last Olympics will be back at the pool in Paris.

Caeleb Dressel. Katie Ledecky. Ariarne Titmus. Emma McKeon.

But the local favorite might just shine brightest of them all.

France's Léon Marchand has drawn comparisons to the great Michael Phelps, a link that was only strengthened by Phelps' long-time coach, Bob Bowman, overseeing the 22-year-old's rise to prominence.

At last summer's world championships in Fukuoka, Marchand broke Phelps' 15-year-old world record in the 400-meter individual medley, to go along with victories in the 200 IM and 200 butterfly — two more of Phelps' signature events.

"Léon has several things that make him a great," Bowman said. "He has speed and he has endurance. So he kind of has the whole package that you want, and so far he's done well under pressure, which is the other piece of that equation. He has it all, really."

Marchand will also have the home-pool advantage in Paris, where the swimming will be contested in a temporary facility set up inside the La Défense Arena, the 30,000-

seat home of the rugby club Racing 92.

The place figures to be especially loud every time Marchand steps up on the blocks.

"I get to swim the (400) IM against the world record holder in his home country," said Carson Foster, the top American hopeful. "That atmosphere is going to be electric."

Marchand, who swam for Bowman at Arizona State, competed in four events at the Tokyo Games, with a best showing of sixth in the 400 individual medley.

But he emerged as one of the sport's rising stars at the 2022 world championships in Budapest, and his performance the following year in Fukuoka only raised the stakes heading into his home-country Olympics.

Big rivals

The United States and Australia have long been the world's most prominent swimming nations, fueling a rivalry that will heat up again in Paris.

While the Americans traditionally have the deepest team, the Aussies have proven to be formidable foes in recent years — especially on the women's side.

At the 2023 worlds, the team from Down Under captured 13 gold medals in swimming. The U.S. won seven, though it did lead the overall medals table 38-25.

Mollie O'Callaghan and Kaylee McKeown each won a pair of gold medals in Fukuoka, Titmus knocked off Ledecky again in the 400 freestyle, and the Aussies bested the Americans in both freestyle relays.

Australia currently holds seven world records in women's events, including Titmus' marks in the 200 and 400 freestyle.

Can't-miss race

The most anticipated event at the pool will come on the first night.

The women's 400 freestyle will feature defending Olympic gold medalist Titmus, 2016 champion Ledecky and Canadian phenom Summer McIntosh.

Titmus is the favorite to repeat after setting a world record last summer in Fukuoka, but Ledecky and McIntosh are determined to give her a run for the top spot on the podium.

McIntosh is only 17 but has already set the world record in both the 400 freestyle and the 400 individual medley.

Biles, others leave Tokyo experience behind

Associated Press

Simone Biles and the rest of the U.S. women's Olympic gymnastics team don't need to be reminded of what happened in Tokyo three years ago. Mostly because nearly all of them lived it.

Biles, reigning Olympic all-around champion Sunisa Lee, 2020 Olympic silver medalist Jordan Chiles and 2020 floor exercise champion Jade Carey were all there inside a nearly empty and oddly silent Ariake Gymnastics Centre during a memorable two weeks that altered the course of each of their careers and in ways both big and small led them back to the Games.

They are older now — Biles is 27, Carey is 24, Chiles is 23 and Lee is 21 — and eager for what they have called a shot at redemption.

"Everybody probably looks at the team, like 'OK, they went to Tokyo and this, this and this happened. And what are they going to do here in Paris?'" Biles said. "But for us, I know we're stronger than what we showed in Tokyo."

Biles arrived in Japan as the face of the Games. She left without the gold medals most expected and instead at the center of the conversation about the intersection between mental health and sports.

Lee became a somewhat unexpected champion after Biles pulled out of multiple finals, a victory she struggled to believe she had rightfully earned. Ca-

rey packed a gold medal in her carry-on coming home, but admits it felt weird competing as an individual after following an unusual path to the Games. Chiles cherished the team silver the Americans captured while Biles watched from the sideline but allowed she wasn't at her best during the meet.

They're all back — along with newcomer Hezly Rivera, just 16 — in hopes of authoring a different ending this time around.

"I think we really want a team gold," said Lee, who overcame multiple kidney-related health issues to finish second behind Biles at the U.S. Olympic trials.

The American women are favored to win with defending champion Russia unable to participate as part of the fallout of the war with Ukraine. It just might not come as easy as Biles and company have made it seem while winning all but one major international competition since the 2011 world championships.

Brazil and powerhouse Rebeca Andrade have made massive strides over the last decade. France, China and Great Britain all have legitimate shots at making the podium.

Still, Biles knows a portion of those who tune in to watch will be waiting to see if what happened in Tokyo will repeat itself. She's taking steps to make sure she's in a better place this time around, including therapy, though she stressed the only reason she's back is because she

feels she owes it to herself.

"Nobody's forcing me to do it," Biles said. "I wake up every day and choose to grind in the gym and come out here and perform for myself just to remind myself that I can still do it."

All she's done since returning last summer following a two-year break was win her sixth world all-around championship while continuing to push her sport into places no one else dares go.

Biles has brushed aside whether this will be her last time competing under the Olympic rings.

"I feel like even for myself, I'm like, 'Oh my gosh, I'm still doing it. I'm still capable,'" she said. "So let's go."

Rivalry renewed

Like their female teammates, the Russian men are also out of the mix to defend the Olympic title they won in a taut final three years ago.

That leaves China and Japan to duel for the top spot at Accor Arena. The Japanese are led by defending all-around gold medalist Daiki Hashimoto.

Hashimoto has won each of the last two world all-around championships. China (2022) and Japan (2023) have split the last two team titles.

Closing the gap

A resurgent U.S. men's program hopes to reach the Olympic podium for the first time since earning bronze in Beijing

16 years ago. The Americans finished third at worlds last fall, and a young team led by 20-year-old Frederick Richard, who believes what happens in Paris could just be the start.

"(We want to) give everything this Olympics and show that we have the potential we can bring home medals and that it's (go hard) to make sure it's not about medals anymore," he said. "It's about gold medals for 2028."

Unlikely comeback

The American women are the first team in modern Olympic history to feature multiple all-around champions on its roster.

While Biles' presence was seemingly assured the moment she came back, the road has been far bumpier for Lee. The last 18 months have seen her deal with massive weight fluctuations related to her kidney problems that limited her training and led her to telling long-time coach Jess Graba that she was ready to quit.

Only she didn't. Instead, Lee and her team of medical professionals were able to get a handle on her treatment, opening the door for Paris.

Biles' presence also means Lee won't feel the pressure to become the first Olympic champion in more than 56 years to repeat. Instead, she is hoping to come home with gold on the balance beam, an event which showcases her uncommon grace.

Bengals say Burrow good for start of training camp

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Joe Burrow and his surgically repaired wrist have been cleared for contact, and the Cincinnati Bengals star quarterback is ready to go for the opening of training camp on Wednesday.

Burrow was sidelined last season when he suffered a torn ligament in his right wrist in the 10th game, a loss to Baltimore on Nov. 16. He had surgery Nov. 27.

"We just need Joe to be out there," new offensive coordinator Dan Pitcher said. "He's going to be out there. He's worked himself in a really good place physically and mentally."

Coach Zac Taylor doesn't know yet if any kind of accommodations will be made for Burrow in training camp and doesn't know yet if the quarterback — or any of the regulars — will play in the preseason games.

Burrow knows the drill when it comes to rehab. In his rookie year in 2020, he injured his knee while being sacked in Week 11 against Washington. He finished rehab just in time for the start of the 2021 season.

Appendicitis caused him to miss all of training camp in 2022. On the second day of camp in 2023, Burrow strained a calf muscle. He didn't miss any games, but the injury limited his mobility early in the season.

Soto hits 2 of Yanks' 5 homers to rout Rays

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Juan Soto hit two of the Yankees' five home runs and New York salvaged a four-game series split with a 9-1 victory over the Tampa Bay Rays on Monday.

Soto had his fourth multi-homer game this season since coming over in a December trade and 21st of his career, tying him with Hall of Famer Eddie Mathews for the second-most by anyone 25 years old or younger. He hit a solo homer into the third deck in right field in the seventh inning and added a three-run homer in the eighth, and now has 25 on the season.

Soto hit his 24th homer into a suite above the second deck down the right-field line and took a 37.7-second trot after hitting a 424-foot shot to right. He briefly stared at the ball, dropped the bat, raised his right hand between first and second and did a little step at third.

"I'm just trying to make sure it was a fair ball," Soto said. "I was literally pulling with everything that I have to stay fair. It was fun to see it and I definitely got a hold (of it)."

DJ LeMahieu, Austin Wells and Anthony Volpe also homered as the Yankees tied a season high by hitting five homers for the second time this season.

New York starter Carlos Rodón (10-7) earned his first win since June 10. He allowed one run and two hits and struck out 10 in seven innings.

"Just a steady mix of everything, getting ahead, attacking the strike zone," Rodón said.

"That's as good as we've seen him throw against us," Tampa Bay manager Kevin Cash said. "When he's right, we know how talented he is and unfortunately we saw it today."

Tigers 8, Guardians 2: Tarik Skubal pitched seven innings while continuing to be mentioned in trade rumors and Justin-Henry Malloy hit a two-run

homer, leading visiting Detroit to a win over Cleveland.

Skubal (11-3) gave up a season-high 10 hits, but just one run as the All-Star worked out of several jams. The left-hander has been linked to potential trades with several contenders as the July 30 trade deadline nears.

Malloy homered in the first inning off Carlos Carrasco (3-8) as the Tigers beat the AL-Central leaders for the fourth time in five games. Cleveland has dropped three straight and is just 2-7 since July 10.

Pirates 2, Cardinals 1: Nick Gonzales hit a go-ahead RBI single in the eighth inning after Mitch Keller allowed one run in the first seven, and host Pittsburgh defeated St. Louis.

Bryan Reynolds led off the eighth with a single to left before advancing to second on a wild pitch. With one out, Gonzales sneaked a slow dribbler off John King (3-2) through the right side of the infield.

Keller gave up six hits in seven innings, striking out three and walking two, before Aroldis Chapman (2-4) pitched a perfect eighth. David Bednar allowed a two-out single to Paul Goldschmidt in the ninth before striking out Nolan Gorman for his 18th save.

Reds 4, Braves 1: Hunter Greene allowed only two hits in seven scoreless innings, Will Benson homered and visiting Cincinnati took advantage of its speed to beat Reynaldo López and Atlanta.

Greene (7-4), making his first start since taking the loss in the All-Star Game, had seven strikeouts. The right-hander has allowed a combined two runs in his last four starts.

The Reds ended a four-game losing streak and dealt the Braves their third straight loss. Cincinnati stole four bases, including two by Benson, and leads the majors with 143.

Mets 6, Marlins 4: Francisco Lindor homered twice, Jeff

McNeil also went deep and visiting New York beat Miami.

McNeil had three RBIs for the Mets, who split the four-game series against the National League's worst team. New York (51-48) is 5-5 versus Miami (35-65) this season.

Mets starter David Peterson (5-0) permitted two runs and six hits in five innings. The left-hander walked four and struck out four.

Cubs 3, Brewers 1: Ian Happ lined a solo homer, six Chicago pitchers cobbled together a five-hitter and host Chicago beat Milwaukee.

Michael Busch and Dansby Swanson each had two hits as the Cubs twice escaped bases-loaded jams to end NL Central-leading Milwaukee's three-game winning streak.

Rangers 4, White Sox 3 (10): Rookie Wyatt Langford hit a game-ending RBI single in the 10th inning, after scoring the tying run in the ninth, as host Texas rallied to beat Chicago.

The White Sox (27-75), who have lost eight in a row and 14 of 17, had gone ahead on Paul DeJong's solo homer in the ninth inning before their bullpen's MLB-high 25th blown save.

Royals 10, Diamondbacks 4: Bobby Witt Jr. fell a single short of the cycle, Salvador Perez and Hunter Renfroe also homered, and host Kansas City beat Arizona for its fourth straight victory.

Witt tripled in the first inning, doubled in the third and drilled a three-run homer to deep left-center in the fourth to get the hard part out of the way. He was then hit by a pitch in the sixth and flew out in the eighth.

Twins 7, Phillies 2: Starter Bailey Ober rebounded from Bryce Harper's two-run homer in the first to settle in for seven innings, and host Minnesota beat Philadelphia.

Ober (9-5) threw only 83 pitches and retired 17 of his last 18 batters, getting a double-play

grounder to erase the lone baserunner in that stretch. The 6-foot-9 right-hander gave up four hits and one walk and improved to 4-1 with a 2.23 ERA in his last six starts.

Athletics 4, Astros 0: Hogan Harris and three relievers combined on an eight-hit shutout, and host Oakland beat Houston.

Harris (2-3) allowed seven hits in 6⅔ innings and matched his career-high of seven strikeouts. It was his first win since June 18.

Rockies 9, Red Sox 8 (12): Ezequiel Tovar singled home the winning run with the bases loaded and two outs in the 12th inning to help host Colorado hand Boston its fourth straight defeat since the All-Star break.

Tovar had three hits to extend his hitting streak to nine games. Charlie Blackmon had two hits, including his seventh homer, and the last-place Rockies won for the fourth time in five games.

Angels 3, Mariners 1: Jo Adell drove in the go-ahead run with a two-out single in the ninth inning, and visiting Los Angeles beat Seattle.

Adell's base hit to center against reliever Trent Thornton (3-2) scored Brandon Drury. Center fielder Victor Robles' throw to the plate went wide and ricocheted away from catcher Cal Raleigh for an error, allowing Zach Neto to score from first base to make it a two-run game.

Dodgers 3, Giants 2: Teoscar Hernández had three hits and three RBIs, including a go-ahead single in the eighth inning, and host Los Angeles extended its winning streak to four games by beating San Francisco.

River Ryan allowed one unearned run over 5⅓ innings in his major league debut for the Dodgers. The 23-year-old right-hander, acquired from San Diego in a 2022 trade, gave up four hits with three walks and two strikeouts.