

DOD not sharing hypersonic info could be risky

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON—The Pentagon's inability to share more details openly with Congress and the public about its progress with hypersonic weapons development could be contributing to increased costs and troubles managing risks, according to a recent federal watchdog report.

Six hypersonic weapons being developed by the Army, Air Force and Navy were reviewed by the Government Accountability Office, assessing development, cost estimates and risk management. A hypersonic weapon can travel at speeds over Mach 5, maneuver in flight and is intended to strike a target from thousands of miles away.

The Defense Department does provide some information to lawmakers, though it is "not comprehensively communicating and reporting to Congress its progress on managing risks," the

GAO said in a report released Monday.

Efforts to develop hypersonic weapons that can be launched on the ground, in the air and at sea accelerated in 2018 and 2019 to compete with similar efforts of China and Russia. But the Pentagon "has yet to field its first operational" hypersonic weapons system.

"Reporting comprehensive information would enable Congress to better understand and oversee" the programs, the GAO said.

The delivery of the Army's long-range hypersonic weapon, which launches from a truck, was pushed from 2023 to at least late 2024 due to difficulties discovered in flight testing. The system has racked up a \$10.3 billion price tag.

The Air Force also extended its five-year prototyping time frame into 2024 for its air-launched, rapid-response weapon after

mixed flight test results. It is expected to cost \$1.2 billion, according to its 2019 estimate.

A hypersonic cruise missile being developed by the Air Force is estimated to cost \$1.9 billion. The weapon system, which would be fired from a fighter jet, is not scheduled to be fielded until mid-2027.

A hypersonic air-launched, anti-surface warfare system developed by the Navy is estimated to cost around \$1.5 billion. The Navy is also in the early stages of developing an aeroballistic missile that would launch from surface warships. Both weapons systems are scheduled to be fielded in 2029.

The costs and risks associated with a \$30 billion hypersonic Navy weapon in the works, dubbed a conventional prompt strike, are better understood than those of the other five weapons in development, the GAO said, but the program is still limited by the De-

fense Department's experience in designing, producing and testing hypersonic weapons. The program relies heavily on Navy decision-makers as subject-matter experts, whose input the GAO said could be prone to bias. The hypersonic weapon is being designed to launch from Zumwalt-class surface ships and Virginia-class submarines.

"Without comprehensive enterprise-level reporting, Congress will have an incomplete or fragmented perspective on the risks DOD has identified, the actions it is taking to address them or the costs that these actions entail," the report read.

The GAO made 10 recommendations to the Defense Department, including increasing the incorporation of feedback from users into system designs, improving the Navy's conventional prompt strike cost estimate and expanding enterprise-level reporting activities.

Navy settles lawsuit with religious vaccine objectors

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

Navy sailors who faced disciplinary actions related to their refusal to comply with the COVID-19 vaccine mandate on account of religion can correct their service records and protect their careers as part of a recently settled lawsuit.

The settlement, which was approved by a Texas federal judge last week, involves a lawsuit filed in 2021 on behalf of 26 Navy SEALs and several other Special Warfare sailors.

The suit alleged the service and Defense Department had violated the First Amendment rights of service members who had religious objections to the vaccine mandate. It also claimed the Navy and DOD violated the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which prohibits federal agencies, departments or

officials from violating the free exercise of religion.

The SEALs' lawsuit subsequently was expanded to include a class of all Navy service members who had religious objections to the vaccine, First Liberty Institute, the law firm representing the sailors, said in a statement July 24 announcing approval of the settlement the same day.

Under the settlement, the Navy must recheck personnel records of service members covered by the lawsuit to ensure all documented adverse actions taken solely due to vaccine mandate refusal are permanently deleted, according to federal court records.

Those adverse actions include administrative separation proceedings and processes, formal counseling and nonjudicial punishment.

"This has been a long and difficult journey, but the Navy SEALs never gave up," Danielle Runyan, senior counsel for First Liberty Institute, said in the statement. "We are thrilled that those members of the Navy who were guided by their conscience and steadfast in their faith will not be penalized in their Navy careers."

On Tuesday, the Navy said it did not have a statement regarding the settlement.

But in rescinding his August 2021 order mandating vaccination against COVID-19, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said he believed the order was correct and that the services would continue to promote the vaccine.

"All commanders have the responsibility and authority to preserve the department's compelling interest in mission accomplishment," Austin said in January 2023.

Troops find special needs program lacking

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

More than half of troops surveyed by the Pentagon who have a family member with special needs are disappointed with a military program intended to provide support and find assignment locations that can provide the needed care.

Only 43% of respondents reported their needs were largely met by the Exceptional Family Member Program in the year prior, while 17% said their needs were not met at all. The remaining troops said the program filled their needs to a moderate or small extent, according to survey results released Monday by the Defense Department Office of Special Needs.

The Defense Department conducted the survey between November 2022 and March 2023 by sending a link through email to troops enrolled in the program, which is mandatory for service members who have a family member with special needs requiring specialized medical care, treatment pro-

grams or educational services. It is meant to ensure those service members receive duty assignments to locations where those special needs can be met.

Roughly 100,000 service members received the survey and were asked to what extent the needs of their family were met. Just about 13% of troops answered the questions, with most enrolled to support a child with a medical need.

Congress mandated the survey in the fiscal 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, an annual bill that defines defense priorities and spending, as the House and Senate Armed Services committees were hearing from families that they were struggling to get duty assignments that had the promised medical and educational supports at those bases. In response, Congress called for reforms to the program, which included creating a standard program across the service branches.

Prior to the Pentagon enforcing the reform last year, each service branch was responsible

for implementing its own version of the Exceptional Family Member Program, which meant Marines, sailors, soldiers, airmen and guardians received similar services but at different levels. The survey was sent prior to standardizing the program.

Marines and sailors tended to report through the survey more positive experiences while soldiers tended to report more negative ones. Officers also tended to report more negative experiences that caused them to consider leaving the military.

"The fact that 31% of the officers ranked between O-4 and O-10 with a family member enrolled stated their experiences will have a negative impact on their decision to remain in service should be a wake-up call to all," said Austin Carrigg, CEO of Exceptional Families of the Military, an advocacy organization. "Our most experienced officers, those who have fought this nation's wars, are negatively impacted. If they choose to leave who remains behind to guide the next generation

should a conflict arise?"

Carrigg, an Army spouse with a child enrolled in the program, said it's no surprise that this survey showed families are struggling.

The Pentagon intends to use the survey results as a baseline of how to improve the experience of those families, said Tomeshia Barnes, associate director of the DOD's Office of Special Needs.

Barnes said she believes the standardizing of the program that began in June 2023 will level out some of the discrepancies between service members. Another survey of these families will occur, but a timeline has not been determined.

Moving to a new duty assignment proved to be a significant issue among survey respondents, particularly with coordinating medical care. They reported finding little help from the family support offices on either end of the move. Looking at the overall extent to which the program provided help during a move, 51% of troops said they received none.

US and Philippines boost ties with \$500M in funding

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Washington's top diplomat and defense chief announced \$500 million in military funding Tuesday to boost Philippine defenses and progress on a proposed military intelligence-sharing pact as both allies renewed their concerns over China's continuing aggressive actions in the region.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who has fortified Manila's decades-old treaty alliance with Washington as hostilities between Philippine

and Chinese forces flared since last year in the disputed South China Sea.

Marcos hailed "very open" communication lines between Washington and Manila, adding that the two countries' treaty alliance and key issues in the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific region "are continuously examined and reexamined so we are agile in terms of our responses."

Marcos has underscored the need for a U.S. military presence for Asian stability and peace.

After meeting their Philippine counterparts later, Blinken and Austin announced the \$500

million military funding to help in an ongoing modernization of the Philippine military and coast guard and boost security collaboration amid shared concerns over China's assertive actions.

"Both of us share concerns and many other countries in the region share concerns, as well, about some of the actions that the People's Republic of China has taken, escalatory actions in the South China Sea, the East China Sea," including "coercive methods," Blinken said in a joint news conference.

He renewed a warning that the U.S. would help defend the

Philippines if Filipino forces, ships and aircraft come under attack in the Pacific, including in the South China Sea.

The U.S. officials also offered condolences over the dozens of deaths wrought by typhoon-worsened monsoon rains in recent weeks and announced an additional \$1 million in aid for the victims and to help devastated communities recover.

The visit came the week after the Philippines and reached a temporary arrangement to prevent clashes around the Philippine-occupied Second Thomas Shoal like the violent faceoff between their forces on June 17.

Top officials testify on Trump rally

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Secret Service's acting director told lawmakers on Tuesday that he considered it indefensible that the roof used by the gunman in the attempted assassination of former President Donald Trump was unsecured, faulting local law enforcement for not circulating urgent information ahead of the shooting and for not adequately protecting the scene.

He also testified that he recently visited the shooting site and said, "What I saw made me ashamed." He said that the shooting amounted to a "failure on multiple levels," including a failure of imagination.

The testimony was the most detailed catalog to date by the Secret Service of law enforcement failings and miscommunications, with Rowe accepting blame for his own agency's mis-

takes while also repeatedly lacing into local law enforcement for not sharing information that a gunman, later identified as 20-year-old Thomas Matthew Crooks, had been spotted on a roof near the rally site in the minutes before the July 13 shooting in Butler, Pa.

"We assumed that the state and locals had it," Rowe said. "We made an assumption that there was going to be uniformed presence out there, that there would be sufficient eyes to cover that, that there was going to be counter-sniper teams" in the building from whose roof Crooks fired shots, less than 150 yards from the rally stage where Trump was speaking.

"And I can assure you," Rowe added, "that we're not going to make that mistake again."

Trump, the 2024 Republican presidential nominee, was struck in the ear by a bullet in

the assassination attempt, one rallygoer was killed and two others were injured before the gunman was killed by a Secret Service counter-sniper.

The blunt and at times emotional testimony Tuesday, featuring combative exchanges with lawmakers, ensured that an already simmering blame game between federal and local authorities will continue. It also suggested that Rowe, with ready and detailed answers, was determined to strike a different posture than that of his predecessor, Kimberly Cheatle, who resigned last week after facing intense criticism from lawmakers from both major political parties after responses that were seen as evasive and lacking in specifics.

Much of Tuesday's hearing before the Senate Judiciary and Homeland Security committees focused on what Rowe suggest-

ed was inadequate information received by Secret Service personnel in the hour before the shooting, including that Crooks had been spotted on the roof.

Local law enforcement officers had spotted a suspicious-looking man pacing near the metal detectors and circulated but ultimately lost track of Crooks before he scaled the roof of a building at AGR International Inc. Shortly before the shooting, a local officer climbed up to the roof to investigate. Crooks turned and pointed his rifle at the officer, who retreated.

"No information regarding a weapon on a roof was ever passed to our personnel," Rowe said. At another point, he noted, "It is troubling to me that we did not get that information as quickly as we should have. We didn't know that there was this incident going on."

Job openings jobs fell slightly to 8.2M in June

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. job openings fell slightly last month, a sign that the American labor market continues to cool in the face of high interest rates.

There were 8.18 million job vacancies in June, down from 8.23 million in May, the Labor Department reported Tuesday. The June number was stronger than expected: Forecasters had expected 8 million job openings.

Still, the report showed other signs of a slowing job market. Employers hired 5.3 million people, fewest since April 2020 when the pandemic was hammering the economy.

The number of people quitting their jobs — a decision that reflects confidence in their ability to find higher pay or better working conditions elsewhere — slid to 3.3 million, fewest

since November 2020.

But layoffs dropped to 1.5 million, lowest since November 2022 and down from 1.7 million in May, a sign that employers remains reluctant to let go of staff.

Vacancies rose at hotels and restaurants and at state and local governments (excluding schools). Openings fell at factories making long-lasting manufactured goods and at the federal government.

The U.S. economy and job market have proven remarkably resilient despite the Federal Reserve's aggressive campaign to tame inflation by raising its benchmark interest rate to a 23-year high. But higher borrowing costs have taken a toll: Job openings peaked in 12.2 million and have come down more or less steadily ever since.

Consumers more confident, outlook of future improves

Associated Press

American consumers felt more confident in July as expectations over the near-term future rebounded. However, in a reversal of recent trends, feelings about current conditions weakened.

The Conference Board, a business research group, said Tuesday that its consumer confidence index rose to 100.3 in July from a downwardly revised 97.8 in June.

The index measures both Americans' assessment of current economic conditions and their outlook for the next six months.

The measure of Americans' short-term expectations for income, business and the job market rose in July to 78.2 from 72.8 in June.

A reading under 80 can signal

a potential recession in the near future.

Consumers' view of current conditions dipped in July to 133.6, from 135.3 in June.

Elevated prices for food and groceries remain the main driver of consumers' view of the U.S. economy. Though inflation has come down considerably since the Federal Reserve started boosting interest rates in March of 2022, price increases remain well above pre-pandemic levels.

"Even though consumers remain relatively positive about the labor market, they still appear to be concerned about elevated prices and interest rates, and uncertainty about the future; things that may not improve until next year," said Dana Peterson, The Conference Board's chief economist.

Trump says he'll 'probably' debate Harris

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Donald Trump on Monday seemed to back away from his earlier commitment to debate Vice President Kamala Harris, questioning the value of a meetup and saying he “probably” will debate but he “can also make a case for not doing it.”

Trump, in an interview with Fox News Channel that aired Monday night, was pressed several times about committing to debating Harris before giving a squishier answer than he had in recent days.

The Republican former president had been eager to debate President Joe Biden when he was the Democratic nominee after months of suggesting that Biden was not mentally up for the matchup — or the presidency.

But after Biden dropped out of the race and Harris became poised to be the Democratic presidential candidate, Trump

has been questioning the terms of the original debate he agreed to with Biden.

He has suggested the Sept. 10 debate on ABC News should be moved to a different network, calling ABC “fake news.”

Last week, in a phone call with reporters, Trump was asked if he’d commit to debating Harris at least once. He responded: “Oh yes, absolutely. I’d want to,” and said there was an obligation to debate.

In the interview Monday, host Laura Ingraham repeatedly pressed Trump on whether he would commit to a debate.

“I want to do a debate. But I also can say this. Everybody knows who I am. And now people know who she is,” Trump said.

Trump eventually said, “The answer is yes, I’ll probably end up debating.”

He went on for a minute, saying any debates need to be held before early voting starts in

states, and then added, “The answer is yes, but I can also make a case for not doing it.”

Trump has skipped debates before, including all the 2024 Republican presidential primary debates. He initially didn’t participate after suggesting the timing was too early and then questioning the venue of another before eventually making it clear he would not participate in any of those debates.

The Republican candidate also sought in the interview on Monday to clarify comments he made last week at a conservative event in which he told an audience of Christians that they “won’t have to vote anymore” after he’s elected.

He urged Christians, who he claims don’t vote in high numbers, to vote “just this time,” and said, “You won’t have to do it anymore.”

In four years, he said: “It’ll be fixed, it’ll be fine. You won’t have to vote anymore, my beau-

tiful Christians,” he said.

He added moments later: “In four years, you don’t have to vote again. We’ll have it fixed so good, you’re not gonna have to vote.”

The comments drew alarm from Democrats and others who noted Trump’s pattern of using authoritarian language, his earlier comments that he would only be a dictator on “day one” and his behavior after losing the 2020 presidential election, in which he refused to accept the results and sought to overturn them.

His campaign and supporters offered various explanations for Trump’s comments, and Ingraham prodded him to explain what he meant.

“They don’t vote and I’m explaining that to ‘em. ‘You never vote.’ This time, vote. I’ll straighten out the country. You won’t have to vote anymore. I won’t need your vote,” Trump said.

Harris, Dems keep calling Trump and Vance ‘weird’

Associated Press

Vice President Kamala Harris and her Democratic allies are emphasizing a new line of criticism against Republicans — branding Donald Trump and his running mate, Ohio Sen. JD Vance, as “weird.”

Democrats are applying the label with gusto in interviews and online, notably to Vance’s comments on abortion and his previous suggestion that political leaders who didn’t have biological children “don’t really have a direct stake” in the country.

The “weird” message appears to have given Democrats a narrative advantage that they rarely had when President Joe Biden was still running for reelection. Trump’s campaign, which so often shapes political discussions with the former president’s pronouncements,

has spent days trying to flip the script by highlighting things about Democrats it says are weird.

“I don’t know who came up with the message, but I salute them,” said David Karpf, a strategic communication professor at George Washington University.

Karpf said labeling Republican comments as “weird” is the sort of concise take that resonates quickly with Harris supporters. Plus, Karpf noted, “it frustrates opponents, leading them to further amplify it through off-balance responses.”

“So far, at least, Trump-Vance has been incapable of finding an effective response,” Karpf said.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, a Democrat who is on Harris’ short list for vice president,

called Trump and Vance “just weird” last week in an MSNBC interview, which the Democratic Governors Association — of which Walz is chair — amplified in a post on X. Walz reiterated the characterization Sunday on CNN, referencing Trump’s repeated mentions of the fictional serial killer Hannibal Lecter from the film “Silence of the Lambs” in stump speeches.

Responding to Trump’s Thursday appearance on Fox News, the Harris campaign — in a news release with the subject line “Statement on a 78-Year-Old Criminal’s Fox News Appearance” — included “Trump is old and quite weird?” in a bulleted list of takeaways.

A day later, multiple news releases from the Harris campaign described her opponents similarly, declaring simply that

“JD Vance is weird” in part due to his stances on abortion, and Harris’ campaign spokesperson saying that Vance had “spent all week making headlines for his out-of-touch, weird ideas.”

Two of Harris’ allies, Sens. Brian Schatz of Hawaii and Chris Murphy of Connecticut, on Friday posted a video on X calling Vance’s past comments about limiting the political power of childless Americans “a super weird idea.”

And then, at her first fundraiser since becoming the Democrats’ likely White House nominee, Harris used the characterization herself, calling out some of Trump’s “wild lies about my record and some of what he and his running mate are saying, it is just plain weird.”

“I mean that’s the box you put that in, right?” she added.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man sentenced after retrial in fire death

NJ HACKENSACK — A man has been sentenced to life in prison for the second time following his conviction in a retrial in the death of a woman whose body was found inside her burning home in New Jersey almost a dozen years ago.

A Bergen County judge imposed the term on Daniel Rochat, 49, in the September 2012 death of Barbara Vernieri, 70, NorthJersey.com reported. The East Rutherford real estate agent was found beaten and set on fire while she was still alive in her home, authorities said.

Rochat's first conviction was overturned in 2022 by an appellate court that ruled that DNA evidence used to connect him to the crime was unreliable. He was tried again this year and convicted in April of murder, arson, felony murder, desecration, hindering and false swearing.

Poison calls surge amid wild mushroom rise

MN MINNEAPOLIS — The warm, soggy summer across much of the Midwest has produced a bumper crop of wild mushrooms — and a surge in calls to poison control centers.

At the Minnesota Regional Poison Center, calls from April through July were up 150% over the same period last year, said Samantha Lee, the center's director. The center took 90 calls for potential exposures over that period, compared to 26 calls for the same months in 2023. Exposures include people

who have had actual or suspected contact with potentially poisonous mushrooms and who may or may not develop symptoms, she said.

The cases can include kids who didn't know what they were doing and foragers who make mistakes, she said.

City, speeding camera firm to refund tickets

AL TUSKEGEE — Hundreds of local drivers who paid fines from speeding cameras will get full refunds, an Alabama mayor confirmed.

In January, the city of Tuskegee hired German company Jenoptik to install speeding cameras. Last week, the mayor of Tuskegee, Lawrence Haygood, said all drivers who had been fined would get their money back, CBS42 reported. Many drivers were getting close to ten fines over \$100 before receiving a citation in the mail.

Months after the cameras were installed, eight Tuskegee drivers filed a lawsuit that said the cameras incorrectly identified speeding cars and charged \$25 to appeal in court. Haygood said that the decision to refund the tickets was unrelated to the lawsuit.

Solitary confinement law partially halted

NY NEW YORK — New York City's mayor issued an emergency order suspending parts of a new law intended to ban solitary confinement in local jails a day before it was to take effect, citing concerns for the safety of staff and detainees.

Mayor Eric Adams declared

a state of emergency and signed an order that suspended parts of the law that set a four-hour time limit on holding prisoners who pose safety concerns in "de-escalation confinement" and limit the use of restraints on prisoners while they are transported to courts or within jails.

The four-hour limit could be exceeded only in "exceptional circumstances." In those circumstances, prisoners would be released from de-escalation confinement "as soon as practicable" and when they no longer pose an imminent risk of serious injury to themselves or others, according to the mayor's order.

Body found in building 3 days after storm

AZ PHOENIX — Authorities believe they have found the body of a Phoenix warehouse worker missing for three days after a micro cloud burst caused the roof of a commercial building to partially collapse.

Phoenix police said they're waiting for the Maricopa County medical examiner's office to confirm the victim's identity before his name is released.

The search for the 22-year-old man began after a brief, violent storm hit the Freeport warehouse. City fire rescue crews worked 12-hour shifts until the body was located.

Authorities said he was the only one who didn't make it out of the building when the severe storm hit the Phoenix area.

Site of deaths during '67 riot to get marker

MI DETROIT — The site of a transient motel in

Detroit where three young Black men were killed, allegedly by white police officers, during the city's 1967 race riot is receiving a historic marker.

As parts of Detroit burned in one of the bloodiest race riots in U.S. history, police and members of the National Guard raided the motel and its adjacent Manor House on July 26, 1967, after reports of gunfire in the area. The bodies of Aubrey Pollard, 19, Carl Cooper, 17, and Fred Temple, 18, were found later. About a half dozen others, including two young, white women, had been beaten.

Wolf confined until '25 breeding season

NM SANTA FE — An exceptionally restless female Mexican gray wolf nicknamed Asha will be held in captivity with a potential mate through another breeding season in hopes of aiding the recovery of the species, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said.

Asha captivated the public imagination after she was found wandering far beyond the boundaries established along the Arizona-New Mexico border for managing the rarest subspecies of gray wolf in North America.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service spokesperson Aislinn Maestas said the wolf, known to wildlife biologists as F2754, has shown signs of bonding and breeding activity with a captive-born male, though so far without producing pups.

The hope is that the pair may be released with pups, depending on the outcome of a February-May 2025 breeding period.

— From Associated Press

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US male gymnasts hope to build on bronze

Associated Press

PARIS — Before they stood with their arms wrapped around each other in a brotherhood forever etched into U.S. Olympic lore, Brody Malone, Frederick Richard, Asher Hong, Paul Juda and Stephen Nedoroscik were collegians.

Yes, the dreams the members of the U.S. men's gymnastics team had fostered since childhood began in small gyms scattered across the country. But they became tangible at Stanford, Michigan and Penn State.

So when it was time for those dreams to become fully, vividly realized inside a raucous Bercy Arena on Monday night, they leaned on the experiences they gained during all those meets in all those sometimes sparsely filled gyms that taught them about pressure and teamwork and belief.

Yes, the bronze medal the

Americans so emphatically earned ended a 16-year drought on the sport's biggest stage.

Yet it was also a message to athletic directors at the dozen schools that still have Division I gymnastics — and to be honest, to the ones that don't, too — that the sport is worth saving.

"If you want to keep seeing USA Gymnastics and Team USA on a gymnastics podium, at least on the men's side, you're going to have to give us more opportunities to compete in college," said Juda, who is in graduate school at Michigan.

Opportunities that are in danger of vanishing quickly thanks to a rapidly evolving college sports landscape. It's a reality the five men who stood on the podium with their arms around each other are only too aware of.

Richard, a rising junior at Michigan, has made it his life's

mission to bring more people to a side of the sport that — at least in the United States anyway — has long plugged along anonymously.

And while he's carved out a rapidly expanding niche on social media, Richard is savvy enough to understand the one thing guaranteed to attract people to men's gymnastics isn't a viral video, but hardware like the medal he kept grabbing in the giddy aftermath.

"My goal even here was to make a statement that the U.S. is getting stronger and stronger and we're only (going up)," Richard said. "And I think we did that today. I think a lot of young boys watching are inspired by us."

That's the way it was for Richard as a kid in the Boston suburbs. There were pictures on the wall at the gym of the medal-winning 2004 and 2008 U.S. men's Olympic teams. Ri-

chard would stare at the pictures and wonder how those teams put all the pieces together.

"It looks like they all came together on the same day and just did like these perfect routines," Richard said. "And you're like, how is that possible?"

Richard found out firsthand.

The Americans didn't record a major fall during any of their 18 routines in the final and finished closer to second-place China than fourth-place Britain.

They leaned into the energy from a vocal contingent of U.S. fans that offered a hint of what it might look like in Los Angeles four years from now.

Mostly, however, they leaned on each other and their experiences to shake off an iffy qualifying session on Saturday in which they finished a sloppy fifth.

Army shooter doesn't qualify for Olympic trap finals

BY MATT WAGNER

Stars and Stripes

CHATEAUX, France — Army Staff Sgt. Will Hinton hit almost 93% of his targets while competing in men's trap shooting qualification at the Paris Olympics.

But following two days and five rounds equaling 125 shots at the Chateauroux Shooting Centre, the Dacula, Ga., native placed 27th out of 30 competitors by breaking 116 targets and didn't come close to reaching the finals.

The U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit member wasn't satisfied with his finish, but he said a taste of the Olympic experience makes him want to return to the table.

"It's the best of the best," Hinton said. "Myself, I didn't make a final, I will not medal, but my game's in a really good spot. I look forward to bringing that

forward, and this is not the (last) Games I plan to compete in."

Hinton was happier with his effort Tuesday after a disappointing start Monday.

The 28-year-old started the second day in 29th place. In his opening round Monday, he missed three clays for a score of 22, then posted consecutive 23s.

On Tuesday, he popped 23 clays with his shotgun before he missed his first one.

He then only missed the target on his 19th shot in the final round, giving him two rounds of 24.

"Yesterday, there was a lot of variables that I'm not used to," Hinton said. "Not that that should affect my game, but I was kind of running the wrong routine. And then I did a lot of learning overnight and changed it today."

Hinton's American teammate, Derrick Mein, advanced

to the final with a total of 122. He and Guatemala's Jean Pierre Brol Cardenas won a tiebreaker for sixth with four others.

Mein finished fifth. Great Britain's Nathan Hales, the world record holder in the event, shattered the previous Olympic final mark of 43 with a 48 to win the gold, while China's Ying Qi and Brol Cardenas took silver and bronze, respectively.

Along with the motivation to improve his game after competing against the world's finest trap shooters, Hinton mentioned how tight-knit the community is at the Olympic level.

He said the sportsmanship of everyone involved was a major positive of his time in France.

"The overwhelming support is probably the biggest thing that I did not expect," Hinton said. "You have people that support you, random people from all over the world cheer-

ing for you."

While the men's event ended, the women began their quest for gold Tuesday, with Army Staff Sgt. Rachel Tozier in the field.

In her first Olympic exposure, the 32-year-old Army Marksmanship Unit member struggled in her first set of 25 attempts, missing three of the first eight.

Tozier flipped a switch after that, missing just one of her next 67 targets. The Pattonsburg, Mo., native ended with 71 of 75 potential hits and sits in 12th place, just two back of Italy's Maria Silvana Stanco for the sixth and final qualification spot.

They'll complete the qualification round Wednesday morning with two more sets of 25 shots, and those who advance to the final will compete at 3:30 p.m. Central European Time.

Wilson, US women cruise past Japan

Associated Press

VILLENEUVE-D'ASCQ, France — A'ja Wilson, Breanna Stewart and Brittney Griner dominated the paint and helped the United States win its Olympic opener as the Americans chase an unprecedented eighth straight gold medal.

Wilson had 24 points, 13 rebounds and 4 blocked shots to help the U.S. beat Japan 102-76 on Monday night.

"Points in the paint and controlling the boards are going to be huge for us moving forward," Wilson said. "So if we can continue that, I feel like we're in good shape."

Stewart scored 22 points and the Americans now have a 56-game Olympic winning streak that dates to the 1992 Barcelona Games.

The U.S. also beat Japan in

the final at the Tokyo Olympics three years ago for its seventh straight gold medal.

Monday's victory tipped off the run to keep that streak going.

"We played this team for a gold medal, you know, not too long ago. And the way they play is unorthodox. They shoot a lot of threes. They're fast. They make you play in a different style," said Diana Taurasi, who is trying to win an unprecedented sixth gold medal. "And I think you saw those different moments where we struggled a little bit, and then we got used to it."

Stewart, who is playing in her third Olympics, said there were some nerves before the game.

"It was great to get this first win under our belt. A team like Japan is a dangerous team if

you really let them get going and us to just kind of build that trust on the fly I think is really important," Stewart said. "And now we kind of know the tone and the standard of, you know, what we're going to do game in and game out."

Japan, which was severely undersized against the U.S., used its frenetic style of shooting 3s off drives to the basket to try and keep the game close.

It worked for about 17 minutes as Japan only trailed 37-32 with 3:01 left before the half. The U.S. then scored 13 of the final 19 points before break, including a three-point play by Wilson with 8.2 seconds left to open up a double-digit lead.

"When it came to our strengths, it was our depth and our height," Wilson said. "And we tried to punish them in the

paint, but also on the defensive end, staying in front of them because Japan is a team that's really like to rip and run and that's not like us. So it made us play out of our defensive schemes, which made us lock in even more so I'm just glad about the presence that we have."

The Americans, who next play Thursday against Belgium, put the game away in the third quarter. Chelsea Gray had nifty passes to Wilson for easy scores and the U.S. was off and running. Japan never threatened.

Maki Takada scored 24 points, and Mai Yamamoto added 17 for Japan, which hit 15 3-pointers. The U.S. made only four of its 20 3-point attempts.

This was Griner's first game internationally since she spent time in a Russian prison in 2022.

Several teams add pitchers in trades before deadline

Associated Press

The St. Louis Cardinals added starting pitcher Erick Fedde and Milwaukee, the team they are chasing in the NL Central, acquired starter Frankie Montas among a flurry of trades Monday by playoff hopeful teams.

Kansas City got veteran right-hander Michael Lorenzen on the day before the MLB trade deadline, and the NL West-leading Los Angeles Dodgers picked up hard-throwing reliever Michael Kopeck in the three-team deal that sent right-hander Fedde and outfielder Tommy Pham from the lowly White Sox to the Cardinals.

Chicago dealt Kopeck to the Dodgers, who got utilityman Tommy Edman and a pitching prospect from the Cardinals. Los Angeles sent three infield prospects to the White Sox.

The Dodgers later reacquired utilityman Amed Rosario from Tampa Bay, getting him in a

deadline deal for the second year in a row — they got him from Cleveland last July for Noah Syndergaard. Rosario signed with the Rays as a free agent this spring, then hit .307 with two homers and 26 RBIs in 76 games.

Montas, the righty who was 4-8 with a 5.01 ERA in 19 starts for Cincinnati, is going to the Brewers in a rare trade between division rivals.

"This is probably the toughest time that I've had leaving a clubhouse," Montas said even before the teams had announced the deal. "The relationships I created here, and the way that they welcomed me in, not just me but my family and kids, it's definitely tough."

But the 31-year-old Montas, traded for the fifth time since his big league debut in 2015, also described going to a first-place team as "kind of like the cool part."

Reigning World Series cham-

pion Texas (52-55), which is in third place in the AL West, traded Lorenzen to the Royals for a minor league lefty reliever.

NL wild-card leader Atlanta got back two players who were part of their 2021 World Series title, making a deal with San Francisco for outfielder Jorge Soler and right-handed reliever Luke Jackson.

Soler was the 2021 World Series MVP after three homers in that six-game series against Houston, and Jackson had three scoreless appearances. Left-hander Tyler Matzek and a minor league infielder went from Atlanta to the Giants.

Houston and Seattle, in a tight race for the AL West lead, both made trades with Toronto.

The Mariners made their third significant move ahead of the deadline by getting veteran Justin Turner from the Blue Jays for a minor league outfielder. Seattle added Randy Arozarena and Yimi Garcia in a pair

of trades last week.

The Astros later got left-hander Yusei Kikuchi (4-9, 4.75 ERA in 22 starts) from Toronto for 23-year-old right-hander Jake Bloss, rookie outfielder Joey Loperfido and minor league first baseman Will Wagner.

Kikuchi is 35-46 with a 4.72 ERA in six seasons with Seattle and Toronto. He joins a rotation missing Justin Verlander (neck stiffness), Cristian Javier and José Urquidy (both Tommy John surgery).

AL Central leader Cleveland added experienced outfielder Lane Thomas from Washington for a minor league left-hander and two infielders. The 28-year-old Thomas is batting .253 with eight homers in 77 games this season, along with 28 stolen bases and a 25-game on-base streak for the longest active in the major leagues. He has a big league-high 24 outfield assists since the start of last season.

Witt's slam caps six-run Royals rally

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Bobby Witt Jr.'s grand slam — and fourth hit of the game — capped Kansas City's six-run, eighth inning rally and the Royals beat the Chicago White Sox 8-5 on Monday night.

Witt lofted the first pitch he saw from John Brebbia, a low slider, into the left-center stands for his 19th homer and third career grand slam. Witt also singled twice and doubled as the Royals handed the White Sox a franchise-record 15th straight loss.

Witt extended his hitting streak to 11 games. The 24-year-old All-Star shortstop is batting .545 (24 for 44) during the surge.

"I'm just trying to be ready for every pitch because you never know what you're going to get in the big leagues," Witt said. "These pitchers are good, so you just want to be prepared."

With Kansas City trailing 5-2 entering the eighth, Hunter Renfroe and MJ Melendez hit back-to-back solo drives off reliever Steven Wilson. Brebbia (0-6) hit Adam Frazier with a pitch and issued a walk to Michael Massey before Witt connected.

"Those guys put together good at-bats, so I had to do my part," Witt said. "There was always kind of a momentum swing or whatever it is, but I think that we just believe in ourselves."

The Royals improved to 58-49 and remained in position for the final AL Wild Card.

"There were so many things that went well tonight, but Bobby's definitely the headline," Kansas City manager Matt Quatraro said. "Great, great poise to not try to do too much and he's just got so much talent, so much bat speed and power."

Luis Robert Jr. had three hits and an RBI, and Andrew Vaughn added a solo shot for the White Sox. Chicago, at 27-82, has the worst record in the majors and is 55 games below .500 for the first time in franchise history. The White Sox have a worse record than the 1962 New York Mets (29-80) through 109 games.

Orioles 11-4, Blue Jays 5-8: Vladimir Guerrero Jr. homered in both games of a doubleheader, including a solo shot in the nightcap that helped visiting Toronto earn a split with Baltimore.

Guerrero went 7 for 10 in the doubleheader with five RBIs. In Game 2, he had a homer, three doubles and three RBIs.

Baltimore made three errors in the second game, leading to three unearned runs. Shortstop Jordan Westburg mishandled a

throw in a second-inning rundown and threw wildly to first base in a two-run fourth that put Toronto ahead for good.

In the opener, Zach Eflin turned in a gritty pitching performance in his Orioles debut, Anthony Santander hit his 30th home run and Baltimore cruised to a victory.

Guardians 8, Tigers 4: José Ramírez homered twice to give him 26 this season and had an RBI double, providing plenty of offense for visiting Cleveland in a win over Detroit.

Ramírez's second homer was No. 240 of his career, tying him with Albert Belle for second in Cleveland history behind Jim Thome's 337. He has 25 multihomer games, one shy of the totals of Thome and Belle.

Tanner Bibee (9-4) kept the Tigers scoreless until they opened the seventh inning with three straight hits, including Dillon Dingler's RBI double in his major league debut. That chased Bibee, who gave up two runs on seven hits in six-plus innings.

Reds 7, Cubs 1: Carson Spiers allowed one hit in five scoreless innings in his return from the injured list, and host Cincinnati homered three times in a victory over Chicago.

Cubs reliever Nate Pearson and manager Craig Counsell were ejected in the eighth inning after Pearson hit Tyler Stephenson in the helmet, one pitch after he allowed a homer to Jeimer Candelario. Stephenson took exception to the beaming while being partially restrained by catcher Miguel Amaya. Pearson was ejected following a discussion by the umpires, and Counsell was tossed after he came out to argue.

Yankees 14, Phillies 4: Aaron Judge homered twice to increase his major league-leading total to 39, Jazz Chisholm Jr. hit his first two home runs for the Yankees and visiting New York beat Philadelphia for its first three-game winning streak since early June.

Judge, Chisholm and Ben Rice all took All-Star Zack Wheeler deep in the first two innings, and Judge added a two-run shot against Yuniór Marte for a big league-best 99 RBIs.

Red Sox 14, Mariners 7: Willyer Abreu capped a 12-pitch at-bat with an RBI single and Masataka Yoshida hit the next pitch for a two-run homer as host Boston scored seven runs in the third inning on the way to a victory over Seattle.

Yoshida also had a double among his three hits and drove in four runs. Abreu had two RBIs for Boston, which had lost seven of

nine games since the All-Star break.

Brewers 8, Braves 3: Willy Adames hit a three-run homer in the sixth and rookie Jackson Chourio added a two-run shot in the eighth to lift host Milwaukee over Atlanta.

Adames' 416-foot home run, his 17th of the season, came off reliever Jesse Chavez (1-2) and put the Brewers in front 4-2. Joey Ortiz's run-scoring triple in the seventh gave Milwaukee a three-run margin and Chourio's homer, his 12th of the season, gave the Brewers a five-run edge.

Mets 15, Twins 2: Pete Alonso homered to start a six-run fourth inning and host New York blew out Minnesota in the opener of a series between playoff contenders.

Jeff McNeil and Luis Torrens each drove in three runs for the Mets, who batted around twice in a three-inning span. Every starter had at least one RBI besides newcomer Jesse Winker, who singled and scored in his first Mets start before getting lifted in the sixth.

Pirates 5, Astros 3: Paul Skenes allowed one earned run over six innings in a no-decision and Michael A. Taylor hit a tiebreaking three-run homer in the ninth off Josh Hader that led visiting Pittsburgh over Houston.

Skenes gave up two runs, five hits and three walks with six strikeouts. His 103 strikeouts in his first 13 starts trail only Hideo Nomo (119), Kerry Wood (118), Herb Score (107) and Jose DeLeon (106), while matching Masahiro Tanaka.

Rangers 6, Cardinals 3: Nathaniel Lowe hit a two-run homer, Nathan Eovaldi worked six solid innings and visiting Texas snapped a three-game skid with a win over St. Louis.

Wyatt Langford added three hits for the Rangers, who have gone 6-5 since the All-Star break. Corey Seager, Jonah Heim, Adolis García and Leody Taveras also drove in runs for Texas.

Diamondbacks 9, Nationals 8: Corbin Carroll hit a pinch-hit homer with one out in the bottom of the ninth inning to cap a five-run rally, and host Arizona shocked Washington with a win.

The D-backs trailed 8-4 heading to the ninth, but Geraldo Perdomo's RBI single brought home Alek Thomas and Ketel Marte followed with a two-run homer down the right-field line off Washington closer Kyle Finnegan. Finnegan (2-5) retired Gabriel Moreno for the first out before Lourdes Gurriel Jr. singled up the middle to set up Carroll's shot.