

3M wins military-issued earplug lawsuit

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

A federal jury in Florida sided with earplug manufacturer 3M that the company's product did not cause hearing loss for a veteran who used them while serving in the military.

The trial was the second of three scheduled this year that could impact the outcome of a lawsuit involving nearly 236,000 veterans who were issued the earplugs while in the service.

3M, a Minnesota-based company, lost the first trial April in which a jury awarded \$7.1 million to three Army veterans who said they suffered from hearing loss and tinnitus because of the earplugs. The second trial involved one veteran, Dustin McCombs, with a similar lawsuit.

The jury on Friday determined 3M was not liable, negligent or fraudulent when selling earplugs to the military, according to court documents.

"We are pleased with today's verdict and will continue to vigorously defend ourselves in upcoming trials. The Combat

Arms Earplug Version 2 product is and has always been safe and effective to use," 3M representatives said in a statement.

Nearly 236,000 veterans are part of the multidistrict lawsuit against 3M, which claims the company's dual-sided earplug used by the military for more than a decade, including during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, could imperceptibly slip in the wearer's ear. Work began on the earplugs in the 1990s and 3M sold them to the military until 2015.

The three trials scheduled for this year are bellwether trials, which are used to present a representative of the cases before a jury to gain useful information for potentially reaching a settlement for all cases. It can help both parties determine the costs of subsequent lawsuits.

McCombs' lead attorneys — Bryan Aylstock of Aylstock Witkin Kreis & Overholtz PLLC, Shelley Hutson of Clark, Love & Hutson GP and Christopher Seeger of Seeger Weiss LLP — said in a statement that they are "disappointed" in the jury's conclusion but look forward to the next

bellwether case, which is scheduled to begin June 7 in Pensacola, Fla.

"We continue to believe that the evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that 3M knew their [Combat Arms Version 2] earplugs were defective, yet allowed our service members who relied on them for hearing protection to suffer from preventable hearing loss and tinnitus," the attorneys said. "We will continue to hold 3M accountable for the damage they have caused to those who served our nation."

No recall was ever issued on the product and a fourth version of the earplug remains in use by the military, according to 3M.

In July 2018, the Justice Department announced 3M agreed to pay \$9.1 million to resolve allegations that it knowingly sold the earplugs to the military without disclosing defects that hampered effectiveness. That lawsuit was filed through the whistleblower provision of the False Claims Act, according to the Justice Department.

In settling the claim, 3M did not admit to wrongdoing, according to the company.

Army probes storming of civilian factory in Bulgaria

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Army is investigating how 173rd Airborne Brigade soldiers ended up storming a civilian factory building during a recent training drill in Bulgaria, which sparked a minor diplomatic stir after the embarrassing mishap came to light.

"We sincerely apologize to the business and its employees. We always learn from these exercises and are fully investigating the cause of this mistake," U.S. Army Europe and Africa said in a statement Tuesday.

The incident happened May 11 during the Army's Swift Response 21 exercise, which took place across numerous countries, including Bulgaria.

Soldiers simulated seizing and securing a decommissioned airfield, which also involved clearing buildings at a

"We sincerely apologize to the business and its employees."

U.S. Army Europe and Africa statement

training area in the town of Cheshnegirovo, the Army said.

Among the nearby buildings was a private business operated by civilians, which the soldiers thought was part of the training area, the Army said.

"No weapons were fired at any time during this interaction," USAREUR-AF said.

Still, Bulgarian President Rumen Radev said the soldiers put lives in danger.

"It is inadmissible to have the lives of Bulgarian citizens disturbed and put at

risk by military formations, whether Bulgarian or belonging to a foreign arm," Radev said, as quoted by Bulgaria's Novinite news agency. "The exercises with our allies on the territory of Bulgaria should contribute to building security and trust in collective defense, not breed tension."

USAREUR-AF said a video posted to social media by Bulgarian journalist Dilyana Gaytandzhieva that showed soldiers entering a building and identified the building as a factory where olive oil machinery is produced appeared to be authentic.

USAREUR-AF said it takes training seriously and prioritizes the safety of "soldiers, our allies and civilians."

"We will implement rigorous procedures to clearly define our training areas and prevent this type of incident in the future," USAREUR-AF said.

DPAA to ID 90% of USS Oklahoma unknowns

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The Defense Department expects by year's end to have identified 90% of the exhumed remains of 388 sailors and Marines who died aboard the USS Oklahoma during the 1941 surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and were buried as unknowns in Hawaii.

"The identification of 338 individuals, to date, from the USS Oklahoma represents the first successful completion of a project of such scope and complexity," the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency said in a news release Tuesday.

The agency spearheads the nation's effort to identify and account for missing service members lost during World War II and all subsequent conflicts.

Active work on the USS Oklahoma project is expected to end

later this year, the DPAA said in a statement provided to Stars and Stripes.

"Nearly 86% of unknowns from the USS Oklahoma have been individually identified and it is expected that 90% will be identified by the end of the project, surpassing the original projected estimate of 80%," the release said.

The USS Oklahoma was moored on Battleship Row on the morning of Dec. 7, 1941, when Japanese torpedo bombers descended on Pearl Harbor. Several made direct hits on the ship, capsizing it and killing 429 crew members.

After being moved to several gravesites, the remains of 394 sailors and Marines who died that day — all too badly burned, disfigured or decayed to identify — were laid to rest in 46 plots for the unknown in 1950 at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific,

also known as the Punchbowl, in Honolulu.

The remains might never have been identified if not for Ray Emory, a Pearl Harbor attack survivor who retired in Hawaii. In the late 1990s, he began researching information about the Oklahoma unknown graves and uncovered evidence of the identity of several of the remains. In 2003, the Defense Department agreed to disinter a casket of commingled remains based on Emory's findings, and five sailors were identified at a DOD lab at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

Emory, who died in 2018, pressed for more exhumations of Oklahoma unknowns, and in 2015 Defense Department officials approved disinterment of all unknown graves at the Punchbowl associated with the Oklahoma.

Those remains — representing 388 sailors and Marines — were

disinterred in 2015 and transferred to DPAA's lab in Nebraska for DNA testing.

"Since then, DPAA anthropologists and odontologists, located primarily at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, have worked to sort and analyze over 13,000 bones and associate them to missing Sailors and Marines," the agency said Tuesday.

"Genealogists from the Navy and Marine Corps Casualty Offices conducted research to find family members so that DNA testing could be conducted by scientists at the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System, all of which were critical components in the identification process."

The Defense Department does not have DNA reference samples from next of kin for 11 of the service members still unaccounted for from the Oklahoma, the agency told Stars and Stripes.

Army flies artillery into Bulgaria to show mobility

By **JENNIFER H. SVAN**
Stars and Stripes

NOVO SELO TRAINING AREA, Bulgaria — The only U.S. rocket artillery brigade in Europe moved rapidly across borders and launched its mobile weapons in Bulgaria, a display of speed aimed at reassuring NATO allies confronted by an increasingly assertive Russia.

About eight hours after departing Germany early Tuesday with its artillery systems, the contingent from the 41st Field Artillery Brigade fired six rockets at targets more than five miles away on a sprawling military range in the Bulgarian countryside.

The soldiers and their two 12-ton wheeled rocket launchers and a support Humvee were gone soon after the smoke cleared. They were back at Ramstein Air Base in Germany before sunset, courtesy of the Tennessee Air National Guard.

The battalion practiced a rapid

insertion with the intent to "get in, execute and then get right back out to minimize our signature and risk to the force," said Lt. Col. Anthony Brunner, commander of the 1st Battalion, 77th Field Artillery Regiment.

The operation led by U.S. Army Europe and Africa was part of the "Fires Shock" series of rocket exercises that began last month in Estonia. The command's artillery units are showcasing their long-range precision rocket systems across two continents.

On Tuesday, the display — the loud bangs, the soaring, inert projectiles and the white smoke — was impressive, observers said.

"I'm so pleased because I witnessed for the first time an event that happened on our territory," said Col. Petrov Yuliyen, chief of the joint training department for Bulgaria's joint force command. "It's perfect."

Japanese police recommend US sailor be charged in crash

By **HANA KUSUMOTO**
AND **SETH ROBSON**

Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Japanese police have recommended a U.S. sailor assigned to Yokosuka Naval Base be charged with negligent driving resulting in death and injury following an accident Saturday that took the life of an elderly woman and injured two other people.

Lt. Ridge Hannemann Alkonis, 33, was arrested at 2:40 p.m. Saturday after police said he crashed his car into vehicles and pedestrians in Fujinomiya, a city in Shizuoka prefecture that's about two hours from the naval base.

Police allege Alkonis drove into a restaurant parking lot in the city's Yamamiya district around 1 p.m. and struck five vacant vehicles and three pedestrians. Alkonis since April has served as a weapons officer aboard the destroyer USS Benfold, according to his LinkedIn profile.

One of the pedestrians, an 85-year-old woman, died that afternoon at a nearby hospital. Also hospitalized were a man, 54, with serious injuries, and a woman, 53, with minor injuries. Alkonis was not injured, according to police.

Police upgraded the charges they recommended against Alkonis following the woman's death and sent the case to prosecutors on Monday, a Fujinomiya police spokesman said Tuesday.

A spokesman for the Shizuoka District Public Prosecutors Office in Numazu confirmed that the case was referred to them and that Alkonis remained in custody. Prosecutors, not police, decide formal charges under Japan's criminal justice system.

Naval Forces Japan spokeswoman Cmdr. Katie Cerezo on Sunday said the Navy was cooperating with Japanese police. She declined to provide additional information about the case on Wednesday.

Getting virus vaccine may lessen need for boosters

Associated Press

Scientists have found clues that the world's leading COVID-19 vaccines offer lasting protection that could diminish the need for frequent booster shots, but they caution that more research is needed and that virus mutations are still a wild card.

Critical studies are underway, and evidence is mounting that immunity from the mRNA vaccines made by Pfizer and Moderna does not depend exclusively on antibodies that dwindle over time. The body has overlapping layers of protection that offer backup.

Pfizer and Moderna have fueled booster questions by estimating that people might need yearly shots, just like with flu vaccinations, and the companies are working to have some candidates ready this fall. But companies will not decide when boosters get used. That will be up to health authorities in each country.

Other experts say boosters may be needed only every few years.

"I would be surprised if we actually needed a yearly booster shot," said Dr. Paul Offit, a vaccine specialist at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia who advises the Food and Drug Administration.

They point to ways the immune system remembers the coronavirus so that once original antibodies fade, the body's defenses can swing back into action if a person is exposed again.

"I'm pretty optimistic. I wouldn't rule out the need for boosters, but the immune response so far looks actually quite impressive," University of Pennsylvania immunologist John Wherry said.

Antibodies that form after vaccination or natural infection do wane naturally, but there's evidence that those levels remain strong for at least six to nine months after mRNA vaccination and possibly longer. They also appear effective against worrisome virus mutants, at least for now.

Scientists do not yet know what's called the correlate of protection, the level below which antibodies cannot fend off the coronavirus without additional help.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S. government's leading infectious disease expert, told a Senate subcommittee last week that vaccine protection would not be infinite.

"I would imagine we will need, at some time, a booster," Fauci said. "What we're figuring out right now is what that interval is going to be."

Infections and deaths continue to fall. The nation's seven-day average for daily new cases fell to less than 17,300 on Tuesday, down from more than 31,000 two weeks ago. Daily deaths declined to 588, down from 605, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. The virus has killed more than 595,000 people in the United States.

Beer among latest vaccine incentives for 'month of action'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Free beer is the latest White House-backed incentive for Americans to get vaccinated for COVID-19, as President Joe Biden planned to announce a "month of action" Wednesday to get more shots into arms before the July 4 holiday.

Speaking from the White House, Biden planned to update the nation on the vaccination rollout and his plans to get 70% of adults partially vaccinated by Independence Day. The latest vaccine sweetener, provided by Anheuser-Busch, builds on other incentives like cash giveaways, sports tickets or paid leave, to keep up the pace of Americans getting shots.

The White House said Biden's "month of action" will continue to use public and private-sector partnerships to encourage Americans to roll up their sleeves.

To date 62.8% of the adult U.S. population have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and 133.6 million are fully vaccinated.

The rate of new vaccinations has slowed again to an average below 600,000 per day, down from more than 800,000 per day when incentives like lotteries were announced, and down from a peak of nearly 2 million per day in early April when demand for shots was much higher.

Anheuser-Busch announced Wednesday morning that it would "buy Americans 21+ a round of beer" once Biden's 70% goal is met through a promotional giveaway on its website that will provide \$5 credits to the first 200,000 people to respond when the nation reaches the vaccine threshold.

Restrictions ease for US service members in Germany

By MARCUS KLOECKNER

Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Movie theaters, entertainment parks and other businesses were allowed to reopen Wednesday, as several areas where U.S. forces live in Germany reported coronavirus incidence rates that allow local officials to ease federally mandated restrictions.

Restrictions on shopping and activities were pared down starting last month in communities that had a weekly aver-

age incidence rate of 100 new cases per 100,000 people, with additional allowances for areas with a rate of less than 50 new cases per 100,000 people.

The state of Rheinland-Pfalz, home to tens of thousands of U.S. service members, reported a weekly average incidence rate of about 32 new cases per 100,000 people Wednesday, a sharp drop compared to recent weeks.

That same day, the improved numbers allowed most of the state to open hotels to

guests and indoor dining to patrons who can either show a negative test or proof of vaccination. Diners eating outdoors at restaurants do not need a test. Swimming pools may also open at 50% capacity, according to the state rules.

Entertainment and cultural venues, including cinemas, are allowed to admit up to 100 people indoors and 250 people at once outside, the rules stated Wednesday.

"Since in past days the incidence rate in Rheinland-

Pfalz has declined significantly, we can continue to go this way carefully but also with confidence," state governor Malu Dreyer said in a statement.

The state government in Mainz said it expects to ease restrictions more in the second half of June. This would include opening flea markets and fairs, which have been closed for several months.

The situation is similar in other German states where U.S. bases are located.

Capitol riot charges anger far-right groups

Associated Press

Former President Donald Trump's lies about a stolen 2020 election united right-wing supporters, conspiracy theorists and militants on Jan. 6, but the aftermath of the insurrection is roiling two of the most prominent far-right extremist groups at the U.S. Capitol that day.

More than three dozen members and associates across both the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers have been charged with crimes. Some local chapters cut ties with national leadership in the weeks after the deadly siege. The Proud Boys' chairman called for a pause in the ral-

lies that often have led to clashes with anti-fascist activists. And one Oath Keeper has agreed to cooperate against others charged in the riot.

Some extremism experts see parallels between the fallout from the Capitol riot and the schisms that divided far-right figures and groups after their violent clashes with counterprotesters at the "Unite the Right" white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Va., in August 2017. The white supremacist "alt-right" movement fractured and ultimately faded from public view after the violence erupted that weekend.

"I think something kind of like that is happening right now in the broader far-right movement, where the cohesive tissue that brought them all together — being the 2020 election — it's kind of dissolved," said Jared Holt, a resident fellow at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab.

But others believe President Joe Biden's victory and the Jan. 6 investigation, the largest federal prosecution in history, might animate the militia movement — fueled by an anti-government anger.

"We're already seeing a lot of this rhetoric being spewed in an

effort to pull in people," said Freddy Cruz, a Southern Poverty Law Center research analyst who studies anti-government groups. "It's very possible that people will become energized and try to coordinate more activity given that we have a Democratic president in office."

Members of the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers make up just a fraction of the more than 400 people charged so far. Prosecutors have narrowed in on the two extremist groups as they try to determine how much planning went into the attack, but authorities have said they're intent on arresting anyone involved.

Judge tosses suit from former Marine who was jailed in Iran

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A judge has thrown out a lawsuit from a former Marine who was jailed in Iran for more than four years and then denied a multimillion-dollar payout from a special U.S. government victims' fund after an FBI espionage investigation into his travels.

Judge Richard Hertling of the Court of Federal Claims said in a ruling dated Friday that the court lacked jurisdiction to overturn decisions of the special master who oversees the fund. A lawyer for Amir Hekmati said Tuesday that he was disappointed by the ruling.

"We will, of course, pursue a prompt and vigorous appeal, and we are confident that ultimately the facts will prevail," said the attorney, Scott D. Gilbert.

Hekmati, who in 2016 was released as part of a prisoner swap, was initially awarded a default judgment after Iran failed to contest his allegations that he was wrongfully imprisoned and brutally tortured there on suspicion that he had been spying for the CIA. Such awards are made from a fund for victims of state-sponsored terrorism that is administered by the Justice Department through a special master and that caps payments at \$20 million, the amount Hekmati and his lawyers say he was entitled to receive.

He was told in late 2017 that his claim was eligible for payment from the fund. But no money came, and the Justice Department

told Hekmati's lawyers in 2019 that it planned to reconsider its earlier position that Hekmati was eligible for an award. Kenneth Feinberg, renowned for overseeing payments to victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, was reappointed special master of the fund for the purpose of reconsidering Hekmati's claim.

In January 2020, Feinberg told Hekmati's lawyers that he had concluded that Hekmati was ineligible for a payout. He cited documents revealing a decade-old FBI espionage investigation into whether Hekmati had traveled to Iran with the intent of selling classified information.

Feinberg said the records raised questions about whether Hekmati had misled the U.S. government when he said his primary purpose in traveling to Iran was to visit his ailing grandmother.

Hekmati has vigorously disputed the espionage suspicions and has never been charged.

Lawyers for Hekmati, who was raised in Michigan and served as an infantryman and interpreter in Iraq before being honorably discharged from the Marines in 2005, say any suggestion he could have been a spy for Iran is impossible to square with the way he was imprisoned and tortured there. They note that he was initially awarded payment from the fund well after the FBI investigation was underway, and that he's never faced any charges.

Iranian warship sinks after fire

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — The largest warship in the Iranian navy caught fire and later sank Wednesday in the Gulf of Oman under unclear circumstances, semiofficial news agencies reported.

The blaze began around 2:25 a.m. and firefighters tried to contain it, the Fars news agency reported, but their efforts failed to save the 679-foot Kharg, which was used to resupply other ships in the fleet at sea and conduct training exercises. State media reported 400 sailors and trainee cadets on board fled the vessel, with 33 suffering injuries.

The vessel sank near the Iranian port of Jask, some 790 miles southeast of Tehran on the Gulf of Oman near the Strait of Hormuz — the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf. Photos circulated on Iranian social media of sailors wearing life jackets evacuating the vessel as a fire burned behind them.

Fars published video of thick, black smoke rising from the ship early Wednesday morning.

Satellite photos from Planet Labs Inc. analyzed by The Associated Press showed the Kharg off to the west of Jask on Tuesday.

Satellites from the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that track fires from space detected a blaze at the site of the Jask that started just before the time of the fire reported by Fars.

Iranian officials offered no cause for the fire aboard the Kharg, though they said an investigation had begun.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Teen shoves bear that swatted family dog

CA BRADBURY — Hai-ley Morinico didn't hesitate when she saw a large bear facing off with her family dogs from the top of a wall in their Southern California backyard.

Home surveillance video aired by ABC 7 shows the mama bear perched on top of the wall, swatting at a large black dog on the ground. Two bear cubs are behind the bear while four smaller dogs are barking and darting around the yard.

The 17-year-old sprints into the frame, uses two hands to push the large bear off the wall, then picks up one of the smaller dogs. She and the other dogs then run out of the frame.

The bears disappear over a wall into a neighbor's yard.

Clerk pays new postage to send wedding invites

AK WASILLA — An Alaska bride-to-be mailed out her wedding invitations last month and eagerly waited for friends and family to respond. And kept waiting.

It turns out, they had incorrect postage on their invitations. Their style of invitation, with a wax seal on the back side of the envelope, required extra postage.

A notice had been sent to the post office box associated with the invitations, informing them about the postage due. Wasilla Post Office window clerk Edward "Lee" Mayton noticed the letters and saw that the owner hadn't checked the P.O. box. Mayton bought the extra postage needed to mail the 50 or so

invitations and with the help of his co-workers, got them stamped and in the mail.

Man accused of plotting to attack a Walmart

TX KERRVILLE — Authorities in Texas arrested a man accused of plotting to carry out a mass shooting at a Walmart, and a search of the suspect's home turned up firearms, ammunition and materials officials described as "radical ideology paraphernalia."

Coleman Thomas Blevins, 28, was arrested in Kerrville and was charged with making a "terroristic threat to create public fear of serious bodily injury," the Kerr County Sheriff's Office said in a news release.

Investigators said they intercepted a message from Blevins indicating he was "preparing to proceed with a mass shooting," and that the threat included Walmart. Blevins was taken into custody the next day.

Park Police rescue dog that tumbled into gorge

NY CASTILE — A specialized police ropes team went down into a western New York gorge to rescue a dog that had fallen into it, state Park Police said.

The Labrador retriever, named Achilles, plunged about 150 to 200 feet into a gorge in Letchworth State Park in Castile, about 50 miles southeast of Buffalo, the park police said in a Facebook post. The dog broke his leg and was stranded.

The Genesee High Angle Rope Rescue team found Achilles and made their way down to the dog.

Police said that except for the broken leg and some other minor injuries, he was healthy.

Woman charged after crash involving 6 kids

MI SPRING LAKE TOWNSHIP — A 29-year-old woman was charged with drunken driving and child endangerment after crashing a vehicle carrying six children into a utility pole in western Michigan.

The Ottawa County sheriff's office said the Kentwood woman apparently lost control of the vehicle at a curve before crashing. No one was hurt.

Boy, 7, swims an hour to rescue his dad, sister

FL JACKSONVILLE — A 7-year-old boy was credited for helping to save his father and 4-year-old sister by swimming to shore and calling for help after they got caught in a strong current during a boating trip on Florida's St. Johns River.

The father, Steven Poust, told Jax4 television station that he anchored his boat in the river while he fished and his children played. Chase Poust said the current was too strong for his sister Abigail to hold onto the boat, and he also let go to stay with her. Only the girl was wearing a life jacket.

Their father jumped in the water to grab her. Chase then began swimming toward shore.

Chase kept swimming, doggie paddling and floating on his back to keep from tiring out. It took him about an hour to reach land. He ran to the nearest house for help.

Crews from the Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission found the father and daughter about a mile from their boat.

Fire destroys historic train depot, museum

MS McCOMB — A massive fire wrecked a Mississippi city's train depot and museum, a beloved restored landmark that dates back to McComb's founding as a railroad town.

No cause was immediately determined for the fire that broke out in the north end of the building in which the museum's office and archives were housed. McComb Fire Chief Gary McKenzie told the Enterprise-Journal that a rigorous investigation will be done.

It's unclear what effect the fire will have on Amtrak train service.

The museum was formed in 2001 and opened in 2003. It expanded in 2013.

Man charged after tires slashed on vehicles

ME PORTLAND — A man was charged after tires were slashed on more than 30 vehicles in Portland's Old Port.

James Rozakis, 43, was charged with criminal mischief, trespassing and violating bail conditions, police said.

He was arrested after being spotted and attempting to run away.

Many of the targeted vehicles were near the Regency Hotel.

— From wire reports

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Zverev advances to 3rd round in Paris

Associated Press

PARIS — Down 4-1 in the third set, Alexander Zverev decided it was time to shorten his match at the French Open.

He was determined to avoid another lengthy fight following a five-set battle in the previous round, so he applied pressure on qualifier Roman Safiullin. The sixth-seeded German won the next game at love, broke back by pushing his rival into unforced errors and was nearly flawless in the tiebreaker.

The reward was a 7-6 (4), 6-3, 7-6 (1) victory to advance into the third round at Roland Garros.

"I'm happy to be through in three sets. I'm happy not to have played another five-setter," Zverev said. "I think it's going to be important for me during the course of this tournament."

Zverev, facing a rival he has known since their days in the boys' categories, dropped his serve three times on Court Suzanne Lenglen but managed to

catch up with Safiullin. It wasn't smooth — he hit 10 double-faults and challenged several calls — but he kept his cool when it mattered.

A 25-shot rally in the final tiebreaker epitomized Zverev's combative attitude. First on the defensive, Zverev turned it around and won the point with a passing shot. He took the next five points to seal the match and extend his perfect record against qualifiers to four matches on the Paris clay.

Zverev has been in excellent form in the buildup to the clay-court major. He is among the top contenders in Paris following his title in Madrid, where he beat Rafael Nadal.

Zverev was joined in the third round by qualifier Henri Laaksonen, who hit 53 winners to upset 11th-seeded Roberto Bautista Agut 6-3, 2-6, 6-3, 6-2. The 29-year-old Swiss had never beaten a top 20 player before.

For the third straight year, Stefanos Tsitsipas also will be playing in the third round. The

fifth-seeded Greek player excelled at the net and saved 11 break points to defeat solid baseliner Pedro Martinez of Spain 6-3, 6-4, 6-3.

Just another Grand Slam filled with five-setters for Kei Nishikori.

The former U.S. Open finalist rallied past 23rd-seeded Karen Khachanov 4-6, 6-2, 2-6, 6-4, 6-4 on Wednesday to reach the third round of the French Open — after having also gone the distance to beat Italian qualifier Alessandro Giannessi in his opening match.

In the women's draw, 2019 runner-up Marketa Vondrousova reached the third round with a 6-1, 6-3 win over wild-card entry Harmony Tan. Earlier, 10th-seeded Belinda Bencic's campaign at Roland Garros ended with a 6-2, 6-2 loss to Daria Kasatkina, while Katerina Siniaikova saved two match points to oust 29th-seeded Veronika Kudermetova 7-6 (7), 5-7, 7-5.

Ahead of the French Open, Siniakova made a deep run in

Parma, where she upset top-seeded Serena Williams.

Williams, a year after she withdrew from the tournament before her second match because of an injured left Achilles, advanced to the third round Wednesday with a 6-3, 5-7, 6-1 defeat of Mihaela Buzarnescu of Romania.

Bencic struggled with her serve throughout and was broken four times by her Russian rival. The Swiss player has never progressed past the third round at the French Open in five appearances. Kasatkina made it to the quarterfinals in Paris in 2018, but it's the first time this season that she has won consecutive matches on clay.

Venus Williams and 17-year-old Coco Gauff were beaten by 13th-seeded Ellen Perez and Zheng Saisai 6-7 (5), 6-4, 6-3 in the first round. It marked the first time that Williams had played a Grand Slam doubles match with anyone but her sister.

Suns dismantle Lakers, take 3-2 lead in series

Associated Press

PHOENIX — The Phoenix Suns made LeBron James look away.

Riding an orange wave of support in the desert, the Suns sent the four-time league MVP to the locker room early and took control of their first-round playoff series with a 115-85 dismantling of the Los Angeles Lakers on Tuesday night.

Phoenix leads 3-2, one win shy of becoming the first team in 15 tries to send James packing in the first round of the playoffs.

"There's nobody that's scared of the moment," Suns guard Devin Booker said. "We're a confident team."

Phoenix won in Los Angeles on Sunday to tie the series and went right at the Anthony Davis-less Lakers in front of a revved-up crowd in Game 5.

Davis was out after suffering a groin injury in Game 4 and the Suns took advantage by attacking every chance they had. Los Angeles put up little resistance, allowing Phoenix

to score nearly at will while building a 30-point halftime lead — the Lakers' largest halftime deficit in 25 years.

Booker scored 30 points after two quiet games, the Suns made 14 three-pointers and had just four turnovers.

Nets 123, Celtics 109: James Harden had 34 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for his first postseason triple-double with his new team, leading host Brooklyn into the Eastern Conference semifinals with a victory over Boston in Game 5.

Kyrie Irving scored 25 points and Kevin Durant had 24 for the Nets, who will face the Milwaukee Bucks in their first appearance in the second round since 2014. The No. 2-seeded Nets will host Game 1 on Saturday.

Jayson Tatum had 32 points and nine rebounds for the Celtics, who made the Eastern Conference finals last year but went quickly with Jaylen Brown and Kemba Walker unavailable.

Evan Fournier added 18 points and Ro-

meo Langford had 17 starting in place of Walker, who missed his second straight game with a knee injury.

Nuggets 147, Trail Blazers 140 (2OT): Michael Porter Jr.'s three-pointer with 1:33 left in the second overtime helped host Denver squelch an epic comeback by Portland Game 5 of the playoff series.

The Nuggets won despite Damian Lillard's franchise playoff record 55 points and NBA playoff record 12 three-pointers.

Lillard scored 17 of Portland's 19 points in the two overtimes, but he didn't score again after his 12th three-pointer in 17 attempts put the Blazers ahead 140-138 with 3:47 left. And his teammates didn't score again, either.

Nikola Jokic scored 38 points and came one assist shy of a triple-double.

The series shifts to Portland for Game 6 on Thursday night with Denver leading 3-2.

Monte Morris scored 28 points off the bench for Denver.

Mullins, Orioles end 14-game losing streak

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Cedric Mullins hustled over to right-center field and made a sliding, back-handed catch at the base of the wall.

It was still early, but by then, this night felt different for the Baltimore Orioles.

"I think that was the turning point in the game," Orioles starter Bruce Zimmermann said. "Everybody saw that, we were ready to roll. You could see kind of a mental shift in our favor after that catch."

Mullins got two hits and scored two runs to go along with his sensational catch, helping Baltimore snap its 14-game losing streak with a 7-4 victory over the Minnesota Twins on Tuesday night.

Pedro Severino and Maikel Franco both homered for the Orioles, who also ended a 16-game head-to-head skid against Minnesota. Zimmermann (3-3) allowed two runs and six hits in 5½ innings, striking out a career-high seven.

Yankees 5, Rays 3: Clint Frazier hit a game-ending, two-run homer with two outs in the 11th inning after making a game-saving catch in the eighth, and slumping New York beat the visiting Tampa Bay Rays.

The righty-hitting Frazier turned on a slider from righthander Andrew Kittredge (5-1)

and stood at the plate to admire the drive, capping a tight finish in which both teams came up short on potential rallies.

Cubs 4, Padres 3: Patrick Wisdom hit his third homer in two games, Willson Contreras also went deep and host Chicago beat San Diego after Padres star Fernando Tatis Jr. left with an injury.

Tatis exited because of right oblique tightness. He hit a fly to left field in the sixth inning and was replaced at shortstop in the bottom half by Ha-Seong Kim.

Cardinals 3, Dodgers 2: Edmundo Sosa hit a tiebreaking single in the ninth inning, Tyler O'Neill made a running catch for the final out and St. Louis won at Los Angeles.

O'Neill led off the ninth with a single against Blake Treinen (1-2) and stole second before Sosa hit a sharp grounder into left field.

Phillies 17, Reds 3: Odúbel Herrera and Andrew McCutchen each hit two of Philadelphia's seven home runs in a rout at Cincinnati. Matt Joyce capped the rout with a grand slam in the ninth off Reds infielder Alex Blandino, who was on the mound to help spare the bullpen.

Nationals 11, Braves 6: Ryan Zimmerman and Juan Soto each hit a two-run homer and Washington overcame Stephen Strasburg's early exit to

win at Atlanta.

Soto had three hits, drove in four runs and scored four times to lead the Nationals' 14-hit outburst.

Indians 6, White Sox 5: AL MVP Jose Abreu grounded out with the bases loaded to blunt a ninth-inning rally against closer James Karinchak, giving Shane Bieber and host Cleveland a win.

Bieber (6-3) allowed two earned runs in seven innings, striking out seven to beat AL Central-leading Chicago for the second time this season.

Tigers 10, Brewers 7: Eric Haase and Jonathan Schoop each hit two home runs, Miguel Cabrera had three RBI and previously light-hitting Detroit won on the road to end Milwaukee's five-game winning streak.

The Brewers' Kolten Wong and Tyrone Taylor also hit two homers apiece in a game that saw nine home runs.

Astros 5, Red Sox 1: Luis Garcia threw a career-high seven innings, Jose Altuve homered and host Houston earned its third straight victory.

Garcia (4-3) permitted one run and six hits, retiring 11 of 12 batters over one stretch.

The right-hander struck out six and walked one in his fourth consecutive win.

Blue Jays 5, Marlins 1: Vla-

dimir Guerrero Jr. keyed a career-best four-hit outing with his major league-leading 17th home run and Toronto celebrated the return to their temporary Buffalo home with a win over Miami.

Royals 10, Pirates 5: Andrew Benintendi hit a grand slam and drove in five runs to lead host Kansas City over Pittsburgh.

and eight hits in 5½ innings.

Rockies 3, Rangers 2 (11): Ryan McMahon scored on Brett Martin's wild pitch in the 11th inning and host Colorado sent Texas to its 13th straight road loss.

Angels 8, Giants 1: Anthony Rendon drove in five runs, Max Stassi returned from a concussion and hit an RBI double and Los Angeles won at San Francisco.

Rendon hit a two-run single in the third to end an 0-for-10 funk and a bases-loaded double during a five-run fourth. He singled again in the ninth.

Athletics 12, Mariners 6: Matt Olson hit his 14th homer in the second inning and a two-run single in Oakland's six-run seventh as it won at Seattle, ending the Mariners' five-game winning streak.

Diamondbacks 6, Mets 5 (10): Josh Reddick hit a two-run double in the bottom of the 10th inning and host Arizona rallied to beat New York.

Vasilevskiy, Lightning take 2-0 lead over Hurricanes

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Andrei Vasilevskiy has spent two games turning nearly every shot away for the Tampa Bay Lightning. A couple more, and the reigning Stanley Cup champions could be headed to the next round.

Alex Killorn and Anthony Cirelli scored while Vasilevskiy carried a shutout into the final minutes, helping the Lightning beat the Carolina Hurricanes 2-1 on Tuesday night for a 2-0 lead in their second-round series.

As in the first round against Florida, Tampa Bay has opened a best-of-seven series with a pair of road wins. This time, it comes against the Central Division champion and a team that was in the Presidents' Trophy hunt until the final week of the regular season.

"We've been through (road playoff games) before," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "And we've got a group that believes in how to play and what you need to do to shut a game down. ... I think when you just have that overall

mentality and everybody puts the team first, good things and magical things can happen. And that's what these guys are doing."

Now Tampa Bay heads home for two games, with Game 3 on Thursday, and a chance to sweep.

"It was rocking these last two games," Lightning captain Steven Stamkos said of PNC Arena with more than 16,000 rowdy fans. "To come in here and get both wins was huge. We know how hard it is to win this time of the year, period."

Football recruiting can return to normal

Associated Press

Minnesota's P.J. Fleck spoke for many coaches nationwide last December when he noted he still hadn't shaken the hands of about half the prospects who were about to sign with his program.

Those days finally are coming to an end.

The NCAA has lifted the recruiting dead period that has been in place since March 13, 2020, due to the coronavirus pandemic. The NCAA returned to its usual recruiting calendar Tuesday, allowing prospects to meet coaches in person and coaches to conduct live evaluations of recruits.

That means programs across

the country are going to make up for lost time.

"It's going to be crazy," South Carolina coach Shane Beamer said.

The change is a relief for high school football players such as Max Reese, a wide receiver from Fenwick High School in the Chicago suburbs. Reese has offers from Bowling Green and Northern Illinois, and he has visited both Mid-American Conference schools. But he couldn't meet the coaching staffs at either program during his visits because of pandemic-imposed restrictions.

Now he finally gets to speak face to face with the coaches who have been Zooming with

him for the last year. That should give both the prospect and the staff a better idea of their interest in each other.

"It's like dating a girl online," Reese said. "You don't know what you're really getting until you see them in person."

Ohio State assistant athletic director for player personnel Mark Pantoni uses a different analogy as he discussed how tough it has been for prospects to evaluate schools based on virtual campus tours.

"It's cool when you see the commercial of the nice flashy car, but you don't really know until you test drive it how cool it really is," Pantoni said. "That's what we're about to do. These

kids are about to test-drive the car finally after seeing the commercial for so many months."

College staffs have been gearing up for this moment.

Florida State was welcoming recruits to campus just after midnight as part of its "Midnight Madness" event to mark the end of the dead period.

At Ohio State, director of campus recruiting Erin Dunston said the Buckeyes have 51 official visits scheduled for June. Pantoni said Ohio State's yearly total of official visits normally is in the "high 40s to low 50s."

"So this is pretty extraordinary, but not unexpected, either," Pantoni said.

Medina Spirit drug test confirmed; Derby win in jeopardy

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Bob Baffert's lawyer said Wednesday that a split-sample test of Kentucky Derby winner Medina Spirit came back positive for the presence of the steroid betamethasone, which could lead to the horse's disqualification and discipline for the Hall of Fame trainer.

Attorney Craig Robertson said the test showed 25 picograms of the steroid, after 21 were found initially. Even a trace amount of betamethasone is prohibited on race day in Kentucky and considered a violation.

Robertson said additional testing is being conducted to try to trace the source of the drug to an ointment to treat a skin infection and not an injection.

Source: Krzyzewski will coach final season

Duke Hall of Fame coach Mike Krzyzewski will coach his final season with the Blue Devils in 2021-22, a person familiar with the situation said Wednesday.

The person said former Duke player and associate head coach Jon Scheyer would then take over as Krzyzewski's successor for the 2022-23 season.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the school hasn't commented publicly on the decision. An announcement is expected later Wednesday.

Celtics replace Ainge as team president

The Boston Celtics shook up their front office on Wednesday, a day after they were eliminated from the playoffs, with president of basketball operations Danny Ainge retiring and coach Brad Stevens moving up to the front office to replace him.

The moves came about 12 hours after the 17-time NBA champions lost to the Brooklyn Nets in Game 5 of their first-round playoff series. The Celtics, who reached the conference finals in three of the previous four seasons, had flirted with a top-four seed in the East for much of the season before stumbling into the play-in

round.

Celtics staff were informed Wednesday morning of the moves, which were first reported by ESPN and The Athletic.

Ainge won NBA titles with the Celtics in 1984 and '86 and took over as the team president in 2003. He was voted the league's top executive in 2008, when Boston won its 17th championship — a league record that has been matched by the Los Angeles Lakers.

In other Celtics news:

■ A plea of not guilty to a charge of assault and battery with a dangerous weapon was entered on behalf of Cole Buckley, 21, of Braintree, Mass., in Boston Municipal Court. He was also ordered to stay away from the TD Garden after he threw a water bottle at Nets guard Kyrie Irving.

Bush among 1st-timers eligible for College Hall

Former Southern California star Reggie Bush, who had his Heisman Trophy victory in 2005 vacated for committing NCAA violations, is among the players

making their first appearance on the College Football Hall of Fame ballot this year.

The National Football Foundation announced Wednesday the players and coaches eligible for election into the Hall of Fame, and 26 of the 78 FBS players will be debuting on the ballot.

Hall of Fame ballots go to more than 12,000 NFF members and current Hall of Famers. The votes are considered by the NFF's Honors Courts, which then deliberates and selects a class of about a dozen players and two or three coaches.

College Football Hall of Famer and two-time Heisman Trophy winner Archie Griffin from Ohio State is the chairman of the Honors Court, which includes athletic administrators, Hall of Famers and members of the media from all over the country.

Other first-timers on the ballot included quarterbacks Andrew Luck of Stanford and Kellen Moore of Boise State, Penn State star linebackers LaVar Arrington and Paul Posluszny and former California running back Marshawn Lynch.