

Afghan army aims for 1,500 new recruits

By J.P. LAWRENCE AND
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Stars and Stripes

BAGRAM, Afghanistan — The Afghan army has launched a recruitment drive to maintain Bagram Airfield as coalition troops prepare to depart the sprawling base in the coming weeks.

Lt. Col. Atiqullah Tarin, a recruiter for the Afghan military in the province that houses Bagram — the largest U.S. base in the country — said he had been ordered last week to sign up about 1,500 new soldiers within the next month.

The drive comes after an acceleration of base closures since May, the official start of the U.S. and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan. The pullout is set to end by Sept. 11, but most foreign troops are expected to leave the country well in advance.

Before May 1, there were 2,500-3,500 U.S. troops in the country and about 7,000 from NATO allies and other coalition members.

U.S. and NATO forces are expected to hand over Bagram Airfield to the Afghan military in about 20 days, or by the end of this month, district governor Lalasherin Darwish Raufi told Stars and Stripes on

Saturday. Local officials have also been told to help the military find recruits to defend Bagram, he said.

The base's transition to the Afghan military is ongoing, said Fazludin Ayar, governor for Parwan province.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said last week in Washington that it was "slightly ahead" of its withdrawal schedule, with more than a third completed.

In the town surrounding Bagram, lines of trucks carrying containers filled with trash left one of Bagram's gates Saturday afternoon. The trucks empty their trash in yards where workers pick through the refuse hoping to find items to sell, or copper and iron to recycle.

Before May 1, only one or two trucks a day left Bagram, said Sayed Wali, a worker at one trash yard. Now as many as 10 to 20 trucks leave the base every day, he said.

Shopkeepers also said they noticed an uptick in trucks with goods leaving Bagram over the last month.

Some residents said they feared that if the Taliban comes to power after the U.S. and NATO leave, there will be problems for the people who worked with foreign troops at Bagram. The area had an unclaimed

bombing that killed three passengers on a bus carrying teachers two weeks ago.

A garrison of 1,500 troops should be enough to help secure the base after the U.S. and NATO leave, said the recruiter Tarin, a longtime officer who walks with a limp from wounds suffered in a land mine explosion.

Leaders will come from elsewhere in the Afghan military. Tarin said the 1,500 troops would most likely just hold the base and not leave for operations.

Around 19,000 troops have died and have been registered for death benefits over the last two years, the Afghan government told Stars and Stripes in February.

The Afghan military aims to recruit 47,000 troops each year, the latest Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction report said.

In Parwan, 84 people from the province volunteered in the two days since the order, Tarin said.

The recruiter said he is prioritizing former soldiers who won't need to undergo basic training. He is also keeping tabs on fresh recruits who are willing to secure Bagram, in case he can't find enough veterans before the deadline.

Poll: Many in EU support US security role

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Support for a U.S. role in the security and defense of Europe grew in 2021 among key allies, even as doubts persisted about Washington's reliability, a poll published Monday showed.

The findings from the German Marshall Fund, a nonpartisan policy group, came ahead of President Joe Biden's visit next week to NATO headquarters in Brussels, where allied heads of state will gather for a security summit.

"While the U.S. is seen as

most influential, it is not seen as the most reliable partner," the 2021 Transatlantic Trends report said.

Relations between the United States and longtime allies such as Germany have been strained in recent years, especially under the Trump administration, which frequently criticized Berlin over trade issues and for not spending enough on defense.

Even though the Biden administration has talked up its support of allies in Europe, questions remain about U.S. reliability on the international stage.

Confidence in the U.S. was "strikingly low" among Germans at 51%, the poll found. Trust was lower only among Turks, at 23%.

"On average, Canada was viewed as the most reliable partner across all countries surveyed, followed by Sweden and Germany," the report said.

Polish residents rated U.S. reliability highest, at 76%.

While views on the U.S. as a reliable partner were mixed, support remained strong in Europe for the U.S. having a security role on the Continent, the poll found.

More than two-thirds of Ger-

mans — 69% — said the United States should be involved in Europe's security and defense, a 10-point rise from last year, the poll found. French support for U.S. involvement was up 10 points since 2020, at 55%.

The German Marshall Fund report, done in collaboration with the Bertelsmann Foundation, was conducted between March 29 and April 13 in 11 countries: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The report did not cite a margin of error.

Army National Guard MP smiles for miles in memes

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

A photo of Spc. Joseph Breining smiling and giving a thumbs-up during a road march in Kosovo last month garnered the attention of hundreds on Twitter and spurred the creation of memes.

The photo drew comparisons of Breining to the Smilin' Bob character from the Enzyte "natural male enhancement" tablet commercials of the early 2000s or to Kenneth Ellen Parcell, the NBC page in the sitcom "30 Rock."

At least one commenter saw a modern reincarnation of the smiling soldier raising a canteen cup, originally from a 1943 World War II propaganda poster about rationing, but more familiar to social media users as the "how about a nice cup of shut the [expletive] up" meme.

But Breining, a Maryland Army National Guard member on his first overseas deployment, says he was just having a fun time picking the brains of a Polish soldier who was marching with a ruck beside him.

"I'm always smiling," Breining said in a phone interview Friday, explaining his philosophy: "If you can't smile through it, you might as well not be doing it."

Indeed, the Defense Department's imagery repository DVIDShub.net contains several photos of the smiling soldier with the 29th Military Police Company.

Military photographers "kind of hone in"

on soldiers like him, said Maj. Sam Otto, public affairs officer for Regional Command-East, Kosovo Force. "He's the only one smiling," Otto said.

There are photos of Breining without a grin, too, such as practicing deescalation tactics in a simulator or training on the use of radar guns alongside allied international MPs.

He's among the 28th rotation of American forces supporting the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo, Otto said. Their nine-month deployment began in November.

Breining doesn't have active Facebook or Twitter accounts, and only became aware his photo was being turned into a meme when other soldiers on the KFOR mission showed him the social media posts.

"I just laughed through it all," he said. "It's funny. I was having a good time."

His grinning even drew the attention of senior noncommissioned officers in the service.

Sgt. Maj. Jason Baker, a public affairs sergeant major for U.S. Army Pacific, praised Breining as one of "two viral soldiers," along with Cpl. Emma Malonelord, the star of an Army recruiting video that drew criticism as "woke" last month.

"Super proud to have these two motivated young Americans serving in our ranks," Baker said in a tweet that was liked over 1,200 times. "It's the people that make this whole thing worth it."

Warrior Games will be hosted by Jon Stewart

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

Comedian Jon Stewart will host the Defense Department's 2021 Warrior Games in Orlando, Fla., as the annual adaptive sports competition for wounded, ill and injured service members returns after the coronavirus pandemic forced its cancellation last year.

The 2021 Warrior Games are expected to be the largest event since the competition was first launched in 2010, Stewart said in an interview Monday on ABC's Good Morning America. The 2021 games, hosted by the Army, will be held Sept. 12 to 22 at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex at Disney World.

"It was really tough to lose the games last year," said Stewart, who will emcee the Warrior Games for the fifth time. "Being able to get these guys all together again — it's great. It's not just about the competition. It's about the community. They all, kind of, hold each other accountable and they really create this incredible bond with each other. It's really wonderful to watch."

The 2021 games, which will be sponsored by Disney and broadcast on ESPN, will be free to the public. They will feature teams from the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Special Operations Command and international teams from Ukraine and the nation of Georgia, according to the Pentagon.

WWII Marine's family returns Japanese photos

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Five fading photographs carried into combat by a Japanese soldier during World War II are back in their homeland after three quarters of a century in America.

The pictures include a portrait of a couple with three young children, a bespectacled man, another fellow holding a wooden sword, a man and a boy standing together, and a woman in a kimono. They were mailed to Pennsylvania in March 1944 by

Marine Sgt. Harry Dininger, who was serving with the 22nd Marine Regiment in the Marshall Islands.

Dininger, 25, who survived being wounded on Guam, was killed fighting near Naha City, Okinawa, on May 10, 1945, according to his distant relative, David Wassel, 59, of White Oak, Pa.

Wassel discovered the photos in a box full of letters in another relative's basement more than a decade ago. Since then, he's been trying to reunite them with the family of the fallen Japanese soldier who they be-

longed to, he said in a telephone interview Friday.

Wassel thinks the Marine sent the photos home to let his mother know what Japanese people looked like.

He didn't make much headway in his quest to return the letters until he met New York-based journalist Mariko Fukuyama in October 2018.

The Marshall Islands War-Bereaved Families Association in Tokyo will hold onto the photos during the search, Fukuyama said.

Slowing vaccination rates threaten goal

The Washington Post

Plummeting vaccination rates have turned what officials hoped would be the “last mile” of the coronavirus immunization campaign into a marathon, threatening President Joe Biden’s goal of getting shots to at least 70% of adults by July 4.

The United States is averaging fewer than 1 million shots per day, a decline of more than two-thirds from the peak of 3.4 million in April, according to The Washington Post’s seven-day analysis, even though all adults and children over age 12 are now eligible.

Small armies of health workers and volunteers often outnumber the people showing up to get shots at clinics around the country, from a drive-through site in Chattanooga, Tenn., to a gymnasium in Provo, Utah, or a park in Raleigh, N.C.

The slowdown is national — with every state down at least two-thirds from its peak — and particularly felt across the South and Midwest. Twelve states, including Utah, Oklahoma, Montana, the Dakotas

and West Virginia, have seen vaccinations fall below 15 daily shots per 10,000 residents; Alabama had just four people per 10,000 residents get vaccinated last week.

However, the picture varies considerably across the country: Thirteen mostly East and West Coast states have already vaccinated 70% of adult residents, and another 15 states, plus the District of Columbia, are over 60% and will likely reach Biden’s goal.

But the rest are lagging. Tennessee and five other states are at 50% or below and vaccinating at such low rates that meeting the president’s threshold is very unlikely.

Officials must get a first dose to 4.2 million adults per week to meet Biden’s goal of ensuring that 70% of adults are at least partially vaccinated by Independence Day.

Complicating the push is that health officials have already reached the “low-hanging fruit” — those people who absolutely want to get vaccinated without you telling them anything,” Anthony Fauci, the government’s top infectious diseases expert,

said on a White House-organized call with community leaders on Friday. “You’re left with a group that you may need ... trusted messengers who go out there and explain to them why it’s critical for themselves, for their family.”

Polls have found that about one-third of Americans have no immediate plans to get vaccinated, with some holdouts saying their skepticism has intensified over time and others arguing the issue is moot because the pandemic has receded in the U.S. Public health experts have said that the nation needs widespread immunity to prevent a resurgence of cases later this year.

The slowdown has prompted a flurry of advertising, lotteries and promotions to win over holdouts, even as the list of incentives for people getting shots has ballooned almost to the point of parody. West Virginia officials are offering a chance to win rifles. Multiple businesses have promised treats like free beer, doughnuts and marijuana. Residents of several states now compete for million-dollar cash prizes.

India cautiously starts reopening as cases fall

Associated Press

Businesses in two of India’s largest cities were reopening Monday as part of a phased easing of lockdown measures in several states now that the number of new coronavirus infections in the country is on a steady decline.

India’s capital allowed businesses and shops to reopen with limited hours and the Delhi Metro, which serves New Delhi and adjoining areas, also resumed operations at 50% capacity. Last week, authorities in the capital allowed some manufacturing and construction activity to resume.

“Now the corona situation is under control. The economy must be brought back on track,” New Delhi’s chief minister, Arvind Kejriwal, told reporters on Sunday.

The strict lockdown mea-

sures had been in place since April at the start of a devastating surge in infections that lasted well into May and overwhelmed health care facilities in many parts of the country.

Some health experts fear the restrictions are being eased too soon, and there are concerns that the virus is still spreading unchecked through India’s villages where testing and medical care are limited.

On Monday, new infections fell to their lowest point in two months.

The 100,636 cases added in the past 24 hours pushed India’s total to nearly 29 million, second only behind the United States. The Health Ministry said 2,427 more people died in the past 24 hours, driving the overall toll to 349,186. Both figures are believed to be vast undercounts.

Another COVID side effect: Many opt for summer school

Associated Press

With her three teenagers vaccinated against COVID-19, Aja Purnell-Mitchell left it up to them to decide whether to go back to school during summer break.

The decision was unanimous: summer school.

“Getting them back into it, helping them socialize back with their friends, maybe meet some new people, and, of course, pick up the things that they lacked on Zoom,” the Durham County, N.C., mother said, ticking off her hopes for the session ahead, which will be the first time her children have been in the classroom since the outbreak took hold in the spring of 2020.

Across the U.S., more children than ever before could be in classrooms for summer school this year to make up for lost learning during the outbreak, which caused monumen-

tal disruptions in education. School districts nationwide are expanding their summer programs and offering bonuses to get teachers to take part.

Under the most recent federal pandemic relief package, the Biden administration is requiring states to devote some of the billions of dollars to summer programs.

The U.S. Education Department said it is too early to know how many students will sign up. But the number is all but certain to exceed the estimated 3.3 million who went to mandatory or optional summer school in 2019, before the pandemic.

School systems must devote some of the federal funding to deal with COVID-19’s disproportionate effect on students from poor families, those whose first language is not English, members of minority groups and those who are homeless or in foster care.

2 arrested for child shot dead in road rage

Associated Press

SANTA ANA, Calif. — Two people were arrested Sunday in connection to a road rage shooting in Southern California that killed a 6-year-old boy, the California Highway Patrol said.

Eriz Marcus Anthony, 24, and Lee Wynne, 23, were taken into custody outside their home in Costa Mesa, the highway patrol said in a statement. Their relationship was not immediately known. Officials said the pair were expected to be charged with murder.

Aiden Leos, 6, was fatally shot in the abdomen on May 21 while seated in the back seat of a car driven by his mother, Joanna Cloonan, on State Route 55 in the city of Orange.

Highway patrol officials said the road rage incident stemmed from “a perceived unsafe lane change.” According to accounts from the mother and witnesses who stopped to help her, another car cut her off, she responded with a hand gesture and the car slipped in behind her and someone inside fired a shot through

the rear of her car.

A \$500,000 reward had been offered for information leading to an arrest, Southern California News Group reported.

“On behalf of Border Division Chief Omar Watson, and the Santa Ana Area, we are deeply grateful for the professionalism and tireless commitment of our investigators who have worked on this case from day one to find those responsible for Aiden’s death,” California Highway Patrol Commissioner Amanda Ray said in Sunday’s statement.

Watson added: “The Department has been in regular contact with the victim’s family and I assure you they, like us, are committed to seeing justice served.”

The arrests came a day after the memorial service for Leos, who was remembered as a child with a vocabulary beyond his years who exuded warmth and tenderness.

It was unclear where Anthony and Wynne were being held, and whether they had attorneys who could speak on their behalf.

Pakistan train crash kills at least 45, injures over 100

Associated Press

GHOTKI — An express train barreled into another that had derailed in Pakistan before dawn Monday, killing at least 45 people, authorities said. More than 100 were injured, and rescuers and villagers worked throughout the day to search crumpled cars for survivors and the dead.

Cries for help pierced the night as passengers climbed out of overturned or crushed rail cars, and local people rushed to the scene in the district of Ghotki, in the southern province of Sindh. Later in the day, heavy machinery arrived to cut open some cars in the hopes of rescuing several people still believed to be trapped. The military deployed troops and helicopters to assist.

At around 3:30 a.m., the Millat Express train derailed and the Sir Syed Express train hit it minutes later, said Usman Abdullah, a deputy commissioner of Ghotki. It wasn’t immediately clear what caused the derailment, and the driver of the second train said he braked when he saw the disabled train but didn’t have time to avoid the collision.

“The challenge for us is to quickly rescue those passengers

who are still trapped in the wreckage,” said Umar Tufail, a police chief in the district. The death toll steadily rose through the day, reaching at least 40, according to Abdullah.

Officials said more than 100 passengers were injured, and those with critical injuries would be brought by helicopter to a nearby city’s hospital. According to railway officials, about 1,100 passengers were on board the two trains.

Earlier, Azam Swati, the minister for railways who headed to the scene of the crash, told The Associated Press that engineers and experts were trying to determine what caused the collision and that all aspects would be examined, including the possibility of sabotage.

Habibur Rehman Gilani, chairman of Pakistan Railways, told Pakistan’s Geo News TV that the segment of the railway tracks where the crash took place was old and needed replacing. He did not elaborate.

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan expressed his deep sorrow over the tragedy, saying on Twitter that he had asked the railway minister to supervise the rescue work and also ordered a probe into the crash.

Putin confirms Russia’s exit from overflight treaty

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday signed a bill to withdraw from an international treaty allowing surveillance flights over military facilities, following the U.S. exit from the pact.

The bill was endorsed by Russian lawmakers after U.S. officials told Moscow last month that President Joe Biden’s administration had decided not to reenter the Open Skies Treaty that the United States left under former President Donald Trump.

As a presidential candidate, Biden had criticized Trump’s withdrawal as “short-sighted.” Moscow had signaled its readiness to reverse the withdrawal procedure and stay in the 1992 treaty if the U.S. returned to the agreement, but now Putin’s signature seals the Russian withdrawal that would take effect in six months.

Putin and Biden are to have a summit in Geneva on June 16, a meeting that comes amid soaring tensions in Russia-U.S. ties that have hit post-Cold War lows after Russia’s 2014 annexation of Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula, accusations of Moscow’s interference in U.S. elections, hacking

attacks and other issues.

The Open Skies Treaty was intended to build trust between Russia and the West by allowing the accord’s more than three dozen signatories to carry out surveillance flights over each other’s territories to oversee troop deployments and other military activities. More than 1,500 flights have been conducted under the treaty since it took effect in 2002, helping foster transparency and monitor arms control agreements.

Trump pulled out of the pact last year, arguing that Russian violations made it untenable for Washington to remain a party, and the U.S. completed its withdrawal in November.

Russia has rejected any violations, arguing that a few restrictions on observation flights it imposed in the past were permissible under the treaty and noted that the U.S. imposed more sweeping restrictions on observation flights over Alaska.

As a condition for staying in the pact after the U.S. pullout, Moscow has unsuccessfully pushed for guarantees from NATO allies that they won’t hand over the data collected during their observation flights over Russia to the U.S.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Arson suspected in theme park fire

ID ATHOL — Authorities suspect an arsonist set a wooden roller coaster on fire in an overnight blaze at a northern Idaho theme park.

The Kootenai Sheriff's Office responded to the Silverwood Theme Park near the town of Athol to find one of the roller coasters on fire. A fire extinguisher was used to put out the blaze.

An initial investigation indicated someone sneaked into the park after it had closed and set fire to one of the roller coaster's wooden supports, KREM-TV reported.

Serial mail thief given 10 years in prison

FL MIAMI — A serial mail thief in Florida was sentenced to 10 years behind bars for stealing items from porches and mailboxes.

Federal prosecutors said in a news release that the sentence for Yunion Blanco-Pedroso, 26, followed his March guilty plea to mail theft and stolen mail possession.

Evidence in the case indicated that Blanco-Pedroso admitted committing 10 porch burglaries in 2020 in Miami and Coral Gables. Investigators also said surveillance video showed that Blanco-Pedroso followed mail delivery trucks, then stole mail from people's boxes and front porches.

When arrested, investigators found packages, mail and checks intended for other people in a blue BMW.

Flight diverted due to unruly passenger

NM ALBUQUERQUE — A flight from Los Angeles to Nashville was diverted to New Mexico after a passenger tried to break into the cockpit, Delta Air Lines said.

The "unruly" man made the unsuccessful attempt on the locked cockpit aboard Delta Air Lines Flight 386 but other passengers and crew members managed to detain him, the airline said.

Video taken aboard the plane shows the zip-tied and shoeless man surrounded by passengers and crew members as he repeats over and over again: "Stop this plane!" He was hauled to the back of the plane, which was diverted to Albuquerque International Sunport.

Man who swam to US returned to Canada

MI PORT HURON — A British man who told authorities that he wanted to work in the United States was stopped after swimming across a river between Michigan and Canada, police said.

The 47-year-old man, whose name wasn't released, told first responders that he didn't need help as he swam the St. Clair River near the Blue Water Bridge, said Port Huron police Sgt. James Gilbert.

The London man was picked up after he touched shore in Port Huron. After a medical check, he was returned to Canada — by a vehicle and not in the water.

Judge suspended for 'improper' conduct

PA PHILADELPHIA — A Philadelphia judge will be suspended for six months after a state judicial panel ruled that her "repeated, clearly improper conduct" in Family Court was "blatant and inexcusable."

The ruling issued by the Court of Judicial Discipline also mandates that Common Pleas Court Judge Lyris Younge serve a probationary term for the rest of her tenure, which extends to 2026. She will also be barred from serving in Family Court and must write apology letters to the people the panel said she wronged.

Younge was cited for illegally jailing parents, having parents handcuffed in her courtroom and insulting and belittling people who appeared before her.

Swastikas drawn in feces found at school

MA NEWTON — Two swastikas were drawn with feces in a high school bathroom in a wealthy Boston suburb, authorities said.

The Nazi symbols were discovered at Newton South High while the MCAS test was being taken, NBC Boston reported.

Authorities said a student discovered the markings, which were each about three inches tall and were later removed by custodians.

Interim Principal Mark Aronson said he was "saddened and angered" in a letter to the school community.

Man arrested for fight over Chick-fil-A sauce

KS WICHITA — A Kansas man was arrested for attacking a grocery store worker over Chick-fil-A sauce, police said.

Wichita police arrested resident James Adam Hirsh, 37, for aggravated assault.

A police spokesman told The Wichita Eagle that the altercation was over the sale of Chick-fil-A sauce at Dillons. Police said Hirsh was asked to calm down or leave the store, then he started punching at an employee.

Police: Chloroform used in abduction attempt

IA SIOUX CITY — Authorities arrested an Iowa man accused of hiding in the backseat a Nebraska woman's car and using zip ties, duct tape and homemade chloroform to abduct the woman and imprison her in a storage shed at his home.

Police arrested Zack Smith, 20, of Bronson, an ex-boyfriend of the woman, on charges of third-degree kidnapping, false imprisonment and two counts of assault, the Sioux City Journal reported.

Smith admitted that he hid in the back of the woman's vehicle and used a BB replica of a handgun to force the woman into his vehicle, where he blindfolded and bound her and held a towel he had soaked with homemade chloroform over her face, police said.

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Biles makes 7th US title look easy

Associated Press

Simone Biles toned it down. A little anyway. And soared even higher.

The 24-year-old gymnastics superstar claimed her record seventh U.S. title Sunday night in Fort Worth, Texas, delivering another stunning — and stunningly easy — performance that served little doubt the pressure surrounding her bid to become the first woman to win back-to-back Olympic championships in more than 50 years is only pushing her to even greater heights.

Shaking off a somewhat sloppy start Friday, at least by her impeccable standards, Biles put on a four-rotation showcase that highlighted why a GOAT emblem — a nod to her status as the Greatest Of All Time — has become a fixture on her competition leotard.

Her two-day total of 119.650 was nearly five points better than runner-up Sunisa Lee and good friend and teammate Jordan Chiles. Biles' all-around score on Sunday of 60.100 was her highest since 2018 and served notice she is only getting better with the Tokyo Games less than seven weeks away.

It helped that she managed to stay in-bounds (mostly) during her floor routine after stepping out three times on Friday. Blame in on the rush she gets when the lights are on and a crowd is in the palm of her hands. She was far more precise in finals save for one tumbling pass where one of her feet stepped over the white border.

Oh, well, something to work on for the Olympic trials later this month in St. Louis.

"It's so crazy because in training I never go out of bounds and I never have this much

power," Biles said. "But with the adrenaline, that's where it comes."

While Biles' victory was never in doubt — it rarely has been during her nearly eight-year reign atop the sport — she remains in no mood to coast.

And to think she didn't even bother with her latest innovation, a Yurchenko double-pike vault she drilled twice at the U.S. Classic last month that caught the attention of everyone from LeBron James to Michelle Obama. Instead, she opted for two with slightly lower difficulty that she completed so casually it was hard to tell if she was in front of an arena that screamed for her at every turn or just fooling around at practice back home in Houston.

Not that it mattered. She still posted the top score on vault anyway. Just like she did on beam. Just like she did on floor. Just like she's done everywhere she's saluted the judges since the 2013 U.S. Championships.

The Yurchenko double-pike will return at trials and likely in Tokyo, where if she completes it during competition yet another element in the sport's Code of Points will be named for her. Just add it to the list of what they call "#SimoneThings."

Biles has been a lock for Tokyo from the moment she returned to training in late 2017. Chiles and Lee may also be nearing that territory. The top two all-around finishers at trials will earn an automatic spot on the Olympic team, though U.S. national team coordinator Tom Forster allowed Biles, Chiles and Lee have separated themselves from the pack.

"You can look at the scores and if the scores are anything, it looks like that," For-

ster said.

Yes it does.

Lee, competing on a bad ankle that sometimes left her limping around the arena, appears to be gaining momentum. Behind a bars routine that is one of the most innovative and electric on the planet, Lee fended off a strong challenge from Chiles to hold on to silver.

"I feel like people are kind of doubting me because I've been injured for a little bit," said Lee, who added she doesn't think she needs to do much more to impress the selection committee.

Chiles continued her remarkable rise over the last six months, finishing runner-up to Biles for the second time in three weeks. The 20-year-old, who started training alongside Biles two years ago, shared an emotional moment with her good friend after drilling her bars dismount. Chiles saw coach Cecile Landi sobbing, which led her to join in, which led Biles to come over and offer a hug and a reminder of how far she's come.

"(She) was telling me I deserved what I just did and I'm gifted and talented and I have the opportunity to make that team," Chiles said.

The real intrigue heading into Trials might be who else can emerge from a crowded field. Emma Malabuyo finished fourth, with Leanne Wong fifth. Jade Carey, who has already secured an individual berth to the Olympics thanks to her performance on the World Cup circuit, was sixth. Forster said he expects Carey to accept her automatic spot rather than try to make the five-woman U.S. team.

Larson and Hendrick Motorsports on top again

Associated Press

SONOMA, Calif. — Kyle Larson first visited Sonoma Raceway as a young kid dressed head-to-toe in Jeff Gordon gear watching NASCAR practice from the hillside on a Saturday afternoon.

Now he's a Cup winner at what is considered the Elk Grove racer's home track, but his victory lane celebration Sunday was a disaster.

Larson tried to recreate a 2014 photo of himself spitting wine into the air following a lower level win, but it was far windier after this big leagues victory and when Larson splayed his mouthful from the oversized chalice, the red wine splashed all

over the new track president.

"I blew it," Larson said. "It was way windy and I feel super bad."

It was the only thing Larson did wrong all day.

Larson beat teammate Chase Elliott in overtime to win his second consecutive race, third of the season, and help Hendrick Motorsports continue its month of dominance.

Hendrick drivers have won four straight races and Larson's Coca-Cola 600 win a week ago at Charlotte Motor Speedway made Rick Hendrick the winningest owner in NASCAR history.

"Obviously, last weekend was huge for

our company, the history and heritage of our company. We're obviously very proud to do that for Mr. Hendrick in our backyard," said Jeff Andrews, executive vice president and general manager at HMS. "Now we come out here to Sonoma and we get one for Kyle in his backyard."

The Hendrick group is on such a roll that maybe only two-time defending winner Martin Truex Jr. was considered a real threat to stop the streak Sunday, when NASCAR returned to California for the first time since 2019 because of the pandemic.

Hendrick's four drivers have combined for seven wins this season.

Marchessault's hat trick lifts Knights

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — After the Vegas Golden Knights lost the first two games of their second-round series against the Colorado Avalanche, captain Mark Stone said no team is out of a series until it loses at home.

After sweeping two in Vegas, the Golden Knights are back in business.

Jonathan Marchessault had his fourth career hat trick to lead Vegas to a 5-1 victory over the Avalanche on Sunday night to tie their second-round series at two games apiece.

Two days after his tying goal sparked a come-from-behind win in Game 3, Marchessault got his third three-goal game with the Golden Knights. The eight-year veteran also had one while with Florida.

"If we win as a group, it's the most important thing," Marchessault said. "And we've proven we can play with the best team in the league. We're on a mission right now. We just have to keep going and focus on Game 5."

Max Pacioretty and Patrick Brown also

scored for Vegas, while Marc-Andre Fleury made 17 saves for his 87th career playoff victory — one shy of tying Billy Smith and Ed Belfour for fourth place on the all-time list.

The game was played in front of an announced crowd of 18,081 — the largest to attend an NHL game this season.

"It's loud — it's hard to hear anything in there," Colorado coach Jared Bednar said about Vegas' home crowd. "You can tell by my voice, just talking on the bench trying to call the next line, I'm losing my voice. There's a lot of noise in this building."

Game 5 is Tuesday night at Colorado, where the Avalanche have yet to lose a playoff game and were 24-4-2 during the regular season. The Golden Knights handed the Avs two of their six home losses this season.

"We didn't think we were going to come in here and take both games," said Brandon Saad, who had the only goal for the Avalanche. "We didn't play as good as we should've, but we're going back to the building where we have success and we play well

at."

Philipp Grubauer, who came in with a .941 playoff save percentage, stopped 30 shots for the Avalanche.

Canadiens 5, Jets 1: Joel Armia had two goals and an assist, Carey Price made 26 saves, and host Montreal defeated Winnipeg to take a 3-0 lead in their second-round playoff series.

Corey Perry, Artturi Lehkonen and Nick Suzuki also scored for the Canadiens, who have won six straight playoff games and haven't trailed in a game since losing Game 4 against Toronto in the first round. Montreal will try to complete a four-game sweep of Winnipeg on Monday night at home.

Armia, Perry and Eric Staal are listed as the Canadiens' fourth line, but the trio is a big reason why Montreal is one win from advancing to the third round.

"They're definitely not a fourth line," Montreal forward Brendan Gallagher said. "They're playing big-boy hockey. Playoff hockey has certainly brought the best out of the three of them."

Young scores 35, Hawks top Embiid and Sixers in Game 1

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Trae Young put an early smackdown on Philly that had the Atlanta Hawks in control of Game 1 and finished the win with a lob to John Collins for a one-handed jam.

Collins punched the air in celebration — and the Hawks took a moment to exhale after a hefty lead was nearly squandered.

"Thank God we were up 20," Hawks guard Kevin Huerter said.

Young scored 25 of his 35 points in the first half as Atlanta shook off Joel Embiid and a hostile crowd and held on to beat the Philadelphia 76ers 128-124 Sunday in their Eastern Conference semifinal opener.

"The confidence in all these guys is high," Young said. "We're out here playing for each other. Out here having fun. Everyone's locked in."

Embiid raised a sledgehammer as he returned from a one-game absence with a cartilage tear in his right knee. He walked out with WWE star Triple H to a roaring ovation.

Young and the Hawks had the Sixers

down for the count from the jump and led by 26 points.

Philadelphia — playing in front of its biggest crowd of the season at 18,624 — refused to easily cede home court advantage, and Embiid scored consecutive baskets that brought the team within three with 1:01 left.

Bogdan Bogdanovic, who missed all three games in the season series against the 76ers with a knee injury, steadied Atlanta when he buried a three that gave them needed breathing room.

He even put his fingers to his lips and shushed the raucous crowd for good measure.

"He's a big shot maker," Huerter said.

That wasn't the only long shot that went off successfully.

Going off as five-point underdogs, according to FanDuel Sportsbook, the Hawks made 14 of their first 18 buckets and were the aggressors, eagerly seizing their moment on national television. Young, much like he did in five games against the Knicks when he averaged 29.2 points, thrived in the spotlight.

Clippers down Mavs in Game 7

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — No chest-thumping, shouting or theatrics. With very little change of expression, Kawhi Leonard altered the Los Angeles Clippers' playoff fortunes.

Leonard narrowly missed a triple-double, finishing with 28 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists, to help the Clippers finish off the Dallas Mavericks 126-111 on Sunday in Game 7 of the first-round series.

"It's all about the moment," Leonard said. "You got to be aggressive all night and don't try to make the game be perfect."

Playing in front of a noisy mix of 7,342 masked fans and cardboard cutouts, Los Angeles did what neither team had been able to pull off in the first six games — win at home. It was the first time in NBA history the road team won the first six games of a playoff series.

"We saw everything in this series," Mavs coach Rick Carlisle said.

The Clippers became the fifth team in league history to lose the first two games at home and come back to win a playoff series.

Mayweather subdues Paul in exhibition

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Floyd Mayweather Jr. outclassed YouTube personality Logan Paul but couldn't stop him inside the distance.

Mayweather and Paul boxed an eight-round exhibition Sunday night at Hard Rock Stadium. With the bout not being scored, no winner was declared.

The 44-year-old Mayweather used the ring skills that propelled him to world titles in five divisions and a 50-0 career record to frustrate Paul with solid lead and counter shots.

"You've got to realize I'm not 21 anymore, but it's good," Mayweather said in the ring. "He's better than I thought he was."

Mayweather, who won titles in the super-featherweight, lightweight, super-lightweight, welterweight and super-welterweight divisions, has said he will not return to competitive boxing. Instead, he will continue to tap into the pay-per-view market with exhibitions like his event with Paul.

Djokovic recovers, advances in Paris

Associated Press

PARIS — For two sets and more than two hours at the French Open on Monday, Novak Djokovic found himself being outplayed by a 19-year-old opponent making his Grand Slam debut.

And yet, to hear Djokovic tell it afterward, he had the kid right where he wanted him.

After dropping a pair of tiebreakers to begin the fourth-round match, Djokovic went from a big deficit to his best tennis. He grabbed 13 games in a row in a dominant display before Lorenzo Musetti stopped playing because of lower back pain and cramps while trailing in the fifth set.

The result officially goes into the books as a retirement. The score when Musetti quit showed Djokovic ahead 6-7 (7), 6-7 (2), 6-1, 6-0, 4-0.

In other fourth-round men's action on the top half of the draw, No. 10 seed Diego Schwartzman

saved seven set points in the opening set on the way to eliminating Jan-Lennard Struff 7-6 (9), 6-4, 7-5. Schwartzman, a semifinalist at Roland Garros in 2020, next will face 13-time champion Nadal or No. 18 Jannik Sinner — who, like Musetti, is an Italian who is 19.

In women's play, 17-year-old American Coco Gauff became the youngest player since 2006 to reach the women's quarterfinals at any Grand Slam tournament by overwhelming No. 25 seed Ons Jabeur 6-3, 6-1 in under an hour.

Gauff now meets Barbora Krejčíková, who reached her first major quarterfinal with a 6-2, 6-0 victory over Sloane Stephens, the 2017 U.S. Open champion and 2018 French Open runner-up.

Maria Sakkari, who is seeded 17th, beat No. 4 Sofia Kenin, last year's runner-up, 6-1, 6-3. Sakkari's quarterfinal opponent will be 2020 champion Iga Świątek or Marta Kostyuk.

No. 1 Hogs pushed to extra game

Associated Press

Seven teams closed out their regionals in the NCAA baseball tournament Sunday and moved one step closer to the College World Series.

But No. 1 national seed Arkansas, trying for a third straight appearance in super regionals, was forced into a winner-take-all game Monday night against Nebraska after losing 5-3 to the Cornhuskers.

Eight other regionals will also go to a second final, including LSU-Oregon. The Tigers beat the Ducks 4-1.

Mississippi State will play Campbell in the final in the weather-delayed regional at Starkville and would have to lose twice to be denied a fifth straight appearance in supers.

Teams advancing were No. 2 Texas (45-15), No. 3 Tennessee (48-16), No. 4 Vanderbilt (43-15), No. 5 Arizona (43-15), No. 8 Texas Tech (39-15), No. 10 Notre Dame (33-11) and No. 13 East Carolina (44-15).

La Russa passes McGraw for 2nd on all-time wins list

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Tony La Russa credited a long list of mentors. He paid tribute to his players, staff and family. He talked about working with strong ownership and front offices over the years.

La Russa moved past John McGraw into sole possession of second on baseball's manager wins list, directing the Chicago White Sox to a 3-0 victory over the Detroit Tigers on Sunday.

It was win No. 2,764 for La Russa, who was hired by Chicago in October.

Phillies 12, Nationals 6: In a bizarre scene, stadium workers using tractors scrambled to hoist the protective screen behind home plate after it suddenly collapsed Sunday, interrupting Philadelphia's 12-6 victory over the Washington Nationals.

Red Sox 6, Yankees 5 (10): Xander Bogaerts hit a two-run single with two outs in the 10th inning, and visiting Boston held off New York for a three-game sweep.

Brewers 2, Diamondbacks 0: Corbin Burnes (3-4) struck out a career-high 13 in seven in-

nings, sending visiting Arizona to its team-record 17th straight road loss.

Marlins 3, Pirates 1: Sandy Alcantara (3-5) gave up one run and six hits in eight innings, ending Miami's longest losing streak in six years at eight games as the Marlins won at Pittsburgh.

Orioles 18, Indians 5: Cedric Mullins hit a leadoff homer as part of a three-hit day, and host Baltimore scored its most runs since beating Oakland 18-2 on Aug. 16, 2015.

Braves 4, Dodgers 2: Max Fried outpitched Trevor Bauer, and host Atlanta took two of three from Los Angeles.

Astros 6, Blue Jays 3: In Buffalo, N.Y., José Altuve led off the game with a home run, and rookie Luis García (5-3) earned his fifth straight win, allowing one run and three hits in six innings.

Twins 2, Royals 1: Minnesota first baseman Miguel Sanó swooped in to catch a popped-up bunt and start a triple play as Minnesota won at Kansas City.

Reds 8, Cardinals 7: Jesse Winker hit a tiebreaking home run off Alex Reyes (3-2) in the

ninth, and visiting Cincinnati completed its first four-game sweep of St. Louis since May 4-7, 1990.

Rockies 3, Athletics 1: Germán Márquez (4-5) allowed one run and four hits in six innings, and host Colorado avoided a three-game sweep.

Rays 7, Rangers 1: Rookie Taylor Walls had a tiebreaking, two-run double in the eighth off Josh Sborz, his season-high third hit, after visiting Tampa Bay loaded the bases with no outs against John King (5-4).

Cubs 4, Giants 3: Patrick Wisdom hit a pair of home runs and drove in three runs in helping Chicago avoid a four-game sweep at San Francisco.

Mets 6, Padres 2: Marcus Stroman won his second straight decision after four consecutive losses and doubled in a run as New York won at San Diego to gain a four-game split.

Mariners 9, Angels 5: Donovan Walton hit the go-ahead home run in the third inning and Logan Gilbert (1-2) struck out seven and allowed two hits in five innings for his first major league win as Seattle won on the road.