

Navy seeks improved LCS reliability

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is proposing to cut four littoral combat ships from the U.S. fleet as the Navy makes headway in addressing the controversial vessel's reliability issues, the commander of Naval Surface Forces said.

The Navy identified 32 reliability factors across the Freedom and Independence variants of the ship "that were impacting our ability to get underway" and meet operational needs, Vice Adm. Roy Kitchener told reporters Monday during a teleconference.

First delivered in 2008, the LCS is a small surface combatant ship designed to operate in "near-shore environments, winning against 21st century coastal threats," according to the Navy. But the ship has been plagued with technological issues and delays that have cost LCSs "hundreds of days" of operations, Kitchener said.

Of the 32 reliability factors, the service prioritized nine — including a well-documented design flaw in the ship's combining gear in the transmissions of the Freedom-class vessels — that were costing valuable time at sea for maintenance and re-

pairs, Kitchener said.

"The idea was, 'How do we quickly identify fixes to improve LCS reliability and sustainability?'" Kitchener said. "What we found was we were having high-failure rates from some critical parts that were reducing our number of days underway."

The Pentagon in its 2022 budget cited the combining gear issues and their "significant associated repair costs" as reasoning behind decommissioning the Freedom-class USS Detroit and USS Little Rock littoral combat ships. In total, the budget seeks to cut four of the ships to save about \$186 million.

The flaw, which affects the gearing mechanism that links the ships' engines, has caused propulsion failures in the USS Detroit and USS Little Rock, according to a Jan. 19 report by U.S. Naval Institute News.

But the combining gear redesign has finished its ground-based testing and will be installed soon in the USS Minneapolis-Saint Paul and undergo additional testing, Kitchener said.

Another factor in the time drain was logistical, Kitchener said. It takes up to 21 days to get contractors to sites to work on

ships, he said. LCS crews rely heavily on contractors for repairs, but Kitchener said there is a plan to move the "preponderance of maintenance" to sailors on maintenance teams.

"We'll still be required to use contractors on some of the more technical systems that we have," Kitchener said.

Even with the littoral combat ship's issues, Kitchener said LCSs give the Navy more ships to help close the 60-vessel gap from the goal of a 355-ship fleet. Of the Navy's 296 ships in service, 23 are littoral combat ships — with that number expected to grow to 31 by 2026, he said.

"Forward presence counts, and if you put strike missiles on those and perhaps some other promising things that we can use to increase its offensive capability, it's a viable ship platform or choice [for] great-power competition against our adversaries," Kitchener said.

Congress in the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act required the Navy to achieve a 355-ship fleet "as soon as practicable," but the proposed 2022 budget funds just eight new ships in the coming year — a number top service officials have said will not be enough to reach the mandatory goal.

Delays growing in Navy's \$166B attack-sub program

Bloomberg

The U.S. Navy's \$166 billion Virginia-class submarine program continues to experience cost increases and "persistent problems" that are likely to force delays in delivery, according to a congressional watchdog's assessment of the Pentagon's \$1.8 trillion weapons portfolio.

The potential 12-vessel "Block V" version of the nuclear-powered, fast-attack sub "is already costing more than expected, due in part to the same inefficiencies, such as inadequate staffing levels, affecting earlier blocks" of the submarine, the Government Accountability Office said Tuesday in its annual weapons overview.

The Block V is the latest in what's expected to be a 48-sub program that has broad support in Congress, but delays in earlier

blocks are rippling through the program. COVID-19 issues that slowed production in 2020 as well as a less experienced workforce at manufacturers General Dynamics and Huntington Ingalls Industries share some of the blame, the report said.

From February to August 2020, for example, "delivery dates for eight of the 10 remaining Block IV submarines were further delayed by four months on average, though program officials stated that Block V has schedule margin to absorb some Block IV delays." The subs are typically bought at a rate of two per year.

Navy officials said "the overall increase in submarine workload and resulting increase of inexperienced new hires at both the suppliers and the shipbuilders, along with long-term challenges meeting staffing

levels, are driving these unfavorable cost trends for both blocks."

General Dynamics and Huntington Ingalls are "mitigating these trends by shifting workers and re-allocating work tasks from different sites, and expanding hiring to add capacity," according to the Navy.

The Navy's program office told the GAO that it has reduced construction time by two years from the first Block I submarine, which dates back to the late 1990s.

Although efforts to deliver two submarines per year "has led to longer construction times, the program office expected this growth to be offset by reductions in post-delivery activities before the submarines enter service," GAO said. "The program also stated that quality is improving and submarines are delivered within budget."

Navy Lodges start to welcome travelers

By ERICA EARL
Stars and Stripes

Some Navy Lodges around the world are reopening for leisure travel guests after a nearly year-long hiatus spurred by the coronavirus pandemic.

Many military-run hotels stopped accepting leisure travel reservations so the rooms could be used for service members and other U.S. personnel placed in quarantine.

"We are excited to welcome back our leisure travel guests," Chris Settelen, vice president of

Navy Exchange Service Command's Navy Lodge Program, said in a news release Tuesday. "While our primary mission is to support military members on permanent change of station orders or temporary duty, we are also here for our families who are enjoying time away from work and on vacation. It will be nice to see them back in our Navy Lodges."

Locations reopening for leisure travel on a space-available basis include Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan; Naval Base San Diego and

Moffett Federal Airfield in California; Jacksonville Naval Air Station, Fla.; and Fort Wadsworth in New York City.

Some lodges require guests to make reservations no later than one week in advance.

In alignment with Defense Department and Centers for Disease Control policies, fully vaccinated guests will not have to wear a mask inside some lodges, according to the release. Guests will need to check the policy at each installation.

The New Sanno Hotel, a U.S.

Naval Joint Services Activity lodge in central Tokyo, reopened to guests in May.

"The challenges of 2020 and 2021 during the Pandemic have taken a great toll on most of us," Manager Michael Chung told Stars and Stripes in an email Wednesday. "Our versions of 'normal' and how we spend our free time was altered, priorities were changed. As we move forward in recovery, we are ready to be treated, to come together socially, to share positive moments with those that they care about."

Housing and feeding midshipmen cost more for Naval Academy in pandemic

The (Annapolis, Md.) Capital

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — The U.S. Naval Academy paid more than \$262,000 in early spring to put midshipmen up at two local hotels while the institution responded to a COVID-19 outbreak.

The Naval Academy sent approximately 200 midshipmen to the Graduate and the Hilton Garden Inn in March in order to free up additional quarantine and isolation space inside Bancroft Hall.

It cost the academy approximately \$106,442 to house the midshipmen at the Hilton Garden Inn from March 1 to March 15 and \$156,172.24 to house them at the Graduate from March 2 to March 25, according to receipts from the hotels obtained by The Capital through a Freedom of Information Act request.

Sending midshipmen to the hotels was just one of the measures used by the academy to mitigate the pandemic while having midshipmen on the Yard, which also included millions of dollars for tents, food preparation items and other housing.

Superintendent Vice Adm. Sean Buck told The Capital that he made the decision that leadership needed to be taught in person, which is why the brigade of midshipmen returned over the summer.

But to bring back the midshipmen, the Naval Academy needed to make adjustments.

First, there was the matter of making sure

there was enough quarantine and isolation space in Bancroft Hall. This was done so the midshipmen would be close to medical personnel if they caught SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

In the fall, the Naval Academy leased dormitory space from neighboring St. John's College while the school stayed remote. The dormitories likely came with a price tag of more than \$1 million, according to the contract between the Navy and St. John's.

When St. John's students returned in the spring semester, the Naval Academy turned to families and sponsors. Approximately 200 midshipmen lived with sponsors, families or family friends who lived within 35 miles of the academy.

Then came the outbreak, which forced the academy to increase the quarantine and isolation space.

Leadership also needed to figure out how to feed midshipmen and how to convert classrooms into hybrid learning spaces so midshipmen could attend class even while they were at home or in quarantine or isolation.

The traditional family-style or buffet service usually done in King Hall would not provide the ability to social distance.

Instead, the dining hall switched to cafeteria-style. Midshipmen could eat with a few friends inside a tent located outside of King Hall.

Navy rescues 15 from sinking ship off Somalia coast

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

A U.S. Navy ship's crew rescued 15 people from a sinking commercial vessel off the coast of Somalia, the Bahrain-based 5th Fleet said Wednesday.

The replenishment oiler USNS Patuxent was operating in the Gulf of Aden when it was notified that the Falcon Line, a general cargo ship registered in the African nation of Gabon, was taking on water.

"Patuxent proceeded at maximum speed to rescue the Falcon Line crew before the ship sank," 5th Fleet said in a statement.

The Patuxent team shielded the Falcon Line crew from heavy winds and high seas so they could board lifeboats, the Navy said.

They provided the rescued crew with food, water and a medical screening, the Navy said.

"As professional mariners, our forces have a duty to help those in need at sea," said Navy Capt. Michael O'Driscoll, commander of Task Force 53.

"The sailors and civilian mariners aboard ships like Patuxent have answered this call before, and they will continue to do so whenever possible."

U.S. 5th Fleet is coordinating with the owner of Falcon Line and other authorities to determine where to disembark the crew members, the Navy said.

Biden ends infrastructure talks; new group emerges

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden ended talks with a group of Republican senators on a big infrastructure package Tuesday and started reaching out to senators from both parties in a new effort toward bipartisan compromise, setting a summer deadline for Congress to pass his top legislative priority.

The president is walking away from talks with lead Republican negotiator Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, of West Virginia, after the two spoke Tuesday, but would welcome her in the new bipartisan group, according to an administrative official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private negotiations.

Shortly after the Biden-Capito talks collapsed, 10 senators huddled late Tuesday over pizza — five Republicans, five Democrats — emerging after three hours with some optimism their new effort could create a viable path forward, said a person familiar with the closed-door talks and granted anonymity to discuss them.

At the same time, with anxiety running high as time slips by, Democrats are laying the groundwork to pass some or all of the ambitious package on their own.

Biden conferred Tuesday with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer about launching the budget resolution process for Senate votes in July, the White House said.

The breakdown in the White House's efforts with GOP senators comes after weeks of prolonged infrastructure talks between the president and Capito as the two sides failed to broker the divide over the scope of Biden's sweeping infrastructure investment and how to pay for it.

The Republican senators offered a \$928 billion proposal, which included about \$330 billion in new spending — but not as much as Biden's \$1.7 trillion investment proposal.

As Biden aims for a compromise deal, he has begun reaching out to other senators, including Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy, of Louisiana, and two key centrist Democrats, Sens. Joe Manchin, of West Virginia, and Kyrsten Sinema, of Arizona, whose votes will be crucial in the evenly split Senate.

Those senators receiving phone calls from Biden were among the group of 10 assembled with Sinema and Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, late Tuesday in Portman's office for what was described as a productive meeting, the person familiar with the session said.

Senate passes bill to boost tech industry in US, counter rivals

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate overwhelmingly approved a bill Tuesday that aims to boost U.S. semiconductor production and the development of artificial intelligence and other technology in the face of growing international competition, most notably from China.

The 68-32 vote for the bill demonstrates how confronting China economically is an issue that unites both parties in Congress. That's a rarity in an era of division as pressure grows on Democrats to change Senate rules to push past Republican opposition and gridlock.

The centerpiece of the bill is a \$50 billion emergency allotment to the Commerce Department to stand up semiconductor development and manufacturing through research and incentive programs previously authorized by Congress. The bill's overall cost would increase spending by about \$250 billion with most of the spending occurring in the first five years.

Supporters described it as the biggest investment in scientific research that the country has seen in decades. It comes as the nation's share of semiconductor manufacturing globally has steadily eroded from 37% in 1990 to about 12% now, and as a chip shortage has exposed vulnerabilities in the U.S. supply chain.

"The premise is simple, if we want American workers and American companies to keep leading the world, the federal government must invest in science, basic research and innovation, just as we did decades after the Second World War," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. "Whoever wins the race to the technologies of the future is going to be the global economic leader with profound consequences for foreign policy and national security as well."

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said the bill was incomplete because it did not incorporate more Republican-sponsored amendments. He nonetheless supported it.

"Needless to say, final passage of this legislation cannot be the Senate's final word on our competition with China," he said. "It certainly won't be mine."

White House drops Trump orders trying to ban TikTok, WeChat

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House has dropped Trump-era executive orders that attempted to ban the popular apps TikTok and WeChat and will conduct its own review aimed at identifying national security risks with software applications tied to China, officials said Wednesday.

A new executive order directs the Commerce Department to undertake what officials describe as an "evidence-based" analysis of transactions involving apps that are manufactured or supplied or controlled by China. Officials are particularly concerned about apps that collect users' personal data or have connections to Chinese military or intelligence activities.

The department also will make recommendations on how to further protect Americans' genetic and personal health information, and

will address the risks of certain software apps connected to China or other adversaries, according to senior administration officials.

The administration earlier this year had backed off President Donald Trump's attempts to ban the popular video app TikTok, asking a court to postpone a legal dispute as the government began a broader review of the national security threats posed by Chinese technology companies.

Also in limbo has been a proposed U.S. takeover of TikTok. Last year, the Trump administration brokered a deal that would have had U.S. corporations Oracle and Walmart take a large stake in the Chinese-owned app on national security grounds.

TikTok has been looking to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to review Trump's divestment order and the government's national security review.

Message survives NRA's legal, money woes

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Liberals have cheered the highly public legal and financial jeopardy ensnaring the National Rifle Association, seeing the gun lobby's potential demise as the path to stricter firearms laws.

But, it turns out, the NRA's message has become so solidified in the Republican Party that even if the organization implodes from allegations of lavish spending and misuse of funds, its unapologetic pro-gun point of view will live on, as the heated debate increasingly shifts from Washington to the states.

Not even the shift in power to Democrats in the White House and Congress has been enough to push through new federal restrictions, and states continue to pass laws with far-reaching protections for gun owners.

Ever confident, the NRA, which is based in Fairfax, Va., says the suggestion it is receding is magical thinking on the left. The group promises it will emerge from its failed bankruptcy effort stronger, particularly as it seeks to relocate to the decidedly pro-gun rights state of Texas.

The durable nature of the NRA's clout is an exemplar of how difficult it is to claw back control from a lobbying powerhouse that has planted deep roots in the American political system with money, organization and relentless messaging.

"The NRA built up an impressive mountain of power over the course of 40 years. And de-

spite their recent fall from grace, that power doesn't disappear overnight," Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., said in an interview.

Not to say there is no hope for gun control — far from it, said Murphy, whose own views are shaped by the massacre of 20 children at a school in Newtown, Conn., on Dec. 14, 2012, and the subsequent, successful effort by the NRA to stop gun legislation in the aftermath. He said Democratic gains in Congress, despite the efforts by the NRA to stop candidates, are one measure of a change in the dynamic. Another is a shift in some public opinion. A Gallup poll in 2019 found the percentage of people viewing the NRA favorably dropping below 50% for only the second time in three decades.

"There's no doubt that their political muscle is reduced," Murphy said, adding that the Georgia special elections for U.S. Senate, won by Democrats Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock in January, are a clear indication of that.

At the same time, though, the NRA has been growing, with 225,000 additional dues-paying members since January. It has more than 5 million members overall — an increase — but its numbers are still down from what it said were 6 million members in 2018. Its embattled leader, Wayne LaPierre, has led the fundraising efforts for nearly three decades, selling himself as an aggressive guardian of the Second Amendment right to bear arms.

He positioned the lobby as the major antagonist of Democratic administrations. Then, in 2016, the organization spent more than \$30 mil-

lion on behalf of Donald Trump's campaign, according to Federal Election Commission data. The effort paid off — after back-to-back mass shootings in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, Trump seemed inclined to take action on extensive background checks but backed off after a phone call with the NRA.

Those successes were happening while the NRA was having major problems within. By 2018, the organization had a \$36 million deficit because of lavish spending. A class action lawsuit by members over mismanagement and a lack of transparency followed in 2019. And then, New York Attorney General Letitia James, a Democrat, sued to disband the group, arguing it was "fraught with fraud and abuse."

The NRA filed for bankruptcy in January, but the effort was rejected by a judge.

Even with that inner turmoil, the NRA has also been behind hundreds of successful efforts to loosen gun laws in the states — most recently working to persuade states to abandon requirements that people get training and pass background checks to carry concealed handguns.

The number of generally pro-gun rights states outnumbers those that pass gun control measures 40 to 10, although the latter have more people, so the country's population is about evenly divided between the two camps.

"Gun rights, the Second Amendment, the right to keep and bear arms is bigger than any organization," said Jordan Stein, communications director for the Gun Owners of America.

Wedding boom on in US as vendors work with COVID-delayed couples

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Couples in the U.S. are racing to the altar in a vaccination-era wedding boom that has venues and other vendors in high demand.

With restrictions on large gatherings loosening, wedding planners and others who make the magic happen said they've started pushing their bookings into late 2022 and early 2023.

"We've run out of trucks for some dates this year and that hasn't happened before," said Ben Goldberg, co-founder and president of the New York Food Truck Association. "Our phones have been ringing off the hook with clients looking to have the weddings they had to put off during COVID."

Also contributing to the rush are couples who went ahead and got hitched during stricter pandemic times with few or no guests and are now on their second go-arounds with larger groups. They're competing for services with those who had always intended to marry this year.

"We're seeing a lot of last-minute bookings with shorter planning windows," said Anna Noriega, who owns the luxury Alorè Event Firm in Miami. Namisha Balagopal, 27, in Emeryville, Calif., is

among the double brides.

She and Suhaas Prasad, 33, met in 2014 and got engaged in May 2019. They planned a traditional South Asian Indian wedding last August in Utah, where Balagopal grew up, with 320 guests and events over five days. But they couldn't make it happen under pandemic restrictions. They decided on a small sunset ceremony that month with fewer than 10 people in attendance on Muir Beach near San Francisco. It's where they had their first date and where Prasad proposed.

Now, their big celebration is on for Aug. 15 outdoors at their original venue in Park City, Utah, with about 230 guests and events over several days, including seven clothing changes for bride and groom.

Tirusha Dave is the owner and CEO of the up-scale wedding planning company Bravura Brides used by Balagopal. She handled 10 weddings in 2019, with just three in 2020. Dave already has 11 weddings booked this year with 250 to 300 guests planned at each.

"I think everybody's ready for things to bounce back, but just in a safe way," she said.

Fastly blames internet outage on software bug

Associated Press

LONDON — Fastly, the company hit by a major outage that caused many of the world's top websites to go offline briefly this week, blamed the problem on a software bug that was triggered when a customer changed a setting.

The problem at Fastly meant internet users couldn't connect to a host of popular websites including The New York Times, the Guardian, Twitch, Reddit and the British government's homepage.

"We experienced a global outage due to an undiscovered software bug that surfaced on June 8 when it was triggered by a valid customer configuration change," Nick Rockwell, Fastly's senior vice president of engineering and infrastructure, said in a blog post.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Amorous cicada blamed for causing car crash

OH CINCINNATI — An amorous cicada was blamed for causing a car crash in Ohio.

The insect flew through an open window, striking the driver in the face, Cincinnati police said. The motorist drove off Riverside Drive and crashed into a utility pole, damaging the vehicle.

The motorist sustained minor injuries, but police tweeted photos showing the car was heavily damaged.

Cicadas are swarming across the Cincinnati area. They're part of Brood X, which emerge from the ground every 17 years to mate.

Lemonade stand helps pay for dad's funeral

KY DOUGLAS — Three children in eastern Kentucky hosted a weekend lemonade stand to help their mother pay for their father's funeral expenses.

John Christopher Tackett, 37, died of a stroke in January, WYMT-TV reported.

His three children, ages 5 to 12, wanted to sell lemonade back then but couldn't due to the cold weather.

Last weekend, they sold lemonade and other snacks along a roadside in the Shelby Valley community of Pike County, near Douglas.

Building with antiques at museum catches fire

MT POLSON — A fire destroyed a barn that housed antiques on the campus of a history museum in

Polson, owner Gil Mangels said.

The fire at the Miracle of America Museum destroyed the barn and another outbuilding, Mangels told KERR-AM.

The barn contained priceless antiques that hadn't been displayed at the museum yet, Mangels said.

The 40-building eclectic museum houses military artifacts, motorcycles, boats, classic cars, old agricultural and industrial equipment along with artwork, a 1912 schoolhouse and a sod-roofed cabin.

Woman may have killed friend using eyedrops

WI MILWAUKEE — Prosecutors accused a suburban Milwaukee woman of killing her friend by poisoning her with eyedrops.

Jessy Kurczewski, 37, was charged with homicide and two counts of felony theft, according to online court records.

A criminal complaint shows the case began in 2018 when Kurczewski called police to her friend's Pewaukee home, saying her friend wasn't breathing, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported. The complaint doesn't name the friend.

Toxicology tests showed the woman had a fatal dose of tetrahydrozoline, the main ingredient in eyedrops, in her system.

Town grapples with yet another runaway animal

RI JOHNSTON — The same Rhode Island town that had to deal with a runaway steer earlier this year is now investigating reports of a donkey on the loose.

The donkey was first spotted in Johnston near the town line

with Scituate. WJAR-TV shared video captured by a motorist that showed the donkey trotting down a street as cars whizzed past.

Animal control will patrol the area where the donkey was last seen, Mayor Joseph Polisena said.

A 1,500-pound steer that escaped on its way to a slaughterhouse spent nearly two months on the lam in Johnston until it was captured in late March.

Burglary leads to fire, injuring five people

KS WICHITA — A man was hospitalized in critical condition after a burglary led to a fire that also caused minor injuries to four Wichita police officers.

Police said the officers responded to a call about a burglary in progress inside a home's detached garage. A news release from police said arriving officers found that the garage entry was barricaded from the inside.

Officers eventually got inside and discovered a man had locked himself into a smaller room, where a fire had been set. Officers used fire extinguishers to put out the blaze and rescue the man, who is hospitalized.

The officers were treated and released due to smoke inhalation.

Senior asks scholarship to be awarded to others

MA FITCHBURG — A high school senior headed to Harvard asked that her school give the \$40,000 college scholarship it had awarded her to someone going to a community college instead.

At the graduation ceremony at Fitchburg High School, Verda Tetteh returned to the stage to ask that the school give its General Excellence Award scholarship to another student or students going to a community college.

"I am so very grateful for this, but I also know that I am not the one who needs this the most," Tetteh said.

Tetteh, who emigrated from Ghana to the United States as a child, said she was inspired by her Christian faith and the example of her mother, who earned a bachelor's degree from a community college as an adult.

Skunk raids a nest of endangered shorebirds

IL CHICAGO — Two endangered shorebirds that birding enthusiasts have tracked for years along a Chicago beachfront have lost their latest clutch of eggs to a skunk attack.

A skunk raided the piping plovers' nest at Montrose Beach Dunes and ate all four of their eggs, said Tamima Itani, vice president and treasurer of the Illinois Ornithological Society.

The nesting pair, known as Monty and Rose, were not harmed when the skunk reached into the protective wire enclosure surrounding their nest, the Chicago Sun-Times reported.

The piping plover is a small shorebird that's on a number of state endangered species lists and is listed as threatened at the federal level.

— From wire reports



Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting World, National and Military News

Nuggets' Jokic selected NBA MVP

Associated Press

DENVER — Nikola Jokic was selected with the 41st draft pick when he entered the NBA seven years ago.

Now, by overwhelming consensus, he's No. 1.

The Nuggets' big man was revealed Tuesday as the NBA's Most Valuable Player for 2020-21, making him by far the lowest draft pick ever to win the award. "The Joker" now has his name etched alongside the greatest players in league history, which surely seemed unlikely when he was that unheralded prospect out of Sombor, Serbia, in 2014.

"To be honest, I didn't even think I would be in the NBA," Jokic said. "My goal when I started to play basketball back home, it was playing in Euroleague because that was kind of the closest top league to my country."

He did a little more.

Jokic was the runaway winner, getting 91 of the 101 first-place ballots cast — 100 of them from a global panel of sports writers and broadcasters who cover the league, the other being an aggregate first-place ballot compiled from fan voting.

That fan vote was the outlier: It went to 2011 NBA MVP Derrick Rose of the New York Knicks, the only vote Rose got.

Philadelphia's Joel Embiid was second, Golden State's Stephen Curry was third, 2019 and 2020 MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo of Milwaukee was fourth and Phoenix's Chris Paul was fifth.

"It's a big accomplishment, but it's something that like I said to the guys, it's not just me," Jokic said. "I came here six years ago and I was growing, the organization was growing, the

coaching staff was growing, the players next to me were growing.

"I couldn't do it by myself. It's an individual award, but it's the effort of everybody."

The previous record-holders for lowest draft picks who became MVPs were Steve Nash and Antetokounmpo, who were both chosen 15th overall. Antetokounmpo won the MVP award each of the last two seasons.

Greece now cedes the bragging rights to Serbia — the fifth nation outside of the U.S. to claim an MVP, joining Canada (Nash), Greece (Antetokounmpo), Nigeria (Hakeem Olajuwon) and Germany (Dirk Nowitzki).

The news came in a team meeting Tuesday, with NBA Commissioner Adam Silver appearing on a video screen to deliver the word.

"First of many," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said. He wore a T-shirt Tuesday night with some of the knocks that Jokic has heard over the years, including "Can't Jump," "Flopper" and "Poor Defender."

The back of the shirt told a different story: "MVP. Joke's On You," it said.

After the top five, the rest of the voting was Dallas' Luka Doncic, Portland's Damian Lillard, New York's Julius Randle, Rose, Utah's Rudy Gobert, Washington's Russell Westbrook, Philadelphia's Ben Simmons and, tying for 13th, was the Los Angeles Clippers' Kawhi Leonard, Brooklyn's James Harden and the Lakers' LeBron James.

James got one fifth-place vote — extending his streak to 18 years with at least one vote in the MVP race.

Mitchell helps rally Jazz past Clippers in Game 1

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Donovan Mitchell did not feel like his usual self for an entire half.

The Utah Jazz guard struggled with a bout of nausea and lightheadedness before halftime Tuesday night. He felt even worse after his individual performance on offense and defense.

"I didn't do a lot of things right for my team in the first half, and it ate at me," Mitchell said.

Mitchell did virtually everything right in the second half.

He scored 45 points and lifted the Jazz to a 112-109 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers in Game 1 of their Western Conference semifinals series.

Mitchell imposed his will offensively after halftime, scoring 32 points to rally Utah from a double-digit deficit.

Jordan Clarkson and Bojan Bogdanovic chipped in 18 points

apiece. Mitchell and Clarkson combined for 12 three-pointers.

Kawhi Leonard scored 23 points to lead Los Angeles. Paul George chipped in 20 points and 11 rebounds. Luke Kennard added 18 points while making a team-high four three-pointers.

The Jazz and the Clippers will play Game 2 on Thursday in Salt Lake City.

"We had a pretty good rhythm in the first half," Leonard said. "We came in the third quarter pretty flat, but they are good defensive team. They played hard tonight, and they fought the whole game."

Utah trailed by as many as 14 points before rallying and overtaking the Clippers in the fourth quarter. The Jazz took the lead for good on a 21-9 run bookended by three-pointers from Bogdanovic. His second one gave Utah a 103-93 lead with 5:22 remaining.

Milton bails out 76ers in Game 2 win vs. Hawks

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Joel Embiid bounded on the court and pointed at Shake Milton following an electrifying stretch that might have saved Philadelphia's season and yelled, "I told you be ready!"

Sure enough, Embiid — who had a sideline confrontation last season with Milton — rallied the forgotten guard with a pregame pep talk.

"For some reason," Embiid said, "I felt like he was going to be needed."

Milton buried a 32-footer and scored 14 points, and Embiid had a playoff-best 40 points and 13 rebounds to lead the 76ers past the Atlanta Hawks 118-102 in Game 2 on Tuesday night and even the Eastern Conference semifinal series.

Game 3 is Friday in Atlanta.

"It really shows what the playoffs is about," Philadelphia forward Tobias Harris said. "You never know who's going to be able to step up."

Milton took his turn in Game 2.

Milton shined at times as a sixth man this season before he fell out of favor and slogged through an awful first round against Washington (3.4 points per game).

With the reserves failing Philly for the second straight game against the Hawks — the Sixers had zero bench points at the half — coach Doc Rivers gave Milton a shot in the third.

Philadelphia squandered a 21-point lead and Trae Young hit a pair of free throws in the third for Atlanta's first lead, 80-79.

Then came Shake.

Lightning oust Canes, reach Cup semifinals

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Andrei Vasilevskiy was at his best again with the Tampa Bay Lightning in position to close out a playoff series.

Throw in a couple of timely goals from Brayden Point and Ross Colton, and the reigning Stanley Cup champions are a step closer to playing for another title.

Vasilevskiy posted his third straight shut-out in a series-clinching victory, helping the Lightning beat the Carolina Hurricanes 2-0 on Tuesday night to win the second-round series in five games.

Point's power-play goal — which followed a huge save from Vasilevskiy — put Tampa Bay up in the second period, then Colton scored in the third. That was more than enough for Vasilevskiy, who finished with 29 saves and stumped the homesteading Hurricanes for the third time in as many series games at PNC Arena.

The Lightning are now 5-1 on the road in the playoffs, including taking a 2-0 series lead in the first round against Florida and then claiming all three in this series.

"We've got a lot of confidence in our group," Point said. "I thought we had a pretty good regular season where we were kind of building to this. ... Yeah, it's just a belief in our group. We've got four lines and all the D and great goaltending. So we just feel confident."

It started with Vasilevskiy, a former Vezi-na Trophy winner as the NHL's top goaltender and a finalist this year. He allowed just two goals on 70 shots through the first two games to open this series.

Then, after a wild Game 4 in Florida that

saw each team score four second-period goals, Vasilevskiy turned away every shot. Among his saves Tuesday was a huge glove stop of a 2-on-1 short-handed chance by Carolina's Vincent Trocheck.

Point's goal came moments later on a gorgeous effort. He took a feed from Alex Killorn to his backhand side near the crease, went to his forehand before returning to the backhand to get Hurricanes netminder Alex Nedeljkovic off balance just enough to score at 4:06 of the second.

"They're both two big-time players that made big-time plays," Tampa Bay coach Jon Cooper said of the sequence.

The Lightning nearly pushed that lead to 2-0 with captain Steven Stamkos scoring a buzzer-beating goal, but a review determined the puck didn't cross the goal line in time. But Colton made up for it at 9:04 of the third for the 2-0 lead.

Carolina just couldn't do the same.

"He made some big saves, timely saves," Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal said of Vasilevskiy. "Good goaltenders do that. He did a good job of not letting us get some momentum and get the crowd into it."

Next up for Tampa Bay in the NHL semifinals is the winner of the series between the New York Islanders and the Boston Bruins. The Islanders lead that best-of-seven series 3-2 and can close it out Wednesday at home.

It was a frustrating finish for Carolina, which was in the playoffs for the third straight season after a nine-season drought. It won the Central Division title for its first division crown since winning the Cup in 2006, and was in the Presidents' Trophy race until the final week of the season.

Stone converts early in OT, Knights top Avs

Associated Press

DENVER — Mark Stone blocked a shot on the defensive end and by the time he spun around, a pass was waiting for him with nothing but clear sailing ahead.

A burst of speed — even as tired as he was — and a wrist shot later, he was being mobbed along the boards by teammates.

The captain to the rescue.

Stone scored on a breakaway 50 seconds into overtime as the Vegas Golden Knights overcame a two-goal deficit to beat the Colorado Avalanche 3-2 on Tuesday night and take a 3-2 lead in their second-round series.

"He was exhausted and you saw how hard he skated all the way down the ice," teammate Alex Tuch said. "He's the heart and soul on this team. He wears his character on his chest. He's the captain we've always wanted. It was a huge goal."

Max Pacioretty corralled the puck after two blocked shots on that end and fed it to Stone, who was off to the races. Stone beat Philipp Grubauer on the glove side to hush what had been a boisterous crowd.

"That was vintage Mark Stone," Vegas coach Pete DeBoer said. "Big-time play to win it for us."

Trailing 2-0 entering the third, the Golden Knights found another gear with Tuch scoring 1:03 into the period and Jonathan Marchessault tying it up just 3:04 later.

Really, though, it was the Marc-Andre Fleury Show, with the Vegas goaltender stopping 28 shots, many of the sensational variety. He stuffed J.T. Compher just 10 seconds into the extra period.

"Fleury makes a big stop there. It happened bang, bang," Colorado captain Gabriel Landeskog said. "He's able to get a piece of it. It didn't go our way tonight."

Fleury picked up playoff win No. 88.

Harding lifts FSU past Oklahoma in WCWS opener

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Florida State freshmen Kalei Harding and Kaley Mudge have the Seminoles knocking on the door of a national title.

Harding homered and drove in four runs and Mudge had three hits, leading Florida State past No. 1 seed Oklahoma 8-4 in the opener of the Women's College World Series championship on Tuesday night.

Mudge, who had 16 hits all season before the World Series, increased her WCWS total to a record-tying 13.

Sydney Sherrill added a two-run single during a five-run fourth inning for the 10th-seeded Seminoles (49-11-1), who need a victory on Wednesday or Thursday in the best-of-three series to win their second NCAA title in four years.

They'll again have to play what amounts

to a road game, 25 miles from Oklahoma's campus.

"It's going to take all of us and all of our fight," Mudge said. "Oklahoma is a great team, and we know they have some hot bats and some good pitchers. Just focusing on us, focusing on what matters. And what matters is the people in our circle."

Harding finished 3-for-4 and scored twice while batting ninth.

Pirates' miscues help Dodgers win

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Ke'Bryan Hayes hastily missed first base and was called out after hitting a first-inning homer, sending Walker Buehler on his way to seven scoreless innings as the Los Angeles Dodgers beat the Pittsburgh Pirates 5-3 Tuesday night.

The Pirates star rookie stung an opposite-field line drive in the first inning against Buehler that narrowly cleared the right-field wall, just inside the foul pole. Running hard and with his eyes on the ball, Hayes missed touching first base and kept on going.

Los Angeles manager Dave Roberts challenged, and umpires overturned the call after a short video review.

"Obviously, Ke' got caught watching the ball," Pittsburgh manager Derek Shelton said. "It's one of those things that Ke' thought he caught the back corner of (the bag), and he didn't. If he even thinks he misses it, he has to go back and touch it."

Buehler (5-0) retired his last 13 batters and had two hits to raise his career batting average to .124. He allowed two hits, struck out two and walked one while throwing 93 pitches.

Pirates rookie JT Brubaker (4-5) shut out the Dodgers through four innings but did not make it out of the fifth, when Los Angeles scored three times.

Kenley Jansen came on to get the last out for his 13th save.

Astros 7, Red Sox 1: Carlos Correa and Yordan Alvarez homered to back Framber Valdez, and visiting Houston ended Boston's five-game winning streak.

Cubs 7, Padres 1: Zach Davies allowed just one hit in six scoreless innings, Anthony Rizzo homered and drove in four runs, and Patrick Wisdom went deep again for Chicago in a win at San Diego.

Orioles 10, Mets 3: Maikel Franco became the sixth player to hit a home run into the second deck at Camden Yards, and host Baltimore rolled to another

high-scoring victory.

Braves 9, Phillies 5: Austin Riley, Ronald Acuña Jr. and William Contreras each hit a solo homer, and Atlanta won at Philadelphia.

White Sox 6, Blue Jays 1: Andrew Vaughn homered in the seventh inning and delivered a tiebreaking sacrifice fly in the eighth, helping host Chicago beat Toronto.

Athletics 5, Diamondbacks 2: Chris Bassitt struck out six in seven strong innings to win his sixth consecutive decision to send Arizona to a franchise-record 18th straight road defeat.

Angels 8, Royals 1: Shohei Ohtani hit the longest homer of his major league career in the first inning, and surging Los Angeles pounded five homers against visiting Kansas City.

Rays 3, Nationals 1: Tyler Glasnow (5-2) struck out 11 in seven strong innings and AL East-leading Tampa Bay beat visiting Washington.

Giants 9, Rangers 4: San Francisco's Mike Tauchman hit

a go-ahead grand slam and Brandon Crawford homered twice while setting a franchise record for most games as a shortstop in a win at slumping Texas.

Yankees 8, Twins 4: Gary Sánchez and Miguel Andújar homered, DJ LeMahieu had two hits and an RBI, and visiting New York ended a four-game skid.

Indians 10, Cardinals 1: José Ramírez homered and drove in four runs, leading Shane Bieber and Cleveland to a win at St. Louis.

Brewers 5, Reds 1: Avisail Garcia homered and singled home another run and streaking Milwaukee won at Cincinnati for its fifth straight win.

Tigers 5, Mariners 3: Eric Haase hit a two-run homer in the first inning and host Detroit beat Seattle.

Marlins 6, Rockies 2: Miami's Pablo Lopez took advantage of an extra day of rest by allowing Colorado only two runs in a career-best eight innings.

Nadal drops set but reaches French Open semifinals

Associated Press

PARIS — Rafael Nadal's French Open set streak is over. His pursuit of a record-breaking 21st Grand Slam title — including 14 at Roland Garros — remains very much intact.

Nadal shrugged off dropping a set in Paris for the first time in two years and regained control Wednesday, whipping violent forehands punctuated with first pumps and yells of "Vamos!" en route to a 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, 6-0 victory over 10th-seeded Diego Schwartzman to reach the semifinals at the clay-court major tournament.

After taking the last nine games against Schwartzman, No. 3 seed Nadal will play in Friday's semifinals against either No. 1 Novak Djokovic, in what would

be a rematch of last year's final and their 58th meeting anywhere, or No. 9 Matteo Berrettini. The Djokovic-Berrettini quarterfinal was scheduled for Wednesday night.

The other men's semifinal will be No. 5 Stefanos Tsitsipas vs. No. 6 Alexander Zverev.

Nadal, who turned 35 last week, is now 105-2 for his career at Roland Garros.

He is just two wins from eclipsing the men's mark for most total Grand Slam singles championships that he currently shares with Roger Federer.

In addition to his 13 trophies at Roland Garros — four in a row from 2005-08, five in a row from 2010-14 and another four in a row so far since 2017 — the Spanish left-hander won four titles at the

U.S. Open, two at Wimbledon and one at the Australian Open.

There are four first-time Grand Slam semifinalists left in the women's bracket, which last happened at the 1978 Australian Open.

In Wednesday's quarterfinals, No. 17 seed Maria Sakkari ended Iga Swiatek's title defense by beating her 6-4, 6-4, and unseeded Barbora Krejčíková stopped the run of 17-year-old Coco Gauff 7-6 (6), 6-3. Sakkari faces Krejčíková on Thursday. The other semifinal will be No. 31 Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova against unseeded Tamara Zidansek.

Nadal entered his quarterfinal with a 35-set run at Roland Garros that began during the 2019 final. That grew to 36 on Wednesday, before Schwartzman out-

played him for a stretch, surprisingly winning more of their exchanges that lasted at least nine strokes.

Ah, but what matters is who wins the match, and Nadal asserted himself quickly after Schwartzman was ahead 4-3 in the third.

Nadal would not drop another game, breaking to go up 5-4, before holding at love to take the third set. Then he broke again to open the fourth and really remove any remaining sense of suspense.

Schwartzman — now 1-11 against Nadal, including a loss in the 2020 French Open semifinals — started muttering to himself and bounced his racket off the clay a moment before getting broken again to trail 3-0 in fourth.