

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Austin: Al-Qaida could regroup in Afghanistan in 2 years

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An extremist group like al-Qaida may be able to regenerate in Afghanistan and pose a threat to the U.S. homeland within two years of the American military's withdrawal from the country, the Pentagon's top leaders said Thursday.

It was the most specific public forecast of the prospects for a renewed international terrorist threat from Afghanistan since President Joe Biden announced in April that all U.S. troops would withdraw by Sept. 11.

At a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., asked Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Gen. Mark Milley whether they rated the likelihood of a regeneration of al-Qaida or Islamic State in Afghanistan as small, medium or large.

"I would assess it as medium," Austin replied. "I would also say, senator, that it would take possibly two years for them to develop that capability."

Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a veteran

of the war in Afghanistan, said he agreed.

"I think that if certain other things happen — if there was a collapse of the government or the dissolution of the Afghan security forces — that risk would obviously increase, but right now I would say 'medium' and about two years or so," Milley said.

The U.S. invaded Afghanistan after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks on America, when the Taliban allowed al-Qaida safe haven in the country. The key goal of U.S. and coalition troops in Af-

ghanistan since then has been to prevent a resurgence and another attack against America or other allies.

Military leaders have consistently said that combat operations in Afghanistan have greatly reduced the number of al-Qaida there. But they say that both al-Qaida and ISIS continue to aspire to attack America.

The Pentagon has said the U.S. withdrawal after nearly 20 years in Afghanistan is a little more than half completed, and U.S.-led coalition partners also are leaving.

Lawmakers: President must order evacuation of Afghan allies

By SARAH CAMMARATA

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Two Army veterans who serve on the House Armed Services Committee delivered a stark message Wednesday to President Joe Biden: Act now to evacuate thousands of Afghan interpreters and their families who worked with U.S. personnel or there will be consequences.

"If [Biden] doesn't act, and he doesn't get these people out, blood will be on his hands and on his administration's hands. And I for one will very publicly and very loudly hold him accountable for that," Rep. Michael Waltz, R-Fla., said during a news conference outside the Capitol.

Rep. Jason Crow, D-Colo., joined Waltz and members of the

American Legion to ramp up calls for Biden to help roughly 18,000 Afghans whose visa applications remain stalled by moving them to U.S. territory on Guam or a friendly country.

"People need to know that the American handshake matters. That we will stand by them through thick and thin," said Crow, a former Army Ranger who

served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The news conference comes as members of the House and Senate, advocacy groups and veterans have been mounting pressure on the Biden administration to protect U.S. allies under the threat of death by the Taliban as the Pentagon accelerates the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan after nearly 20 years of war.

Cocaine found on Cape Canaveral Space Force Station shore

By CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

A wildlife manager was checking on sea turtle nests at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida when she discovered bundles that turned out to be 30 kilograms of cocaine with a street value of \$1.2 million.

Angy Chambers of the 45th Civil Engineer Squadron was patrolling the beach on Cape Canaveral last month when she came across a package wrapped tightly in plastic and tape.

"I immediately contacted the 45th Security Forces Squadron," she said in a Space Force statement. "While I was wait-

ing for them to arrive, I drove a little further and noticed another package, and then another."

She suggested the security forces bring a utility terrain vehicle, "as I counted at least 18 packages," the statement said.

Joseph Parker, the squadron's flight sergeant and on-scene commander, closed all beaches and started search protocols, which eventually turned up a total of 24 packages.

A Brevard County Sheriff's Office narcotics agent performed a field test to verify that the bundles contained cocaine, Parker said in the statement.

The sheriff's office estimated the value of the drugs at about \$1.2 million.

Drug traffickers will often transport shipments in bales of 25 "bricks," each weighing about a kilogram, said David Castro, an agent with the Department of Homeland Security's main investigative arm, Homeland Security Investigations. Sometimes those bales break apart and the bricks are lost at sea until they wash ashore, he said.

Cape Canaveral is located on Florida's Atlantic coast, near Cocoa Beach and the Kennedy Space Center. The Space Force station is home to the service's

primary space launch site in its eastern range, operated by Space Launch Delta 45, headquartered at nearby Patrick Space Force Base.

Castro collected the drugs after they were transported to a secure location, weighed them, conducted field tests and examined the packages for unique markings.

Homeland Security officials were still investigating where the drugs came from, but Parker was thankful for Chambers' vigilance.

"There is also a higher level of job satisfaction knowing that these drugs will not make it into our community," he said.

CNO bristles at criticism of book pick for sailors

The Washington Post

Adm. Michael Gilday, chief of Naval Operations, rebuffed pointed interrogations by GOP lawmakers who grilled him over his decision to recommend sailors read a book deemed by some conservatives as anti-American.

The U.S. Navy's top admiral also defended moves to address and root out racism and extremism in the forces as well as efforts to bolster inclusion and diversity, which have prompted criticism from some conservatives and Republican lawmakers.

"Do you personally consider advocating for the destruction of American capitalism to be extremist?" Rep. Jim Banks, R-Ind., asked Gilday during a House Armed Services Committee hearing Tuesday, referring to a passage from Ibram X. Kendi's book "How to Be an Antiracist," which argues capitalism and racism are interlinked.

Banks continued to interrogate the admiral over specific quotes from Kendi's book, which was a No. 1 New York Times best seller in 2020, and statements he had made elsewhere in the past.

Visibly distraught, Gilday fired back:

"I am not going to sit here and defend cherry-picked quotes from somebody's book," he said. "This is a bigger issue than Kendi's book. What this is really about is trying to paint the United States military, and the United States Navy, as weak, as woke."

He added that sailors had spent 341 days at sea last year with minimal port visits — the longest deployments the Navy has done, he said.

"We are not weak. We are strong," Gilday said.

Rep. Doug Lamborn, R-Colo., also challenged the admiral by citing specific quotes from the book and asked him how those ideas laid out by Kendi would further advance or improve the Navy's power.

Gilday responded by arguing the importance of transparency and open dialogue about racism.

"There is racism in the Navy just as there is racism in our country, and the way we are going to get out of it is by being honest and not to sweep it under the rug," he expounded,

adding that he does not agree with everything the author says in the book.

The key point however, he said, is for sailors "to be able to think critically."

The exchange was the latest in vociferous complaints from some conservative leaders and lawmakers who suggest the armed forces are becoming a pawn for the country's culture wars and "wokeness" ideology, as the military takes steps to address issues of racial inclusion, extremism, racism and white supremacy.

And only last week, Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., accosted Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin about Kendi's book, which Cotton said promoted "critical race theories" at a different Senate Armed Services Committee hearing where Austin was testifying.

Days earlier, Cotton and Rep. Dan Crenshaw, R-Texas — two combat veterans — launched a "whistleblowers" online platform to report examples of "woke ideology" in the military.

"Enough is enough. We won't let our military fall to woke ideology," Crenshaw, a former Navy SEAL, said in a tweet.

Also in February, Austin instructed a one-day stand-down across the Defense Department pausing regular activities to address extremism and white nationalism in the ranks — an issue Austin declared as a priority after a number of rioters at the U.S. Capitol in January were found to have military backgrounds.

The confrontation Tuesday is also the latest in reproaches by Banks, who is a Naval Reserve officer, and other GOP members over Gilday's recommendation to include Kendi's book in the Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program.

In February, Banks sent a letter to Gilday arguing that the views promoted in the book are "explicitly anti-American" and demanded Gilday explain the Navy's decision to include it on the reading list or remove it.

Gilday responded to Banks in a letter obtained by Fox News saying that the book was included on the list because "it evokes the author's own personal journey in understanding barriers to true inclusion, the deep nuances of racism and racial inequalities."

General: Europe still a 'priority theater' for Army

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Europe remains high on the list of the U.S. Army's priorities, the Army's top general said Thursday after holding in-person talks with allied ground commanders for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic started.

"Europe is a priority theater for the United States Army," Gen. James McConville, the Army's chief of staff, told reporters by phone from U.S. Army Europe and Africa headquarters in Wiesbaden after holding three days of talks with European allies.

The military leaders agreed at three days of discussions — which also marked the first in-person meetings between them since former President Donald Trump ordered sweeping cuts to the number of U.S. troops in Germany — that a "policy of strength" was the best way to deter adversaries like Russia, McConville said.

A focus of the talks had been on ensuring that U.S. and partner military modernization efforts are in sync, he said.

"Our allies are all taking a look at where they need to be in the future. Their priorities are really on command and control, making sure we can all work together," McConville said.

The U.S. Army has embarked on a modernization push focused on improving long-range precision fires while adding more sophisticated command and control capabilities to counter adversaries like Russia and China. But those upgrades need to be compatible with what allies are doing, since "we are always going to fight with allies and partners," McConville said. "As we build these systems, as we transform our armies and militaries, we want to make sure we can all communicate with each other."

Correction

A story in Wednesday's edition about a Marine who helped save a Japanese man contained incorrect medal criteria. It should have said the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal is awarded to service members who distinguish themselves with "heroic or meritorious achievement or service."

Juneteenth to become a new US holiday

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States is commemorating the end of slavery with a new federal holiday.

President Joe Biden was set to sign legislation into law Thursday afternoon to make Juneteenth, or June 19, the 12th federal holiday. The House voted 415-14 on Wednesday to send the bill to Biden.

Juneteenth commemorates June 19, 1865, when Union soldiers brought the news of freedom to enslaved Black people in Galveston, Texas — two months after the Confederacy had surrendered. That was also about 2 ½ years after the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves in the Southern states.

It's the first new federal holiday since Martin Luther King Jr. Day was created

in 1983.

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management, which is the human resources office for the federal government, tweeted Thursday that most federal employees will observe the new holiday — Juneteenth National Independence Day — on Friday since June 19 falls on a Saturday this year.

“Our federal holidays are purposely few in number and recognize the most important milestones,” said Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y. “I cannot think of a more important milestone to commemorate than the end of slavery in the United States.”

The Senate passed the bill Tuesday under a unanimous consent agreement that expedites the process for considering leg-

islation. It takes just one senator's objection to block such agreements.

The bill was sponsored by Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass., and had 60 co-sponsors. Democratic leaders moved quickly to bring the bill to the House floor after the Senate's vote the day before.

Some Republican lawmakers opposed the effort. Rep. Matt Rosendale, R-Mont., said creating the federal holiday was an effort to celebrate “identity politics.”

“Since I believe in treating everyone equally, regardless of race, and that we should be focused on what unites us rather than our differences, I will vote no,” he said in a press release.

Many states recognize Juneteenth as a holiday or have an official observance of the day, and most states hold celebrations.

Jobless claims climb to 412,000 from pandemic low

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits rose last week for the first time since April despite widespread evidence that the economy and the job market are rebounding steadily from the pandemic recession.

The Labor Department said Thursday that jobless claims rose 37,000 from the week before. As the job market has strengthened, the number of weekly applications for unemployment aid has fallen for most of the year. The number of jobless claims generally reflects the pace of layoffs.

With vaccinations up and more consumers venturing out to spend — on restaurant meals, airline fares, movie tickets and store purchases — the economy is rapidly recovering from the recession. All that renewed spending has fueled customer demand and led many companies to seek new workers, often at higher wages, and avoid layoffs.

In fact, the speed of the rebound from the recession has caught many businesses off guard and touched off a scramble to hire. In May, employers added a less-than-expected 559,000 jobs, evidence that many companies are struggling to find enough workers

as the economy recovers faster than expected.

But many economists expect hiring to catch up with demand in the coming months, especially as federal unemployment aid programs end and more people pursue jobs. They note that the economy still has 7.6 million fewer jobs than it did before the pandemic struck.

And employers are posting job openings faster than applicants can fill them. In April, they advertised a record 9.3 million job openings, up a sharp 12% from the number in March.

Bipartisan group on infrastructure up to 21 senators

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A bipartisan senators' group working on a \$1 trillion infrastructure compromise more than doubled in size to 21 members Wednesday, a key threshold that gives momentum to their effort as President Joe Biden returns from overseas at a pivotal time for his big legislative priority.

Biden told reporters he had yet to see the emerging proposal from the group but remained hopeful a bipartisan agreement could be reached, despite weeks of on-again, off-again talks over his more robust \$1.7 billion American Jobs Plan.

“I'm still hoping we can put together the two bookends here,” Biden said as he prepared to depart Geneva after attending a

summit of European leaders.

The administration dispatched top White House advisers for back-to-back meetings on Capitol Hill while the president was away. Biden and his Democratic allies in Congress are proceeding on a two-track strategy — seeking a bipartisan bill while preparing to go it alone if Republicans try to block the investments with a filibuster in the Senate.

The administration officials huddled late Wednesday in the Capitol basement with the Democratic senators in the bipartisan group, grinding through details of the proposal. On Tuesday, the White House team shored up restless House Democrats eager for momentum on a shared domestic priority with the president.

Ahead of Wednesday's late afternoon session, the 20 senators issued a joint statement backing the emerging bipartisan proposal, doubling their ranks in a show of momentum as Biden is expected to re-engage at home. The list was later updated to 21.

The number is significant: With 11 Republicans and 10 Democrats, the group for the first time shows the potential for a bipartisan accord that could theoretically reach the 60-vote threshold in the Senate, which is now evenly split 50-50, that's needed to advance bills by bypassing the filibuster.

“We support this bipartisan framework that provides a historic investment in our nation's core infrastructure needs without raising taxes,” the senators said.

Portland tries restoring damaged reputation

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — The smell of fresh empanadas wafted through the stands at Portland's Saturday Market. People talked through their masks with artists as others sifted through fork windchimes, crystal necklaces, tie dye dresses and clay mugs.

The weekly event was smaller than in years past, but long-time attendees say it was a sign of life being breathed back into downtown.

Nine blocks away, past businesses still shuttered with plywood boards — the names of Black people killed by police painted onto them — a panhandler leaned against a fence outside the federal courthouse in an area that was choked with

tear gas last summer as thousands of protesters seized the streets. It's now overwhelmed by a makeshift homeless camp.

The scenes are from a city trying to emerge from one of its most wrenching periods, one that saw its reputation go from quirky "Portlandia" to violent dystopia in the minds of many on the outside looking in.

The Pacific Northwest city had best been known nationally for its ambrosial food scene, craft breweries and nature-loving hipsters.

But last year, as a portion of its downtown was consumed by nightly protests that often turned violent and resulted in clashes with federal agents, former President Donald Trump and his administration labeled Por-

tlant an "anarchist jurisdiction."

"It does feel kind of like someone dropped a bomb in some areas (of Portland), but I think they're very contained areas," said Ocean Howell, a professor at the University of Portland who teaches urban history and planning. "I think there's likely some businesses that are gone and aren't coming back. And there are just some people, generally, who are kind of spooked from everything."

City officials have insisted that Portland is resilient as they launch a revitalization plan — in the form of citywide cleanups of protest damage, aggressive encampment removals, increased homeless services and police reform — to repair its

reputation.

Based on a survey conducted by the city last month, 68% of people said their top reason for not visiting was due to riots and protests.

In recent months, Portland officials have committed millions of dollars to cleaning up downtown — removing graffiti, clearing large homeless encampments and restoring damaged buildings.

In addition, the mayor's office has launched a reputation and rebranding effort.

"We're doggedly determined to recover," Mayor Ted Wheeler said in his State of the City address this year. "Our community has what it takes to move forward to a much greater future."

2 SC executions halted until firing squad formed

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — The South Carolina Supreme Court on Wednesday blocked the planned executions of two inmates by electrocution, saying they cannot be put to death until they truly have the choice of a firing squad option set out in the state's newly revised capital punishment law.

The high court halted this month's scheduled executions of Brad Sigmon and Freddie Owens, writing that corrections officials need to put together a firing squad so that inmates can really choose between that or the electric chair. The state's plans, the court wrote in an unanimous order, are on hold "due to the statutory right of inmates to elect the manner of their execution."

The executions were scheduled less than a month after the passage of a new law compelling the condemned to choose between electrocution or a firing squad if lethal injection

drugs aren't available. The statute is aimed at restarting executions after an involuntary 10-year pause that the state attributes to an inability to procure the drugs.

Prison officials previously said they still can't get hold of lethal injection drugs and have yet to put together a firing squad, leaving the 109-year-old electric chair as the only option.

"The department is moving ahead with creating policies and procedures for a firing squad," Chrysti Shain, a spokeswoman for the South Carolina Department of Corrections, said in a statement Wednesday. "We are looking to other states for guidance through this process. We will notify the court when a firing squad becomes an option for executions."

State prison officials have not indicated when a firing squad would be up and running.

Chinese-crewed spaceship docks in new space station

Associated Press

JIUQUAN, China — A Chinese spaceship carrying a three-person crew docked with China's new space station at the start of a three-month mission Thursday, marking a milestone in the country's ambitious space program.

The Shenzhou-12 craft connected with the Tianhe space station module about six hours after takeoff from the Jiuquan launch center on the edge of the Gobi Desert.

The three astronauts are the first to take up residency in the main living module and will carry out experiments, test equipment, conduct maintenance and prepare the station for receiving two laboratory modules next year.

The mission brings to 14 the number of astronauts China has launched into space since 2003, becoming only the third country after the former Soviet Union and the United States to do so on its own.

The astronauts were seen off by space officials, other uni-

formed military personnel and a crowd of children waving flowers and flags and singing patriotic songs.

The rocket dropped its boosters about two minutes into the flight followed by the cowlings surrounding Shenzhou-12 at the top of the rocket. After about 10 minutes, it separated from the rocket's upper section, extended its solar panels and shortly afterward entered orbit.

About a half-dozen adjustments took place over the following six hours to line up the spaceship for docking with the Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, module at about 4 p.m.

The travel time is down from the two days it took to reach China's earlier experimental space stations, a result of a "great many breakthroughs and innovations," the mission's deputy chief designer, Gao Xu, told state broadcaster CCTV.

"So the astronauts can have a good rest in space, which should make them less tired," Gao said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Adult altercation ends Little League title game

KY STANTON — A Little League baseball championship game in eastern Kentucky came to an abrupt end when a group of adults got into an altercation on the field.

The Stanton Police Department and the city's Parks and Recreation Department are investigating Monday's incident, officials said.

Video of the incident shared to Facebook shows more than a dozen adults on the field and some can be heard shouting obscenities, news outlets reported.

Stanton Police Sgt. Ian Morton told the Lexington Herald-Leader on Tuesday that police are trying to determine what led to the events and whether charges should be filed.

5 hurt when fire causes boat to explode at lake

MO SUNRISE BEACH — Five people from Nebraska were seriously injured when a boat exploded Tuesday at the Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri.

The Missouri State Highway Patrol said the explosion happened near Sunrise Beach. The boat was docked when a mechanical failure caused a fuel-related fire, the patrol said.

James and Kari Hohenstein, Brad Vanwinkle and two children aged 12 and 16 were seriously injured. A 2-year-old was taken by private vehicle to the hospital with minor injuries.

Message in a bottle travels across Atlantic

RI PROVIDENCE — A Portuguese teenager found a message in a bottle that traveled at least 2,400 miles from a Vermont teenager.

Christian Santos, 17, was spear-

heading in the Azores when he found a crumpled plastic bottle that was tossed into the sea near Rhode Island in 2018, The Boston Globe reported.

Santos' mother, Molly Santos, posted a photo of the note on Facebook asking for others to share the post in hopes of finding the writer to share how far the message traveled.

The note reads, "It is Thanksgiving. I am 13 and visiting family in Rhode Island. I am from Vermont." It included an email address to respond. Molly Santos said that she sent an email to the address, but never received a response.

Wildlife groups investigating bird deaths

VA RESTON — People should stop feeding birds while scientists determine why hundreds have been blinded and killed in the Washington, D.C., region since late May, a federal agency said.

Wildlife managers in Washington, Virginia, Maryland and West Virginia have received an increasing number of reports about sick and dying birds in recent weeks, according to a statement from the U.S. Geological Survey on behalf of conservation groups in the area.

The agency said birds have experienced "eye swelling and crusty discharge, as well as neurological signs." Some have tremors, keep their heads tilted or have trouble balancing, The Washington Post reported. A definitive cause of death has yet to be determined.

Birds can transmit diseases to one another when they congregate at feeders and baths. Environmental agencies recommend basic precautions including avoiding the handling of birds but wearing disposable gloves if necessary, keeping pets away from birds and cleaning feeders with bleach.

Megan Kirchgessner, a veterinarian with Virginia's Department of Wildlife Resources, told the Post that at least 325 reports of sick birds have been collected. She said the condition appears to affect only young blue jays and grackles.

Town accidentally sells municipal water tower

FL BROOKSVILLE — A small town in Florida accidentally sold its water tower in a blundered real estate transaction.

A businessman purchased a municipal building underneath the city of Brooksville's water tower last April for \$55,000 with the goal of converting it into a gym. However, when Bobby Read went to the county to get an address for his new business location, he was told the parcel he bought included the entire water tower site, according to the Tampa Bay Times.

Luckily for the town, Read was willing to give it back. County records show he transferred the water tower back to Brooksville through a warranty deed last month. The town of 8,500 residents is located 50 miles north of Tampa.

Police: Stolen ambulance driven into bay in chase

NY IRONDEQUOIT — Reports of a stolen ambulance from a Utica-based company turned into a lengthy pursuit on the New York State Thruway for state troopers Sunday morning into the afternoon.

WHAM-TV reported that police say they caught the vehicle on the Thruway and later on I-490 and into the city of Rochester. The chase lasted about 100 miles.

Police said they later located the ambulance off of the Culver Road exit, and were led down Seneca Road when the vehicle crashed into Irondequoit Bay near Newport

Yacht Club.

David Drushler was making a delivery at the yacht club and witnessed the incident. He said the woman rolled the window down to get out and was trying to get on top of the ambulance.

"People on the power boats around were yelling, 'She's drowning. She can't swim.' That's when the power boats came down and fished her out," Drushler said.

Crews spent more than an hour pulling the ambulance out of the water.

A spokesperson from Kunkel Ambulance said the vehicle was stolen during a post-shift cleaning and tracked using a GPS.

The woman was immediately taken into custody and charges are pending.

Postal carriers among 4 indicted in meth case

OK TULSA — A Tulsa man and three U.S. Postal Service carriers have been charged with participating in a methamphetamine drug conspiracy, federal prosecutors said Tuesday.

A federal grand jury in Tulsa indicted Kamau Jahi Williams, 42; Erick Scott, 49; Christine Conner, 54, all of Tulsa; and Shawn Boike, 46, of Skiatook, with drug conspiracy, acting U.S. Attorney Clint Johnson said in a statement. The defendants made initial federal court appearances Tuesday.

Prosecutors allege that Williams orchestrated the conspiracy with the other three, all postal workers at the Apache Street Post Office in Tulsa. Williams' drug supplier in California would mail shipments of meth to an abandoned Tulsa address, and the postal workers would mark the packages as delivered and then give them to Williams, prosecutors allege.

— From wire reports

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and Military News

Hornets' Ball named top rookie

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — LaMelo Ball thought he would become NBA Rookie of the Year long before he joined the league.

That belief became a reality Wednesday night as Ball's versatility as a passer, scorer and rebounder earned the Charlotte Hornets point guard the honor despite missing 21 games with a fractured wrist.

Ball was the runaway winner, receiving 84 of the 99 first-place votes to beat out finalists Anthony Edwards from the Minnesota Timberwolves and Tyrese Haliburton from the Sacramento Kings. Edwards received the other 15 first-place votes. The award was determined by a global panel of 100 writers and broadcasters who cover the league.

"Honestly, way before the league when I was playing basketball and they were talking about the NBA stuff, that is when I knew when I'm a rookie that is one of the accomplishments I can get," Ball said.

His teammates took to social media to congratulate him with Gordon Hayward tweeting "Rookie of the year, and well deserved. Huge congrats @MELOD1P! Can't wait to get out on the court with you again. Just the beginning!"

The 6-foot-7 Ball was selected third overall in 2020 after playing professional ball in Lithuania and Australia.

He led all rookies with averages of 6.1 assists and 1.6 steals per game and was third with 15.7 points and 5.9 rebounds. He made an immediate impact with the Hornets, becoming the youngest player in the NBA history to have a triple-double with 22 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists in just his 10th career game on Jan. 9 against the Atlanta Hawks.

George leads short-handed Clippers past Jazz in Game 5

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Paul George delivered exactly what was needed to move the Los Angeles Clippers one step closer to their first conference finals berth.

With Kawhi Leonard sidelined with a knee injury, George responded with one of the best postseason performances of his NBA career with 37 points, 16 rebounds, and five assists to lead the Clippers to a 119-111 victory over the Utah Jazz in Game 5 of their Western Conference semifinals series Wednesday night.

George became the first player in franchise history to post at least 35 points, 15 rebounds, and five assists in a playoff game.

"It was no secret. I knew I had to be big tonight and gotta be big going forward," George said.

Marcus Morris scored 25 points and Reggie Jackson added 22 for Los Angeles. It won its third straight game to push the top-seeded Jazz to the brink of elimination. The Clippers shot 51% from the field in Leonard's absence after he played a critical role in helping them win Games 3 and 4 in the series.

"Our season is alive because of his shouldering of all the work he's done," George said. "We got to hold it together and continue to keep this boat afloat until he returns."

Bojan Bogdanovic made nine three-pointers and scored 32 points to lead Utah. Donovan Mitchell added 21 points. Rudy Gobert chipped in 17 points and 11 rebounds. Six players scored in double figures for the Jazz.

Utah and Los Angeles will play Game 6 on Friday in Los Angeles.

"This series is not over," Mitchell said. "We got a lot of life left to give, a lot of juice to give and we just got to go out there and play with a level of desperation that we'd never played with before, otherwise we'll be home."

The Jazz trailed the entire fourth quarter after making just six baskets in the third. Utah cut the deficit to 100-97 when Mitchell converted a three-point play with 5:46 left. Jackson answered with back-to-back baskets to squelch a Jazz comeback. Utah could get no closer after that.

"We know that we're going to need a better collective effort than we had tonight," Gobert said. "Hopefully, we get more urgency the next game because now, if we lose, we're going home, so you can't get more urgency than that."

Hawks rally from 26 down, shock 76ers

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Trae Young ran off the court clapping and yapping toward the few Hawks fans that braved the Philly crowd and stuck around and were rewarded with a comeback victory for the ages.

"I was just showing love to the ATL fans that showed up," Young said, "and we're going to need them to show up Friday for us."

Oh yes, there will be a Game 6 in the Eastern Conference semifinals, with Atlanta — not top-seeded Joel Embiid and the Philadelphia Sixers — playing for a spot in the next round.

"If you don't believe, you got to believe now," Hawks coach Nate McMillan said.

How could they not? Atlanta fans can roll off a lengthy list of infamous collapses in its collec-

tive sports history.

Here was a comeback to remember.

Young was fouled on a three-pointer and hit all three free throws with 1:26 left to cap a 26-point rally and send the Hawks on their way to a 109-106 victory Wednesday night in Game 5.

The team won in Philadelphia for the second time in the series and can advance to the conference finals for the first time since 2015 with a victory Friday night in Atlanta.

"We knew what we had to do and we had to do it in a hurry. No quit," McMillan said.

Young scored 39 points and added to a postseason where he has become a breakout star.

"We keep fighting no matter what the score is. I'm proud of this team," Young said. "We have confidence in each other."

Embiid scored 17 points in an 8-for-8 first quarter and seemingly had the Sixers on their way toward a romp with a 26-point lead in the first half. They still led 87-69 at the end of the third before they collapsed.

Consider:

■ Embiid scored 39 points and Seth Curry had 36 and they were the only two Philadelphia players to score a field goal in the second half.

■ The Hawks outscored them 40-19 in the fourth on 16-for-22 shooting.

■ The Sixers still had a 97.5% chance of winning Game 5 with 4:23 remaining.

■ Had 10 of 15 turnovers in the second half.

"We got too comfortable," guard Ben Simmons said. "We didn't play the way we should be playing."

Ledecky gets two more Olympic berths

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — The long and short of it was not an issue for Katie Ledecky.

On another memorable night for the American swimming star, Ledecky won the 200-meter freestyle and the historic 1,500 free about 70 minutes apart at the U.S. Olympic trials Wednesday, locking up two more individual events for the Tokyo Games.

This was about as tough as it gets.

First, a relative sprint over four laps — the shortest event on Ledecky's program.

Then, a grueling metric mile comprising 30 laps — the longest race in pool swimming and one that will be making its Olympic debut for the women in Tokyo.

Her short time between races was chaotically choreographed to keep Ledecky as fresh as possible for the 1,500.

"The goal was to get in the warm-down pool as quickly as I could," she said. "I tried to keep moving, hydrated and

swam for 15-20 minutes before they pulled me to go back to the awards (ceremony). I ate a banana, drank chocolate milk and water, put a jacket on as I was walking."

It worked out just fine.

The 24-year-old from the nation's capital touched the wall far ahead of everyone else with a winning time of 15 minutes, 40.50 seconds — well off her 2018 world record (15:20.48), but fastest in the world this year.

Erica Sullivan was nearly a half-lap behind, but she knocked more than 4 seconds off her personal best to take the expected second Olympic berth in 15:51.18.

The 200 free was one of four gold medals that Ledecky won at the Rio Games. She'll get a chance to defend that title after winning in 1:55.11, a full body length ahead of the field.

Allison Schmitt, who won the event at the 2012 London Games, is headed to her fourth Olympics at age 31 after holding off Paige Madden by one-

hundredth of a second for the runner-up spot behind Ledecky.

Schmitt's time was 1:56.79, which gives her a likely individual event in Tokyo as well as a spot on the 4x200 free relay. Madden and Katie McLaughlin, who was fourth in 1:57.16, will also be going to the Olympics as relay swimmers.

Ledecky already won the 400 free, though she wasn't as fast as expected. She's also heavily favored in the 800 free, another race she won at Rio, which means she could swim as many as four individual events and perhaps a couple of relays at the Tokyo Games.

Ledecky did confirm that she's scratched the 100 free.

She's already got enough on her Olympic plate.

In other races on the fourth night of the trials, Zach Harting earned his first trip to the Olympics with a victory in the men's 200 butterfly, while Alex Walsh won a thrilling race in the women's 200 indi-

vidual medley — the top three were separated by just four-hundredths of a second.

Harting, a 23-year-old from Huntsville, Ala., won with a time of 1:55.06. He is already making plans to get the customary Olympic rings tattoo.

"Coming in here and not making the team was not an option," he said. "I don't know if I could have handled it, so the easiest thing to do was make the team, and that's what I did."

Gunnar Bentz, who was among the swimmers involved in Ryan Lochte's infamous night in Rio five years ago, touched after Harting in 1:55.34 and will get the expected second spot in the event.

Walsh won in 2:09.30, followed by Kate Douglass at 2:09.32 and Madisyn Cox in 2:09.34.

Douglass will get the expected second spot on the Olympic team, while Cox endured another heartbreak after finishing fourth in two events at the 2016 trials.

Price makes 29 saves as Canadiens hold off Knights

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The Montreal Canadiens vowed to adapt after looking out of sync in the first game of their Stanley Cup semifinal series with the Vegas Golden Knights.

It's exactly what they did Wednesday night.

Carey Price made 29 saves and the Canadiens beat the Golden Knights 3-2 to tie the series at a game each.

Price improved to 9-4 in the playoffs, his most victories in a postseason. He had eight in 2014.

Paul Byron, Joel Armia and Tyler Toffoli scored for Montreal, with Byron making it 3-0 with 2:45 left in the second period.

Alex Pietrangelo scored twice for Vegas, and Marc-Andre Fleury made 20 saves.

Abandoning the rugged approach they took in Game 1, the Canadiens looked more like the team that reeled off seven straight wins in the first and second rounds, dominating in all three zones within the first 20

minutes.

"We showed some good composure," Montreal coach Dominique Ducharme said. "At one point we felt the pressure, they were trying to come back. Overall, we showed pretty good composure. I think we can still do a better job. We wanted to support the puck better. I think we did that tonight and it paid off. I think we still can be better on a few occasions managing the puck and we'll do that."

Game 3 is Friday night in Montreal.

The Canadiens, who improved to 6-2 on the road in the postseason, have won 21 straight playoff games when scoring three or more goals.

"Can't go down 2-0 and expect to win the game," Golden Knights captain Mark Stone said. "These guys play a good team game when they get the lead. We gotta do a better job with our starts and we gotta find our preparation."

With Vegas missing top-line center Chan-

dlar Stephenson, and third-line center Nick Roy skating in his place, Montreal opened the game with a first-period advantage in shots on goal (12-4), shot attempts (24-13), scoring chances (14-4) and high-danger chances (8-1).

Armia got the scoring going after he crunched Golden Knights defenseman Alec Martinez into the end boards behind Fleury, allowing Corey Perry to gather the puck and feed Joel Edmundson in the right circle. Edmundson fired a shot that deflected back to Armia, who one-timed it past Fleury's right skate.

Jeff Petry made his presence felt in his first game back after missing the Canadiens' last two. He played give-and-go with Cole Caufield, who opted to pass across the slot rather than fire on net and found Toffoli, who snapped a shot through Fleury's pads to not only push the Montreal's lead to 2-0, but extend its first-period scoring edge in the playoffs to 12-3.

D-backs lose 22nd straight road game

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Hours before first pitch, many of the Arizona Diamondbacks were busy working in an outdoor weight room at Oracle Park as others prepared for their pregame fielding drills.

The little things aren't leading to winning results right now, which makes the constant losing all the more painful. Manager Torey Lovullo is searching for answers from his own staff as well as baseball friends everywhere who might offer something that works.

Arizona dropped its 22nd straight road game Wednesday night, matching the 1963 Mets and '43 Philadelphia Athletics for the major league record with a 13-7 loss to the San Francisco Giants.

"This is obviously nothing that we ever expected, nothing that we're proud of and we can't reverse anything that's happened over the past 40-plus days," Lovullo said. "We've got to find a way to win a baseball game tomorrow."

Mets 6, Cubs 3: Jacob deGrom was pulled from a second straight start with an arm injury, this time leaving after three perfect innings with right shoulder soreness, but host New York's bullpen stepped up to finish a three-hitter.

One start after being pulled from a gem against San Diego with flexor tendinitis in his right arm, deGrom went directly down the clubhouse tunnel after finishing the third against Chicago.

After the game, deGrom said initial tests ruled out a serious issue, but he planned to get imaging and more observation Thursday.

The right-hander struck out eight of the nine batters he faced and lowered his ERA to 0.54.

Sean Reid-Foley (2-0) relieved deGrom and allowed one run over two innings.

Phillies 2, Dodgers 0: Zack Wheeler out-pitched Clayton Kershaw, and Rhys Hoskins homered early to end an 0-for-33 slump as Philadelphia won at Los Angeles to avoid a three-game sweep.

Hoskins connected in the first inning and J.T. Realmuto added an RBI double in the third.

Astros 8, Rangers 4: Jose Altuve homered twice and made major league history by hitting a leadoff homer one game after belting a walk-off grand slam, leading host Houston past Texas.

Altuve connected again with a shot to the train tracks atop left field with two outs in the eighth inning to extend the lead to 8-4 and give him his fifth career multi-homer game. Astros rookie Chas McCormick also hit two home runs on a night when Houston went deep a season-high six times.

Red Sox 10, Braves 8: Christian Arroyo slugged a pinch-hit grand slam in the seventh inning as Boston won at Atlanta to move within one game of first place.

The Red Sox recovered after blowing a 6-3 lead. Freddie Freeman hit a go-ahead homer for the Braves in the sixth after Dansby Swanson's three-run shot tied the game in the fifth.

Reds 2, Brewers 1: Tyler Mahle tied his career high with 12 strikeouts, Tucker Barnhart drove in the go-ahead run with a double in the seventh inning and Cincinnati finished a three-game sweep at Milwaukee.

The Reds have won six straight and 11 of 13. The Brewers dropped three straight for the first time in nearly a month and were swept for the third time this season. Milwaukee totaled nine hits and four runs in the series against the Reds.

Rockies 8, Padres 7: Pinch-hitter Charlie Blackmon singled home the winning run in the ninth inning and Colorado shook off a

monster homer by Fernando Tatis Jr. to beat visiting San Diego.

Tatis hit a 477-foot homer, the longest of his career and his NL-leading 21st. He also doubled, but the Padres lost for the 13th time in 17 games.

Athletics 8, Angels 4: Ramón Laureano hit a home run and made a homer-robbing catch in his return from the injured list, and host Oakland rallied past Los Angeles for its sixth straight win.

White Sox 8, Rays 7 (10): Yasmani Grandal hit a game-ending RBI single in the 10th inning and host Chicago took two of three from Tampa Bay in a matchup of division leaders.

Yankees 3, Blue Jays 2: Gerrit Cole pitched eight effective innings, pinch-hitter Gary Sánchez connected for a two-run homer and Aroldis Chapman dodged trouble in the ninth as visiting New York held off Toronto.

Indians 8, Orioles 7: Aaron Civale became the first pitcher with 10 wins this season and José Ramírez homered and drove in three runs as Cleveland extended Baltimore's road losing streak to 18 games.

Nationals 3, Pirates 1: Paolo Espino got his first major league win at age 34, Josh Bell hit a two-run homer against his former team and host Washington beat Pittsburgh for a three-game sweep.

Tigers 6, Royals 5: Willi Castro homered during a three-run rally in the seventh inning and Detroit won at Kansas City for a three-game sweep.

Cardinals 1, Marlins 0: Yadier Molina grounded an RBI single down the third-base line in the ninth inning and host St. Louis edged Miami to sweep the season series.

Twins 7, Mariners 2: Nelson Cruz hit a three-run homer against his former team, rookie starter Bailey Ober struck out six and Minnesota won at Seattle.

Nadal skipping Wimbledon, Olympics to rest body

Associated Press

MADRID — Rafael Nadal will not play at Wimbledon or at the Tokyo Olympics, saying Thursday that he has decided to skip the two tournaments after "listening" to his body.

Nadal, who reached the French Open semifinals last week but lost to Novak Djokovic, has won the title at Wimbledon twice, in 2008 and 2010. He also won the Olympic gold medal in singles at the 2008 Beijing

Games and in doubles at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games.

"The goal is to prolong my career and continue to do what makes me happy, that is to compete at the highest level and keep fighting for those professional and personal goals at the maximum level of competition," Nadal said.

The 35-year-old Spaniard said the fact that there are only two weeks between Roland

Garros and Wimbledon "didn't make it easier" on his body to recover from "the always demanding" clay-court season.

"Sport prevention of any kind of excess in my body is a very important factor at this stage of my career in order to try to keep fighting for the highest level of competition and titles," Nadal wrote on Twitter.

Nadal is a 20-time Grand Slam champion with a record 13 titles at the French Open.