

Biden: Afghans will 'decide their future'

Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — During a meeting Friday at the White House, President Joe Biden sought to reassure Afghanistan's leaders of his enduring commitment to their country after U.S. forces are withdrawn later this year, the prospect of which has already emboldened Taliban militants.

"The partnership between the United States and Afghanistan is not ending," Biden said in comments before the start of his meeting with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation. Yet he put the onus on Afghans to determine their fate.

"Afghans are going to have to decide their future, what they want," Biden said. "It's going to be very difficult. But we're going to stick with you, and we're going to do our best to see to it you have the tools you need."

Ghani said he respected Biden's decision to withdraw American forces and paid tribute to the 2,312 Americans who died fighting in Afghanistan over two decades. He also acknowledged the Taliban's recent gains, stating casually that "things happen" in moments of transition, but he vowed that his

country's fledgling democracy will endure.

"We are determined to have unity, coherence," Ghani said. "You will see: With determination, with unity and with the partnership, we will overcome all odds."

But such resolute words — and Biden's promises of diplomatic, economic and humanitarian assistance — can't obscure the reality that Afghanistan is at a crossroads and facing an uncertain future.

Since Biden's April announcement that all U.S. troops would leave Afghanistan by Sept. 11, making good on his campaign promise to end America's longest war after nearly 20 years, a Taliban blitz has overtaken dozens of districts.

Among them are areas on Afghanistan's northern border with Tajikistan, a key supply route. The Taliban has also made gains across the northern provinces of Kunduz, Balkh and Baghlan.

The Taliban gains have been accompanied by reports of Afghan troops surrendering en masse.

In recent days, activists have posted videos of weary soldiers walking sheepishly across the front lines, shaking the hands of waiting Taliban fighters and surrendering

their arms — a result, many allege, of tribal elders negotiating with the Taliban ahead of what many fear will be a rout of government forces.

Open-source analysts scouring social media contend that the government has lost hundreds of U.S.-supplied heavy weapons, armored vehicles and trucks, with almost 200 Humvees captured by the Taliban since June. Four helicopters have been downed.

Those incidents have sparked urgent questions about the viability of the U.S.-backed and -trained Afghan army and its associated militias after September.

The Wall Street Journal recently reported that U.S. intelligence officials believe the Afghan government could collapse within six months after American and NATO forces leave.

According to the White House, the Pentagon's Afghanistan Security Forces Fund will provide financial support to the country's national army and its police, air force and special security forces.

The fund includes more than \$3 billion for the current fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30, and Biden has asked Congress to provide \$3.3 billion for 2022.

Most UFO sightings by military remain unexplained

By **CAITLIN DOORNBOS**

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A review of more than 140 military encounters with UFOs failed to establish whether they were extraterrestrial in origin, atmospheric events or sent by Earthly adversaries.

All but one of the 144 military encounters with UFOs in the last 17 years that have been reviewed by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence remain unexplained, according to a report released Friday.

"We were able to identify one reported UAP with high confidence," the report states. "In

that case, we identified the object as a large, deflating balloon. The others remain unexplained."

The unclassified Unidentified Aerial Phenomena report reviewed military and intelligence community unexplained encounters between 2004 and 2021. Congress ordered the report in late 2020 as part of the Intelligence Authorization Act. ODNI was given 180 days to prepare unclassified and classified reports revealing what the U.S. intelligence community knew about UFOs.

"UAP clearly pose a safety of flight issue and may pose a chal-

lenge to U.S. national security," the report states. "There are probably multiple types of UAP requiring different explanations based on the range of appearances and behaviors described in the available reporting."

The encounters might have involved "foreign adversary systems" from China or Russia, industry developmental programs, weather phenomena or "airborne clutter" such as balloons, birds or drones, the report said without drawing definitive conclusions.

The report at no point mentioned aliens or lists outer-space lifeforms as possible explana-

tions.

While the report solved few mysteries, some patterns emerged in the review, including 18 incidents that involved "unusual UAP movement patterns or flight characteristics" that "appear to demonstrate advanced technology."

The study, largely based on encounters reported by Navy pilots, stated limited data contributed to ODNI's inability to draw more conclusions, as "sociocultural stigmas and sensor limitations remain obstacles to collecting data on UAP" because service members are apprehensive about coming forward.

Reagan assisting with US drawdown

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan and its strike group arrived in the Middle East on Friday to help protect troops withdrawing from Afghanistan, the Navy announced.

The Reagan and its crew of 5,000 joins the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, which has been in the region since early April. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin later that month ordered the ship to stay there ahead of the drawdown's May 1 start.

"The Ronald Reagan [strike group] will operate and train alongside regional and coalition partners and provide airpower to protect U.S. and coalition forces as they conduct drawdown operations from Afghanis-

tan," the Navy said in its announcement.

The ship's strike group includes the guided-missile cruiser USS Shiloh and guided-missile destroyer USS Halsey, according to the announcement.

Based in Yokosuka, Japan, the Reagan typically patrols the 7th Fleet area of operations in the Western Pacific, a region wrought with tension over China's military buildup on islands and reefs in the South China Sea.

Friday marked the first time since 2012 that the ship has entered the 5th Fleet region, which includes the Arabian Sea, Red Sea, Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman and parts of the Indian Ocean, according to the Navy.

"As an inherently flexible maneuver force capable of supporting routine and

contingency operations, the carrier's presence demonstrates the U.S. Navy's commitment to regional partners and maritime security," the service said in its statement.

But with the ship now in the 5th Fleet region — the 7th Fleet region is no longer protected by an aircraft carrier.

The aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson was in the Pacific Ocean as of Tuesday, according to a Navy statement that day, but the ship was in the 3rd Fleet's area of responsibility, which spans from Hawaii to California.

The Navy did not say Friday whether the Eisenhower would travel home now that the Reagan has arrived. Before Austin ordered the carrier to stay in the region to assist with the drawdown, the Eisenhower already had been deployed since February.

Turkey offering to secure airport in Afghanistan

Bloomberg

As the U.S. prepares to exit Afghanistan's sprawling Bagram base after 20 years of war, NATO partner Turkey is willing to take the lead securing another airstrip — Kabul's Hamid Karzai International, 40 miles to the south.

Throwing a protective ring around the landlocked nation's airport is critical for those wanting to sustain a strategic presence in Afghanistan. That includes Western powers on the lookout for emerging terrorist threats, China with its now-stalled interest in vast mineral deposits and India, which wants Kabul as a key ally in its tussle with neighboring Pakistan.

But the proposed Turkish operation is being planned with few public details of the U.S. air support that would be rendered if the airport is targeted by an ascendant Taliban that has seized control of dozens of districts in recent weeks, and with power-sharing talks between the militant movement and President Ashraf Ghani's government in Qatar at an impasse.

It's a dangerous proposition for Ankara, which has provided security at the airport's busy military section for six years as part of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, though, has his eye on the possible rewards. Taking on a job no one else wants

would provide an opportunity to repair ties with Washington strained by years of disputes, most intensely Turkey's purchase of a Russian missile-defense system that NATO considers a threat to its security.

"Safeguarding the airport is a way of making nice without giving too much up," on issues that really count with the U.S., including the missiles, said Jenny White, professor at Stockholm University's Institute for Turkish Studies.

"With its aggressive policies, Turkey has lost friends in every corner," she said. "It needs to put a good face on for the financial markets and hopes to curry favor with the U.S. and Europe."

Va. base picked to host F-22 fighter jet training

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force plans to host F-22 fighter jet training at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Va., the service announced Friday, almost three years after the program left its original home at Tyn dall Air Force Base, Fla., after a devastating hurricane.

The Air Force said it signed a Record of Decision approving Joint Base Langley-Eustis as the eventual home for the 325th Fighter Wing,

the F-22's formal training unit that teaches pilots to fly the stealthy fifth-generation fighters known as Raptors. However, Air Force officials said Friday that the service had yet to determine when the unit would move to Virginia from Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., where it was moved in the wake of Hurricane Michael, the Category 5 storm that devastated Tyn dall in October 2018.

That decision will not come until the completion of a tactical air study ordered in Febru-

ary by the service's chief of staff, Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown. That study is meant to determine the best mix of Air Force aircraft for the future and is expected to be completed by early next year. Some service officials have suggested the study could lead the Air Force to retire the F-22 well ahead of initial plans to fly Raptors into the middle of the century.

The study could alter or halt altogether the service's plans to host Raptor training at the Virginia base, a service official said Friday.

Chauvin gets 22½ years in Floyd's death

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Former Minneapolis police Officer Derek Chauvin was sentenced Friday to 22½ years in prison for the murder of George Floyd, whose dying gasps under Chauvin's knee led to the biggest outcry against racial injustice in the U.S. in generations.

The punishment — which came after Chauvin broke his yearlong silence to offer condolences to the Floyd family and express hope that they eventually have “some peace of mind” — is one of the longest prison terms ever imposed on a U.S. police officer in the killing of a Black person.

Still, Floyd's family members and others were disappointed. The sentence fell short of the 30 years prosecutors had requested. And with good behavior, Chauvin, 45,

could get out on parole after serving two-thirds of his sentence, or about 15 years.

“Just because it's the most time doesn't mean it's enough time,” said Nekima Levy Armstrong, a Minneapolis protest leader.

Judge Peter Cahill went beyond the 12½-year sentence prescribed under state guidelines, citing Chauvin's “abuse of a position of trust and authority and also the particular cruelty” shown to Floyd.

Floyd family attorney Ben Crump said the family had gotten “some measure of accountability” but is hoping Chauvin gets the maximum at his upcoming federal civil rights trial. Crump said this was the longest sentence a police officer has ever received in Minnesota.

But he added: “Real justice in America will be Black men and Black women and people of color who will not have to fear

being killed by the police just because the color of their skin. That would be real justice.”

Outside the courthouse, a crowd of about 50 people clasped hands or placed them on each other's shoulders. The reaction was subdued as people debated whether the sentence was long enough. Some cursed in disgust.

At George Floyd Square, as the intersection where Floyd was pinned to the pavement is now known, members of the crowd broke into applause, and several said, “We'll take it.”

Chauvin was immediately led back to prison. He showed little emotion when the judge pronounced the sentence. His eyes moved rapidly around the courtroom, his COVID-19 mask obscuring much of his face.

Fire hindering rescue efforts at fallen condo

Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. — A “very deep fire” hampered rescue efforts Saturday at the collapsed oceanfront condominium tower near Miami where authorities are racing to recover any survivors beneath a mountain of rubble, officials said.

Rescuers were using infrared technology, water and foam to battle the blaze, whose source was unclear. Smoke has been the biggest barrier, Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said during a news conference.

“We're facing very incredible difficulties with this fire. It's a very deep fire. It's extremely difficult to locate the source of the fire,” she said.

One hundred fifty-nine people remain unaccounted for since Thursday's collapse, which killed at least four.

Authorities also announced Saturday they are beginning an audit of buildings nearing their 40-year review — like the fallen Champlain Towers South — to make sure they're safe.

Federal Emergency Management Agency officials have

joined local and state authorities at the site, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said.

The news came after word of a 2018 engineering report that showed the building had “major structural damage” to a concrete slab below its pool deck that needed extensive repairs, part of a series of documents released by the city of Surfside.

While the report from the firm of Morabito Consultants did not warn of imminent danger from the damage — and it is unclear if any of the damage observed was responsible for the collapse — it did note the need for extensive and costly repairs to fix systemic issues with the building.

It said the waterproofing under the pool deck had failed and had been improperly laid flat instead of sloped, preventing water from draining off.

“The failed waterproofing is causing major structural damage to the concrete structural slab below these areas. Failure to replace the waterproofing in the near future will cause the extent of the concrete deteriora-

tion to expand exponentially,” the report said.

The firm recommended that the damaged slabs be replaced in what would be a major repair.

The report also uncovered “abundant cracking and spalling” of concrete columns, beams and walls in the parking garage. Some of the damage was minor, while other columns had exposed and deteriorating rebar. It also noted that many of the building's previous attempts to fix the columns and other damage with epoxy were marred by poor workmanship and were failing.

Beneath the pool deck “where the slab had been epoxy-injected, new cracks were radiating from the originally repaired cracks,” the report said.

Gregg Schlesinger, a former construction project engineer who is now a lawyer handling construction defect cases, said another area of concern in the report is cracks that were discovered in the tower's stucco facade. Schlesinger said that could indicate structural prob-

lems inside the exterior that could have been critical in the collapse.

“The building speaks to us. It is telling us we have a serious problem,” Schlesinger said in a phone interview Saturday.

He added that there are frequently “telltale signs” on oceanfront buildings indicating problems structurally, largely from saltwater and salty air intrusion.

“This is a wakeup call for folks on the beach. Investigate and repair. This should be done every five years,” Schlesinger added. “The scary portion is the other buildings. You think this is unique? No.”

Abi Aghayere, a Drexel University engineering researcher, said the extent of the damage shown in the engineering report was notable.

In addition to possible problems under the pool, he said several areas above the entrance drive showing signs of deterioration were worrisome and should have been repaired immediately because access issues prevented a closer inspection.

GOP balks at terms of Biden infrastructure bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden's bipartisan infrastructure deal has been thrown in doubt as Republican senators said they felt "blindsided" by his insistence that it must move in tandem with his bigger package. The White House doubled down on the strategy, meanwhile, saying it should have come as no surprise.

The rare accord over some \$1 trillion in investments faced new uncertainty Friday, barely 24 hours after Biden strode to the White House driveway, flanked by 10 senators from a bipartisan group, with all sides beaming over the compromise.

Senators were described as "stunned," "floored" and "frustrated" after Biden publicly put the conditions on accepting their deal, according to two people familiar with the private conversations who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the reactions.

"I've been on the phone with the White

House, my Democratic colleagues, my Republican colleagues, all darn day," said Sen. Rob Portman of Ohio, the lead Republican negotiator, in an interview Friday.

"My hope is that we'll still get this done. It's really good for America. Our infrastructure is in bad shape," he said. "It's about time to get it done."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki, who was asked at her briefing about the GOP dismay, said senators should not have been surprised by the two-track strategy that Biden has publicly discussed on many occasions.

"That hasn't been a secret. He hasn't said it quietly. He hasn't even whispered it," she said.

Psaki said the president plans to stand by the commitment he made to the senators. "And he expects they'll do the same," she said.

The path ahead is now uncertain.

On border tour, Harris laments 'infighting' over immigration

Associated Press

EL PASO, Texas — Vice President Kamala Harris on Friday used her first trip to the U.S.-Mexico border since taking office to call for an end to political "rhetoric" and "infighting" over immigration, an issue that Republicans have been eager to weaponize against her.

Immigration "cannot be reduced to a political issue," Harris told reporters. "We're talking about children, we're talking about families, we're talking about suffering. And our approach has to be thoughtful and effective."

Harris's trip came after months of criticism from Republicans and some in her own party over her absence and that of President Joe Biden from the border at a time when immigration officers have logged record numbers of encounters with migrants attempting to cross into the U.S.

Her half-day stop — in which she toured a Customs and Border Protection processing center and met with migrant children there, visited an intake center on the border and held a roundtable with local service provid-

ers — is unlikely to quell GOP efforts to use immigration as a political cudgel against the administration.

Harris defended both the timing of her visit and the choice of El Paso for the stop. Some critics had said the location is too far removed from the epicenter of border crossings creating a strain on federal resources. She told reporters after landing in El Paso that she had said in March that she would come to the border and it was "not a new plan."

But Republicans faulted Harris for a trip that they dismissed as little more than a photo session. Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, a conservative Republican and leading administration critic on immigration, charged that Biden's policies "opened the floodgates to human smugglers and drug cartels."

While Cruz said he was glad Harris had visited, "if the vice president came to Texas without a concrete plan to secure our border and is unwilling to reverse her administration's failed immigration policies that caused the crisis, then her visit is nothing short of a glorified photo-op."

Microsoft debuts Windows 11, more app compatibility

Associated Press

Microsoft has unveiled the next generation of its Windows software, called Windows 11, which has sleeker visual features and is more open to third-party apps.

The newest version of Microsoft's flagship operating system announced Thursday will be a successor to today's Windows 10, which the company introduced in 2015.

In a challenge to rival Apple, the company also announced that it won't force app developers to pay fees to Microsoft for using its app store; and that Google's popular Android apps will run on its new system.

Windows 11 is expected to become available later this year on new computers and other devices and as a free update for those with Windows 10. It includes a host of cosmetic upgrades, such as a new Start button, a revamped task bar and sounds, and under-the-hood features designed to boost speed and efficiency.

While opening more doors to third-party developers, it also further entrenches Microsoft's workplace chatting tool Teams by making it easier to contact people when starting up.

Forrester analyst J.P. Gownder said the aesthetic, user-friendly improvements reflect CEO Satya Nadella's promise to build products that people will "love," not tolerate, though Gownder questioned whether Windows 11 is truly a new generation of software. The fact that it is built on the same core code base as Windows 10 might actually be a good thing, he added, because it could avoid the technical glitches that plagued the release of Windows Vista in 2007.

Microsoft's virtual announcement event was itself affected by technical difficulties Thursday, forcing the company to recommend some viewers watch it on Twitter instead.

Microsoft said it would allow developers to bypass the payments system in its app store if they have their own commerce engine.

That could create problems for Apple, which has faced government scrutiny over its app store and a legal battle from Epic, the maker of the popular Fortnite game, which contends Apple has been gouging app makers by charging commissions ranging from 15% to 30% for in-app transactions because it forbids other options on its iPhone, iPad and iPod.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man pleads guilty after putting razors in dough

ME PORTLAND — A man accused of putting razor blades and screws in pizza dough at supermarkets in Maine and New Hampshire pleaded guilty to a federal count of tampering with a consumer product.

Nicholas Mitchell's agreement calls for a sentence of up to four years and nine months for the crime that led to a recall of pizza dough at Hannaford supermarkets in five states. The recall later extended to Shaw's and Star Markets.

Mitchell, 39, of Dover, N.H., was arrested in October 2020 after razor blades were first found in pizza dough sold at a Hannaford store in Saco.

Officer rescues kitten from rush-hour traffic

IN SOUTH BEND — A northern Indiana police officer turned cat-whisperer to help rescue a kitten after the frisky feline darted in front of his cruiser during rush-hour traffic.

South Bend Police Officer Chris Voros was driving when the gray kitten ran in front of his cruiser. Voros stopped, got out and tried to help the cat, but it darted under his vehicle.

Bystanders soon stopped to help and within a few minutes the cat emerged and they helped Voros corral it.

Ex governor's grave found after 60-year search

LA ALEXANDRIA — After being missing for 60 years, the gravesite of Loui-

siana Gov. Joseph Walker was found in Rapides Parish in the central part of the state.

Walker was the 13th governor of Louisiana, serving from 1850 to 1853.

Local historians found the gravesite off Bayou Rapides Road in the city of Alexandria after searching for the landmark since the 1950s, KALB-TV reported.

They are hoping a historical marker will be placed at the site.

Photo album stolen from famous bar returned

MA GLOUCESTER — A precious photo album stolen from the Massachusetts bar made famous in Sebastian Junger's 1997 book "The Perfect Storm" and the 2000 movie of the same name has been returned with a note of apology, the bar's owners said.

The album was delivered via U.S. Mail to the Crow's Nest in Gloucester, owner Gregg Sousa told the Gloucester Daily Times. It came from Georgia.

"I just wanted to return this," the accompanying note said. "It was taken by a drunk friend, and I do not feel that was right. SORRY."

The album, which contained irreplaceable pictures of regulars — some deceased — along with George Clooney, Mark Wahlberg and other stars of the Oscar-nominated movie was kept under the bar, but made available to curious patrons who wanted to take a look.

Herd of cows get loose, shutting down bridge

WV HUNTINGTON — The revenge of the

cows heated up with yet another instance of a herd getting loose in a U.S. community.

This time a cattle-hauling truck rolled over along Interstate 64 in West Virginia, and an emergency dispatcher in Cabell County said a bridge connecting Huntington to Lawrence County, Ohio, also had to be shut down temporarily.

The dispatcher, who cited policy in declining to give his name, said authorities were trying to determine how many cattle were on the truck. However, they took off in several directions, including onto the nearby bridge.

Huntington is home to Marshall University, whose nickname happens to be the Thundering Herd.

2 escapees recaptured while returning to prison

OK HODGEN — Two men who walked away from a state prison in southeastern Oklahoma were recaptured as they tried to return to the prison, the Oklahoma Department of Corrections said in a statement.

Chad McGlory, 43, is serving a 15-year sentence from Oklahoma County for burglary, driving under the influence and being a felon in possession of a firearm.

Jerome Brock, 21, is serving five years for convictions in Cleveland County on burglary and robbery charges, according to the DOC.

The Jim E. Hamilton Correctional Center is a minimum security facility with about 700 inmates in Hodgen, about 170 miles southeast of Oklahoma City near the Arkansas border.

Snake removed by police turned out to be python

KS PITTSBURG — When Pittsburg Police Officer Jesse Spencer was sent to a home to remove a snake from the front porch, he expected the typical garden snake.

What he found was an 8-foot-long python.

Police posted a photo of Spencer holding the snake. The department said the officer "fulfilled the job description category 'other duties are required.'"

Pythons are constrictor snakes and are not native to the U.S., though they are sold as exotic pets.

Crazy seabird-killing ants eradicated from atoll

HI HONOLULU — An invasive species known as the yellow crazy ant has been eradicated from a remote U.S. atoll in the Pacific, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced.

The ants stalk seabirds on the uninhabited Johnston Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and prevented nesting on about 70 acres of land.

For about a decade, the ants have threatened the seabirds by swarming their nests — and anything else on the ground. The ants spray formic acid on the birds, causing injuries including blindness and even death, Fish and Wildlife Service officials said.

Volunteers and federal workers comprised so-called Crazy Ant Strike Teams that experimented with baits and other techniques to get rid of the pests.

— From wire reports

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Stanley Cup Final features 2 East teams

Associated Press

After gutting out a tough series to get to the Stanley Cup Final, the Tampa Bay Lightning shouldn't have to change their style of play to match up against the Montreal Canadiens.

They won't have to change time zones, either.

Thanks to an adjusted playoff format for just this season, this will be the first final between two Eastern Conference teams in 41 years. Tampa Bay and Montreal will face off for the third time in eight postseasons, and this time it's for the Stanley Cup.

"They're going to get the best team that they've played against so far, and we're going to get the best team that we've played against so far," Lightning captain Steven Stamkos said Friday after a 1-0 victory against the New York Islanders in Game 7 of the semifinals. "It's going to be a tough, grinding series."

Montreal swept Tampa Bay in the first round in 2014 on the way to the East finals, and the Lightning beat the Canadiens in six games in the second round on their way to the 2015 Final. Lightning coach Jon Cooper, Stamkos and six other players remain from the series six years ago, while the Canadiens only have Brendan Gallagher left on their roster from back then.

These teams have also flip-flopped roles since. The Canadiens are now the younger team that hadn't gone deep into the playoffs yet, while the Lightning endured the pain of losing in the 2015 Final and getting swept out of the first round in 2019 before winning it all in the bubble last year.

"It took a lot to get here," Cooper said. "It was all building blocks to get to here, and you

can't predict that. It's going to happen."

It's happening now, with Game 1 at Tampa Bay set for Monday night.

Travel help

The last time a Stanley Cup Final took place between two Eastern teams, the New York Islanders beat the Philadelphia Flyers in 1980 for the first of their four consecutive titles.

Then-Flyers forward Reggie Leach didn't think much of the bus trips back and forth between Philadelphia and Long Island because, "We took a bus every place back then."

This won't quite be that, but it's nothing like recent series between Boston and St. Louis, Washington and Vegas or Chicago and Tampa Bay.

"It takes a toll on you flying across the country on your off days," said former Blackhawks forward Patrick Sharp, now an NBC Sports analyst. "You have enough stress and physical pressure in those games that to spend your off days on the airplanes getting ready to play another one was definitely tough."

Price vs. Vasilevskiy

Who's the best goaltender in hockey? The final between Montreal's Carey Price and Tampa Bay's Andrei Vasilevskiy could go a long way toward deciding that.

Price has allowed 35 goals in 17 games, and Vasilevskiy 36 goals in 18 games.

"It'll be obviously a big challenge for both teams," Vasilevskiy said. "Carey, obviously he's a great goalie — one of the best in the NHL — so, I'll give him my best effort, for sure."

Crowd control

Cooper said he'd never heard a building as loud as the final minute of the semifinal clincher against the Islanders, and that's with Tampa Bay's Amalie Arena at full capacity. Montreal's Bell Centre has been limited to 3,500 fans with the hope, even from visitors, that more are let in for the Final.

"I hope they let more fans in there," Cooper said. "The fans in Quebec deserve it. They haven't been back since '93. They deserve to watch their team play. ... This game was meant to be played in front of fans."

Coaching contrast

While Cooper has been behind the Lightning's bench since 2013, the Canadiens are on their third coach since February. Dominique Ducharme took over when Claude Julien was fired in February, and assistant Luke Richardson became acting coach when Ducharme tested positive for the coronavirus.

Ducharme could be out of isolation as soon as Game 3 Friday in Montreal.

Win now vs. win long ago

Montreal will be looking for its first championship since 1993, which was Tampa Bay's inaugural season. The Canadiens have an NHL-best 24 titles, but the Lightning have won twice since 2004 and become a standard bearer for franchise success.

"It's going to be a huge challenge for us, and that's where we go back to all the times that we've been in this situation," Stamkos said. "And this core now, there's guys that this is their third Final. We just go back on past experiences and go from there."

Vasilevskiy shines again as Lightning take Game 7

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Thanks to Andrei Vasilevskiy and another stellar defensive performance, the defending champion Tampa Bay Lightning are headed back to the Stanley Cup Final.

"It's becoming a broken record, but it's not how many you put in the net, it's how many you keep out," coach Jon Cooper said Friday night after Vasilevskiy had 18 saves and benefited from exceptional play in front of him to beat the New York Islanders 1-0 in Game 7 of their NHL playoff

semifinal.

"It's a hard lesson to learn, especially the players coming up today and the skill, the rules getting put into place that open up skill and to skate and to score," Cooper added. "But when you get to the playoffs it's about defending."

Yanni Gourde scored a short-handed goal, giving Vasilevskiy all the offensive support needed to advance to the Cup Final matchup against the surprising Montreal Canadiens, who upset the Vegas Golden Knights in the other semifinal.

Game 1 is Monday night in Tampa.

"Just a great effort by the whole team. ... That was just a textbook Game 7," Vasilevskiy said.

Gourde beat Islanders goalie Semyon Varlamov from the slot off a nifty pass from Anthony Cirelli at 1:49 of the second period, culminating a sequence that began with defenseman Ryan McDonagh blocking a shot at the other end.

"It's disappointing because that was an opportunity for us to do something against them. We

weren't paying enough attention and it ended up in the back of the net," Islanders coach Barry Trotz said.

"I thought we managed the first period and it was pretty quiet. And then they got the short-handed goal and that energized the building," Trotz added. "In the third period we left it all out there. This group has so much character. They are feeling the pain right now."

Vasilevskiy turned away seven shots in the final period to finish his fifth career playoff shutout.

Nola helps Phillies, split DH with Mets

Associated Press

Bryce Harper blew kisses at a booing crowd to punctuate his home run, and the Philadelphia Phillies beat the New York Mets 2-1 in eight innings Friday night for a doubleheader split after Aaron Nola matched a long-standing major league record with 10 straight strikeouts in the opener.

Odúbel Herrera drove in the tiebreaking run with a groundout against reliever Sean Reid-Foley (2-1) in the eighth as both games took an extra inning to determine a winner.

Nola tied Tom Seaver's mark for consecutive strikeouts set 51 years ago, but the Mets rallied to win the first game 2-1 in eight innings on big hits by Francisco Lindor and Dominic Smith.

In the opener, Seth Lugo (1-0) struck out three in the top of the eighth and stranded two runners for the NL East leaders, playing their third doubleheader in seven days.

Nola matched the mark set by Mets ace Tom Seaver, who fanned his final 10 hitters in a 2-1 victory over the San Diego Padres at Shea Stadium on April 22, 1970.

Padres 11, Diamondbacks 5: Fernando Tatis Jr. hit three homers, hours after saying he would skip the All-Star Home Run Derby because of an ailing

shoulder, and host San Diego sent Arizona to its record 24th straight road loss.

Tatis hit a solo home run off Corbin Martin in the first inning and another solo drive in the second off Riley Smith. Tatis connected again in his third at-bat, a two-run shot off Smith in the fourth.

Dodgers 6, Cubs 2: AJ Pollock and Max Muncy homered during the eighth inning as host Los Angeles rebounded from being no hit by Chicago one night earlier.

Zach McKinstry also went deep for the Dodgers. Blake Treinen (2-3), the sixth of seven pitchers who got the call from Dave Roberts, pitched 1½ scoreless innings.

Orioles 6, Blue Jays 5 (10): At Buffalo, N.Y., Austin Hays drove in two runs to cap an eighth-inning rally, and Baltimore beat Toronto to snap a 20-game road losing streak.

Baltimore's road skid was tied for the second-longest in AL history, trailing only the 22 losses in a row by the 1943 Philadelphia Athletics.

Red Sox 5, Yankees 3: Hunter Renfroe had two RBIs, including go-ahead sacrifice fly in the third inning, and Boston's pitchers held visiting New York scoreless over the final seven innings.

It was Boston's fourth straight win over the Yankees.

Rangers 9, Royals 4: Nate Lowe's three hits included his first career triple in the majors as host Texas dominated its former All-Star Mike Minor and beat Kansas City.

Playing his 146th game in the big leagues, Lowe's two-run triple highlighted a four-run fourth inning. Rookie Jonah Heim matched career highs with three hits and two RBIs for Texas.

Twins 8, Indians 7: Luis Arraez hit two triples and a tiebreaking two-run double in the sixth inning, sparking host Minnesota to a victory over Cleveland.

Arraez went 3-for-4 with three RBIs, Alex Kirilloff hit a two-run homer and Josh Donaldson also drove in two runs for the Twins.

Rays 4, Angels 3: Shohei Ohtani led off by homering for the seventh time in nine games, but host Tampa Bay edged Los Angeles when pinch-hitter Brandon Lowe was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded.

Moved up to the leadoff spot, Ohtani hit a drive estimated at 453 feet off the D-ring in right field at Tropicana Field, only the 39th ball to reach that spot since the park opened in 1998. It was Ohtani's 24th homer, ex-

tending a career high.

Braves 3, Reds 2: Guillermo Heredia homered, doubled and made a defensive gem before crashing into the wall in the eighth inning in his return to the lineup in visiting Atlanta's win over Cincinnati.

Brewers 5, Rockies 4 (11): Willy Adames hit a tying, two-run homer in the ninth inning and singled to set up Keston Hura's sacrifice fly in the 11th as host Milwaukee beat Colorado to cap a return to full capacity at American Family Field.

Marlins 11, Nationals 2: Kyle Schwarber hit 13th home run in the last 14 games but Miguel Rojas hit a three-run homer in a four-run first inning and host Miami went on to end Washington's five-game winning streak.

Mariners 9, White Sox 3: Yusei Kikuchi (5-3) pitched another road gem and Luis Torrens homered twice, helping visiting Seattle beat Chicago.

Pirates 5, Cardinals 4: Wil Crowe (1-4) gave up four runs over five innings for his first major league win, and visiting Pittsburgh beat St. Louis for its fifth victory in seven games following a 10-game losing streak.

Giants 2, Athletics 0: Johnny Cueto (6-3) outdueled Sean Manaea and host San Francisco beat Oakland in the Bay Bridge Series opener.

COVID-19 outbreak eliminates NC State from CWS

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Vanderbilt will advance to the College World Series finals after North Carolina State was forced to drop out because of COVID-19 protocols, the NCAA announced early Saturday.

NC State had only 13 players available during its 3-1 loss to the Commodores on Friday. The teams were scheduled to meet again Saturday afternoon in a winner-take-all Bracket 1 final.

The NCAA Division I Baseball Committee declared that game a no-contest.

"This decision was made based on the recommendation of the Championship

Medical Team and the Douglas County Health Department," the NCAA said in a statement. "As a result, Vanderbilt will advance to the CWS Finals.

"The NCAA and the committee regret that NC State's student-athletes and coaching staff will not be able to continue in the championship in which they earned the right to participate. Because of privacy issues, we cannot provide further details."

Vanderbilt returns to the finals for a second straight time. The Commodores won the 2019 CWS. There was no tournament last year because of the pandemic.

The Commodores will meet Mississippi

State or Texas in the best-of-three finals starting Monday.

NC State players and coaches gathered at home plate to take pictures around the CWS logo early Saturday, after the rain-delayed Texas-Mississippi game was completed.

NC State was missing four starting position players and had only 13 of its 27 players available for its Friday game, which was delayed an hour after the NCAA said it needed time to complete "health and safety protocols." NC State said "several players" had entered the COVID-19 protocol.

Heat, starting gun biggest tests on track

Associated Press

EUGENE, Ore. — Hurdler Sydney McLaughlin's knee was bloody. Lined up three lanes outside of her, Nnenna Hailey was so hot, she looked to the stands and begged for water.

That was before the race started.

Thanks in part to some hair-trigger sensors on the starting blocks, hurdlers felt the heat as acutely as anyone Friday on a 92-degree day at the U.S. Olympic track and field trials.

It took five tries to get a heat of the men's 110 meters off and running. It took another four to get McLaughlin and Co. off the blocks for their 400 qualifier.

"I've never had that many restarts ever in my life," said McLaughlin, whose upcoming showdown with world-record holder Dalilah Muhammad could be one of the best races of the Olympic season. "My knee started bleeding a little bit just from the hot track, getting down that many times."

McLaughlin won her heat. Hailey finished second. But with the temperatures heading to triple digits this weekend, this hardly felt like a no-fuss day of preliminaries for runners with bigger races in store.

"After the second restart, you know when you spit and your spit is, like, white?" Hailey said. "I couldn't run like that."

Only 20 minutes earlier, the men endured a similar struggle.

Four times they lined up. Four times the starting gun went off. Each time, the alarm sounded and the gun went off again to signal the illegal start. The crowd hooted and whistled. Ato Bolden and the NBC commentators went nuts, wondering aloud why the sensors weren't being disabled. Only one runner, Samuel Brixey, was disqualified, but he lodged a protest and was moved on to the next round.

Bucks rout Hawks in Game 2

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — The Milwaukee Bucks knew the key to tying the Eastern Conference finals was making sure Trae Young didn't take over again.

They did all that and more Friday night.

Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 25 points, Jrue Holiday added 22 and the Bucks blew out the Atlanta Hawks 125-91 in Game 2.

Young struggled for much of the night after finishing with 48 points and 11 assists in the Hawks' 116-113 Game 1 victory.

"Last game he was living in the paint, had a lot of floaters (and) those are pretty much layups for him," Holiday said. "We didn't really want that to get him started early. And I don't think he went to the free-throw line much tonight, which is also pretty big for us."

Young scored 15 points but matched a career worst with nine turnovers before leaving the game for good with 3:48 remaining in the third quarter. He shot 6-for-16 overall, 1-for-8 on three-point attempts and 2-for-3 on free throws.

"I take complete responsibility for what happened tonight," Young said. "Taking care of the ball is something I've got to be better at. I will be better at it. It's really they just upped their physicality tonight. We've got to do the same."

The Bucks never trailed, scored 20 straight points late in the second quarter and led by at least 30 throughout the second half. Both teams rested their starters for the entire fourth quarter.

This marks the third straight series in which the Hawks lost Game 2 after winning Game 1 on

the road. Those Game 2 losses have been decided by a total of 59 points.

The series shifts to Atlanta for Game 3 on Sunday.

"We have to play harder," Hawks coach Nate McMillan said. "That intensity that they came out with wasn't a surprise to us. But they showed that there's another level that we have to get to. They totally just dominated the entire game."

Young said he didn't believe the Bucks did anything different schematically to slow him down Friday. He thought the Bucks just played more aggressively and benefited from the way the game was called.

"When they're aggressive and (officials) don't call it, nights like tonight happen," Young said.

Milwaukee was intent on making life difficult for Young two nights after the Bucks blew a seven-point lead in the final four minutes of Game 1. Young's Game 1 performance had made him the first player ever with at least 45 points and 10 assists in a conference finals game.

Young committed eight turnovers in the first half alone. Milwaukee's Khris Middleton agreed the Bucks' aggressiveness made a difference.

"That was a huge key from Game 1 to Game 2," Middleton said. "Game 1, they were able to get whatever they wanted on the court. Trae was getting in the paint, throwing those lobs and getting everybody else involved. Tonight we wanted to set the tone and just make sure they weren't going to be comfortable."

Biles soars to lead at U.S. Olympic Trials

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Simone Biles is primed for Tokyo.

The world and Olympic gymnastics champion put on a dazzling display during the U.S. Olympic Trials on Friday night, pulling out all the stops — well, almost all of them — on her way to a commanding lead and a spot in Japan next month.

Her all-around total of 60.565 included a 15.133 on beam that featured the "double-double" dismount named for her, a maneuver she's kept under wraps since the 2019 world championships. She opted to skip the Yurchenko double-pike vault she unveiled in competition last month and still posted the top score on the event.

Her floor exercise — the one

that includes not one but two eponymous elements in the sport's Code of Points — was both spectacular and spectacularly controlled. Clearly frustrated after stepping out of bounds several times while winning her seventh national title earlier this month, Biles kept her toes well inside the white lines during her law-of-physics pushing tumbling passes.

"I was super excited going into this one," Biles said. "I know exactly what to expect. And I feel like I'm very ... like I'm a lot more emotional this time around, which is so crazy. Even walking out of the tearing up and crying. The girls are like, 'Are you OK?' I'm fine. It's just like, I can't believe the time is here. It's been five years and

I'm grateful."

The top two all-around finishers Sunday night after the finals automatically qualify for the Olympic team. Biles is a lock no matter what happens Sunday.

Sunisa Lee and Jordan Chiles are nearing that territory, too. They might already be there.

The trio of Biles, Lee and Chiles came in 1-2-3 at nationals. They're in the same positions heading into the finals after Lee put up a 57.666, followed by Chiles at 57.132, more than a half-point ahead of MyKayla Skinner.

The selection committee has set aside 30 minutes after the end of finals to put the team together. They might need every last second of it to see who earns the fourth spot.