

Center provides a place to decompress after deployment

BY KARIN ZEITVOGEL
Stars and Stripes

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — Leaving Bagram Airfield near Kabul last week after a five-month deployment was bittersweet for Tech. Sgt. Anthony Rescigno.

He was doing what he loves in Afghanistan as part of the 405th Expeditionary Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron — picking up critically wounded patients and “keeping them alive until we can get them to the higher echelon of care,” he said Friday at the Deployment Transition Center at Ramstein, where service members decompress after an overseas deployment and are given the tools they need to ease back into life at home.

Rescigno’s commander at Bagram had recommended that he pass through the DTC on the way home so that he could let go of some of the stress he and his unit were under in Afghanistan. Others, particularly security forces, have been referred to the program before deploying because their commanders know what they’re likely to go through.

Rescigno sometimes worked 24-hour shifts because, due to the U.S. drawdown in Afghanistan, his unit was understaffed, he said.

“We had to keep the wheels turning, so everyone stepped up,” the 29-year-old Massachusetts native said.

He arrived at Ramstein pas-

senger terminal on Wednesday for the four-day DTC program and was met by center personnel, including Staff Sgt. Terrell McClain, who went through the program himself in 2010 after a deployment to Iraq.

“It gives you time to decompress rather than hopping straight on a plane to the States, where you’re back with babies, husbands, wives, whatever,” McClain said. “You can relax for a few days, with normal showers where you don’t need shoes, and nice weather — for Germany.”

A day after Rescigno arrived, DTC staff and the returning service members went on a daytrip to Heidelberg. While the troops enjoyed being tourists, DTC personnel monitored them for signs of PTSD or combat-related trauma, said DTC commander Lt. Col. Kenneth Sterling.

The DTC was set up in 2010 when some 2.1 million service members, spread across 3.7 million deployments, had taken part in the Global War on Terror. An active-duty Air Force detachment of the 86th Mission Support Group, it’s based at Ramstein in southwest Germany because the location is well-placed, logistically and geographically, to receive military members returning from overseas deployments.

The program is for anyone returning from deployment, regardless of whether they served in a combat zone.

Army staff sergeant will make history boxing for Team USA at Olympics

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

Army Staff Sgt. Naomi Graham’s jab is the boxing equivalent of a Hellfire missile launched from an attack helicopter at a distant opponent.

The 32-year-old ammunition specialist from Fayetteville, N.C., is one of the United States’ best hopes for a medal at the Tokyo Olympics, which kick off July 23. Graham will be the first female active-duty U.S. service member to box for gold, according to Team USA.

Ranked No. 1 among U.S. middleweights and eighth in the world, Graham has steadily climbed the international ladder, taking fifth at the 2016 World Boxing Championships before moving up to third in 2018. In 2019, she won gold at the Pan American Games.

But boxing was only a peripheral part of Graham’s life when she enlisted in February 2013.

“I just wanted to serve my country,” she told Stars and Stripes during a telephone interview Friday.

Her first duty station was with the 1st Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 4th Aviation Regiment at Fort Carson, Colo.

In addition to issuing ammo for the unit’s AH-64 Apaches, Graham said she spent time in the field helping to fuel the mighty attack helicopters.

Boxing is in Graham’s blood. The youngest of six siblings watched her older sister, Rachel, fight professionally and started to train on her own at Fort Carson. Her first fights were at amateur events where she showed up looking for

someone in her weight class, she said.

In 2014, Graham won the All-Army title. She then joined the Army’s World Class Athlete Program, also at Fort Carson, letting her train fully for the Olympics.

Graham has an incredible reach and a devastating jab, USA Boxing assistant Joe Guzman, a former Army heavy-weight competitor, told Defense Media Activity in 2019.

In her first competitive match at a Fort Carson gym, she won using only that punch, he said.

“I could tie her right hand behind her back and she just beat people with her jab, that’s how good it is,” Guzman said.

Serving in the Army taught Graham skills such as patience, resilience and “getting the job done” that also apply to boxing, the 5-foot, 10-inch, 165-pound fighter told Stars and Stripes.

“I’m having fun, but I’m also there for business,” she said of her attitude in the ring.

Other troops have been giving her plenty of support and letting her know they will be cheering for her in Tokyo, Graham said.

Though her time in uniform has not taken her to combat zones, she has traveled extensively, boxing for the Army in places like Russia, India, Kazakhstan, Germany, France and Spain.

Going professional after the Olympics is an option and a common path for fighters, Graham added.

“It’s something I’m thinking about,” she said.

Analysts: Russia boosts deception ahead of drills

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Spoofing the location of NATO ships, spreading disinformation on social media and threatening military repercussions are typical ploys from a well-worn Moscow playbook, analysts said ahead of an international naval exercise in the Black Sea co-hosted by the United States and Ukraine.

The annual Exercise Sea Breeze comes ahead of Russian threats to potentially fire on participants if they intrude in their territorial waters, and following a heated dispute over the passage of a British destroyer through the Black Sea on Wednesday.

Jorge Benitez, an expert on European security with the Atlantic Council think tank, said the incident amounted to a “dangerous escalation” by Moscow.

On Wednesday, the Russian military said it had fired warning shots at and dropped bombs in the path of HMS Defender, which sailed offshore of Sevastopol in Crimea.

Russia said the actions caused the destroyer to leave the area. London disputed that claim, denying that any shots were fired and saying the vessel was traveling through Ukrainian waters in accordance

with international law.

“The combined harassment from several Russian fighter jets and ships proves that this aggression against the Royal Navy was not the decision of one zealous Russian officer, but required top-level approval,” Benitez said.

The Kremlin’s ultimate aim is to intimidate allies and frighten normal commercial shipping away from Ukrainian ports, he said.

The U.S. and other allies taking part in Sea Breeze should continue as planned while expanding NATO ship patrols in the Black Sea in the future, Benitez said.

But so far, Moscow’s efforts seem to have had little effect, and the U.S. and its allies have continued preparations for Sea Breeze, one of whose aims is to send a firm message to Moscow that they won’t be intimidated.

“If Moscow believes we will stand together in wartime and have enough military might to fulfill our goals — in this case upholding Ukrainian sovereignty — then Russia will be deterred,” Holmes said. “At the same time our allies, partners, and friends will take heart and feel confident enough to oppose Russian demands.”

Carl Vinson trains off Hawaii; Russia holds drill nearby

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The USS Carl Vinson and its strike group spent the past two weeks training off the coast of Hawaii, just as the Russian navy held a massive exercise in nearby waters that included targeting a mock carrier strike group with missiles.

The Carl Vinson’s drills with Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard units coincided with Russia’s exercise, which took place about 400 miles west of Hawaii and included almost two dozen warships, submarines and support vessels.

The Russian Defense Ministry last week published an online account of that training, which included a scenario that “worked out the tasks of detecting, countering and delivering missile strikes against an aircraft carrier strike group of a mock enemy.”

The U.S. Defense Department in recent years has shifted its strategic focus away from the Middle East and toward so-called “great-power competition” with China and Russia.

“Our strike group is prepared to carry out the full spectrum of missions, from humanitarian relief to combat operations,” Rear Adm. Dan Martin, commander of the Carrier Strike Group 1, said in a Navy news release last week.

The San Diego-ported Carl Vinson is the flagship of Carrier Strike Group 1, which includes the guided-missile destroyers USS O’Kane, USS Howard, USS Chafee, USS Dewey and USS Michael Murphy; Destroyer Squadron 1; and Carrier Air Wing 2.

Joining the strike group for training has been units from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 323; Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352; the fast-attack submarine USS Seawolf; and the Coast Guard cutters Midgett and Oliver Berry, the Navy said in a news release Friday.

“Synchronizing our capabilities through combined operations sharpens our edge and reinforces our commitment to a stable and secure global maritime environment.” Vice Adm. Steve Koehler, the commander of U.S. 3rd Fleet, said in the release.

Naval Academy midshipman who died played for the football team

By KAT BOUZA
Stars and Stripes

A Naval Academy midshipman who died while on summer leave is being remembered as a kind-hearted jokester who once played linebacker for the school’s football team.

Michael Myles James, 22, of Hiram, Ga., was found unresponsive at his uncle’s home there on Wednesday morning, academy spokeswoman Cmdr. Alana Garas told the Military Times.

The cause of death is under investigation and foul play is not suspected, according to a news release from the academy.

James was an English major who attended the Naval Academy Prep School before enrolling at the school in Annapolis, Md., as a member of the class of 2022, according to an academy news release.

James was also a member of the academy’s football team and played linebacker his plebe year, according to a Navy Football roster.

“We are heartbroken to hear of Myles’ passing,” head coach Ken Niumatalolo said in a statement. “Myles was a great young man and was beloved by his brothers/team-mates. He was fun to be around and was a real jokester.”

Remains from Pearl Harbor return to Hawaii

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii — The unidentifiable remains of 50 sailors and one Marine who died aboard the USS Oklahoma during the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor were flown to Hawaii on Thursday and will be buried in Honolulu later this year on the 80th anniversary of the raid.

During an honorable carry ceremony near the joint base's runway, Marine and sailor guards of honor carried 10 flag-draped coffins from a C-17 that had arrived from Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska where the enclosed remains had undergone DNA testing.

The return of the remains represents the near completion of the six-year project by the De-

fense Department to identify Oklahoma victims who had been long buried as unknowns at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, also called the Punchbowl Cemetery, in Honolulu.

The remains of 388 sailors and Marines that had been buried in the cemetery in 1950 were exhumed in 2015 and sent to Offutt.

To date, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has identified 337 of those remains.

"We still will make identifications," Carrie LeGarde, the USS Oklahoma project's lead anthropologist, told reporters before the ceremony began. "They are in progress, so it's not completely done at this point. That will continue over the next couple months."

DPAA has been thus far unable to identify the 51 remains

flown to Hawaii on Thursday, partly because DNA samples from some next of kin could not be found.

The remains will be kept at DPAA's identification laboratory on the joint base until their reburial by the Navy on Dec. 7 at the Punchbowl.

"The Navy is not actively pursuing family reference samples anymore for the Oklahoma project," LeGarde said. "We did a big push in the last year, and they got a lot of family reference samples actually in the last year. That has made a huge difference and why we're still making identifications now."

The USS Oklahoma was moored on Battleship Row on the morning of Dec. 7, 1941, when Japanese torpedo bombers descended on Pearl Harbor. Sever-

al made direct hits on the ship, capsizing it and killing 429 crew members.

After being moved to several gravesites, the remains of 394 sailors and Marines who died that day — all too badly burned, disfigured or decayed to identify — were laid to rest in 46 plots for the unknown in 1950. A few of those remains had been identified in the years leading up to 2015.

During brief remarks to a small group of people gathered for the ceremony, Adm. Sam Paparo, commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet, reflected on the military's ethos of striving to never leave a fallen comrade behind.

"These heroes that you see here have begun their final journey to the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific," he said.

US, UK find 50 drones violating base airspace

By **KYLE ALVAREZ**
Stars and Stripes

RAF MILDENHALL, England — New technology used in a collaboration between the U.S. military and British authorities has detected more than 50 small drones violating the airspace around two bases used by the U.S. Air Force in England in the past nine months, officials have said.

Since last October, when the technology was first used, the Air Force has tracked the small unmanned aircraft systems, or sUAS, flying in airspace surrounding RAF Mildenhall and Lakenheath, and notified British Defense Ministry police.

Mildenhall is home to the U.S. Air Force's 100th Air Refueling Wing, and the Air Force's only F-15 fighter wing in Europe is based at Lakenheath.

Of the 50 drones detected, five were recovered by police. They were piloted by hobbyists who "were found to not have malicious intent," said Staff Sgt. Aus-

tin Grimmer, the 100th Security Forces Squadron noncommissioned officer in charge of counter-sUAS operations at Mildenhall.

But the growing number of violations of military and commercial airspace by drones have led the U.S. Defense Department to draft a strategy to counter sUAS and the British to pass legislation giving police more power to stop them.

Drones may impede flight operations and endanger personnel and equipment, military officials have said.

"It is evident that the potential for hazards or threats (from small drones) has the ability to impact the Joint Force," then-acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller said in the plan, which calls for the U.S. military to work with partner countries — as the United States did with Britain — to "respond to the needs of a rapidly changing security environment."

US Navy in Naples relaxes rules on masks outdoors

Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Starting Monday, Naval Support Activity Naples will no longer require masks outdoors if social distancing of at least six feet can be maintained, the base said Friday.

The rule change falls in line with Italy's eased coronavirus restrictions, which allow citizens in white zone regions to go without masks outside as long as social distancing of about 3 feet is maintained.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines recommend social distancing of at least 6 feet. NSA Naples adheres to the more stringent policy, the installation Facebook page said.

Non-immunized individuals, ages 2 and up, must continue to follow Defense Department policy of wearing masks on all installations,

the announcement said. Masks must be worn at all NSA Naples facilities before approaching or entering certain areas.

This includes the Capo Spine walkway from 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. if social distancing can't be maintained, any commercial shopping area, customer service areas, along with corridors, hallways and stairwells, and while riding a bus, the base announcement said. Masks may be taken off in spaces that are not open or accessible to the general public, such as office spaces and where 6 feet of separation can be maintained.

Individuals who desire to wear masks may continue to do so. Personnel should avoid asking questions about vaccination status or personal reasons for wearing a mask, the announcement stated.

Firm said in '18 building needed \$9M in repairs

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Nearly three years before an oceanfront building collapsed near Miami, an engineering firm estimated that major repairs the building needed would cost more than \$9 million, according to newly released emails.

The email from the firm of Morabito Consultants was among a series of documents released by the city of Surfside as rescue efforts continued at the site of the collapsed building, where more than 150 people remained unaccounted for. At least nine people were killed in the collapse.

The release of the 2018 cost estimate followed the earlier publication of another document from the firm showing the ground-floor pool deck of the building was resting on a concrete slab that had “major structural damage” and needed to be extensively repaired. That report also uncovered “abundant cracking and spalling” of concrete columns, beams and walls in the parking garage.

The report did not warn of imminent danger from the damage, and it is unclear if any of the damage observed was responsible for the collapse of Champlain Towers South.

The cost estimate showed that repairs across the entire building would cost more

than \$9.1 million, with the cost of work at the garage, entrance and pool deck alone accounting for more than \$3.8 million. The work had not been done by the time the building collapsed.

The earlier report 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 deterioration to expand exponentially,” the report said.

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

Some of the damage to the concrete in the parking garage 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.

Hot air balloon crash kills 5 in Albuquerque

Associated Press

A hot air balloon hit a power line and crashed onto a busy street in Albuquerque on Saturday, killing all five people on board, including the parents of an Albuquerque police officer, police said.

The crash happened around 7 a.m. in the city’s west side, police spokesman Gilbert Gallegos said. Police identified two of the passengers as Martin Martinez, 59, and Mary Martinez, 62 — the parents of a prison transport officer with the Albuquerque Police Department.

Police did not immediately release the others’ names but said the male pilot, and a female and male passenger were from central New Mexico.

Martin Martinez also had worked for Albuquerque police on bicycle patrol but most recently was a sergeant with the local school district’s police force, authorities said. Some Albuquerque officers who responded to the crash had worked with him and were sent home because it took a toll on them, said police Chief Harold Medina.

“It really emphasized the point that no matter how big we think we are, we’re still a tightknit community and incidents like this affect us all,” Medina said.

The Albuquerque Public Schools District said Martin Martinez “will forever be remembered for his lifelong dedication, courage and selflessness to the profession of law enforcement.”

The intersection where the balloon crashed was still cordoned off late Saturday afternoon. The multi-colored balloon had skirted the top of the power lines, sending at least one dangling and temporarily knocking out power to more than 13,000 homes, said police spokesman Gilbert Gallegos.

The gondola fell about 100 feet and crashed in the street’s median, catching on fire, the Federal Aviation Administration said. Bystanders frantically called out for a fire extinguisher to put out the flames and prayed aloud, video posted online showed.

The envelope of the balloon floated away, eventually landing on a residential rooftop, Gallegos said.

Gallegos said hot air balloons can be difficult to manage, particularly when the wind kicks up.

“Our balloonists tend to be very much experts at navigating, but sometimes we have these types of tragic accidents,” he said.

Texas court tosses suits against store for 2017 church shooting

Associated Press

AUSTIN — The Texas Supreme Court says survivors and relatives of those killed in a 2017 mass killing at a church can’t sue a sporting goods chain for selling the gunman the rifle used in the attack.

The court Friday threw out four lawsuits against Academy Sports and Outdoors that alleged a San Antonio-area store negligently sold the gun to Devin Kelley in 2016.

Kelley killed more than two dozen people when he opened fire at the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs. The 26-year-old then killed himself during a chase after the shooting.

Academy Sports and Outdoors, where the shooter purchased a Ruger AR-556 semi-automatic rifle that included a 30-round maga-

zine, had appealed after two lower courts declined to dismiss lawsuits.

The Supreme Court agreed with Academy, and ruled the petitions were prohibited by the U.S. Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act. The act protects retailers from lawsuits arising from criminal acts by third parties.

The lawsuits said that Kelley provided store clerks with a Colorado ID, and the U.S. Gun Control Act required Academy to comply with Colorado gun laws before approving the purchase. Colorado, however, prohibits the sale of magazines holding more than 14 rounds, while Academy sold Kelley a rifle that came packaged with a 30-round magazine.

But the court said the sale was legal because the federal law applies only to the sale of firearms, not components.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Teens poured alcohol on nesting sea turtle

AL ORANGE BEACH — Police in coastal Alabama said a group of teenagers were arrested after pouring alcohol on a nesting sea turtle.

Officers responded to a call that juveniles were harassing a sea turtle on the beach.

Police said they found a group of teenagers near the nesting sea turtle and discovered that they had poured alcohol on the turtle. Officers made several arrests for underage possession of alcohol.

The Orange Beach Wildlife Center and Management Program wrote in a social media post that workers discovered signs of a false crawl, which is where a sea turtle comes to shore to nest but decides not to for one reason or another.

Rock ‘cairn’ vandalism found at national park

NM ALBUQUERQUE — Authorities at Petroglyph National Monument said visitors committed extensive vandalism by collecting rocks and stacking them in the form of cairns, sometimes used as a hiking trail marker.

The federally protected park was created to preserve rock designs scratched by Indigenous people starting at least 700 years ago, and Spanish settlers as far back as 400 years ago.

“Moving, stacking, or making shapes out of rocks is a form of vandalism and will impact every visitor who comes after,” said Park Superintendent Nancy Hendricks, asking visitors to “respect these sacred land-

scapes.”

National Park Service workers are dismantling the stacks of rocks, but can’t be sure they’ll return the rocks where they came from along the largely preserved desert landscape.

Music manager says \$200K in property stolen

MS SOUTHAVEN — A music manager said someone stole \$200,000 in cash, jewelry, credit cards and other property from his north Mississippi home.

WREG-TV reported Southaven police are investigating after the robbery at the home of Michael Sykes. He was out of town at the time.

Sykes said burglars entered his gated subdivision and then entered his house through a first-floor window, possibly disabling his alarm system.

There, he said they took credit cards, \$36,000 in cash, Louis Vuitton luggage, watches, and custom jewelry with the logo of Sykes’ company, Palm Tree Entertainment.

Man charged after burning American flag

KS LARNED — Jason Wayne Cauble, 37, of Larned was charged with arson after a large U.S. flag was burned outside a business in Larned, Pawnee County Attorney Douglas McNett said.

Investigators said the 30-by-20 foot flag was burned at the Carr Auction and Realty Inc. building in Larned.

McNett explained that people who burn their own flags are protected by First Amendment

free speech rights but arson can be charged when another person’s property is burned.

Woman arrested after newborn abandoned

CA LYNWOOD — A woman who said she was sexually assaulted in Guatemala was arrested and accused of leaving her newborn baby in a Los Angeles-area restroom, authorities said.

The 22-year-old woman was arrested on suspicion of cruelty to a child likely to produce great bodily injury or death.

The baby, found two days after he was abandoned, was treated at a hospital and will be put up for adoption, authorities said.

The woman acknowledged to investigators that she entered the country illegally, gave birth to the boy and left him in the trash can of a women’s restroom in a Lynwood park, according to a statement from the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department.

Small quake shakes up city, surrounding area

MD WOODLAWN — A small earthquake shook the Baltimore area last week, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

The quake had a preliminary magnitude of 2.6, according to Paul Caruso, a geophysicist at the USGS National Earthquake Information Center. It was centered in Woodlawn, just west of Baltimore, and was about 1.5 miles deep.

Fire department officials in Baltimore city and Baltimore

County said they had no reports of injuries or damage from the quake more than an hour after it struck.

Forested wetland being restored after 200 years

MI DETROIT — Michigan Department of Natural Resources specialists are working to restore a 200-acre, forested wetland on Belle Isle in Detroit.

Efforts to restore natural water flow, retain surface water and enhance ecological integrity started this past spring and are expected to help reverse damage that has occurred over the past two centuries, according to the DNR.

Workers will remove fill that existing trails were built on and replace it with accessible boardwalks and primitive trails to restore surface drainage. Unused roads that impede water flow also will be removed.

State seeks to attract lifeguards with more pay

MA BOSTON — Massachusetts officials are upping pay and offering bonuses in a bid to attract more lifeguards at the state’s beaches.

The new incentives come amid a shortage of lifeguards in the state and across the country.

Pay for Department of Conservation and Recreation lifeguards is going up from \$17 to \$20 an hour. Head lifeguards will start making \$21 an hour, up from \$18. Lifeguards who remain on the job the entire season can earn a \$500 bonus.

— From wire reports



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Suns outlast Clippers, take 3-1 lead

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Neither team could make a shot. The ball bounced crazily on and around the rim, but rarely went in.

In timeouts, the Suns only talked defense. The Clippers deliberately missed free throws in a desperate attempt to retain possession and fire up a three-pointer.

In the end, former Clipper Chris Paul made clutch free throws on a night when everyone was missing.

Devin Booker scored 25 points before fouling out in the final minute and Phoenix escaped with an 84-80 victory Saturday night to take a 3-1 lead in the Western Conference finals.

The Suns can advance to the NBA Finals for the first time since 1993 with a victory Monday night in Phoenix.

“We’re not looking too far ahead,” Booker said.

Los Angeles rallied from 0-2 deficits to win against Dallas and Utah and reach the West finals for the first time in franchise history.

“It’s going to be hard and tough, but it has to be one game at a time,” Paul George said. “Play as hard as we can in Game 5.”

The Clippers struggled with poor shooting in all but the third quarter, when they made 10 of 17 shots to pull within three

points. They got within one four times in the fourth, but could never take the lead in front of a sellout crowd of 18,222 that hung on every agonizing miss.

“It was a crazy, emotional game,” Paul said.

LA shot 32% (27-for-83) for the game; Phoenix was barely better at 36% (31-for-86). The Clippers, who led the league in three-point shooting during the regular season, made five; the Suns hit four.

“That was a slugfest,” Phoenix coach Monty Williams said. “It wasn’t Offense 101, for sure.”

Los Angeles coach Tyrone Lue said, “We had a chance to take the lead on 12 possessions and couldn’t do it. It just wouldn’t fall for us.”

Deandre Ayton added 19 points and a career playoff-high 22 rebounds, and Paul had 18 points and seven assists.

George had 23 points, 16 rebounds and six assists before fouling out with 1 second left. Reggie Jackson added 20 points for the Clippers. Ivica Zubac had 13 points and 14 rebounds.

Los Angeles successfully challenged a call in the final minute that led to Booker’s sixth foul. Terance Mann scored and they trailed 79-76.

The final 13 seconds turned into a free-

throw shooting contest, with the Suns fouling to try to keep the Clippers off the three-point line. Paul made 5 of 6. Los Angeles was 4 of 8.

With injured Kawhi Leonard again watching from a suite, the Clippers outscored Phoenix 30-19 in the third after trailing by 16 in the first half.

Both teams’ offense collapsed in the fourth, when the Suns outscored the Clippers 15-14.

“It was tough because we fought all the way to get it to a one-point game, and we had looks that we normally make all season and they weren’t falling,” Mann said. “The game could have easily went a whole different way if we were hitting those shots.”

Not so masked man

After missing a layup, Booker ditched the clear plastic mask he’d been wearing since getting his nose broken in a head-to-head collision with Patrick Beverley in Game 2.

“You don’t realize how much you get hit in the face until after you take it off,” he said, adding that he isn’t used to playing with it on.

Booker said he’s not sure whether he’ll wear it in Game 5.

Lomachenko tops Nakatani by TKO in return

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Vasily Lomachenko is back, and in vintage form.

The former three-weight world champion was successful in his return to the ring, stopping Japanese veteran Masayoshi Nakatani in the ninth round Saturday night.

With Nakatani’s left eye closed after eight devastating rounds, Lomachenko (15-2, 11 KOs) used a flurry of battering lefts in front of an announced sellout crowd of 2,072 inside Virgin Hotel’s The Theater, to finish off his much taller opponent in a statement return in his first bout since an upset loss to Teofimo Lopez in October.

“I’ve accomplished my goals and I’m back on track,” Lomachenko said through an inter-

preter.

Lomachenko landed 59% of his power punches, as he dominated from the opening bell, peppering Nakatani with a steady stream of hard, straight lefts. Lomachenko was only hit by 12% of Nakatani’s power punches.

Lomachenko’s biggest round prior to the ninth was a destructive sixth, during which he landed a number of punches that caused Nakatani’s head to snap backward several times, eventually bloodying the Osaka native’s eye, nose and mouth.

Lomachenko also knocked down Nakatani in the fifth, using a three-punch combo near the end of the round.

In his last fight, Nakatani was knocked down twice by Felix Verdejo before responding with

a ninth-round KO win. This time, Nakatani never stood a chance as he was outclassed by the former pound-for-pound Ukrainian great in every round.

It marked the first time Nakatani (19-2) was stopped in a fight, with his only other loss coming by way of decision, at the hands of Lopez in 2019.

“I realized (I was in control) after the third and fourth rounds because I was punching him with straight lefts and punching him with precision,” Lomachenko said. “I’m very happy because of the strategies that had been chosen, and also all the work, all the preparations, the trainings that had been done, all worked just fine and well, so I’m very happy. The result was as we planned.”

With the win, Lomachenko is

hoping to land a rematch against Lopez, who was set for his first title defense in Miami on June 19 until he tested positive for COVID-19. His mandatory bout against George Kambohos, and the entire undercard, has been rescheduled for Aug. 14 in Miami, but could be moved to Sept. 11 in Las Vegas.

Lopez’s father, Teofimo Sr., who was in attendance, told ESPN during an interview after the fight his son’s camp is willing to grant the rematch, but with the caveat it must happen immediately after the Kambohos bout.

“After this performance I think the public wants to see this fight,” Lopez Sr. said. “It’s gonna be the biggest fight in the world. We can make it happen in December.”

Red Sox win 5th in a row over Yankees

Associated Press

BOSTON — Playing against the New York Yankees seems to bring out the best in Nathan Eovaldi. His latest performance has the Boston Red Sox on the verge of a second straight sweep of their longtime rivals.

Eovaldi pitched neatly into the eighth inning, Adam Ottavino escaped a pair of late jams and the Boston held off New York 4-2 on Saturday night. The Red Sox improved to 5-0 against the Yankees this season.

It was a bounce-back night for Eovaldi (8-4), who was coming off his shortest outing of 2021 in which he lasted just four innings at Kansas City.

He was more composed at Fenway Park, keeping his fastball in the high 90s while allowing one run off seven hits, issuing no walks and striking out six over 7⅓ innings.

“Tonight I felt like everything was working for me,” Eovaldi said. “The fastball command was there. ... I think that opened things up for the rest of the game as well.”

Diamondbacks 10, Padres 1: Arizona snapped its record 24-game road losing streak by rolling at San Diego, getting six

scoreless innings from Merrill Kelly and four hits and five RBIs from Eduardo Escobar.

Escobar and Christian Walker homered for the Diamondbacks, who hadn't won away from Chase Field since April 25, when Madison Bumgarner pitched seven no-hit innings at Atlanta.

Arizona had dropped 20 of 21 games and 34 of 37 overall.

Escobar connected for a two-run homer, and drove in runs with a double, a single and a groundout. He finished a triple shy of the cycle.

Kelly (4-7) allowed five hits, struck out five and walked none.

Mets 4, Phillies 3: Jacob deGrom gave up two runs for the first time this season and New York rallied after he exited, beating visiting Philadelphia on Michael Conforto's sacrifice fly in the ninth inning.

DeGrom's bid to set the Mets record for the longest scoreless-inning streak fell just short. His run ended at 31 innings on rookie Nick Maton's RBI single in the second. R.A. Dickey set the team shutout mark of 32⅓ innings in 2012.

Blue Jays 12, Orioles 4: Vladimir Guerrero Jr. hit his major

league-leading 26th home run, Teoscar Hernández and Randal Grichuk also connected and Toronto rolled past visiting Baltimore.

Guerrero homered during a four-run burst in the third inning that also included Bo Bichette's RBI double and Hernández's homer.

Dodgers 3, Cubs 2: Cody Bellinger homered with two out in the ninth inning, and host Los Angeles beat Chicago for its first walk-off victory of the season.

Max Muncy and Justin Turner each drove in a run in the first inning, and the Dodgers then made 26 outs before Bellinger crushed a 422-foot solo shot to center off Keegan Thompson (3-2).

Rays 13, Angels 3: Shane Bieber pitched six effective innings, Brett Phillips drove in three runs and host Tampa Bay beat Los Angeles for its fourth straight win.

Marlins 3, Nationals 2: Rookie Zach Thompson struck out 11 in six innings, helping Miami beat Kyle Schwarber and visiting Washington.

Tigers 3-2, Astros 1-3: Yordan Alvarez and Carlos Correa

hit back-to-back homers in the sixth inning and Houston rallied to a win at Detroit to split a doubleheader.

Cardinals 3, Pirates 1: Adam Wainwright pitched into the seventh inning, Paul Goldschmidt and Paul DeJong hit solo home runs and host St. Louis ended a five-game losing streak.

Rangers 8, Royals 0: Kyle Gibson had a season-high 10 strikeouts over seven scoreless innings, Joey Gallo hit two massive homers and Texas beat visiting Kansas City, ending more than monthlong stretch without winning a series.

Reds 4, Braves 1: Luis Castillo pitched seven scoreless innings and Jesse Winker homered before departing with a hip injury, leading host Cincinnati past Atlanta.

Brewers 10, Rockies 4: Christian Yelich hit a two-run homer during a six-run rally in the eighth inning that gave host Milwaukee a victory over Colorado.

Giants 6, Athletics 5 (10): Curt Casali hit a game-ending double in the 10th inning as host San Francisco beat Oakland.

Leggett's hit sends Bulldogs to CWS finals vs. Vandy

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Tanner Leggett's first hit in more than a month was the biggest of the season for Mississippi State.

Leggett's single in the bottom of the ninth inning scored the tiebreaking run, and the Bulldogs advanced to the College World Series finals with a 4-3 victory over Texas on Saturday night.

“What an opportunity,” he said. “Some people get nervous for that situation, but I pray for that situation. Thank Coach for putting me in the game.”

The No. 7 national seed Bulldogs (48-17) reached the finals for the first time since 2013, when they were runners-up to UCLA. Mississippi State will play for its first national title against No. 4 Vanderbilt in an all-SEC, best-of-three series starting Monday

night.

The Commodores (48-16) got their spot in the finals when the NCAA removed North Carolina State from the tournament because of COVID-19 protocols. Vandy and NC State were supposed to play a bracket final on Saturday, but that game was declared a no-contest.

The Commodores won two of three against the Bulldogs in Nashville in the regular season. Vandy is the reigning national championship, having won the CWS in 2019. There was no tournament last year because of the pandemic.

“We have to go against the best,” MSU coach Chris Lemonis said, “and that's the way we want it.”

Leggett grew up 2½ hours from Starkville, rooted for the Bulldogs in all sports

growing up, and said yes, with no hesitation, when MSU recruited him out of a junior college two years ago.

Leggett has appeared in 40 games and typically is a defensive replacement in the late innings. The .206 career hitter has only gotten occasional chances to bat late in the season.

Leggett got his opportunity in the ninth after Cole Quintanilla hit Kellum Clark with a pitch. Brayland Skinner pinch ran for Clark and stole second to set the stage for Leggett, who drove a 1-1 pitch into left-center.

Skinner came around to score easily, and Leggett rounded first base and tossed his helmet into the grass as teammates rushed to mob him.

Habs face biggest test yet in Lightning

Associated Press

MONTREAL — Artturi Lehkonen is keeping his composure after becoming part of the Montreal Canadiens' illustrious history by scoring the franchise's most important goal in nearly three decades.

If the upstart Canadiens' remarkable playoff run has been fueled, in part, by a desire to earn respect, then their journey is not yet complete. The team with the worst record of the NHL's 16 playoff qualifiers now has the daunting task of facing the defending champion Lightning in the Stanley Cup Final, which opens at Tampa Bay on Monday.

"We've got a lot of confidence," Lehkonen said Saturday, two days after his goal at 1:39 of overtime sealed a 3-2 win over Vegas in Game 6 of the semifinals and vaulted Montreal to its

first Cup Final appearance since winning its 24th title in 1993.

"I've received a lot of messages after that, but can't get too hyped up about it yet," the 25-year-old checking line forward added. "If you want to be the best, you've got to beat the best."

Tampa Bay is as good as they come in advancing to the championship round for the third time since 2015, following a 1-0 win over the New York Islanders in Game 7 of their semifinal series on Friday.

The Lightning are 13-0 when coming off a playoff loss in winning seven straight series, and became the fourth team in the NHL's salary-cap era to repeat as a finalist. Tampa Bay features a playoff-experienced lineup which includes goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy, who has posted shutouts in four straight series-

clinching wins. The run dates to the team's 2-0 win over Dallas in Game 6 of last year's Final.

Canadiens forward Corey Perry wasn't interested in revisiting what happened last year during his one season with Dallas.

And yet, he's more familiar than any of his teammates when it comes to assessing the Lightning, considering the NHL was limited to inter-division play only this year.

"You look up and down their lineup ... you can talk about them all day long," Perry said.

"They added grit at the deadline last year, and kind of taken off," he added. "We're excited for this opportunity. We're here for a reason. They're here for a reason."

The teams haven't met since Tampa Bay completed a four-game season-series sweep of

Montreal with a 4-0 win at home on March 5, 2020. The Canadiens are 2-8-2 in their past 12 meetings and 0-5-1 at Tampa Bay since a 2-1 overtime win on April 1, 2017.

The Lightning have a 2-1 playoff series edge over Montreal, including a six-game second-round win in their previous meeting in 2015.

Both teams are similar in how their respective general managers remade their rosters, adding size and playoff experience to offset past playoff collapses.

Last year, Tampa Bay's Julien Brisebois' additions of Pat Maroon, Barclay Goodrow and Blake Coleman played key roles on a team coming off an embarrassing four-game, first-round loss to Columbus in 2019.

Sisson shrugs off heat, wins 10,000

Associated Press

EUGENE, Ore. — Nobody could blame Emily Sisson for wanting to get this over with as quickly as possible.

On a sweltering Saturday at the U.S. Olympic track and field trials, the 29-year-old runner borrowed her husband's sunglasses, got out to the front early and set a meet record in the 10,000 meters. She finished in 31:03.82 to earn a trip to the Tokyo Games.

"I kept telling myself, 'If you're feeling the heat, so is everyone else too,'" Sisson said. "I'm used to leading from the front, so it doesn't really spook me."

With highs expected to reach 102 degrees, meet organizers took pity on the distance runners and moved their race to the morning instead of its early evening time slot. Still, it was 85 when the starting gun went off.

Soon after, it was Sisson applying the heat to the other 40 women in the race. It was a tactical decision to set a brisk pace from the outset.

"It was hot. We knew it was going to be hot," she said after beating Deena Kastor's 2004 trials record by nearly 6 seconds. "It was hard. It didn't feel easy."

Karissa Schweizer finished second in 31:16.52. She's also qualified in the 5,000. Third place went to Alicia Monson (31:18.55), who retreated into the shade after the race and covered her legs in wet towels to cool down.

"I just kind of expected it to be pretty brutal out there," Schweizer said. "The problem with the heat is that it just makes you feel exhausted. ... I just worked through every lap."

Elsewhere at the trials, outspoken activist Gwen Berry stirred controversy with a protest at the medals podium after she won the bronze medal in the hammer throw.

While the National Anthem played, Berry placed her left hand on her hip and shuffled her feet. She took a quarter turn, so she was facing the stands, not the flag. Toward the end, she plucked up her black T-shirt with the words "Activist Athlete" emblazoned on the front, and draped it over her head.

"I feel like it was a set-up, and they did it on purpose," Berry said of the timing of the anthem. "I was pissed, to be honest."

Berry's reaction to the "Star-Spangled Banner" took its fair share of the spotlight on a blazing-hot second-to-last day at trials that also featured some blazing-fast times.

Malone secures spot on US team in gymnastics

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Brody Malone tried to block it all out. The stakes. The scores. The noise. His ears wouldn't cooperate.

So yeah, Malone knew exactly where he was in the standings at the U.S. Olympic Trials on Saturday. In the lead. In control. And comfortable.

Good thing, because the 20-year-old with the soft southern drawl that betrays his Northwest Georgia roots better get used to it. He's probably going to be there for a while.

Equal parts stoic and spectacular, Malone put on a command performance while racing to victory and the automatic berth on the Olympic team that came with it. Malone's all-around total of 171.600 was a good three points ahead of Yul Moldauer and the rest of the field.

Sam Mikulak made his third Olympic squad, the 29-year-old six-time national champion overcoming a fall on pommel horse — long his nemesis — to get a nod from the selection committee after finishing fourth.