

US airstrikes in Syria, Iraq target militias

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military, under the direction of President Joe Biden, carried out airstrikes against what it said were “facilities used by Iran-backed militia groups” near the border between Iraq and Syria, drawing condemnation from Iraq’s military and calls for revenge by the militias.

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said the militias were using the facilities to launch unmanned aerial vehicle attacks against U.S. troops in Iraq. It was the second time the Biden administration has taken military action in the region since he took over this year.

Kirby said the U.S. targeted three operational and weapons storage facilities Sunday — two in Syria and one in Iraq.

He described the airstrikes as “defensive,” saying they were launched in response to the attacks by militias.

“The United States took nec-

essary, appropriate, and deliberate action designed to limit the risk of escalation — but also to send a clear and unambiguous deterrent message,” Kirby said.

The Pentagon said the facilities were used by Iran-backed militia factions, including Kata’ib Hezbollah and Kata’ib Sayyid al-Shuhada.

Two Iraqi militia officials told The Associated Press in Baghdad that four militiamen were killed in the airstrikes near the border with Syria. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to give statements. They said the first strike hit a weapons storage facility inside Syrian territory, where the militiamen were killed. The second strike hit the border strip.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based group that closely monitors the Syrian conflict through activists on the ground, reported that at least seven Iraqi militiamen

were killed in the airstrikes.

The Iran-backed Iraqi factions vowed revenge for the attack and said in a joint statement they would continue to target U.S. forces.

“We... will avenge the blood of our righteous martyrs against the perpetrators of this heinous crime and with God’s help we will make the enemy taste the bitterness of revenge,” the statement said.

Iraq’s military condemned the strikes as a “blatant and unacceptable violation of Iraqi sovereignty and national security.” The statement called for avoiding escalation, but also rejected that Iraq be an “arena for settling accounts” — a reference to the U.S. and Iran. It represented rare condemnation by the Iraqi military of U.S. airstrikes.

In Iran, foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh accused the U.S. of creating instability in the region. “Definitely, what the U.S. is doing is dis-

rupting the security of the region,” he said on Monday.

U.S. military officials have grown increasingly alarmed over drone strikes targeting U.S. military bases in Iraq, which became more common since a U.S.-directed drone killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani near the Baghdad airport last year. Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis was also killed in the attack.

Sunday’s strikes mark the second time the Biden administration has launched airstrikes along the Iraq-Syria border region. In February, the U.S. launched airstrikes against facilities in Syria, near the Iraqi border, that it said were used by Iranian-backed militia groups.

The Pentagon said those strikes were retaliation for a rocket attack in Iraq earlier that month that killed one civilian contractor and wounded a U.S. service member and other coalition troops.

Marines drop requirement of 360-degree tattoo photos

By CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps has done away with a tattoo policy rule requiring its members to submit 360-degree photos of themselves when seeking enlisted retention, or special assignments like embassy guard or drill instructor.

In an administrative memo last week, the service ended the nearly 7-year-old requirement for the photos, which were used to validate compliance with the service’s tattoo regulations, the strictest in the Defense Department.

Marines have complained for years that the tattoo policy hurts careers and retention and may prevent otherwise qualified recruits from joining the service. Other Marines have lamented all the body art

they won’t get — such as “sleeves” — so long as the rules remain in effect.

As the Corps drew down from 202,000 to 182,000 active-duty personnel and reduced its involvement in Afghanistan, officials in 2014 began to focus more on issues of appearance and grooming standards.

Marines can have “an unlimited number of tattoos” that can’t be seen when they’re wearing a physical training uniform. But they are prohibited from designs on the head, neck, mouth, wrist, knee, elbow or hand, and there are limits on the size and number of tattoos visible when in PT gear.

The new photo policy does not change those standards. And it requires Marines with visible tattoos to provide a close-up

photo of each, aligned with a measuring device to show that each one isn’t too close to a knee or elbow, as required by the tattoo regulation.

But Marines whose tattoos aren’t visible in the T-shirt and shorts of the PT uniform no longer have to submit photos or sketches of their hidden tattoos.

Officials over the years have justified the service’s stringent body art rules as just one of many ways the Corps sets itself apart. Still, many Marines have bridled at the restrictions. Last year, an infantry corporal started a Change.org petition seeking a modification to allow sleeve tattoos. It received over 76,000 signatures.

The Marine Corps did not immediately respond to an inquiry about the reason for the change to the photo requirement.

USS Mustin leaving Japan after 15 years

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The USS Mustin is sailing back to the United States after an eventful 15 years of Western Pacific service that included multiple disaster-relief missions and frequent freedom-of-navigation operations in the South and East China seas.

The guided-missile destroyer, which departed its former homeport of Yokosuka last week, is bound for San Diego, where it's slated to join 3rd Fleet following a maintenance and modernization period early next year, according to Cmdr. Nicole Schwegman, a Pacific Fleet spokeswoman.

Schwegman said in an

email Friday that the work will begin early next year and take two years to complete. She was unable, however, to comment on the nature of the repairs and upgrades the ship will receive.

"Planned maintenance availabilities like these are critical to ensuring ships are maintained and equipped to perform combat ready tasking when called upon and achieve their expected service life," she said in an email Friday.

The Mustin will be replaced in Yokosuka by the USS Ralph Johnson, 7th Fleet spokesman Lt. Mark Langford said in an email Tuesday. The destroyer, commissioned in 2018, returned to Naval Station Ever-

ett, Wash., in January following its maiden deployment to the 5th Fleet and 7th Fleet operations areas.

It's unclear when the Ralph Johnson will arrive in Japan. The Navy typically does not announce ship movements in advance for security reasons.

In July, it sailed within 12 nautical miles of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. Beijing has reclaimed land and built military infrastructure in the Spratlys since 2014, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative.

The Mustin, which arrived in Japan in July 2006, has conducted three of its own

freedom-of-navigation operations in the South China Sea. The most recent happened near the Paracels on Aug. 27.

The destroyer has also been active in the Taiwan Strait, sailing three times through the politically sensitive waters that separate the island from the Chinese mainland. Its most recent passage there happened Dec. 19.

Other highlights of the Mustin's time with 7th Fleet include its involvement in 2011's Operation Tomodachi, the humanitarian relief following the devastating earthquake and tsunami in north-eastern Japan. It provided similar aid to the Philippines after 2013's Typhoon Haiyan.

Air Force lieutenant colonel dies in noncombat incident

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

An Air Force lieutenant colonel in charge of a heavy-construction unit in Qatar died Saturday in a noncombat incident while deployed in support of the coalition battling the Islamic State, the military said.

Lt. Col. James C. Willis, 55, of Albuquerque, N.M., died at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, the Defense Department said in a brief statement Sunday that provided no further details. The incident is under investigation, it said.

Willis was commander of the 210th Red Horse Squadron, or Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineers, a New Mexico Air National Guard unit from Kirtland Air Force Base.

"The entire New Mexico National Guard is deeply saddened by the loss of Lt. Col. James Willis," said Maj. Gen. Ken A. Nava, the state's adjutant general, in a Facebook post Sunday. "Our heartfelt condolences go out to his family, friends and the unit. Please keep all of them in your thoughts and prayers during this

difficult time."

The Red Horse unit deployed to the Middle East this spring, the 150th Special Operations Wing said in an April statement after the group completed combat skills training and quarantine at Fort Bliss, Texas, and departed for their overseas mission.

The squadron provides civil engineering with rapid-response capabilities to conduct operations in remote, high-threat environments, the 150th SOW website said. It is self-sufficient and provides heavy repair capability and construction support for activities such as rebuilding airfield runways damaged by attacks. Willis took command of the 130-member squadron in late 2018, his command biography said.

A 1993 graduate of Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, Calif., he was commissioned in 2002 and had been sent to Israel, South Korea, the U.S. Virgin Islands and throughout the United States for construction projects, disaster relief and weapons of mass destruction training and response, the biography said.

Gunman in Times Square hits Marine

New York Daily News

Video released by police Monday captures the moment a gunman opened fire in Times Square, wounding a Marine who was visiting New York City.

The shooter held the gun in his right hand even as he fled the scene on Broadway near W. 45th St., outside the Minskoff Theatre, about 5:15 p.m. Sunday, the video shows. He has not been caught or identified.

Police said the latest shooting — just steps away from where a girl was hit by gunfire last month — was triggered by an argument between two men, possibly street vendors or performers.

The slug ricocheted and struck the 21-year-old victim in the back, sources said.

Medics took Samuel Poulin in stable condition to Bellevue Hospital.

Poulin, who recently graduated The Citadel, the military college in Charleston, S.C., with a Marine Corps commission, was visiting the city from upstate with his family, including his wife.

Biden aims his vaccine push at 'movable middle'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Thrown off-stride to reach its COVID-19 vaccination goal, the Biden administration is sending A-list officials across the country, devising ads for niche markets and enlisting community organizers to persuade unvaccinated people to get a shot.

The strategy has the trappings of a political campaign, complete with data crunching to identify groups that can be won over.

But the message is about public health, not ideology. The focus is a group health officials term the “movable middle” — some 55 million unvaccinated adults seen as persuadable, many of them under 30.

“We’re not just going to do the mass vaccination sites,” said Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra. “It’s door to door. It’s mobile clinics. We’re doing vaccinations at church, the PTA meeting, the barber shop, the grocery store.”

Officials have seized on a compelling new talking point, courtesy of the coronavirus. The potent delta variant that has ravaged India is spreading here. Now accounting for about 1 in 5 virus samples genetically decoded in the U.S., the more transmissible mutation has gained a foothold in Mountain West and heartland states. Many of those in-

fectured are young and unvaccinated.

The White House has lent its top names to the vaccine push.

President Joe Biden visited a mobile vaccination site in Raleigh, N.C., on Thursday. Earlier in the day, first lady Jill Biden held the hand of a woman at a drive-thru vaccination site in Kissimmee, Fla.

Doug Emhoff, the husband of Vice President Kamala Harris, has racked up thousands of frequent flyer miles, visiting at least 18 or 19 states by his count.

The administration also has recruited celebrities and athletes, including country music star Brad Paisley and the Tampa Bay Lightning hockey team. It has teamed up with Twitch and Riot Games to reach online gamers and with Panera and Chipotle to offer free food to those getting a shot.

The message, as Surgeon General Vivek Murthy put it: “If you are vaccinated, you are protected. If you are not, the threat of variants is real and growing.”

It’s unclear how well the levers of persuasion are functioning. Vaccination rates have dropped below 1 million a day, and there’s no sign yet of a turnaround. The administration has acknowledged that it will fall short of its goal of having 70% of adults vaccinated by July Fourth.

Japan ups health controls as Olympic arrival tests positive

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga pledged Monday to strengthen health controls at airports after a Ugandan Olympic team member tested positive for COVID-19 at the town hosting their training camp, triggering concerns that the upcoming games will spread infections.

A Ugandan team member, reportedly a coach, tested positive Saturday at Tokyo’s Narita airport and was quarantined there. But the rest of the nine-person team was allowed to travel more than 300 miles on a chartered bus to their pre-Olympics camp in the western prefecture of Osaka.

Three days later, a second Ugandan al-

so tested positive for the virus, forcing seven town officials and drivers who had close contact with the team to self-isolate. The team members were quarantined at a local hotel.

Concerns escalated after it was announced that both Ugandans had the delta variant of the virus, which is believed to spread more easily.

In response to criticism of the case, Suga rushed to Tokyo’s Haneda international airport to inspect virus testing for arrivals and vowed to ensure appropriate border controls as growing numbers of Olympic and Paralympic participants enter Japan ahead of the July 23 opening of the games.

Puerto Rico to receive nearly \$4B in US funds

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said Monday that Puerto Rico will receive nearly \$4 billion in federal education pandemic relief funds to help boost the U.S. territory’s fight against COVID-19.

The announcement was made during Cardona’s official three-day trip to Puerto Rico, the first for a Biden administration Cabinet member. It marks the first time the island has full access to those funds.

Roughly half of the nearly \$4 billion will be released as part of the American Rescue Plan Act, which was signed into law in March to help offset the pandemic’s impact on the economy and public health.

“I am honored to be in Puerto Rico — the island of my roots — as the federal government releases critical funds to support Puerto Rico’s efforts to safely reopen its schools for in-person learning,” Cardona said.

Puerto Rico reopened dozens of public and private schools in March for the first time since the pandemic began, although less than 100 of the island’s more than 850 public schools were authorized to do so. At the time, only kindergartners, special education students and children in first, second, third and 12th grades were allowed to return to school for in-person classes twice a week. A month later, officials closed all schools given a spike in COVID-19 cases and didn’t reopen some of them until May.

For more than a year, many teachers and students have struggled with ongoing power outages and unreliable or nonexistent internet connections amid virtual learning.

It wasn’t immediately known exactly how the administration of Puerto Rico Gov. Pedro Pierluisi planned to spend the newest federal funds. The announcement comes three months after Cardona announced that Puerto Rico had immediate access to \$912 million in federal education money.

Strict conditions had prevented the U.S. territory from receiving certain federal funds in a timely manner under the Trump administration, but these have been easing under President Joe Biden.

The island of 3.3 million people has reported nearly 123,000 confirmed coronavirus cases and more than 2,000 COVID-19 deaths. More than 40% of the population has been vaccinated.

Rescuers in Fla. spot voids, look for survivors

Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. — Rescue workers digging for a fifth day into the remnants of a collapsed Florida condo building stressed Monday that they could still find survivors in the rubble, a hope family members clung to even though no one has been pulled out alive since the first hours after the structure fell.

Another body was recovered overnight, bringing the confirmed death toll to 10. But more than 150 people are still missing in Surfside. Their families rode buses to a site close enough to watch the intense rescue effort, including firefighters, sniffer dogs and search experts employing radar and sonar devices.

Early Monday, a crane lifted a large slab of concrete from the debris pile, enabling about 30 rescuers in hard hats to move in and carry smaller pieces of debris into red buckets, which are emptied into a larger bin for a crane to remove. The work has

been complicated by intermittent rain showers moving through the area, but at least the fires that hampered the initial search have been extinguished.

Andy Alvarez, a deputy incident commander with Miami-Dade Fire Rescue, told ABC's "Good Morning America" on Monday that rescuers have been able to find some voids inside the wreckage, mostly in the basement and parking garage areas.

"We have over 80 rescuers at a time that are breaching the walls that collapsed, in a frantic effort to try to rescue those that are still viable and to get to those voids that we typically know exist in these buildings," Alvarez said.

"We have been able to tunnel through the building," Alvarez added. "This is a frantic search to seek that hope, that miracle, to see who we can bring out of this building alive."

He said rescuers, like the families, are still hoping for good news. "You've gotta have hope

and you've gotta have faith," he said.

Others who have seen the wreckage up close were daunted by the task ahead. Alfredo Lopez, who lived with his wife in a 6th floor corner apartment and narrowly escaped disaster, said he finds it hard to believe anyone is alive in the rubble.

"I just can't see anybody, you know — I hope to God that they're going to find somebody, but man, you know, if you saw what I saw: nothingness and then, you go over there and you see, like, all the rubble. How can somebody survive that?" Lopez told The Associated Press.

Israeli Diaspora Affairs Minister Nachman Shai, head of a humanitarian delegation from Israel that includes several search-and-rescue experts, said the professionals have told him of cases where survivors were found after 100 hours or more.

"So don't lose hope, that's what I would say," he said.

Some families had hoped their visit to the site near the 12-story building would enable them to shout messages to loved ones possibly buried deep inside the pile.

As they returned to a nearby hotel, several paused to embrace as they got off the bus.

Others walked slowly with arms around each other back to the hotel entrance.

"We are just waiting for answers. That's what we want," said Dianne Ohayon, whose parents, Myriam and Arnie Notkin, were in the building. "It's hard to go through these long days and we haven't gotten any answers yet."

The building collapsed just days before a deadline for condo owners to start making steep payments toward more than \$9 million in repairs that had been recommended nearly three years earlier, in a report that warned of "major structural damage."

Records fall as dangerous Northwest heat wave builds

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Intense. Prolonged. Record-breaking. Unprecedented. Abnormal. Dangerous.

That's how the National Weather Service described the historic heat wave hitting the Pacific Northwest, pushing daytime temperatures into the triple digits, disrupting Olympic qualifying events and breaking all-time high temperature records in places unaccustomed to such extreme heat.

Portland reached 112 degrees Fahrenheit Sunday, breaking the all-time temperature record of 108 F, which was set just a day earlier. In Eugene, Ore., the U.S. track and field trials were halted Sunday afternoon and fans were asked to evacuate the stadium due to extreme heat. The National

Weather Service said it hit 110 F in Eugene, breaking the all-time record of 108 F. Oregon's Capital city, Salem, also recorded the highest temperature in its history on Sunday: 112 F, breaking the old mark by 4 degrees.

The temperature hit 104 F in Seattle. The NWS said that was an all-time record for the city better known for rain than heat and was the first time the area recorded two consecutive triple digit days since records began being kept in 1894. The region's sizzling temperatures were expected to get even hotter Monday before beginning to cool Tuesday.

Portland General Electric said about 3,000 customers were without electricity in the greater Portland area Sunday. Puget Sound Energy reported 3,400 customers down in the greater Seattle area.

Drought woes in dry West raise July 4 fireworks fears

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Many Americans aching for normalcy as pandemic restrictions end are looking forward to traditional Fourth of July fireworks. But with a historic drought in the U.S. West and fears of another devastating wildfire season, officials are canceling displays, passing bans on setting off fireworks or begging for caution.

Fireworks already have caused a few small wildfires, including one started by a child in northern Utah and another in central California. Last year, a pyrotechnic device designed for a baby's gender reveal celebration sparked a California blaze that killed a firefighter during a U.S. wildfire season that scorched the second-highest amount of land in nearly 40 years.

Some regions of the American West are experiencing their worst drought conditions in more than a century this year, said Jennifer Balch, director of Earth Lab at the University of Colorado. People setting off fireworks at home is a concern because of both the tinder-box conditions ripe for starting wildfires and the threat of injuries.

"As a fire scientist, I'm bracing myself for this fire season because of how dry and hot it is already," Balch said. "I think fireworks right now are a terrible idea."

Fireworks industry professionals, who also stressed caution in drought-prone areas, expect strong sales despite a shortage caused by pandemic-related manufacturing slowdowns and trade disruptions.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: Woman fed rats, worsened rodent issue

RI CRANSTON — A woman was charged with allegedly violating a Rhode Island city ordinance against feeding wild animals.

The 55-year-old woman's neighbors blame her for exacerbating the rodent problem in Cranston, WJAR-TV reported. The publication captured several nocturnal rats active in the middle of the day. Neighbors say that it's even worse during the night.

The woman and her parents, who own the home, pleaded not guilty. Outside of the courthouse, she told reporters that she's being charged for feeding fowl birds and ducks.

Anthony Moretti, director of Administration for Mayor Ken Hopkins, said he saw more than 20 rats in a carport at the woman's home.

Marina boat explosion injures 1; cause sought

NJ ATLANTIC CITY — One person was injured as a result of an explosion on a boat at a New Jersey marina, police said.

State police, firefighters and emergency medical responders were called to the blast on a 33-foot Sea Ray at the Frank S. Farley State Marina in Atlantic City, The Press of Atlantic City reported.

One person on another vessel was injured by flying debris, state police said. That person was taken to AtlantiCare Regional Medical Center with injuries that weren't considered life-threatening, police said.

No other vessels were damaged, police said. The cause of

the blast remains under investigation.

Deputy quickly fired for taunting noise opponent

SC BEAUFORT — A deputy in South Carolina was fired after he intentionally drove his loud truck past the home of a man who asked county officials for a noise ordinance.

Beaufort County deputy Christopher Capps told a supervisor, "I'll admit I did poke the bear a little bit," and later told an internal investigator he was wrong to taunt the man with his truck with 38-inch tires, according to disciplinary documents obtained by The Island Packet of Hilton Head.

The man chased Capps and his truck in his own vehicle after the drive-by racket for more than 6 miles before they were both pulled over by other officers, according to the documents.

Capps said he accelerated by the man's Beaufort home because he "complains about the loud cars" in County Council meetings, according to the investigation.

2 charged after dead monkey found in hot car

TN SEVIERVILLE — Police in Tennessee said two people face charges after officers found a dead monkey inside a hot car parked outside of a waterpark.

According to the Sevierville Police Department, officers found the dead 9-week-old marmoset monkey and a 5-week-old monkey that was alive in the car parked at Soaky Mountain Waterpark after the facility's management notified police.

Police said the other monkey

was taken to an animal hospital and was very dehydrated, but improving.

One of the monkeys' owners is charged with aggravated animal cruelty and the other with animal cruelty. Both are from Indiana.

Boy shooting chipmunks accidentally hits uncle

NH MILTON — A 32-year-old man was accidentally shot in the head in New Hampshire after the bullet fired by his 8-year-old nephew ricocheted while they were shooting chipmunks, police said.

The man is expected to recover, Fosters Daily Democrat reported.

Police said a bullet shot by the 8-year-old ricocheted after killing a chipmunk and hit the man in the head. Milton Police Chief Richard Krauss called it "truly just a freak accident."

Police: Teens stole car with 2-year-old inside

MD SILVER SPRING — Two 15-year-old boys from Washington were charged with kidnapping-related offenses after police in Maryland said they stole a car with a 2-year-old girl in the back seat.

Montgomery County detectives learned that a woman who stopped to vacuum her car at a Silver Spring gas station was putting money into the machine when a teen drove off in her car with her daughter in the back.

A witness followed the car and saw the car stop to pick up a second teen, police said. The car stopped again and the two teens ran off. Officers found the car and the girl uninjured.

Officers found two people who matched the suspects' descrip-

tions walking in downtown Silver Spring. After a short chase, police said the teens were taken into custody.

Man impersonates cop, tries breaking in houses

VA CENTREVILLE — A Virginia man was arrested after police said he posed as an officer while trying to force his way into his neighbors' homes, then fought with responding police officers.

WTOP-FM reported the 36-year-old man left his Centreville home after a domestic incident. Fairfax County police said the man tried to force his way into two of his neighbors' homes while identifying himself as a police officer. When officers arrived, he was being "held down" by one neighbor, police said in a news release.

The man was arrested and charged with burglary, assault on law enforcement, two counts of destruction of property, simple assault and impersonating a police officer.

Chicago Botanic Garden to charge for admission

IL GLENCOE — A famed horticultural park north of Chicago that's been free for nearly 50 years is about to cost money.

Starting next January, the Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe will charge visitors on a sliding scale, between about \$10 to \$26.

Jean Franczyk, the garden's president and CEO, said the decision to charge admission was driven by popularity of the park that drew more than a million visitors a year before the pandemic.

— From wire reports



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NHL royalty vs Hockey Bay in Cup Final

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Brian Engblom sat in the lower bowl at Amalie Arena with the Tampa Bay Lightning's two Stanley Cup banners to his right and the team looking to add a third skating on the ice in front of him.

Reflecting on his days playing for the Canadiens and winning the Stanley Cup in the late 1970s, Tampa Bay's TV analyst sees the makings of the Lightning growing a championship culture just as Montreal has for nearly a century.

"They already have," Engblom said Sunday. "You're supposed to win it all, and creating that kind of environment is difficult and takes time, but they're already there."

The Lightning face the Canadiens in the Stanley Cup Final starting Monday, a series pitting the defending champions against the NHL's most decorated franchise. Tampa Bay is going for a third title since beginning play in 1993, the last year the Canadiens — or any team from Canada — won the Cup, making this a matchup of old-school winners against a modern-hockey model of success.

"A lot of people need to do a lot of good work in order to build a good organization," said Lightning general manager Julien BriseBois, who cut his teeth with the Canadiens. "Both organizations have really

strong ownership, passionate fan bases, good coaching, strong support staff and ultimately really good players, and that's why we're going to be facing each other in the Stanley Cup finals this year."

Montreal is looking to hang a 25th Cup banner in the rafters at Bell Centre with a team that has plenty of similarities to Tampa Bay's 2015 group. That was the last time these teams met in a playoff series, and it was in the second round.

The Lightning now are a grizzled group with a handful of heartbreaking losses and the 2020 bubble triumph in the rearview mirror.

"It took a lot to get here: the heartbreak in 2015 getting all the way to the final and losing and then 2016 going to Game 7 against Pitt, losing that one, 2018 against Barry Trotz (and the Washington Capitals) — he beat us in Game 7 in this building, the heartbreak to Columbus in 2019," coach Jon Cooper said. "It was all building blocks to get to here."

Until this improbable run led by goaltender Carey Price, the Canadiens hadn't won a round since losing to the Lightning six years ago. Qualifying for the playoffs just twice in the previous five seasons made for plenty of turnover, so this young Montreal team reflects Tampa Bay teams of the re-

cent past.

And the Lightning have learned how to translate the lessons that come from losing into winning over time.

"For us now, we've been in a lot of these series," veteran forward Alex Killorn said. "Just going through that you learn a ton. You learn how in series you've got to be even keel. You've got to realize that things aren't always going to go your way. You might get a bad call, this might happen, that might happen ... And I think the older you get, you might have just more experience."

BriseBois' experience in Montreal's organization as a young executive helped make the Lightning into a perennial contender. With an office next to Hall of Famer Jean Beliveau, BriseBois said he was "learning a lot more than I was contributing" and soaked up generations of Habs success.

After working under longtime Tampa Bay GM Steve Yzerman, BriseBois took over in 2018. Their combined knowledge from the Canadiens and Detroit Red Wings became the blueprint in a far more nontraditional market in Florida.

The Lightning's 66 playoff and 333 regular-season victories since 2015 are the most in the NHL in that time.

Middleton's 38 lift Bucks past Hawks for 2-1 lead

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Khris Middleton showed once again that the Milwaukee Bucks have more than one player capable of taking over a game.

He did it Sunday night at the best possible time.

Middleton scored 20 of his playoff career high-tying 38 points in the fourth quarter, leading the Bucks to a 113-102 victory over the Atlanta Hawks for a 2-1 lead in the Eastern Conference finals.

"What he did today was unreal," Giannis Antetokounmpo said. "He was unbelievable. Carried the team at the end ... What I saw today was greatness. Simple as that."

Trae Young scored 35 points for the Hawks, but was slowed in the final period. He stepped on an official's foot late in the third and injured his right ankle. He will have an MRI on the ankle on Monday.

"It's hurting. It's frustrating," Young said, adding the injury impacted "my blow-by speed."

Game 4 is set for Tuesday night in Atlanta.

Middleton scored 10 points in the decisive run in the fourth that gave Milwaukee the lead. He had 11 rebounds and seven assists.

"I just finally got them to go," Middleton said. "I've been struggling some with the ball going in the basket. Finally they started dropping for me at the right time. I'm thankful for that."

Antetokounmpo, who often has the spotlight for the Bucks, had 33 points. The team trailed most of the game before surging in the fourth quarter. The Hawks led 95-88 before Middleton made his first of three three-pointers during the 15-3 run for a 103-98 lead.

"Just being around him a lot, he starts to see it go in, he starts to feel good, he gets in a rhythm in a lot of ways," said Milwaukee coach Mike Budenholzer before adding, "I'm just glad he's on our side."

After never leading in a 125-91 Game 2 loss, Atlanta was eager for a better start in

their first home game of the series. Turnovers by Middleton and Antetokounmpo led to dunks by Clint Capela, and Kevin Huerter added a three-pointer for a 7-0 lead.

The Hawks stretched the advantage to 13 points. Antetokounmpo was held to five first-quarter points, but regained his scoring form in the second period. He had 11 points in the period as the Bucks finally pulled even at 56-all on a three-pointer by Pat Connaughton with 12 seconds remaining in the half.

Milwaukee took its first lead at 82-80 on a basket by Bobby Portis Jr. with 1:47 remaining in the third. A three-pointer by Danilo Gallinari, who had 18 points, gave Atlanta an 85-83 lead at the end of the period.

Middleton opened the final period by sinking a three that signaled the start of his big period. He went on to outscore the Hawks, who had 17 points, by himself in the period.

"He was really going from everywhere," Atlanta coach Nate McMillan said.

McLaughlin sets 400 hurdles mark at trials

Associated Press

EUGENE, Ore. — Sydney McLaughlin looked to her left and saw the numbers “51.90.” Her first thought: “Oh my gosh!”

Now, at long last, the 400-meter hurdles world record belongs to her.

On Sunday night at U.S. Olympic track trials, McLaughlin finally outraced Dalilah Muhammad to earn the victory, and the record, that Muhammad kept grabbing whenever they met. McLaughlin’s 51.90 was good enough to beat Muhammad by 0.52 seconds. It shattered Muhammad’s old world record by 0.26.

“It’s one of those moments you think about and dream about and play in your head that you’ll put it together,” said McLaughlin, who not long ago aligned with coach Bobby Kersee.

Her record was the highlight of a day that included other kinds of history.

Noah Lyles won the 200 meters to punch his Olympic ticket, then celebrated by kneeling on the track and clasping his hands together: “I just stopped stressing and let my body do what it does,” he said after posting a world-leading time of 19.74 that came on the heels of some lackluster runs through

the 100 and 200 rounds.

He shared the spotlight with 17-year-old Erriyon Knighton, whose third-place finish makes him the youngest male member of the U.S. Olympic track team since Jim Ryun in 1964.

JuVaughn Harrison, a 22-year-old from LSU, won not one, but two titles on the same day to become the first American to make the Olympics in both the high jump and the long jump since Jim Thorpe in 1912.

“That’s a lot of years for somebody not to do it,” Harrison said. “It’s really good for me to have my name in history like that.”

It’s an amazing enough feat on a normal day. On this day — unbelievable.

Temperatures at Hayward Field reached 108 degrees and the surface of the track exceeded 150.

It forced USA Track and Field to put a halt to the action at about 3 p.m., shortly after heptathlete Taliyah Brooks was being carted off the track in a wheelchair. Brooks was in fourth place when she went down during javelin warmups. She did not make it back, and when the competition resumed some five hours later, Annie Kunz got the win.

McLaughlin’s race was delayed by about four hours. She said the wait “was a little bit of a throw in our plan.”

“But we were prepared for that,” she said. “Bobby always talks about Muhammad Ali, and always having to be ready for that left hook.”

In this case, it was another Muhammad — Dalilah Muhammad — who has, in her own way, been preparing McLaughlin for this day.

This marked the third straight major race in which the two squared off and a world record was set. The last two times, it was Muhammad who came out on top.

“Dalilah is a great competitor, and I was growing into my own person,” McLaughlin explained when asked if she was deflated after running such good times, only to come in second.

Up next is the Olympics. The finals in the 400 hurdles are set for Aug. 4. The world record in this event is always in jeopardy.

“She definitely pushes me,” Muhammad said during her interview on the track. Then, she turned to McLaughlin and said: “Congratulations, you world-record holder. It’s going to be a battle in Tokyo for sure.”

Shaky in gymnastics finals, Biles still best of the best

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Simone Biles vs. herself remains a work in progress. The gymnastics superstar vs. the world?

Same as it ever was.

Next stop, Tokyo. And one more shot at history. And gold. Perhaps lots of it.

The reigning world and Olympic champion will headline the U.S. women’s gymnastics team in Japan next month, clinching one of the automatic berths with another easy victory at the Olympic Trials on Sunday night.

Well, maybe not that easy.

The 24-year-old found herself in tears at one point during an uncharacteristically shaky — by her impeccable standards — performance. Her bars were uneven. She fell off the beam. Stepped out of bounds on floor exercise. While her two-day total of 118.098 was more than two

points ahead of Olympic teammate Sunisa Lee, Lee actually posted a higher all-around score than Biles during the finals.

“I kind of got in my head today and started doubting myself,” Biles said. “And you could see that in the gymnastics. But just go home, work harder. This is just the beginning of the journey.”

Or perhaps the beginning of the end. Biles isn’t sure what awaits after the Tokyo Games. She’s been too focused on trying to become the first woman in more than a half-century to repeat as Olympic champion. The lure of history and respect for her own immense talent is why she returned after a short break following her dominant five-medal performance in Rio de Janeiro in 2016. It’s why she stuck around after the COVID-19 pandemic led officials to

postpone opening ceremonies in Tokyo by a year.

Biles heads to Japan as the face of her sport, U.S. delegation and maybe even the entire Olympic movement. She’s become more than just a gymnastics star since her coronation in Rio in 2016. Her consistent excellence — her last second-place finish in a meet came more than nine years ago — combined with her charisma and her possibility-pushing routines have thrust her into the company of Michael Phelps and Usain Bolt, athletes whose dominance on the world stage have made them Olympic icons.

Sports stops to watch when she does her thing. The pressure she feels — both internally and externally — is real. And it bubbled up as she gave a somewhat exhausted salute to the judges following her floor routine, grateful for the standing

ovation that accompanied it but also simply relieved the big show is finally here.

“Yes, very relieved that Olympic Trials is over,” she said. “We still have a lot of work to put in once we get over there.”

Lee, Jordan Chiles and Grace McCallum will join Biles on the four-woman Olympic team. MyKayla Skinner, an alternate in 2016, was awarded the “plus-1” specialist spot. Jade Carey earned a nominative spot through the World Cup circuit, meaning she will compete as an individual.

The selection committee opted to take the top four finishers at trials even though national team coordinator Tom Forster admitted a team with Skinner on it instead of McCallum could potentially put up a marginally higher score due to Skinner’s world-class vaulting.

M's win, Santiago tossed for substance

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Seattle reliever Hector Santiago became the first player to be ejected as part of Major League Baseball's new foreign substance protocols when he was thrown out of Sunday's 3-2 victory over the Chicago White Sox.

Santiago was checked by the umpires as he exited in the fifth inning. His glove was confiscated, and it was later announced that Santiago had been ejected.

Crew chief Tom Hallion told a pool reporter that Santiago was ejected for "having a foreign substance that was sticky on the inside palm of his glove." The 33-year-old left-hander said what the umpires found was a combination of rosin and sweat.

Taylor Trammell homered twice for Seattle in the resumption of Saturday's suspended game. Paul Sewald (5-2) got one out for the win, and Kendall Graveman worked the ninth for his seventh save.

The White Sox rebounded in the scheduled series finale, winning 7-5 behind Zack Collins' four RBIs. Aaron Bummer (1-4) pitched an inning for the win, and Liam Hendriks got two outs for his 20th save.

Red Sox 9, Yankees 2: Kiké Hernández and Rafael Devers homered in the first inning as host Boston hammered Gerrit Cole to complete a second straight sweep of its longtime rival.

J.D. Martinez and Christian Vázquez also

homered for the Red Sox. Eduardo Rodríguez (6-4) was solid in earning his first win in nine starts.

Dodgers 7, Cubs 1: Clayton Kershaw racked up a season-high 13 strikeouts in eight dominant innings, and Zach McKinstry hit a grand slam in the second inning as host Los Angeles beat Chicago.

Cody Bellinger homered in his second straight game and drove in three runs in the Dodgers' third consecutive win over the Cubs after four Chicago pitchers combined for a no-hitter in the series opener Thursday.

Athletics 6, Giants 2: Cole Irvin struck out eight in eight innings to remain unbeaten in five June starts, and Oakland avoided a three-game sweep at San Francisco.

Angels 6, Rays 4: Shohei Ohtani hit his 25th homer and drove in three runs, and Los Angeles won at Tampa Bay to stop a five-game losing streak.

Twins 8, Indians 2: Host Minnesota won as Nelson Cruz hit a three-run homer shortly after Cleveland right fielder Josh Naylor was carted off the field following a frightening collision with a teammate.

Nationals 5, Marlins 1: Washington ace Max Scherzer allowed one run in six innings and passed two umpire inspections without a fuss in a win at Miami.

Padres 5, Diamondbacks 4: Fernando Tatis Jr. hit a go-ahead double during a

three-run rally in the seventh inning, and host San Diego took two of three against the team with baseball's worst record.

Brewers 5, Rockies 0: Keston Hiura homered, doubled and drove in three runs to back a sharp performance by Eric Lauer, and host Milwaukee beat Colorado for its fifth consecutive victory.

Phillies 4, Mets 2: Zack Wheeler threw seven scoreless innings against his former team, and Philadelphia won at New York for a split of a four-game series.

Braves 4, Reds 0: Kyle Muller earned his first career victory, and Ronald Acuña Jr. and Austin Riley went deep in Atlanta's win at Cincinnati.

Blue Jays 5, Orioles 2: Toronto star Vladimir Guerrero Jr. drove in two runs to raise his major league-leading RBI total to 66 in a win over visiting Baltimore.

Pirates 7, Cardinals 2: Pittsburgh's Max Kranick pitched five perfect innings in his major league debut before a 64-minute rain delay forced him from the game in St. Louis.

Rangers 4, Royals 1: Joey Gallo homered and Jordan Lyles pitched seven strong innings after getting bumped from the rotation for one start, helping host Texas finish a three-game sweep of Kansas City.

Tigers 2, Astros 1 (10): Robbie Grossman's squeeze bunt in the 10th inning drove in the winning run, and host Detroit beat Houston for a split of their four-game series.

Wimbledon's back; Djokovic wins opener

Associated Press

WIMBLEDON, England — Wimbledon returned Monday after being called off in 2020 because of the pandemic, and so much felt rather familiar at the All England Club, from the rain that disrupted the schedule to the victory for Novak Djokovic.

Much like the delays to competition around the grounds — it took about 4 1/2 hours to begin play on the outside courts; more than a dozen matches were postponed entirely — Djokovic got off to a slow start in his bid for a record-tying 20th Grand Slam title and sixth at Wimbledon.

The defending champion dropped the opening set against Jack Draper, a 19-year-old wild-card entry from England who is ranked 253rd, before eventually showing his best tennis under the Centre Court roof and winning 4-6, 6-1, 6-2, 6-2 with the help of 25 aces.

Djokovic is halfway to a calendar-year Grand Slam, after trophies at the Australian Open in February and the French Open two weeks ago. The man he came back to defeat in the final at Roland Garros after dropping the first two sets, No. 3 seed Stefanos Tsitsipas, quickly was bounced out of the All England Club, losing to 57th-ranked Frances Tiafoe of the United States 6-4, 6-4, 6-3 in just over two hours at No. 1 Court.

Tiafoe had been 0-11 against opponents ranked in the Top 5.

In the first women's match completed, Aryna Sabalenka — who is seeded No. 2 after defending champion Simona Halep and four-time major champ Naomi Osaka pulled out — advanced with a 6-1, 6-4 victory over qualifier Monica Niculescu. Other winners included 2017 champion Garbiñe Muguruza, No. 23 Madison Keys and No. 32 Ekaterina Alexandrova.

Kyle Busch ends Hendrick streak

Associated Press

LONG POND, Pa. — Kyle Busch had a Joe Gibbs Racing team member slide in his Toyota through the window and he tried to figure out how to mend a fried stick shifter welded in fourth gear.

It's rare a NASCAR driver has a passenger in the car, so Busch made small talk on the pit stop with car chief Nate Bellows.

"Wait," Busch said, "you don't want to go with me?" The Toyota never really did get fixed. There were 115 miles to the Pocono finish, Busch had a fried clutch, only one gear and had to rush his car chief out of the car. But he had a full tank of gas, so he hit it.

Busch came through in the clutch — even when he raced without one — and busted Hendrick Motorsports' winning streak when he raced to his second victory of the season Sunday.

Busch was on the brink of snapping Hendrick's streak of six straight Cup wins with a runner-up finish to Alex Bowman in Saturday's Pocono twinbill opener. He couldn't get the help he needed Saturday with the right push. But he got the critical pit road assist Sunday.

Kyle Larson was second for Hendrick.