

NATO to expand in east but no new bases

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The U.S.-led NATO alliance will adopt a plan in a matter of weeks to send more weaponry and combat units to its eastern flank, but the strategy appears to fall short of fulfilling some allies' wishes for new installations filled with permanently based troops.

At the conclusion of a defense ministers meeting in Brussels on Thursday, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg outlined some of the moves he expects to be approved when heads of state meet in Madrid later this month.

The new force model builds on the troop deployment concepts implemented in recent years to guard against Russian aggression. But it's still unclear how much of NATO's expanded mission in the east will be filled by American ground forces.

Germany and the United Kingdom, among others, have said they intend to increase deployments to the eastern reaches of NATO.

"We heard several allies indicating that they will provide new national announcements to contribute to the new force model," Stoltenberg said. "I'm certain that they will make the announcements well ahead of the NATO summit in two weeks' time."

Citing three NATO diplomats, Reuters reported Thursday that many members, including Britain and the United States, do not favor permanent new bases in the Baltics. The reason: they would cost billions of dollars and be hard to sustain.

"The new force model also consists of many different elements, but when it comes to the land component, and especially in the eastern part of the alliance, we speak about mainly three pillars," Stoltenberg said.

The first pillar is a larger forward-based presence with more combat-ready formations and command-and-control capabilities.

The second is more pre-positioned equipment, such as armor and ammunition. And the third involves troops who are assigned to train in and defend specific territory, Stoltenberg said.

However, he did not mention construction of permanent bases with allied forces assigned to them. Eastern allies such as Poland and the Baltic states have made repeated calls for a more robust NATO military

presence in their countries.

Even before Russia's full-fledged invasion of Ukraine in February, NATO had multinational battlegroups operating in the Baltics and Poland to shore up defenses.

And in the aftermath of Russia's invasion, allies have doubled the number of battlegroups, with units now operating in eight countries.

The concept of "preassigned forces" means that units from specific allied countries will focus on specific areas. Some will be deployed forward, while others will remain in their home country "but (be) ready to move quickly if needed," Stoltenberg said.

Before the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, there were 80,000 U.S. troops in Europe, about 65,000 of whom are permanently based on the Continent. The number of American troops in Europe now stands at just over 100,000 because of additional rotations.

Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Mark Milley has said he favors a rotational model going forward rather than the addition of large numbers of new, permanently based troops in Europe.

Ukraine gets possible path to EU, aid pledges

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The European Union's executive arm recommended putting Ukraine on a path to membership Friday, a symbolic boost for a country fending off a Russian onslaught that is killing civilians, flattening cities and threatening its very survival.

In another show of Western support, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson arrived in Kyiv to meet with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to offer continued aid and military training, adding that evidence points to Russia "taking heavy casualties" in the invasion.

"We are with you to give you

the strategic endurance that you will need," Johnson said on his second visit to the country. Although he did not detail the aid, he said Britain would lead a program that could train up to 10,000 Ukrainian soldiers every 120 days in an unspecified location outside the country.

The latest embrace of Ukraine by its European allies also marks another setback for Russian President Vladimir Putin, who launched his war nearly four months ago, hoping to pull his ex-Soviet neighbor away from the West and back into Russia's sphere of influence.

At Russia's showpiece economic forum in St. Petersburg

on Friday, Putin reprised his usual defense of the war. He has alleged the invasion was necessary to protect people in parts of eastern Ukraine controlled by Moscow-backed rebels and to ensure Russia's own security.

Johnson's trip followed one by the leaders of Germany, France, Italy and Romania, who vowed in Kyiv a day earlier to support Ukraine's fight without asking it to make any territorial concessions to Russia.

The European Commission's recommendation that Ukraine become a candidate for membership will be discussed by leaders of the 27-nation bloc during a summit next week in

Brussels. The war has increased pressure on EU governments to fast-track Ukraine's candidate status. But the process is expected to take years, and EU members remain divided over how quickly and fully to open their arms to new members.

Political and military support for Ukraine from Western countries has been key to its surprising success in the face of larger and better-equipped Russian forces. Zelenskyy has also clamored for additional immediate support in the form of more and better weapons to turn the tide in the east, known as the Donbas region.

Third missing American ID'd as Marine vet

The Washington Post

Former Marine Corps officer Grady Kurpasi is the third American to go missing in Ukraine, his wife, Heeson Kim, told *The Washington Post* on Thursday evening. Two other American veterans who have recently lost contact with family are also feared to have been captured by Russian forces.

Kurpasi, who volunteered to join Ukraine's fight against Russia's invasion, left the United States in early March and arrived in Kyiv on March 21, said George Heath, a representative for his family. The 49-year-old was last heard from on April 26, when he was tasked with holding an observation post in the Kherson region so civilians there could evacuate, Heath added. The veteran last spoke to family and friends in the United States a few days before the assignment.

The State Department said earlier Thursday that a third American had gone missing several weeks ago but did not name him. CNN first confirmed Kurpasi's identity.

Heath said that Kurpasi's cellphone signal was recently traced to the vicinity of a large shopping mall in the Kherson and Mykolaiv regions. He did not provide more detail. *The Washington Post* could not independently verify that claim.

Kurpasi lived in New York City during the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and joined the Marines shortly after, Heath said. He called Kurpasi, who was his platoon commander between 2012 and 2014, a "great man" who has always "led from the front and led by example."

During his 20 years of military service, Kurpasi took part in three combat tours in Iraq and was awarded a Purple Heart, according to his service record provided to *The Post*. The linguistics graduate from the University of California at Los Angeles received a scholarship from the Pat Tillman Foundation, which provides education grants to promising leaders with a military background, in 2009.

While many foreigners volunteered to fight Russia alongside the Ukrainian military, Heath said Kurpasi had originally intended to help civilians. He "fell into" a combat role, Heath said.

\$45 billion increase to defense budget approved

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Senate Armed Services Committee voted Thursday to recommend a \$45 billion increase to fiscal 2023 military spending, bumping up the White House's proposed national defense budget to \$847 billion.

Senators and committee staff attributed more than half of the funding increase to historic inflation that has been teetering between 7% and 8%. The remainder of the increase accounts for additional funding for security aid to Ukraine, filling the Pentagon's munition stocks, procuring equipment and initiating more military construction projects.

Congress last year exceeded the White House's proposed budget by \$25 billion, authorizing \$768 billion to reflect an inflation rate of about 2%, said Oklahoma Sen. Jim Inhofe, the committee's ranking Republican. The White House had requested \$813 billion for defense spending next fiscal year, including \$773 billion for the Pentagon.

"I'm very pleased because it's actually ... everything I hoped for," Inhofe told reporters before the 23-3 vote on the measure. Inhofe and other Republicans had pressed for an overall increase of 3% to 5% above inflation.

Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, told reporters Wednesday that he also expects spending totals to increase in the House's version of the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act.

"We'll see by how much, but it's not going to be an insignificant amount," he said. "We're going to wind up with an increased number."

The House Armed Services Committee is scheduled next week to mark up its draft of the authorization bill, which sets policy and funding expectations for the Pentagon. Democrats on the House Appropriations Committee approved a \$762 billion fiscal 2023 defense budget on Wednesday that is in line with the White House's request. The full committee is set to vote on the bill next week.

China launches high-tech carrier

Associated Press

BEIJING — Beijing launched a new-generation aircraft carrier Friday, the first such ship to be both designed and built in China, in a milestone as it seeks to extend the range and power of its navy.

The Type 003 carrier christened Fujian left its drydock at a shipyard outside Shanghai in the morning and tied up at a nearby pier, state media reports said.

State broadcaster CCTV showed assembled navy personnel standing beneath the massive ship as water jets sprayed over its deck, multi-colored streamers flew and colorful smoke was released.

Equipped with the latest weaponry and aircraft-launch technology, the Type 003 ship's capabilities are thought to rival those of Western carriers, as Beijing seeks to turn its navy, already the world's lar-

gest, into a multi-carrier force.

The Type 003 employs a catapult launch, which experts had said appears to be an electromagnetic-type system like one originally developed by the U.S. Navy. China's official Xinhua News Agency confirmed the Fujian employed the electromagnetic system in a report on Friday's launch.

Such a system puts less stress on the aircraft than older steam-type catapult launch systems, and the use of a catapult means that the ship will be able to launch a broader variety of aircraft, which is necessary for China to be able to project naval power at a greater range, Rahmat said.

"These catapults allow aircraft deployed to carry a more extensive load of weapons in addition to external fuel tanks," Rahmat said.

Panel puts focus on Trump's Jan. 6 plan

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump's extraordinary effort to overturn his 2020 election defeat came into ever-clearer focus Thursday, with testimony describing his pressuring Vice President Mike Pence in vulgar private taunts and public entreaties to stop the certification of Joe Biden's victory in the run-up to the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection.

Trump's closest advisers viewed his last-ditch efforts to halt congressional certification of his loss as "nuts," "crazy" and even likely to incite riots if Pence followed through, witnesses revealed in stark testimony Thursday.

The panel revealed how Trump put his vice president in danger as Pence was presiding over a joint session of Congress on Jan. 6, 2021, when the defeated president sent his supporters to the Capitol to "fight like hell" over his false claims of a fraudulent election.

Rioters came within 40 feet of the place at the Capitol where Pence and others had been evacuated. Never-before-shown photos showed Pence and his team sheltering.

"He deserves to be burned with the rest of them," one rioter is heard saying on video as the mob prepares to storm the iconic building.

"Pence betrayed us," says another rioter, wearing a Make America Great Again hat in a selfie video inside the Capitol.

Pence's counsel Greg Jacob testified that he could "hear the din" of the rioters nearby. Asked if Trump ever checked on Pence during the siege, Jacob said, "He did not."

With live testimony and other evidence from its yearlong investigation, the panel held its third hearing this month aiming to demonstrate that Trump's repeated false claims and desperate attempt to stay in power led directly to the Capitol insurrection.

All told, the committee is pulling together

a dark portrait of the end of Trump's presidency as the defeated Republican was left grasping for alternatives as courts turned back dozens of lawsuits challenging the vote.

Trump latched onto conservative law professor John Eastman's obscure plan to defy historical precedent of the Electoral Count Act and reverse Joe Biden's victory.

Trump aides and allies warned bluntly in private about his efforts, even as some publicly continued to stand by the president's false election claims. Nine people died in the insurrection and its aftermath.

"Are you out of your effing mind?" Eric Herschmann, a lawyer advising Trump, told Eastman in recorded testimony shown at the hearing.

In a social media post Thursday, Trump decried the hearings anew as a "witch hunt," lambasted coverage by "the Fake News Networks" and exclaimed, "I DEMAND EQUAL TIME!!!"

Senate GOP, Democrats split over gun deal details

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democratic and Republican senators were at odds Thursday over how to keep firearms from dangerous people as bargainers struggled to finalize details of a gun violence compromise in time for their self-imposed deadline of holding votes in Congress next week.

Lawmakers said they remained divided over how to define abusive dating partners who would be legally barred from purchasing firearms. Disagreements were also unresolved over proposals to send money to states that have "red flag" laws that let authorities temporarily confiscate guns from people deemed danger-

ous by courts, and to other states for their own violence prevention programs.

The election-year talks have seemed headed toward agreement, with both parties fearing punishment by voters if Congress doesn't react to the carnage of last month's mass shootings. A total of 31 people were slain at a grocery store in Buffalo, N.Y., and an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas. An outline of a deal has been endorsed by President Joe Biden, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.

Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, a lead GOP bargainer, seemed visibly unhappy as he

left Thursday's closed-door session after nearly two hours, saying he was flying home.

"This is the hardest part because at some point, you just got to make a decision. And when people don't want to make a decision, you can't accomplish the result. And that's kind of where we are right now," Cornyn said.

"I'm not frustrated, I'm done," he added, though he said he was open to continued discussions.

Lawmakers have said a deal must be completed and written into legislative language by week's end if Congress is to vote by next week. It begins a July 4 recess after that.

Gunman kills 2, wounds 1 at Alabama church potluck

Associated Press

VESTAVIA HILLS, Ala. — A gunman opened fire inside a suburban Alabama church, killing two people and wounding a third at a small group meeting before being taken into custody Thursday, authorities said.

Police Capt. Shane Ware did not identify the suspect, but said he was a 71-year-old man who occasionally attended services.

The suspect was taken into custody following the shooting Thursday night at St. Ste-

phen's Episcopal Church in the Birmingham suburb of Vestavia Hills. Ware said prosecutors were preparing warrants to charge him with capital murder.

Ware said the man pulled a gun and opened fire during a potluck dinner attended by other church members.

He killed an 84-year-old man and a 75-year-old woman, and left another woman wounded, before a person in the room restrained the gunman and held him until po-

lice arrived.

The Rev. Rebecca Bridges, the church's associate rector, led an online prayer service on the church's Facebook page Friday morning. She prayed not only for the victims and church members who witnessed the shooting, but also "for the person who perpetrated the shooting."

"We pray that you will work in that person's heart," Bridges said. "And we pray that you will help us to forgive."

Floods upend gateway towns to Yellowstone

Associated Press

RED LODGE, Mont. — This gateway town to Yellowstone National Park has become a dead end, a casualty of the severe flooding that tore through one of America's most beloved natural attractions and swept away roads, bridges and homes.

The unprecedented flood has closed the entire park and forced the evacuation of 10,000 visitors. And towns like Red Lodge that lead to Yellowstone's northern entrances and rely on tourists passing through could suffer all summer.

Officials have said the park's southern part, which features Old Faithful, could reopen as soon as next week. But the north end, which includes Tower Fall and the bears and wolves of Lamar Valley, could stay closed for months after sections of major roads inside Yellowstone were washed away or buried in rockfall. Roads leading to the park also have wide-

spread damage that could take months to repair.

Red Lodge is facing a double disaster: It will have to clean up the damage done by the deluge to parts of town and also figure out how to survive without the summer business that normally sustains it for the rest of the year.

"Winters are hard in Red Lodge," Chris Prindiville said as he hosed mud from the sidewalk outside his shuttered cafe, which had no fresh water or gas for his stoves. "You have to make your money in the summer so you can make it when the bills keep coming and the visitors have stopped."

At least 88 people were rescued by the Montana National Guard over the past few days from campsites and small towns, and hundreds of homes, including nearly 150 in Red Lodge, were damaged by muddy waters. One large house that was home to six park employees in the town of Gardiner was ripped from its foundation and floated 5 miles down-

stream before sinking. Four to five homes could still topple into the Stillwater River, which already washed several cabins away, according to a spokeswoman for Stillwater County.

No deaths or serious injuries have been reported.

Red Lodge was under a boil-water advisory, and trucks supplied drinking water to half of the town that was without it. Portable toilets were strategically placed for those who couldn't flush at home.

The Yodeler Motel, once home to Finnish coal miners, faced its first shutdown since it began operating as a lodge in 1964. Owner Mac Dean said he is going to have to gut the lower level, where 13 rooms flooded in chest-high waters.

President Joe Biden declared a disaster in Montana, ordering federal assistance be made available.

Officials: Cattle deaths in Kansas caused by heat stress

Associated Press

BELLE PLAINE, Kan. — Thousands of cattle in feedlots in southwestern Kansas have died of heat stress due to soaring temperatures, high humidity and little wind in recent days, industry officials said.

The final toll remains unclear, but as of Thursday at least 2,000 heat-related deaths had been reported to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the state agency that assists in disposing of carcasses. Agency spokesman Matt Lara said he expects that number to rise as more feedlots report losses from this week's heat wave.

The cattle deaths have sparked unsubstan-

tiated reports on social media and elsewhere that something besides the weather is at play, but Kansas agriculture officials said there's no indication of any other cause.

"This was a true weather event — it was isolated to a specific region in southwestern Kansas," said A.J. Tarpoff, a cattle veterinarian with Kansas State University. "Yes, temperatures rose, but the more important reason why it was injurious was that we had a huge spike in humidity ... and at the same time wind speeds actually dropped substantially, which is rare for western Kansas."

Last week, temperatures were in the 70s and 80s, but on Saturday they spiked higher than

100 degrees, said Scarlett Hagins, spokeswoman for the Kansas Livestock Association.

"And it was that sudden change that didn't allow the cattle to acclimate that caused the heat stress issues in them," she said.

The deaths represent a huge economic loss because the animals, which typically weigh around 1,500 pounds, are worth around \$2,000 per head, Hagins said. Federal disaster programs will help some producers who incurred a loss, she added.

And the worst may be over. Nighttime temperatures have been cooler and — as long as there is a breeze — the animals are able to recover, Tarpoff said.

UK orders extradition of Assange; appeal is planned

Associated Press

LONDON — The British government on Friday ordered the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to the United States to face spying charges — a milestone, but not the end of the decade-long legal saga.

WikiLeaks said it would challenge the order, and has 14 days to lodge an appeal.

Home Secretary Priti Patel signed the order authorizing Assange's extradition to the U.S., where he faces charges over WikiLeaks' publication of a huge trove of classified documents.

The decision was referred to Patel after a

British court ruled in April that Assange could be sent to the U.S., where he faces trial on 17 charges of espionage and one charge of computer misuse. American prosecutors say Assange unlawfully helped U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning steal classified diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks later published, putting lives at risk.

The Home Office said in a statement that "the U.K. courts have not found that it would be oppressive, unjust or an abuse of process to extradite Mr. Assange," and so the government had to approve the extradition.

"Nor have they found that extradition would be incompatible with his human rights, including his right to a fair trial and to freedom of expression, and that whilst in the U.S. he will be treated appropriately, including in relation to his health," it said.

Supporters and lawyers for Assange, 50, argue that he was acting as a journalist and is entitled to First Amendment protections of freedom of speech for publishing documents that exposed U.S. military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. They argue that his case is politically motivated and that he cannot get a fair trial in the U.S.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Elephant isn't a person, top state court rules

NY ALBANY — New York's top court rejected an effort to free Happy the elephant from the Bronx Zoo, ruling that she does not meet the definition of "person" who is being illegally confined.

The 5-2 decision by the state Court of Appeals affirms an earlier court decision and means Happy will not be released through a habeas corpus proceeding, which is a way for people to challenge confinement.

The majority decision written by Chief Judge Janet DiFiore said that "while no one disputes that elephants are intelligent beings deserving of proper care and compassion," a writ of habeas corpus is intended to protect the liberty of human beings and does not apply to a nonhuman animal like Happy.

The case had been closely watched by animal rights activists and industries that depend on animals. The zoo and its supporters warned that a win for advocates at the Nonhuman Rights Project could open the door to more legal actions on behalf of animals, including pets and other species in zoos.

47 cats living in car rescued from heat

MN HARRIS — Forty-seven cats were rescued from a vehicle that was parked in sweltering heat at a rest area, authorities said.

The cats discovered Tuesday were living in the car with their owner who recently became homeless and didn't want to leave the animals behind, according to Animal Humane So-

ciety investigator Ashley Pudas.

"Unfortunately, with the heat yesterday he recognized that it was above and beyond what he was capable of at this time. And he let us help them out," she said, noting that the owner had not left the cats alone.

The owner had been living with cats in the vehicle "for some time," the Animal Humane Society said. Despite the heat and unsanitary conditions, most of the cats had only minor medical issues.

Man found dead ran out of gas in Death Valley

CA DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK — A Southern California man was found dead in Death Valley National Park after apparently running out of gas and getting out to walk in the scorching heat, authorities said.

Park visitors found the body of David Kelleher on Tuesday, a park statement said.

Kelleher, 67, of Huntington Beach, was about 2½ miles from the vehicle, and apparently was walking from Zabriskie Point toward Furnace Creek, the park said. He was found about 30 feet from State Route 190 but the highway was obscured by terrain and a mesquite tree.

Kelleher hadn't been reported missing but a park ranger spotted a lone vehicle in the Zabriskie Point parking lot on June 11 and remembered it from three days earlier. It was registered to Kelleher.

Thousands of gallons of oily material in river

MI FLINT — Several thousands of gallons

of an oil-based, black material with a petroleum smell spilled into the Flint River in Flint, authorities said Wednesday.

The spill appeared to be 5 miles long, Jill Greenberg, a spokeswoman for Michigan's environmental agency, told MLive.com.

"Booms are being deployed and investigators are working to determine a source," the agency said on Twitter.

Officials said drinking water was not threatened. Flint used the river for drinking water in 2014-15 before lead contamination caused the city to return to a regional water supplier.

School district ends 'peace pipe' routine

IN ANDERSON — A central Indiana school district that adopted a Native American mascot nearly a century ago has dropped a basketball pregame routine where students dressed as American Indians performed a "peace pipe" ceremony.

The Anderson Community Schools' athletic teams will continue to use the Indians name and logo, but the pipe routine performed before Anderson High School's basketball games is being eliminated immediately under recommendations unanimously approved by the district's school board.

Children served sealant instead of milk

AK ANCHORAGE — A dozen children and two adults were served floor sealant instead of milk at a day care summer program at an Alaska elementary school after

containers were apparently mixed up, the school district superintendent said Wednesday.

Several students complained of burning sensations in their mouth and throats, and at least one child was treated at a hospital after the Tuesday morning incident in Juneau, Superintendent Bridget Weiss said.

Police are investigating how the mix-up occurred, "not really because we believe there's anything criminal or mal-intent at this point, but we do want a thorough investigation of what happened, how it happened, and they're trained investigators," Weiss said.

Equipment donated for offshore marine habitat

MS PASCAGOULA — Surplus equipment from Chevron's Pascagoula Refinery is getting a new purpose.

Five carbon-steel structures from a recent refinery project were slated to be recycled. That's until a Chevron worker suggested repurposing the equipment as artificial fishing reefs. The company has partnered with Mississippi Gulf Fishing Banks to help make that a reality.

"When you have an artificial reef, you're giving fish an opportunity to live and grow and sustain," Chevron Pascagoula Refinery Operations Manager Christine Haswell told WLOX-TV. "And so we're very, very excited to be part of this."

The structures underwent an extensive environmental evaluation and will be deployed by MGFB after receiving clearance from the Department of Marine Resources.

— From Associated Press

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Warriors win 4th NBA title in 8 years

Associated Press

BOSTON — The Golden State Warriors are NBA champions once again, topping the Boston Celtics 103-90 on Thursday night for their fourth title in the last eight seasons.

Stephen Curry scored 34 points and was named the NBA Finals MVP as the Warriors claimed the franchise's seventh championship overall. And this one completed a journey like none other, after a run of five consecutive Finals, then a plummet to the bottom of the NBA, and now a return to greatness just two seasons after having the league's worst record.

"We found a way to just get it done," Curry said after Golden

State accepted the championship trophy and celebrated on the court.

With tears in his eyes and hoarse with emotion, Curry struggled to speak as he explained what allowed the Warriors to capture their latest crown.

"It's part of a championship pedigree, our experience," he said. "We built this for 10-11 years. That means a lot when you get to this stage."

For Curry, Klay Thompson, Draymond Green and Andre Iguodala, it's a fourth championship. The first three rings came in 2015, 2017 and 2018, when Golden State was dynastic and made five consecutive trips to the Finals.

"They're all unique, they're all special," coach Steve Kerr said of the multiple titles. "This one might have been the most unlikely. ... It takes a group effort to get it done and we had a great group."

Injuries, including ones that sidelined Thompson for 2½ years, and roster changes changed everything. But this season, with Thompson returning around the midway point, the Warriors were finally back.

Back on top, too. Champions, again, denying the storied Celtics what would have been their record 18th championship, one that would have allowed Boston to break a tie with the Los Angeles Lakers for the most in league history.

This tale for Golden State ended much differently than their most recent Finals appearance against Toronto in 2019, one that saw Kevin Durant tear his Achilles tendon in Game 5 and then Thompson tear his ACL in what became the Raptors' title-clincher in Game 6.

The aftermath of that loss was exacerbated by Durant's decision to leave that summer in free agency to join the Brooklyn Nets and Thompson's own Achilles injury while rehabilitating his knee injury.

"It all paid off," Thompson said. "It was dog days, a lot of tears shed. ... You knew it was a possibility, but to see it in real time. ... It's crazy."

New names, McIlroy top leaderboard at US Open

Associated Press

BROOKLINE, Mass. — For one day at least, the U.S. Open was wide open.

Five of the top six on the leaderboard played their way onto The Country Club course through qualifying. The other was four-time major winner Rory McIlroy, who slammed and tossed aside his clubs during the round but also made enough shots with them to remain just one stroke off the lead.

"It's been eight years since I won a major," McIlroy said after shooting a 3-under 67 to end the day in a five-way tie for second behind Adam Hadwin. "And I just want to get my hands on one again."

A 34-year-old Canadian who only secured a spot in Brookline eight days earlier, Hadwin had five birdies on the front nine, then played the back at even par to finish with a 66. McIlroy was tied for second with Callum Tarren, David Lingmerth, Joel Dahmen and MJ Daffue.

It was a big sports day in Boston: FIFA announced on Thurs-

day afternoon that the area will host 2026 World Cup matches, and the Red Sox had a matinee against Oakland. (The A's won 4-3).

The Celtics lost Game 6 of the NBA Finals 103-90 to the Golden State Warriors on Thursday night, with McIlroy among those heading to the TD Garden for the game.

Rory roars

McIlroy has been the most vocal defender of the PGA Tour against the new LIV Golf circuit throwing Saudi Arabian money around to attract big-name defectors. But the best thing he can do for the legacy circuit is to keep winning.

Days after his victory in the RBC Open, McIlroy made back-to-back birdies on the way in to become the first player to reach 4 under. He missed the ninth green — his 18th hole — and settled for his only bogey of the round.

"Even though I'm standing up here slightly frustrated that I bogeyed the last, it's a great

start to the tournament," he said. "The margins are just so fine in this tournament, and I think you can sort of see that out there with some of the reactions."

McIlroy took two angry swings at the sand on No. 5 after advancing his ball from a terrible lie on the lip of one bunker right into the next trap. But he got up and down from the sand, making a 13-footer to save par.

On No. 9, he tossed aside a club in disgust during a bogey that kept him from the overall lead.

The emotion was "almost to remind yourself sometimes how much it means to you," he said.

Major streaks

In his attempt to win a major for the third straight year, Collin Morikawa made the turn at 3 under but didn't make another birdie. On No. 18, a par 4, he had to lay up short of the bunker, pitched into the trap and then went up-and-down from there for bogey to finish 1 under.

"I never expect it to get easier," he said. "We're at a U.S. Open. We're at a major championship. ... I think it will only get tougher."

Defending U.S. Open champion John Rahm also salvaged a 69 after driving wide left on the last two holes. He hit a second drive on No. 17 in case the ball couldn't be found, and sent that one off-course as well before a marshal found his original ball.

He saved par.

"I fully know how lucky I got on that (17th) hole, and I tried to take advantage to make a birdie," he said. "But I'll take the 4 and run any day of the week."

On the 18th, Rahm hooked his drive over the fence toward the television compound, and two kids ran off with the ball. He took his drop and left himself a 12-foot birdie putt to finish with a 69.

"If that doesn't scream to you it's the Open," then nothing will, he said. "Sometimes you play good golf and can't get things going and sometimes you get a break."

Rivals Aggies, Sooners surround 'Horns

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — It's officially known as College World Series Bracket 1. It could just as easily be called the Rivals Bracket.

Texas is grouped with its two biggest adversaries, Oklahoma and Texas A&M, and will play one or the other depending on the outcome of its game against Notre Dame on Friday.

"If you want to look to the second game, it's going to be a lot of fun," Longhorns catcher Silas Ardoin said. "That's why we come to the University of Texas, to play those storied and rival programs, like OU and A&M, whichever one it is. We've played in front of great crowds all season, tough ones and ones that are supporting us. We have respect for both of those programs."

Texas won two of three against the Sooners in the regular season and lost to them in the Big 12 championship game. The Longhorns lost a single game to the Aggies in March.

A subplot is that Texas and Oklahoma will join A&M in the Southeastern Conference in the not-too-distant future.

The Longhorns are making their record 38th appearance in the CWS, which is in its 75th year, and the players are cognizant of the history.

"We're down by five, it's not just us fighting; it's the program we're fighting for," shortstop Trey Faltine said. "That legacy and dynasty is much bigger than our team and will forever be much bigger than one singular team in a year."

Of course, all the success has made the school easy to root against for people not dressed in burnt orange.

"People just get tired of Texas, to be honest with you," coach David Pierce said. "So we feed off that."

Longhorns-Aggies passions flared last week and showed up on social media. An A&M graduate who sang the national anthem before a Texas game in the Women's College World Series ended his performance by flashing the "Horns Down" sign. It caught the NCAA's attention, and the singer's invitation to sing the anthem before a CWS game was rescinded.

Irish breakthrough

Returning to Omaha after 20 years is especially sweet for Notre Dame, which lost a three-game super regional at eventual national champion Mississippi State last season.

"When you have to go through that and watch Mississippi State dogpile and just to

see them experience that, I think that is kind of something that sticks with you for a long time," first baseman Carter Putz said. "We knew that we were a good enough team to make it to Omaha."

SEC West reunion

All four SEC teams are from the West Division. Familiarity is supposed to breed contempt. In this case, there's also some comfort.

"Obviously, we played a lot of these teams before," Arkansas pitcher Connor Noland said. "It really gets you ready to jump into this kind of tournament where you might face those teams again. I think we're ready and have a good sneak peek of what we have to do."

Pull a starter out of a hat

Oklahoma coach Skip Johnson had an unusual way of avoiding a question about his pitching plan against Texas A&M.

Johnson said his late father used to keep household bills in a cowboy hat that he would pull out when it was time to pay them.

"That's what I'll be doing," he said. "I'll put all the names in a cowboy hat and pull it out and find out who is going to pitch tomorrow."

Lightning unfazed by trailing Avs in Stanley Cup Final

Associated Press

DENVER — Minutes after losing Game 1 of the Stanley Cup Final in overtime, Patrick Maroon scoffed at the idea that it was some sort of gut punch to the Tampa Bay Lightning.

"Two really good teams going at it," he said. "That's Game 1. We just got to refocus and be ready for Game 2."

Few teams in recent NHL history are better at doing that, which is why the Lightning are unfazed about trailing the Colorado Avalanche. The two-time defending champions have won 11 consecutive series since their remarkable postseason run began in 2020; in five of them, Tampa Bay has lost the opener — including twice this postseason — and the experience has steeled them for situations just like this.

"It's not about riding the wave of one game," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said Thursday. "It's kind of about getting our feet under us. It's understanding we're playing a different team. We can't win the series all in one game, and (players have) been really good at that."

Players wasted no time in moving on to Game 2 on Saturday night. Tampa Bay, after all, had roared back from a 3-1 first-period deficit to tie the opener before Andre Burakovsky's overtime winner. Elements from successful stretches of Game 1 can factor into the team's tweaks and changes moving forward.

"We've done a great job of making adjustments after losses, so we'll look to do that," captain Steven Stamkos said. "The

mindset is we're here to win a series and you don't know when that's going to come: four games, five, six, seven. You never know."

The Lightning have over the past three postseasons won series in all those combinations. But it wasn't long ago that they were on the wrong side of a stunning defeat.

It's hard to forget Tampa Bay getting swept in the first round by Columbus in 2019 after steamrolling the rest of the league all season and winning the Presidents' Trophy with the best overall record. The adjustments, absent any panic moves like firing Cooper or breaking up the core, paved the way for this run.

That includes trying to figure out how to slow down the speedy Avalanche, who want to

turn games into track meets and use their offensive talent to pump in goals. Despite not getting past the second round the past four years, Colorado also has plenty of playoff experience and knows to expect a major pushback from the champs in Game 2.

Coach Jared Bednar believes the best way to handle that is for his team to keep playing its style.

"Regardless of how Tampa plays, we have a certain identity that we need to play to be successful," Bednar said.

Tampa Bay is the first team since Wayne Gretzky's Edmonton Oilers in the mid-1980s to reach the final three years in a row and is four victories away from the league's first threepeat since the New York Islanders dynasty of the early '80s.

Yanks notch 14th straight home victory

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Anthony Rizzo hit a solo home run with one out in the ninth inning and the streaking New York Yankees beat the Tampa Bay Rays 2-1 Thursday night for their 14th straight home win.

The Yankees have their longest home winning string since taking 15 in a row at the original Yankee Stadium on Aug. 16-Sept. 26, 1961, when Roger Maris was chasing Babe Ruth's single-season home run record.

Rizzo's 16th homer gave New York its seventh straight win overall and eighth series sweep this year. The Yankees became the sixth team since 1930 and the first since the 2001 Seattle Mariners to win at least 47 of their first 63 games.

"It's impressive," Rizzo said. "We're winning games in a lot of different ways, which is really good."

Padres 6, Cubs 4: Joe Musgrove pitched seven effective innings in his third straight win, and visiting San Diego handed

Chicago its 10th straight loss.

Musgrove (8-0) permitted two runs and five hits. He struck out a season-high nine and walked one.

San Diego improved to 7-2 in its last nine games with its first four-game sweep of the Cubs since Aug. 16-19, 2010, at Wrigley Field.

Mets 5, Brewers 4: Mark Canha hit a two-run homer and host New York threw out the potential tying run at the plate in the ninth inning to preserve a comeback win over scuffling Milwaukee.

Pete Alonso nailed Hunter Renfroe on a relay throw in the ninth. Edwin Díaz then struck out Christian Yelich for his 13th save.

Angels 4, Mariners 1: Mike Trout accounted for all of Los Angeles' offense with his 48th and 49th career home runs against host Seattle and Shohei Ohtani tossed six innings of three-hit ball.

Trout's first homer came off Mariners starter George Kirby

in the third inning. His second came in the seventh against reliever Sergio Romo. Both times, Seattle had two outs in the inning but each time the Angels' Taylor Ward singled to bring Trout to the plate. It was Trout's seventh multi-homer game against Seattle.

Phillies 10, Nationals 1: Kyle Schwarber homered twice, Zack Wheeler won his third consecutive start, and visiting Philadelphia routed Washington in the opener of a five-game series.

The Phillies, who scored seven runs in the third inning against Patrick Corbin (3-9), have won 12 of their last 14 and improved to 11-2 under interim manager Rob Thomson.

Guardians 4, Rockies 2: José Ramírez doubled for his eighth straight game with an extra-base hit, and visiting Cleveland matched a season high with its fourth win in a row.

Ramírez hit an opposite-field grounder that hugged the third-base line against an exaggerated

shift in the first inning. He is the first major leaguer with extra-base hits in eight consecutive games since Cincinnati's Joey Votto in 2020.

Orioles 10, Blue Jays 2: Cedric Mullins had three hits, and visiting Baltimore pounded former teammate pitcher Kevin Gausman.

Austin Hays hit his ninth home run, a solo shot off Matt Gage in the eighth, and Rongned Odor had two hits and two RBIs as Baltimore won for the fourth time in six games.

Athletics 4, Red Sox 3: Paul Blackburn pitched sharply into the sixth inning, Christian Bethancourt hit a two-run single and Oakland held off host Boston for just its second win in 15 games.

Chad Pinder added an RBI single for the Athletics, who closed their nine-game road trip at 2-7.

Rangers 3, Tigers 1: Ezequiel Duran hit a three-run triple with two out in the ninth inning and Texas won at Detroit.

Commissioner says Rays, A's need new ballparks soon

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said the Tampa Bay Rays and Oakland Athletics need to reach new ballpark deals soon and left open the possibility of considering relocation if agreements are not struck.

"There is urgency with respect to Tampa," Manfred said Thursday during a news conference following an owners meeting. "There needs to be a resolution in the Tampa Bay region for the Rays."

Tampa Bay's lease at Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg, Fla., where the team has played since its inaugural season in 1998, expires after the 2027 season. The Rays said in January that MLB had rejected the team's plan to split its season between Florida and Montreal.

"Obviously, the end of that lease is a hard deadline, but you need to take into account that stadiums take a little bit of time to build, right?" Manfred said. "So we are getting to the point where wherever it is in the region that has an interest in having 162 baseball games, they need to get to it, get with the club — I know the Rays are anxious to get something done — and see if a deal can be made."

The Athletics have played at the Coliseum since 1968 and their lease expires after the 2024 season. The A's have proposed a new ballpark at Howard Terminal and are working with Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf to gain the necessary approvals.

Oakland has averaged a major league-low of 8,283 fans this season and the Rays are 25th at

13,740, also ahead of Miami, Cleveland and Pittsburgh.

On other topics:

■ The new competition committee will evaluate a pitch clock and limits on defensive shifts, and Manfred hopes for a recommendation ahead of spring training,

■ MLB approved the sale of a minority stake in the Cleveland Guardians to David Blitzer, co-owner of the NBA's Philadelphia 76ers and the NHL's New Jersey Devils. Blitzer will have the right to increase his stake to a controlling interest in several years.

■ MLB hopes to increase digital offerings of games in an era of declining cable viewers.

"We are concerned about our reach," Manfred said. "We think that we have fans who want to watch baseball, who don't feel

that they have an adequate opportunity to do that."

Apple is streaming Friday night games this season and Peacock is streaming Sunday morning games starting at 11:30 a.m. and noon EDT.

■ On the proposed international draft. The labor contract set a July 25 deadline to reach an agreement with the players' association.

"Our concern and I think this has been well documented over time, is situations where clubs make commitments to players before they're technically age-eligible to sign," Manfred said. "There are individuals involved in those negotiations that take a really significant piece of the compensation that really should be going to the player, off the top."