

Russian helo violates Estonian airspace

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

A rare intrusion into Estonian airspace by a Russian Mi-8 attack helicopter has prompted the latest salvo of charges that Moscow is ratcheting up tensions in the Baltic region one week ahead of a major NATO security summit.

Earlier this week, Russia lashed out at Lithuania for imposing a transit ban on certain goods to Russia's military exclave of Kaliningrad. Both the ban and the airspace incursion happened over the weekend.

The helicopter, assigned to a Russian border guard unit, was flying with its transponders turned off and lingered in Estonian airspace Saturday evening for nearly two minutes, the Estonian Defense Ministry said in a statement Tuesday.

"This is the picture of the threat, how we

see the Russian threat," Kusti Salm, a ministry official, told local reporters Tuesday. "It has never been as serious as it is now."

In response, Estonia summoned Russian Ambassador Vladimir Lipayev and lodged a formal complaint.

The incident was the second violation of Estonian airspace by Russia this year, the ministry said. Last year, five such incidents occurred, it said.

But Estonian officials are sounding the alarm over the latest incursion, which comes amid high tensions over Russia's unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing war there.

Estonian officials said the Russian aircraft didn't file a flight plan or establish two-way radio communication with Estonian air traffic control, as air safety rules require.

The incident "undoubtedly causes addi-

tional tensions and is completely unacceptable," Tallinn said Tuesday.

News of the airspace violation comes on the heels of Kremlin threats to retaliate against fellow NATO member Lithuania unless the transit ban is lifted. Russia relies on trains that travel through Lithuania to get supplies to Kaliningrad.

The items affected by the ban are subject to European Union sanctions, and officials shot down claims Lithuania had acted unilaterally against Russia. They said the Baltic country coordinated its move with the EU.

At a NATO summit in Madrid next week, heads of state are expected to adopt a new strategy to address concerns about potential Russian aggression. The strategy is expected to involve an increase in troop levels along the alliance's eastern flank.

29 Chinese planes cross Taiwan's air defense zone

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

Taiwan deployed jets and air defense systems Tuesday after 29 Chinese warplanes, including bombers and fighters, entered its air defense zone, according to Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense.

Chinese aircraft have approached Taiwan's territory repeatedly in recent years, forcing the island's air force to scramble jets in response. Large formations of Chinese military aircraft also approached Taiwan in January and May.

The latest incursion included six bombers and 17 fighters along with electronic warfare, early warning, antisubmarine and aerial refueling planes, Taiwan's Defense Ministry said in a statement posted on its website Tuesday. The air defense identification zone is a wide area beyond a country's airspace where approaching aircraft are required to identify themselves.

"[A]ircraft tasked, radio warnings issued and air defense missile systems deployed to monitor the activities," the ministry said in its statement.

A map tweeted by the ministry the same day shows most of the Chinese planes traveled in a zig-zag flight path south of Taiwan.

The incursion came four days after the launch of China's third aircraft carrier, the Fujian, named for the mainland province opposite Taiwan. A week ago, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman repeated his country's claim to exclusive rights over the Taiwan Strait. The U.S. considers the strait international waters and has sent warships through it on a monthly basis this year.

Chinese aircraft and vessels have made "an alarming increase" in unsafe aerial intercepts and confrontations at sea, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said June 11 at the Shangri-La Dialogue defense summit in Singapore.

"We've witnessed a steady increase in provocative and destabilizing military activity near Taiwan," Austin said.

America's "One China" policy regarding Taiwan remains "unchanged and unwavering," Austin said in the opening speech at the defense summit held each summer in the Asian city-state. "But unfortunately, that doesn't seem to be true for [China]," he said.

Under the "One China" policy, the U.S. acknowledges Beijing's view that it has sovereignty over Taiwan, which split from the mainland in 1949, but considers Taiwan's status as unsettled.

Chinese aircraft in recent months flew in record numbers near Taiwan, and nearly every day, Austin said. China regards Taiwan, which lies just off its southeast coast, as a renegade province that, at some point, must be unified under Beijing's control.

The United States formally switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979. The U.S., however, has continued to supply arms to Taiwan under the Taiwan Relations Act.

The U.S. has maintained "strategic ambiguity" about what military actions it would take in the event China moved to take the self-governing island by force.

President Joe Biden, in Tokyo on May 23 during his first presidential visit to Japan, signaled an apparent end to that policy by saying the U.S. would defend Taiwan against a Chinese invasion.

The U.S. "One China policy" acknowledges Beijing's claim over Taiwan but doesn't give China the right to take Taiwan by force, Biden said.

"We agree with the One China policy and all the attendant agreements we made, but the idea that it can be taken by force, just taken by force, would just not be appropriate," Biden said.

Defense: US hid evidence in 'Fat Leonard' case

The San Diego Union-Tribune

As the jury in the "Fat Leonard" trial deliberates the fate of five former officers charged with bribery, defense lawyers made new allegations that federal prosecutors were improperly withholding evidence that could help their case.

In a motion filed June 17, lawyers for the five said they uncovered information that a federal agent who was key in the sprawling investigation of military contractor Leonard Glenn Francis, known as "Fat Leonard" for

his immense size, made inaccurate statements in a sworn arrest warrant affidavit in a strikingly similar case a year ago.

At a brief court hearing Tuesday, lead prosecutor Assistant U.S. Attorney Mark Pletcher did not address the accusations and told U.S. District Court Judge Janis Sammartino the government would write a response to the motion.

It is the latest allegation from defense lawyers about prosecutorial misconduct in the trial that began in February.

The defendants — former Rear Adm. Bruce Loveless; former Capt. David Newland, James Dolan and David Lausman; and former Cmdr. Mario Herrera — are charged with conspiracy, bribery and fraud. They are accused of accepting bribes from Francis and in return helping his Singapore-based ship servicing business, Glenn Defense Marine Asia, or GMDA. Francis pleaded guilty and admitted defrauding the government out of at least \$35 million.

The statements by Defense Criminal Investigative Services Special Agent Cordell DeLaPena came in the unrelated prosecution of Frank Rafaraci, the chief executive of Multinational Logistics Service, or MLS, which, like Francis' company, contracts with the U.S. Navy to service ships in foreign ports.

Rafaraci was initially charged in September 2021 with bribery of a Navy official and defrauding the government out of at least \$50 million through inflated invoices between 2011 and 2018.

Most use of land mines by US military banned

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden's administration announced Tuesday that it would restrict the use of anti-personnel land mines by the U.S. military, aligning the country's policy more closely with an international treaty banning the deadly explosives.

"The president believes strongly that we need to curtail their use worldwide," John Kirby, a national security spokesman, said at a White House briefing.

The United States has not extensively deployed the mines since the Gulf War in 1991. But the announcement represents a shift from a more permissive stance under then-President Donald Trump, and it concludes a review that has lasted for more than a year.

Bonnie Jenkins, the State Department's undersecretary for arms control and international security, said the new policy fulfills "a commitment that President Biden made as a candidate," when he described Trump's decision as "reckless."

Anti-personnel land mines are buried underground or scattered on the surface, and they can pose a lethal threat to civilians long after combat has ended. Russia has reportedly used the explosives during its invasion of Ukraine.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., described the White House announcement as a "long overdue recognition that the grave humanitarian and political costs of using these weapons far exceed their limited military utility."

"As welcome as this step is, the White House needs to put the U.S. on a definitive path to join the treaties banning anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions," he said in a statement.

Under the new policy, the U.S. will restrict the use of these explosives outside of its efforts to help defend South Korea from a potential North Korean invasion. Although the U.S. does not currently have any minefields deployed there, Washington has pledged support for Seoul's defense, which includes anti-personnel mines.

Airman arrested in connection with US base attack in Syria

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — An unidentified airman has been arrested in connection with an attack using explosives in April on a small U.S. military base in Syria that wounded four American service members, Air Force officials said Tuesday.

"As part of an ongoing investigation, on June 16, an airman was taken into custody stateside in conjunction with the attack in Green Village, Syria," Air Force spokeswoman Ann Stefanek wrote in an email. "After reviewing the information in the investigation, the airman's commander made the decision to place him in pretrial confinement."

Stefanek declined to provide the service member's name until prosecutors file charges against the airman.

"It is too early in the process for a charge sheet," she said. "It will be available if charges are preferred."

The attack occurred in the early morning of April 7 at the base known as Green Village, which is east of the Euphrates

River and adjacent to major oil fields. Four U.S. troops received "minor" injuries that included "possible traumatic brain injuries," U.S. officials said at the time.

Several hundred U.S. and coalition forces are stationed at Green Village as they train local forces to fight remnants of the Islamic State terrorist group, according to the Pentagon.

Though indirect fire was initially blamed for the incident, investigators later found evidence that suggested someone had deliberately placed explosive material in an ammunition storage room and a shower area, according to an April 15 statement by Combined Joint Task Force — Operation Inherent Resolve.

Operation Inherent Resolve is a U.S.-led international coalition under U.S. Central Command that targets the Islamic State, primarily with campaigns in Iraq and Syria.

The investigation, which is being conducted by the Army's Criminal Investigation Division and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, is ongoing.

N. Korean leader convenes military meeting

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is meeting with his senior military officials to discuss national defense policies and continuing his arms buildup following a highly provocative run in ballistic missile testing this year that revived tensions with Washington and Seoul.

Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency said Wednesday that Kim presided over a meeting of the ruling Workers' Party's Central Military Commission that began Tuesday to review defense work during the first half of 2022 and confirm "crucial and urgent tasks" to expand military capabilities and imple-

ment key defense policies.

The report did not specify any plans or mention any critical remarks toward the United States or rival South Korea.

U.S. and South Korean officials have said in recent months that the North could be preparing to conduct its first nuclear test explosion since 2017, as Kim escalates brinkmanship aimed at cementing the North's status as a nuclear power and negotiating economic and security concessions from a position of strength.

KCNA said the commission's members started discussing the agenda that was presented, indicating the meeting may continue for days.

The members could discuss the progress in weapons development and plans to deploy some of the systems that were tested in recent months, including a purported hypersonic missile, a long-range cruise missile and the North's newest intercontinental ballistic missile, said Cheong Seong-Chang, a senior analyst at South Korea's private Sejong Institute.

The North's ramped-up testing activity has come under a five-year arms development plan Kim announced in early 2021, when he revealed an extensive wish list of advanced military assets, including tactical nuclear weapons, nuclear-powered submarines, multiwarhead missiles and solid-fuel, long-range weapons.

Official: US must be in for long haul with Ukraine

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

NATO's top official said Wednesday that the United States and other allies must be prepared to support Ukraine "for the long haul" in its war with Russia.

Failure to do so would embolden Russian President Vladimir Putin, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg warned at an event in Brussels hosted by Politico.

"If Putin gets his way by using military force against an independent, democratic nation in Europe, it will be a much higher (price) than the price we pay today to support Ukraine," Stol-

tenberg said ahead of a meeting of allied heads of state in Madrid.

Politico and other outlets reported in recent weeks that Germany, France and Italy were keen to hasten the end of the war, even if that required concessions to Putin. But on Wednesday, Stoltenberg squelched notions of an end to the fighting in the near term.

"I cannot tell you exactly how long this war will last," he said. "This is now turning into a war of attrition."

Next week, President Joe Biden and other NATO leaders will agree to a new NATO strategic concept that deals with

threats posed by Russia and the military rise of China. Allies will also look to increase the number of troops positioned along NATO's eastern flank, Stoltenberg said.

While exact details haven't been revealed, the plan could result in additional rotations to the Baltics, Poland or elsewhere for U.S. troops operating in Europe.

Meanwhile, the implications of the Russia-Ukraine war are expected to take center stage at the summit.

To that end, allies will make new commitments to Ukraine with a focus on helping it shift from Soviet-era weaponry to NATO gear, Stoltenberg said at

Wednesday's event.

Also, anti-drone equipment and technology to enhance secure command-and-control communication are among the things allies will provide, Stoltenberg said.

Ukrainian officials have warned that much more will be needed to hold off Russia's push into the eastern part of the country, where artillery bombards cities around the clock.

For allies, the test going forward will be one of political endurance as the U.S. and other members spend billions of dollars getting increasingly sophisticated weaponry into the country.

Ukraine expects EU-wide support for bloc candidacy

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — A Ukrainian deputy prime minister overseeing the country's push to join the European Union said Wednesday that she's "100%" certain all 27 EU nations will approve making Ukraine a candidate for membership in the bloc during a summit this week.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Deputy Prime

Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Olha Stefanishyna said the decision could come as soon as Thursday, on the first day of the two-day EU leaders summit in Brussels.

Asked how confident she was that Ukraine would be accepted as an EU candidate, she said: "The day before the summit starts, I can say 100%."

Countries that had been skeptical — Stefanishyna cited the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark — about starting accession talks with Ukraine while it is fighting Russia's invasion are now supportive, she said.

The EU's executive arm threw its weight behind Ukraine's candidacy last week.

Stefanishyna described that decision as "a game-changer"

and said unanimous support from the European Commission had cut ground from under "the legs of those most hesitating — not even skeptic — but hesitating countries."

"Most of the EU leaders have explained that there is a consensus already, so there's no like, no discussion about the consensus on Ukraine," she told The AP.

Jan. 6 takeaways: Trump's playbook, threats

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House select committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol insurrection is turning to former President Donald Trump's pressure campaign on state and local officials to overturn his 2020 election loss.

In its fourth hearing this month, the panel examined how Trump focused on a few swing states, directly urging officials to decertify President Joe Biden's victory or find additional votes for himself. It was part of a larger scheme that also involved dozens of lawsuits, pressure on Department of Justice officials and, eventually, lobbying Vice President Mike Pence to reject Biden's win at the congressional electoral count on Jan. 6.

"Pressuring public servants into betraying their oaths was a fundamental part of the playbook," the committee's chairman, Mississippi Rep. Bennie

Thompson, said of Trump and his allies. "And a handful of election officials in several key states stood between Donald Trump and the upending of American democracy."

'They did their jobs'

The panel is keeping to a tight narrative as it makes its case to the American public that Trump's efforts to overturn his defeat directly led to the violence at the Capitol on Jan. 6, when hundreds of his supporters broke into the Capitol and interrupted the certification of Biden's victory.

The witnesses at Tuesday's hearing were all public officials who were directly lobbied by Trump or who received threats for doing their jobs after Trump persuaded millions of his followers — with no evidence — that he had actually won, not lost, the election.

Arizona's Republican state House Speaker Rusty Bowers,

who testified in person, spoke about phone calls from Trump and his allies asking him to decertify Arizona's legitimate electors and replace them. Bowers said he repeatedly asked Trump's attorneys to show evidence of widespread fraud, but they never provided any.

"You are asking me to do something against my oath, and I will not break my oath," Bowers said he told them. He recalled John Eastman, a chief architect of Trump's plan to create slates of fake electors, telling him to "just do it and let the courts sort it out."

Threats to officials

The hearing also examined how Trump's threats put state officials in danger.

Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson talked about how her "stomach sunk" when she heard the sounds of protesters outside her home one

night after the election when she was putting her child to bed. She wondered if they had guns or were going to attack her house. "That was the scariest moment," not knowing what's going to happen, Benson said.

Another Michigan official, Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey, told the committee about receiving 4,000 text messages after Trump published his phone number online. Cutler, the Pennsylvania House speaker, said his information was also revealed online, prompting protesters to show up at his house when his 15-year-old son was home alone.

Arizona's Bowers told stories of people outside his house on loudspeakers and one man with a gun who verbally threatened his neighbor. He teared up as he spoke of his daughter, who he said was "gravely ill," and his wife becoming upset as people swarmed outside.

Senators reach deal on gun violence bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate bargainers reached agreement Tuesday on a bipartisan gun violence bill, potentially teeing up final passage by week's end on an incremental but landmark package that would stand as Congress' response to mass shootings in Texas and New York that shook the nation.

Lawmakers released the 80-page bill nine days after agreeing to a framework for the plan and 29 years after Congress last enacted major firearms curbs. It cleared an initial procedural hurdle by 64-34, with 14 Republicans joining all 48 Democrats and two allied independents in voting yes.

That strongly supported a

prediction by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., of approval later this week. Passage by the Democratic-led House could follow quickly.

Even though Republicans blocked tougher restrictions sought by Democrats, the accord marks an election-year breakthrough on an issue that pits the GOP's staunch gun-owning and rural voters against Democrats' urban-centered backers of firearms curbs. That makes it one of the most incendiary culture war battlefields in politics and a sensitive vote for some lawmakers, particularly Republicans who might alienate Second Amendment stalwarts.

At least 1K dead, 1.5K hurt in Afghanistan earthquake

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — A powerful earthquake struck a rural, mountainous region of eastern Afghanistan early Wednesday, killing at least 1,000 people and injuring 1,500 more, according to a state-run news agency. Officials warned the already grim toll would likely rise.

Information remained scarce on the magnitude 6.1 temblor near the Pakistani border, but quakes of that strength can cause severe damage in an area where homes and other buildings are poorly constructed and landslides are common. Experts put the depth at just 6 miles — another factor that could increase the impact.

The disaster posed a major

test for the Taliban-led government, which seized power last year as the United States planned to pull out from the country and end its longest war, two decades after toppling the same insurgents in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.

Rescuers rushed to the area by helicopter Wednesday, but the response is likely to be complicated since many international aid agencies left Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover.

Neighboring Pakistan's Meteorological Department said the quake's epicenter was in Afghanistan's Paktika province, some 31 miles southwest of the city of Khost. Buildings were also damaged in Khost province, and tremors were felt as far away as Islamabad.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

High-capacity ammo magazines ban to begin

WA EVERETT — Starting July 1, the sale of ammunition magazines with more than 10 rounds will be banned in Washington state. Importing, manufacturing and distributing them will also be outlawed.

The only magazines allowed for sale and importing will be those with a maximum capacity of 10 cartridges under a measure pushed through by Democrats and signed by Gov. Jay Inslee earlier this year, the Everett Herald reported.

Washington residents can continue buying larger magazines until the law takes effect. Any owned as of July 1 are unaffected by the law.

The Second Amendment Foundation and other gun rights organizations filed a federal lawsuit this month, claiming that the new law violates constitutional protections under the Second and Fourteenth amendments. They've sought to block the law with an injunction but no hearing had been set as of Friday.

Child stabbed in chest by barb from catfish

FL NEW PORT RICHEY — A child was stabbed in the chest by a barb from a catfish during a fishing trip, sheriff's officials in Florida said.

The child's mother began driving toward a hospital but stopped in New Port Richey and called 911 when the child started having difficulty breathing, Pasco County Fire Rescue officials said on Twitter.

Firefighters discovered the barb was embedded 1 to 1½ inches

in the child's chest, according to the agency's spokesman, Corey Dierdorff. The child was then airlifted to St. Joseph's Hospital in Tampa.

Dierdorff told news outlets he did not know how or where the child was stung, or what kind of catfish it was.

Catfish have spines and stingers on their fins and the underside of their bodies. Because of this, anglers are cautious around catfish, but Dierdorff said he had never heard of anything like this incident.

Firework display causes small fire at stadium

GA ATLANTA — A firework from a nearby display hit a gutter at Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz stadium and caused a small fire, city fire officials said.

A fire inspector on standby at the stadium during the fireworks show noticed some smoke and flames coming from the stadium's roofline and contacted dispatch, according to a news release from the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department.

Fire trucks arrived within minutes and saw a small amount of smoke and fire along the roof on the north side of the stadium. Firefighters used an aerial ladder and extinguished all visible flames with a single water extinguisher, the release said.

Contest decides state's official birthday cake

WV CHARLESTON — West Virginia now has an official birthday cake.

The state's first lady, Cathy Justice, recently announced the winner of her West Virginia Birthday Cake Contest. It came during the celebration of the

state's 159th birthday.

Kim Wymer of Scott Depot was named the grand prize winner, according to a news release. Her recipe — "Ms. Van's Blackberry Skillet Cake" — becomes the official birthday cake of West Virginia.

It will be served annually on June 20 to commemorate the anniversary of West Virginia's statehood.

In addition to her recipe becoming the official birthday cake, Wymer also won a \$500 gift card, a custom cake platter and was awarded a certificate as the contest's grand prize winner.

Starving pelicans released after rehab

CA NEWPORT BEACH — A dozen of the hundreds of brown pelicans found starving on the Southern California coast were released recently after rehabilitation at a wildlife center.

The pelicans were returned to the wild at Corona del Mar State Beach after treatment at the Wetlands and Wildlife Care Center in Huntington Beach. They were among about 70 that have been brought to the center since mid-May, said Dr. Elizabeth Wood, the facility's veterinarian.

"They were all brought in in a state of emaciation," Wood said. "They were basically starving."

"We don't have a clear answer as to what caused this," she said.

Teen charged with arson in barn fire

MD PYLESVILLE — A 15-year-old boy was charged with arson after a large barn fire that caused hundreds of thousands of dollars in

damage, Maryland fire officials said.

Firefighters were dispatched to Onion Road in Pylesville for reports of a 50-foot by 100-foot barn ablaze, the Office of the State Fire Marshal said in a news release. The barn and its contents are considered a complete loss with damages estimated to be over \$750,000, officials said.

Investigators determined the fire was set intentionally and charged the teen with second-degree arson, first-degree malicious burning, and malicious destruction of property.

The teen was released to the custody of his parents and referred to the Department of Juvenile Services.

81 sea turtle nests on shore is up from 2021

NC MANTEO — There are more sea turtle nests on a portion of North Carolina's Outer Banks this season than at the same time last year, officials said.

An update from Cape Hatteras National Seashore said there have been 81 nests laid this season, including a Leatherback nest, which officials said was the first since 2012. There were 70 nests at the same time last year, according to the update.

Healthy sea turtle populations are important indicators of healthy ocean habitats, the National Park Service said. They help to maintain balance in oceanic food webs by keeping the populations of their prey, such as jellyfish and mollusks in check as well as enhancing rates of nutrient cycling.

All sea turtle species are protected under the Endangered Species Act.

— From wire reports

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Three hoping to be top pick in NBA Draft

Associated Press

Forwards are expected to dominate Thursday's NBA Draft, starting with the trio of Gonzaga's Chet Holmgren, Auburn's Jabari Smith and Duke's Paolo Banchero. They are the headliners at the position and have been widely ranked as the top prospects overall with their size and open-floor potential.

Those three are also the clear frontrunners for the No. 1 pick. Smith has already worked out for the Orlando Magic, the team with the No. 1 pick. He also worked out with Oklahoma City, the team that holds the No. 2 pick in Thursday's draft.

Smith said he enjoyed the workout with the Thunder, but made no secret of his wish to be the No. 1 pick.

"It would mean a lot to me," Smith told reporters. "A lot of great players have went No. 1. It would mean the world to me."

Holmgren, Smith and Banchero have similarities. All are forwards, all at least 6-foot-10 (Holmgren is a 7-footer), and all played one year of college ball. Holmgren and Smith were second-team AP All-Americans this past season, Banchero a third-team selection.

Here's a look at the draft's top forwards and who may be the first three selections:

Holmgren

The nation's No. 1 recruit lived up to expectations for the Zags as a second-team AP All-American.

Strengths: The 7-foot, 195-pound Holmgren has an unusual mix of fluid perimeter skills with a roughly 7-5 wingspan. He averaged 14.1 points, 9.9 rebounds and 1.9 assists while shooting

60.7% alongside a returning AP All-American in Drew Timme.

He made 39% of his three-point tries and had 14 games with at least two made threes, showing the kind of consistency sure to pull less-mobile bigs from the basket. And he has the ball-handling skills to take advantage — just look at his length-of-court, behind-the-back drive for a dunk against UCLA for proof — for unique shot-creating potential in such a long frame.

"I definitely see a lot of things in the NBA style of game that I feel like I can thrive in," Holmgren said Monday, "with the spacing, with the speed ... you're getting up and down for 48 minutes. So I definitely think I have a lot of tools that are suited for that."

At the other end, Holmgren proved an elite rim protector, ranking fourth in Division I with 3.7 blocks per game.

Concerns: He needs to get stronger. He struggled at times with physical play and could use the added bulk for finishing through contact, too.

Smith

The 6-10, 220-pound freshman was a second-team AP All-American who helped the Tigers claim their first-ever No. 1 ranking.

Strengths: The 19-year-old Smith is a rangy forward with potential to impact both ends of the floor. He averaged 16.9 points, 7.4 rebounds and 2.0 assists with ability to play in the post or step outside, where he shot 42% from three-point range with a good-quality jumper. He also made 79.9% of his free throws to convert when drawing fouls. He also averaged 1.0 blocks and 1.1 steals with the versatility to chase multiple positions, making him ESPN's No. 2 overall prospect.

"I just see myself defending, affecting winning and just doing whatever a team needs me to do,"

Smith said. "Spacing the floor, knocking down shots, running the floor, and just showing all assets to my game."

Concerns: Smith shot just 42% overall with heavy reliance on his jump shot, so he could use a bit more development with creating off the drive and improving his ball handling (1.9 turnovers per game) for easier looks.

Banchero

The 6-10, 250-pound freshman was the Blue Devils' focal point in a Final Four run under now-retired Hall of Fame coach Mike Krzyzewski.

Strengths: The 19-year-old Banchero averaged 17.2 points and 7.8 rebounds with the strength to tussle inside and mobility to roam the perimeter. Ranked as ESPN's No. 3 draft prospect, the AP third-team All-American was comfortable snatching down a rebound and leading the break. And his skillset proved particularly effective in being able to overpower smaller defenders, move around less-mobile bigs and score in the midrange with polish.

Banchero said Friday he feels he is "the best player in the draft, I feel like I showed that throughout the year." Duke associate head coach Chris Carrawell said he thinks Banchero should go No. 1 overall, too.

"For a non-guard at his size, he can create shots from the inside and out," Carrawell said. "That's rare."

Concerns: Banchero shot just 33.8% on three-pointers, though he was better in the NCAA Tournament. He also had stretches when he could assert himself and impose his will even more, including going the final 7½ minutes of the Final Four loss to rival North Carolina with no baskets and only two shot attempts. Banchero also needs to improve defensive consistency.

McEntire, Hogs eliminate Tigers at College World Series

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Will McEntire limited Auburn to three hits and a run in seven innings, Peyton Stovall became the first player in 13 years with five hits in a College World Series game, and Arkansas eliminated the Tigers with an 11-1 victory Tuesday night.

The Razorbacks (45-20) moved to the Bracket 2 final against Mississippi. They would have to beat the Rebels on Wednesday night and again Thursday to go to the best-of-

three CWS finals this weekend.

Auburn (43-22) finished with 18 more wins than a year ago and made it to Omaha after being picked last in the Southeastern Conference West.

McEntire gave the Hogs the top-quality start they needed after they used seven pitchers in a 13-5 loss to Ole Miss on Monday.

McEntire (2-2) retired the first 11 batters he faced before Sonny DiChiara singled to center with two outs in the fourth. The 6-foot-4, 225-pound right-hander

struck out a career-high nine, walked one and didn't give up a run until Bobby Peirce homered leading off the seventh.

Auburn starter Mason Barnett (3-3) allowed four runs and five hits in 2½ innings.

Texas A&M 5, Notre Dame 1: At Omaha, Neb., Nathan Dettmer pitched three-hit ball for seven shutout innings, and the Aggies capitalized on the Fighting Irish's mistakes to beat an elimination game.

No. 5 national seed Texas A&M

(44-19) played Oklahoma in the Bracket 1 final. The Aggies need to beat the Sooners on Wednesday and again Thursday to reach the CWS finals this weekend. Notre Dame (41-17) ended the season with its most wins since 2006 and first Omaha appearance since 2002.

Dettmer (6-3) was working on three days' rest after giving up seven runs and getting pulled in the second inning of Texas A&M's 13-8 loss to Oklahoma on Friday.

Maple Leafs' Matthews wins Hart Trophy

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Toronto's Auston Matthews won the Hart Trophy as the NHL's most valuable player on Tuesday night, becoming only the third Maple Leaf to win the award and the first since Ted Kennedy in 1954-55.

The 24-year-old forward received 119 first-place votes in voting by the Professional Hockey Writers Association and finished well ahead of Edmonton's Connor McDavid and Igor Shesterkin of the New York Rangers for the honor presented during the NHL Awards Show.

"I can't lie, it feels really good. ... It's pretty special," Matthews said, though he conceded there were some bitter-sweet feelings about accepting the award in Tampa, where the

two-time defending champion Lightning and Colorado Avalanche will meet in Game 4 of the Stanley Cup Final on Wednesday.

"There is some angst, wishing you were still playing," Matthews said.

Shesterkin claimed the Vezina Trophy as the league's top goaltender. Colorado's Cale Makar took the Norris Trophy, presented to the league's best defenseman, and Detroit's Moritz Seider claimed the Calder Trophy as the top rookie.

Matthews became the first player to score 60 goals since Tampa Bay's Steven Stamkos did it 10 years ago, helping the Maple Leafs (54-21-7, 115 points) set franchise records for wins and points. Toronto lost to the two-time defending Stanley Cup champion Lightning in the

first round of the playoffs.

The Maple Leafs star, who posted career bests with 46 assists and 106 points, also took home the Ted Lindsay Award as most outstanding player in the regular season, an honor determined by voting by members of the NHL Players Association.

Shesterkin became the third Rangers goalie in the past 40 years to win the Vezina, joining Henrik Lundqvist (2011-12) and John Vanbiesbrouck (1985-86). He went 36-13-4 with an NHL-best 2.07 goal-against-average and .935 save percentage before leading a playoff run that ended against Tampa Bay in the Eastern Conference finals.

Seider is the first Red Wings player to win the Calder Trophy since goalie Roger Crozier during the 1964-65 season. He led all first-year defensemen with

50 points and finished ahead of Toronto's Michael Bunting and Anaheim's Trevor Zegras in balloting for the award.

Makar is the fifth defenseman to win Norris within his first three regular seasons, joining Adam Fox, Erik Karlsson, Denis Potvin and Bobby Orr (twice). He led all defensemen with 28 goals while helping the Avalanche finish with a Western Conference-best 119 points (56-19-7).

The 2019-20 Calder Trophy winner beat out Tampa Bay's Victor Hedman and Nashville's Roman Josi.

"They are such incredible players," Maker said of the other Norris finalists. "They pushed me hard all season."

Calgary's Jacob Markstrom and Nashville's Juuse Saros were finalists for the Vezina.

Nichushkin dominating for Avs in Stanley Cup Final

Associated Press

Valeri Nichushkin stood in front of a poster of Alex Ovechkin hoisting the Stanley Cup on the eve of his first trip to the Final and remembered what it was like to witness that moment.

"That was fun to watch when Ovi win it, especially when he celebrated," he said. "I think that was one of the best things."

One thing better for Nichushkin would be hoisting hockey's holy grail himself.

"I hope so," he said. "We'll see."

Nichushkin and the Colorado Avalanche are two wins away from doing just that, and the big Russian winger is a big reason why they took a 2-1 lead over the back-to-back defending Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay Lightning into Game 4 on Wednesday. He was tied for the team lead in goals with three, set up Andre Burakovsky for his overtime winner in the series opener and scored in Game 3 before it was called back for an oh-so-close offside.

He has consistently been the best player on the ice in the Final, hounding the puck, forcing turnovers and creating offense.

"He's built for this time of year," coach Jared Bednar said. "Big, long, strong, fast, tenacious, hungry, relentless on the puck, finishing off the chances he gets. He can

play with top guys. You can move him up and down the lineup, plays power play, penalty kill. I mean, I don't know what else to say about the guy."

Nichushkin, who hasn't spoken to reporters since the series began, has been a pest on defense, as usual, but has added some offense that was missing for much of his playoff career in the NHL.

Over his first 28 postseason games with the Dallas Stars and Avalanche, Nichushkin had just one goal and two assists. That included a 25-game goal drought.

This postseason, he is among Colorado's goal-scoring leaders with eight, trailing just Nathan MacKinnon and Gabriel Landeskog. Nichushkin has received Selke Trophy votes for the league's top defensive forward each of the past three seasons, but this offensive evolution is a development even his coach didn't see coming.

"I'm a little bit surprised at where he's gotten to with his game," Bednar said before describing why he perhaps shouldn't be so surprised. "I'll be cutting video after a game, trying to get some work done to lighten the load for the next morning and I'll be the last one there, the trainers are leaving and I'll be walking out of the room and I'll see Val walk out of the room. He's

just getting done lifting. That's just the type of guy he is."

That strength has been obvious on the ice early in the Final, outmuscling Lightning players to get to good scoring areas and winning board battles to get the puck back.

Defenseman Josh Manson remembers playing against Nichushkin while with Anaheim and just how much of a struggle he was to deal with.

"It feels like he's way more consistent with it now," Manson said. "He fits in the structure so well. He forechecks so hard. He's such a big, strong guy. He's lanky and he just constantly puts you under pressure and he's strong enough to turn the puck over."

So strong teammate J.T. Compher referred to Nichushkin as "a horse." Physically, yes, but he has also shown smarts, like shaking free of a defender to be in place for his power-play goal that jump-started a 7-0 rout in Game 2.

In a lot of ways, Nichushkin fit the bill for what Colorado was looking for to augment the flashy skill of MacKinnon, Landeskog, Mikko Rantanen and Cale Makar. His offense is almost a bonus after all he has done for the Avalanche in three seasons.

Rays' Paredes hits 3 HRs to top Yanks

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Isaac Paredes homered in his first three at-bats and the Tampa Bay Rays beat the Yankees 5-4 on Tuesday night, handing New York only its third loss in 20 games.

Paredes combined with Harold Ramirez for back-to-back homers in the first off Nestor Cortes, then put the Rays ahead 3-2 in the third and added a two-run drive in the fifth on the first pitch after Clarke Schmidt relieved.

It was just the second multihomer game for Paredes, who hit two against Detroit on May 18. He was hit by a pitch from Ron Marinaccio in the seventh.

"The adrenaline was definitely saying that I should hit another homer," Paredes said through a translator.

Tampa Bay had lost eight of its previous 10 games.

The Rays acquired the 23-year-old from Detroit on April 4 for outfielder Austin Meadows. Paredes is hitting .209 with eight homers and 16 RBIs, and 10 of his last 13 hits have been for extra bases.

This was the seventh time a Tampa Bay player hit three homers after Jonny Gomes, B.J. Upton, Evan Longoria (twice), Travis d'Arnaud and Brandon Lowe — the latter two against the Yankees.

"That's what made it very special," Paredes said. "It's always a tough series against the Yankees and so it's very important to win against them. With the series that we've been having up to this, I'm just glad we were able to get a victory out of this."

Royals 12, Angels 11 (11): Shohei Ohtani hit two three-run homers and drove in a career-high eight runs, but Whit Merrifield led off the 11th inning with an RBI double and visiting Kansas City hung on to beat Los Angeles.

Ohtani crushed a 423-foot homer in the sixth and a game-tying, 438-foot shot in the ninth, giving him the biggest RBI game of his five-year stateside career. The AL MVP then set the single-game major league record for RBIs by a Japanese-born player with a sacrifice fly in the 11th inning.

But Ohtani's eighth RBIs weren't enough after Merrifield and Kyle Isbel drove in runs off Jose Quijada (0-2) earlier in the 11th.

Daniel Mengden struck out Mike Trout with two Angels on base before Ohtani's flyout, and he retired Jared Walsh on a game-ending popup as Kansas City held on for its fifth victory in six games despite

blowing a five-run lead in the sixth and a three-run lead in the ninth.

Carlos Santana had four hits and drove in a season-high five runs for the Royals, while rookie Bobby Witt Jr. had his first multi-homer game while driving in a career-high four runs.

Guardians 6, Twins 5 (11): Andrés Giménez had an RBI single in the 11th inning and visiting Cleveland moved into the AL Central lead, percentage points ahead of Minnesota.

With Oscar Gonzalez on second, Giménez singled to center field with one out and the Guardians improved to 10-2 in their last 12 games and 16-4 since May 30.

Trevor Stephan (3-2) struck out Carlos Correa, Max Kepler and Gary Sanchez, Minnesota's 3-4-5 hitters, with two on and nobody out in the 10th.

Astros 8, Mets 2: Yordan Alvarez hit a two-run homer and Kyle Tucker had three RBIs as host Houston beat New York in an interleague matchup between two of the top teams in the majors.

Jose Altuve and José Siri added solo home runs for Houston in the first meeting between the teams since the Astros swept a three-game series in September 2017.

Giants 12, Braves 10: Mike Yastrzemski broke out of a slump with a go-ahead two-run double in the sixth inning, Joc Pederson and Austin Wynns homered and visiting San Francisco beat Atlanta.

Yastrzemski drove a pitch from Collin McHugh to right that put the Giants up for good at 8-7. San Francisco has won eight of 11 and 14 of 22.

Cardinals 6, Brewers 2: Nolan Gorman went 4-for-4 with two solo homers and four RBIs as visiting St. Louis moved into a share of the NL Central lead with Milwaukee.

Gorman broke a 2-all tie with a homer to center off Chi Chi González (0-1) in the fourth inning. He extended the lead to 4-2 with a drive over the right-field wall against Miguel Sánchez in the seventh.

Rangers 7, Phillies 0: Nathaniel Lowe and Jonah Heim hit consecutive homers off former teammate Kyle Gibson, Martín Pérez went six innings in his fifth scoreless start this season and host Texas beat Philadelphia.

Dodgers 8, Reds 2: Tony Gonsolin became the first pitcher in the majors to win nine games, Freddie Freeman drove in five runs and visiting Los Angeles beat Cincinnati.

Gonsolin (9-0) gave up two runs on solo

homers by Jonathan India and Albert Almora Jr., but only allowed one other hit through five innings and 87 pitches. The 28-year-old righty has a 1.58 ERA.

White Sox 7, Blue Jays 6 (12): Josh Harrison hit a game-ending single with two outs in the 12th inning and host Chicago topped Toronto.

Luis Robert matched a career high with four RBIs and made a sliding grab in center field in the top of the 12th, helping the White Sox win for the sixth time in eight games. The reigning AL Central champions returned to .500 for the first time since May 29.

Mariners 8, Athletics 2: Julio Rodríguez, Jesse Winker and Eugenio Suárez hit consecutive homers in the seventh inning and visiting Seattle beat Oakland.

Red Sox 5, Tigers 4: Trevor Story hit a three-run homer out of Fenway Park, Christian Vázquez added a solo shot and Boston beat Detroit.

Boston went ahead 4-3 in the fourth when Story put a hanging a slider from rookie Beau Brieske (1-6) on Lansdowne Street for his 11th homer this season.

Pirates 7, Cubs 1: Bligh Madris hit his first major league home run and fellow rookie Roansy Contreras pitched five solid innings to lead host Pittsburgh past Chicago.

Madris hit a solo shot to right-center field off Mark Leiter Jr. in the sixth inning to close the scoring.

Marlins 9, Rockies 8: Garrett Cooper lined a tiebreaking double in the eighth inning, and host Miami overcame a four-run deficit to beat Colorado.

Colorado led 4-0 before Miami scored five times in the fourth and three in the fifth to take an 8-5 lead. The Rockies tied the score 8-8 in the sixth after Cooper allowed Brendan Rodgers' two-out grounder to get by him and into right field for an error that led that led to three unearned runs.

Nationals 3, Orioles 0: Erick Fedde allowed two hits in six innings, and visiting Washington beat Baltimore for its second straight victory following an eight-game skid.

César Hernández doubled on the game's first pitch and scored on a double by Nelson Cruz to put Washington in front.

Padres 3, Diamondbacks 2 (11): Jorge Alfaro singled home the winning run with one out in the 11th inning to give host San Diego a victory over Arizona.

Eric Hosmer hit a game-tying homer in the sixth for the Padres.