

US pledges \$800M in arms to Ukraine

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

President Joe Biden said Thursday that the U.S. soon will send Ukraine a further \$800 million in weaponry, including advanced rocket systems, as part of the long-term American commitment to the country.

“As long as it takes, so Russia cannot in fact defeat Ukraine and move beyond Ukraine,” Biden told reporters at the conclusion of NATO’s summit in Madrid.

Biden said U.S. support must endure even as the U.S. faces its own struggles in the form of soaring inflation and exorbitant gas prices, which have been made worse by the Russia-Ukraine war.

During the summit, the U.S. and other allies took significant steps toward transforming the 30-nation military pact. Among them, members agreed to invite Sweden and Finland to join the alliance.

A new strategic concept that named Russia a top threat and China a challenger to Western security also was finalized.

Biden announced that the U.S. military will expand missions in Europe in a variety of ways, including the establishment of a

permanent garrison for the Army in Poland.

All of the changes stem from the U.S. and NATO’s reaction to the war in Ukraine. Biden said the end result thus far of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s war is an alliance more unified than ever.

“Before the war started, I told Putin that if he invaded Ukraine that NATO would not only get stronger, we would get more united,” Biden said. “And that is exactly what we see today.”

The summit was a showcase for how dramatically the tone among allies has shifted since the end of the previous U.S. administration, during which NATO gatherings were marked by President Donald Trump’s hectoring of members to pony up more money for defense.

Most allies still fall far short of the NATO benchmark of 2% of national GDP to be spent on defense by 2024. Only nine of NATO’s 30 members will hit that figure in 2022, according to NATO.

But Biden heaped praise on members for moving in the right direction, especially Germany, which he singled out for its recent pledge to hit the 2% mark in the near

future.

“Allies across the board are stepping up, increasing defense spending,” he said.

While pressure during the Trump era was arguably one of the factors that has led to increased defense expenditures in recent years, reaction to Russia’s attack on Ukraine also has forced allies to rethink their approaches. Germany in particular has called Russia’s war a watershed moment.

In Ukraine, Biden said Russia has fallen short on its initial objective to take the whole of the country. For example, Ukraine’s resistance forced Moscow to retreat from Kyiv and concentrate its efforts in the east.

“Ukraine has already dealt a severe blow to Russia,” Biden said.

When asked how long Americans should be willing to pay more, Biden said he is looking for ways to bring costs down, such as marshaling support for a cap on how much countries can pay for Russian energy supplies. But the effectiveness of such measures is unknown.

In the meantime, “the United States is rallying the world to stand with Ukraine,” Biden said.

Russians leave key island but keep up eastern assault

Associated Press

SLOVIANSK, Ukraine — Russian forces withdrew from a strategic Black Sea island Thursday, potentially easing the threat to the vital Ukrainian port city of Odesa, but kept up their push to encircle the last stronghold of resistance in the eastern province of Luhansk.

The Kremlin portrayed the pullout from Snake Island as a “goodwill gesture.” Ukraine’s military said the Russians fled in two small speedboats following a barrage of Ukrainian artillery and missile strikes. The exact number of troops was not disclosed.

Russian Defense Ministry

spokesman Lt. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said the withdrawal was intended to demonstrate that Moscow isn’t hampering U.N. efforts to establish a humanitarian corridor for exporting agricultural products from Ukraine.

Ukraine and the West have accused Russia of blockading Ukrainian ports to prevent exports of grain, contributing to a global food crisis. Russia has denied the accusations and said that Ukraine needs to remove mines from the Black Sea to allow safe navigation.

Turkey has sought to broker a deal to unblock grain exports. But the talks have dragged on,

with Kyiv expressing fear that Russia will exploit the removal of the mines to attack Odesa.

Snake Island sits along a busy shipping lane. Russia took control of it in the opening days of the war in the apparent hope of using it as a staging ground for an assault on Odesa.

It was unclear if the evacuation meant a change in Moscow’s designs on Odesa. Odesa is Ukraine’s biggest port, crucial for shipping grain to Africa, the Middle East and other parts of the world, and is also the headquarters of the country’s navy.

The island early on took on legendary significance for Uk-

raine’s resistance to the Russian invasion, when Ukrainian troops there reportedly received a demand from a Russian warship to surrender or be bombed. The answer supposedly came back, “Go (expletive) yourself.”

Ukraine has celebrated the story with patriotic fervor, issuing a postage stamp in commemoration.

The island’s Ukrainian defenders were captured by the Russians but later freed as part of a prisoner exchange. After the island was taken, the Ukrainian military heavily bombarded the small Russian garrison there and its air defenses.

4 ex-officers guilty in 'Fat Leonard' trial

The San Diego Union-Tribune

A federal jury in San Diego convicted four of five former U.S. naval officers of conspiracy, bribery and fraud on Wednesday, capping a four-month long trial and a decade-long investigation of the worst corruption scandal in the history of the Navy.

After deliberating over parts of three weeks, jurors convicted former Capt. David Newland, James Dolan and David Lausman and former Cmdr. Mario Herrera of conspiracy to commit bribery, receiving bribes and conspiracy to commit honest services wire fraud due to their entanglements with Singapore-based military contractor Leonard Glenn Francis.

Lausman was also convicted of obstruction of justice for destroying a computer hard drive with documents and emails from his time as the commanding officer of the aircraft carrier USS George Washington.

The jury deadlocked and reached no verdict on charges against a fifth defendant, former Rear Adm. Bruce Lovelless.

The verdict ended a lengthy

trial — the only one in the sprawling prosecution — that began with opening statements on March 2. The evidence jurors were shown featured reams of documents including emails and invoices, testimony from federal agents and testimony from other Navy officials caught in the scandal who had pleaded guilty and agreed to give evidence against others in exchange for a potentially lighter sentence.

Prosecutors laid out what is now, after nearly a decade of "Fat Leonard" indictments and more than two dozen guilty pleas, a familiar litany: Francis — nicknamed for his girth — showered gifts of fancy meals, prostitutes, high-end hotel rooms and other perks on Navy officers from 2006 through 2014.

In return, they effectively did his bidding, such as providing ship schedules for the Navy's 7th Fleet and trying to steer Navy ships to ports around Southeast Asia that Francis and his company, Glenn Defense Marine Asia, controlled. Once there, he gouged the Navy on services, including fuel, sup-

plies, sewage disposal, security, shore transportation and more.

Francis admitted to defrauding at least \$35 million from the U.S. Navy.

Defense lawyers put on only a handful of witnesses, attacking the government case via cross-examinations. In closing arguments that stretched over several days, they assailed the government's reliance on cooperating witnesses angling for shorter sentences. They said the emails presented by prosecutors were presented out of context and insinuated wrongdoing by simply connecting the former officers to Francis or his company.

The trial included an extraordinary, three-day-long hearing mid-trial to get to the bottom of allegations that federal prosecutors had illegally withheld information from defense lawyers. It was one of several motions that defense attorneys filed during the course of the trial contending prosecutors had committed misconduct and a mistrial should be declared.

But U.S. District Court Judge Janis Sammartino has not issued any formal rulings on the

motions filed by lawyers — unusual in any trial, but especially so in such a high-profile case. The most recent was filed even while the jury deliberated, arguing that the government had not disclosed that a key case agent had made inaccurate statements in a sworn arrest warrant affidavit in a strikingly similar case a year ago.

That motion and the others are still pending, frustrating defense lawyers. "Our view is this case should never have gone to the jury," Joseph Mancano, the lawyer for Newland, said during a hearing June 22 outside the presence of the jury. He also criticized how federal prosecutors have handled the case.

"The layers of prosecutorial misconduct in this case are mind-boggling," he told the judge.

But in response, government lawyers said nothing the defense raised in the motions was enough to halt the case.

"None of the issues — individually or collectively — arise to 'flagrant misbehavior' or have caused 'substantial prejudice' to the defendants," prosecutors wrote.

Navy ends program of early separation for enlisted sailors

By ALISON BATH

Stars and Stripes

The Navy is canceling all early-separation programs for active-duty enlisted sailors and encouraging those with approved separation or retirement plans to stay, as retention efforts take on growing importance for the service.

The policy change, announced in a June 22 administrative order posted Tuesday, comes amid recent attempts to balance the fleet by offering early separation to sailors in certain ratings or career fields considered overmanned, such as boatswain's mate or culinary specialist.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael

Gilday told Congress in May that future recruitment will be difficult — especially efforts to sign up people with cyber expertise, USNI News reported May 16.

Gilday's comments follow a series of retention initiatives by the Navy this year, including reenlistment bonuses in certain ratings and career fields and an initial enlistment bonus of up to \$50,000 for new sailors.

The service's 2023 budget forecasts an estimated active-duty end strength of 346,300, a drop of 620 officers and enlisted sailors compared with the 2022 level, according to Navy budget documents.

Similarly, the service estimated that it would have 900 fewer reservists in 2023, for

an end strength of 57,700, the documents show.

In Tuesday's announcement, the Navy said cancellation of the programs will not affect sailors whose early separation was already approved. It also said sailors with an approved separation or retirement can delay their departure from the service if they apply by Aug. 31.

Service members whose separation or retirement was due to age, misconduct or disability are not eligible for the postponement.

In addition, people who had started their retirement or separation orders, such as shipping of their household goods, are ineligible, the Navy said.

Key inflation gauge up 6.3% from a year ago

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A measure of inflation that is closely tracked by the Federal Reserve jumped 6.3% in May from a year earlier, unchanged from its level in April.

Thursday's report from the Commerce Department provided the latest evidence that painfully high inflation is pressuring American households and inflicting particular harm on low-income families and people of color.

The government's report also said that consumer spending rose at a sluggish 0.2% rate from April to May. Consumer spending is beginning to weaken in the face of high inflation. But it's still helping fuel inflation itself, especially as demand grows for services ranging from airline tickets and hotel

rooms to restaurant meals and new and used autos.

On a month-to-month basis, prices rose 0.6% from April to May, up from the 0.2% increase from March to April.

Chronically high inflation has become a leading threat to the economy and a political hazard for President Joe Biden and Democrats as midterm elections near. Seventy-nine percent of U.S. adults describe the economy as poor, according to a new survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Inflation is eclipsing the healthy 3.6% unemployment rate as a focal point for Americans who are struggling, in particular, with high gasoline and food prices.

In response, the Fed has embarked on a series of aggressive interest rate hikes that are intended to slow growth by making borrowing more expensive but that also risks causing a recession. Two weeks ago, the Fed raised its key rate by three-quarters of a point — its largest hike in nearly three decades — and signaled more large rate increases to come.

The Fed tends to monitor Thursday's inflation gauge, called the personal consumption expenditures price index, even more closely than it does the government's better-known consumer price index. While the components of the two indexes differ — CPI tends to weigh gasoline and housing costs more heav-

ily and to show higher inflation — the two gauges tell the same basic story: Inflation is running dangerously hot.

Thursday's report showed that consumer incomes rose 0.5% from April to May, staying slightly ahead of inflation. In addition, the savings rate rose slightly to 5.4% last month, though it remains well below its peak of nearly 34% in April 2020.

The Fed was slow to recognize the severity of the inflation threat, dismissing it as mainly a temporary consequence of supply chain bottlenecks. But spiking prices have proved intractable, and now the central bank is playing catch-up with sizable rate hikes that could end up derailing the economy.

Poll: Overwhelming majority believe US on wrong track

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An overwhelming and growing majority of Americans say the U.S. is heading in the wrong direction, including nearly 8 in 10 Democrats, according to a new poll that finds deep pessimism about the economy plaguing President Joe Biden.

Eighty-five percent of U.S. adults say the country is on the wrong track, and 79% describe the economy as poor, according to a new survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The findings suggest Biden faces challenges as he tries to motivate voters to cast ballots for Democrats in November's midterm elections.

Inflation has consistently eclipsed the healthy 3.6% unemployment rate as a focal point for Americans, who are dealing with high gasoline and food prices. Even among Democrats, 67% call economic conditions poor.

"He's doing the best he can — I can't say he's doing a good job," said Chuck McClain, 74. "But his opposition is so bad. I just don't feel the Democratic Congress is

doing enough."

The Las Vegas resident is a loyal Democrat who said he doesn't miss an election, but he said the price of gas and groceries, Russia's war in Ukraine and the country's deep political divides have led more Americans to feel as though Washington is unresponsive to their needs.

"My wife and I are very frustrated with where the country is headed, and we don't have a lot of hope for the political end of it to get any better," he said.

The poll shows only 39% of Americans approve of Biden's leadership overall, while 60% disapprove. His approval rating fell to its lowest point of his presidency last month and remains at that level. The Democratic president gets hit even harder on the economy, with 69% saying they disapprove of him on the issue. Among Democrats, 43% disapprove of Biden's handling of the economy.

Through the first half of 2021, about half of Americans said the country was headed in the right direction, a number that has steadily eroded in the past year.

R. Kelly sentenced to 30 years in federal sex trafficking case

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Disgraced R&B superstar R. Kelly was sentenced Wednesday to 30 years in prison for using his fame to sexually abuse young fans, including some who were just children, in a systematic scheme that went on for decades.

Through tears and anger, several of Kelly's accusers told a federal court in New York City, and the singer himself, that he had misled and preyed upon them.

"You made me do things that broke my spirit. I literally wished I would die because of how low you made me feel," said one unnamed survivor, directly addressing Kelly, who kept his hands folded and his eyes downcast.

Kelly, 55, didn't give a statement and showed no reaction on hearing his penalty, which also included a \$100,000 fine. He has denied wrongdoing, and he plans to appeal his conviction.

The Grammy-winning, multi-platinum-selling songwriter was found guilty last year of racketeering and sex trafficking at a trial that gave voice to accusers

who had previously wondered if their stories were being ignored because they were Black women.

Victims "are no longer the preyed-on individuals we once were," another one of his accusers said at the sentencing.

A third woman, sobbing as she addressed the court, also said Kelly's conviction renewed her faith in the legal system.

The woman said Kelly victimized her after she went to a concert when she was 17.

"I was afraid, naive and didn't know how to handle the situation," she said, so she didn't speak up at the time.

"Silence," she said, "is a very lonely place."

Kelly's lawyer, Jennifer Bonjean, said he was "devastated" by the sentence and saddened by what he had heard.

"He's a human being. He feels what other people are feeling. But that doesn't mean that he can accept responsibility in the way that the government would like him to and other people would like him to. Because he disagrees with the characterizations that have been made about him," she said.

Supreme Court curbs EPA's power

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a blow to the fight against climate change, the Supreme Court on Thursday limited how the nation's main anti-air pollution law can be used to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from power plants.

By a 6-3 vote, with conservatives in the majority, the court said that the Clean Air Act does not give the Environmental Protection Agency broad authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from power plants that contribute to global warming.

The court's ruling could complicate the administration's plans to combat climate change. Its proposal to regulate power plant emissions is expected by the end of the year.

President Joe Biden aims to cut the nation's greenhouse gas emissions in half by the end of the decade and to have an emissions-free power sector by 2035.

Power plants account for roughly 30% of

carbon dioxide output.

"Capping carbon dioxide emissions at a level that will force a nationwide transition away from the use of coal to generate electricity may be a sensible 'solution to the crisis of the day,'" Chief Justice John Roberts wrote in his opinion for the court.

But Roberts wrote that the Clean Air Act doesn't give EPA the authority to do so and that Congress must speak clearly on this subject.

"A decision of such magnitude and consequence rests with Congress itself, or an agency acting pursuant to a clear delegation from that representative body," he wrote.

In a dissent, Justice Elena Kagan wrote that the decision strips the EPA of the power Congress gave it to respond to "the most pressing environmental challenge of our time."

Kagan said the stakes in the case are high.

She said, "The Court appoints itself—instead of Congress or the expert agency—the decisionmaker on climate policy. I cannot think of many things more frightening."

The justices heard arguments in the case on the same day that a United Nations panel's report warned that the effects of climate change are about to get much worse, likely making the world sicker, hungrier, poorer and more dangerous in the coming years.

The power plant case has a long and complicated history that begins with the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan. That plan would have required states to reduce emissions from the generation of electricity, mainly by shifting away from coal-fired plants.

But that plan never took effect.

Acting in a lawsuit filed by West Virginia and others, the Supreme Court blocked it in 2016 by a 5-4 vote, with conservatives in the majority.

Jackson sworn in as first Black woman on high court

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Ketanji Brown Jackson was sworn in to the Supreme Court on Thursday, shattering a glass ceiling as the first Black woman on the nation's highest court.

The 51-year-old Jackson is the court's 116th justice, and she took the place of the justice she once worked for. Justice Stephen Breyer's retirement took effect at noon.

Moments later, joined by her family,

Jackson recited the two oaths required of Supreme Court justices, one administered by Breyer and the other by Chief Justice John Roberts.

"With a full heart, I accept the solemn responsibility of supporting and defending the Constitution of the United States and administering justice without fear or favor, so help me God," Jackson said in a statement issued by the court. "I am truly grateful to be part of the promise of our great Nation. I extend my sincerest thanks

to all of my new colleagues for their warm and gracious welcome."

Roberts welcomed Jackson "to the court and our common calling." The ceremony was streamed live on the court's website.

Jackson, a federal judge since 2013, is joining three other women, Justices Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Amy Coney Barrett — the first time four women will serve together on the nine-member court.

Biden nominated Jackson in February.

Ariz., La. among states grappling over abortion bans

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Arizona's attorney general says a total abortion ban that has been on the books since before statehood can be enforced and Louisiana's attorney general is warning doctors against performing abortions even while a ban there is temporarily blocked, as states grapple with long-halted laws in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

And in Kentucky, a judge cleared the way Thursday for abortions to resume in that state temporarily blocking the state's near-total ban on the procedure. The high court decision

has set off legal battles in multiple states where lawmakers have sought to ban or restrict abortion.

In Arizona, Republican Gov. Doug Ducey has said a law he signed in March banning abortions after 15 weeks took precedence over a total ban in place since at least 1901, 11 years before Arizona statehood.

But Attorney General Mark Brnovich, a fellow Republican, said he was reviewing the 1901 law in the wake of *Roe* and providers immediately stopped performing the procedure out of fear of prosecution.

Brnovich on Wednesday sided with those

who pointed to a specific provision in the new law that said it did not override the earlier one, which has been blocked since 1973. Brnovich says he'll seek to have it unblocked.

"Our office has concluded the Legislature has made its intentions clear with regards to abortion laws," Brnovich said on Twitter. "ARS 13-3603 (the pre-statehood law) is back in effect and will not be repealed" when the new law takes effect.

Ducey spokesman C.J. Karamargin said the governor's office was reviewing Brnovich's decision and had no immediate comment.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Vets groups rip outhouse plans for cemetery

ND FARGO — A coalition of veterans organizations is upset over plans to build an outhouse on the grounds of a national cemetery that borders North Dakota and Minnesota.

The group said Tuesday it plans to file a formal complaint with the Department of Veterans Affairs over the outdoor bathroom set to be built next to a proposed Native American ceremony area at the Fargo National Cemetery.

United Patriotic Bodies Commander Jason Hicks says members of the coalition “believe it is a colossal waste of taxpayer money and also not proper for a national cemetery.” He said the outhouse would have no electricity or heat in an area where temperatures fall below freezing from December through April, KVRN-TV reported.

“At least with the porta potties, those can be emptied. Now think of the hot humid summers,” Hicks said.

Hicks calls the cemetery “our Arlington,” referring to Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia near Washington, D.C.

The National Cemetery Administration did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Man who hid pills in kids' backpack gets 7 years

RI PROVIDENCE — A man who stored more than 1,000 counterfeit Adderall pills containing methamphetamine or fentanyl in a child's Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles backpack in the Rhode Island apartment he shared with his

three children has been sentenced to more than seven years in prison, federal prosecutors said Tuesday.

Davith Hoy, 42, was a wholesaler of methamphetamine and fentanyl pills whose crimes came to light when an alleged dealer he supplied was arrested in an unrelated case, according to a statement from the U.S. attorney's office in Rhode Island.

That person made a phone call from behind bars that was monitored by authorities, in which he arranged for his girlfriend to meet Hoy and receive some pills, authorities said.

Federal agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives found the drugs in the backpack when they executed a search warrant at Hoy's Cranston home in March 2021, prosecutors said.

Hoy pleaded guilty in March to drug charges. The other man and his girlfriend await trial.

Airbnb permanently bans parties at its properties

CA SAN FRANCISCO — Airbnb is making permanent its ban on parties at homes listed on the site for short-term rentals.

The San Francisco company believes the ban has worked, saying Tuesday that reports of parties at listed properties have dropped 44% from a year ago.

More than 6,600 guests were suspended last year for related violations, Airbnb said.

Airbnb began to crack down on parties in 2019 after a fatal shooting at a party in a house in California. At that time, the company prohibited advertising parties at Airbnb locations on social media.

The number of parties at

Airbnb locations increased during the pandemic, Airbnb said, as people moved gatherings from bars and clubs to rented homes. That led to a temporary ban in 2020.

Inmate sentenced for dealing meth from prison

MN ST. PAUL — An inmate serving time for dealing methamphetamine was sentenced Monday to an additional 29 years behind bars for running a drug trafficking operation from behind bars.

Marco Antonio Avila, 37, was previously sentenced in 2018 to 26 years in prison for distributing large quantities of meth in the Rochester area. He was incarcerated in Victorville, Calif.

Authorities say Avila continued his operations in prison by recruiting and directing at least one person to purchase meth from a Mexico-based drug supplier to distribute to customers throughout southern Minnesota. A search discovered 30 separate 1-pound packages of meth inside a Corvette stored in a Woodbury storage garage.

Avila pleaded guilty in March to one count of conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine.

Hiker hospitalized after grizzly bear mauling

WY MEETEETSE — A hiker has been hospitalized after being mauled by a bear, believed to have been a grizzly, in the mountains of northwestern Wyoming, the state's Game and Fish agency said Tuesday.

The man was hiking Monday at high elevation on Francis Peak, a 13,000-foot summit southeast of Yellowstone Na-

tional Park, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department said Tuesday. The attack happened too quickly for the man to use the bear spray he was carrying, officials said.

Trooper crawls into narrow pipe, rescues missing dog

NY CONKLIN — A missing golden retriever named Lilah, discovered deep inside a culvert pipe in upstate New York, could not be lured out by her owner with peanut butter dog treats or cheese.

In the end, State Trooper Jimmy Rasaphone decided to crawl about 15 feet into the pipe under a rural road to rescue Lilah, despite the extremely tight fit.

“He crouched down and literally disappeared into the hole with a leash that had a choker on it,” said Lilah's owner, Rudy Fuehrer, who called 911 for help on Sunday morning. “He was able somehow to manipulate his arms and get the choker around the dog's head.”

The trooper and retriever both emerged soaking wet, but safe.

The 13-year-old dog had been missing since Friday afternoon. Fuehrer was walking his two other dogs — both Lilah's offspring — a few hundred feet down the road from his house Sunday when he heard a plaintive yelp.

Fuehrer tried to get the weary and confused dog out but eventually called 911. When Rasaphone and his partner showed up, Rasaphone said he'd go into the pipe since he was the smallest of the three of them. Fuehrer estimates the pipe's diameter was under 2 feet. He was able to pull Lilah out after Rasaphone emerged.

— From wire reports

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Tennis fans increasingly misbehaving

Associated Press

This is not what one thinks of when pondering the supposedly genteel roots of tennis, and the purportedly proper atmosphere at dates-to-the-1800s Wimbledon, a country club sport being contested at a place officially called the All England Lawn Tennis Club: a player, Nick Kyrgios, capping a first-round victory Tuesday by spitting in the direction of a spectator he said was hassling him.

“I’ve been dealing with hate and negativity for a long time, so I don’t feel like I owed that person anything. Like, he literally came to the match to literally just not even support anyone, really. It was more just to stir up and disrespect. That’s fine,” Kyrgios said after beating Britain’s Paul Jubb 3-6, 6-1, 7-5, 6-7 (3), 7-5. “But if I give it back to you, then that’s just how it is.”

During the match, which filled the stands at 1,980-seat Court No. 3 — and attracted lengthy lines of folks hoping to eventually be let in, likely owing to the popularity of the anything-can-happen Kyrgios, a

27-year-old from Australia, and the involvement of a local player — Kyrgios asked, without success, to have the fan removed for cursing and sending other verbal abuse his way.

This comes less than three weeks after organizers at a tournament in Stuttgart, Germany, investigated when Kyrgios said he heard racist insults from the crowd during a match, and raises questions about when unruly behavior is too unruly or whether more should, or even can, be done to shield athletes from inappropriate comments that come from the stands.

“I’ve grown up in Australia, so I definitely know what racism is. I feel like it’s a battle, constant battle, coming from that place and dealing with it. ... I don’t think it’s got anything to do with that. I just think spectators, in general, think there’s just no line there anymore. They can just say something and they film it and then they laugh about it,” Kyrgios said. “It’s like that could actually hurt someone’s feelings. Do you know what I mean?”

Tennis players long have dealt with online abuse, particularly from gamblers angry about a particular match’s outcome. Negative interaction among athletes and the people paying to watch them is gaining more attention in real life, too.

At a tournament in Indian Wells, Calif., in March, Naomi Osaka cried after a spectator shouted, “Osaka, you suck!”

The four-time Grand Slam champion explained the episode dredged up thoughts of when Serena and Venus Williams were jeered at that event in 2001 after Venus withdrew, citing an injury, before the sisters were supposed to play each other. Their father, Richard, said racial slurs were sent his way; his daughters stayed away from Indian Wells for years.

“Personally, I’ve never experienced any type of heckling on the court (and) I’m very lucky, because I know other players have experienced it. Definitely online, I have the experience a lot, but that’s different,” said Coco Gauff, an 18-year-old Floridian who was the runner-up at the French Open this

month and won her Wimbledon match Tuesday. “I definitely think there is a line that you shouldn’t cross.”

Gauff mentioned what she called the “obvious” examples of racial or sexual comments.

“That’s definitely way past the line,” she said. “There are some things that you do have to deal with as an athlete. That’s just a part of the sport. Particularly in tennis, it’s not very common. It’s not in the tennis culture, especially let alone at Wimbledon. I think the line definitely is a lot closer to being crossed than I would say than other sports because that’s just the culture of tennis. For me, personal attacks — that kind of crosses the line, really.”

An All England Club spokesperson said no fans were removed from Kyrgios’ match, but there could be a review of what went on, including what he said at his news conference.

As for the sorts of things he is hearing from people during his matches, Kyrgios concluded: “I’m just starting to think that it’s normal, when it’s really not.”

Kvitova feels nerves, still reaches Wimbledon third round

Associated Press

WIMBLEDON, England — Petra Kvitova has plenty of experience on the grass courts of Wimbledon. After all, she’s a two-time champion at the All England Club.

But that doesn’t mean everything is easy for her once she steps onto the green courts in southwest London.

She has spoken about being nervous when she comes to Wimbledon, and she showed some of those nerves on Thursday when she beat Ana Bogdan 6-1, 7-6 (5).

It was a straight-set victory, but the second set wasn’t straightforward.

Kvitova was leading 5-1 when Bogdan started to reel off game after game. Then Kvitova had a match point while serving at 5-4, but failed to convert that chance and then the game itself, eventually leading to the tiebreaker.

“Especially a few games on my serve, it was really long games, and mentally very tough,” the 25th-seeded Kvitova said. “I think maybe even this took some energy from my serve and I just couldn’t make it.”

Kvitova will next face Paula Badosa. The fourth-seeded Spaniard defeated Irina Bara 6-3, 6-2.

Sixth-seeded Karolina Pliskova, who reached the Wimbledon final last year, was eliminated on Centre Court. The Czech player lost to British wild-card entry Katie Boulter 3-6, 7-6 (4), 6-4.

The 25-year-old Boulter also beat Pliskova last week at a warmup tournament in Eastbourne for her first win against a top-10 player. She broke for a 5-4 lead in the final set and converted her first match point with a volley winner.

Boulter will face Harmony Tan in the

next round. Tan eliminated seven-time Wimbledon champion Serena Williams in the first round and then beat 32nd-seeded Sara Sorribes Tormo 6-3, 6-4 on Thursday.

Top-ranked Iga Swiatek also advanced — and won her 37th straight match.

Swiatek defeated Lesley Pattinama Kerkhove 6-4, 4-6, 6-3 on No. 1 Court to improve her winning streak, the longest since Martina Hingis also won 37 matches in a row in 1997.

She will next face Alizé Cornet, who defeated American player Claire Liu 6-3, 6-3.

In the men’s draw, Nick Kyrgios advanced to the third round for the sixth time in eight Wimbledon appearances. The unseeded Australian, who reached the quarterfinals at the All England Club in his debut in 2014, beat 26th-seeded Filip Krajinovic 6-2, 6-3, 6-1.

Flurry of NBA free-agent deals ahead

Associated Press

Let the talking begin. The trading, too, and eventually the signing.

Free agency officially opened Thursday in the NBA, when the teams were able to begin negotiating at 6 p.m. Eastern with players who were not under contract — although, in reality, free agency and the slew of offseason movement was already off and running.

James Harden declined his \$47 million option for next season with Philadelphia on Wednesday and became a free agent — but told the team he intends to stay on a new deal that will allow the 76ers the flexibility they need to sign other players, according to a person with direct knowledge of that situation.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because neither Harden nor the 76ers confirmed those plans publicly.

Harden's decision came almost simultaneously Wednesday with another massive move — the San Antonio Spurs are trading All-Star guard Dejounte Murray to the Atlanta Hawks for Danilo Gallinari and three first-round picks, according to another person with direct knowledge of the terms of that deal who spoke to AP with anonymity because the trade had not been announced by either side. ESPN first reported the completion of that deal, which pairs Murray with another All-Star in Trae Young in the Hawks' backcourt.

Kyrie Irving and Russell Westbrook have already made their decisions; both could have been free agents this summer and

found a combined 84 million reasons not to hit the open market — \$47 million for Westbrook to opt-in for the last year of his deal with the Los Angeles Lakers, and nearly \$37 million for Irving to do the same with the Brooklyn Nets.

Jalen Brunson will be in demand, with the expectation that he'll quickly agree to leave Dallas and become the new point guard in New York. There will be players who might look elsewhere, or accept \$200-million-plus deals with their current teams — opportunities that are presenting themselves to Zach LaVine with Chicago and Bradley Beal with Washington.

The largest deal, in terms of dollars, coming in the next few days almost certainly won't go to a free agent: All signs point to two-time reigning NBA MVP Nikola Jokic being offered a supermax extension in the \$260 million range by the Denver Nuggets.

The only question there will be how quickly he finds a pen to put to that paper.

Minnesota can give Karl-Anthony Towns a supermax of about \$210 million this summer, as can Phoenix with Devin Booker.

Other players are restricted free agents, meaning their current teams will have the right to match offers from other clubs. The most notable name on that list is Deandre Ayton, the Phoenix center who was the No. 1 pick in the 2018 draft but watched others in his draft class get their first extensions last summer.

Some players will be free agents in name only. John Wall, for example, will get \$41 million in a buyout from the Houston Rockets, and has already decided that he wants to

play for the Los Angeles Clippers next season. The Clippers are expected to use a \$6.4 million exception to sign Wall, and that figure matches the money that Wall gave back to make the buyout of the final year of his contract happen.

"We'll see what happens as free agency opens up and everything else," Clippers owner Steve Ballmer said. "I think the sky's the limit for our team. The sky is the limit. ... And of course, you've got to have a little bit of luck to win the Larry O'Brien Trophy, which is what we'd really like."

Another element of this time of year: Young players, and not grabbing them in free agency this year but keeping them out of free agency in future years.

Ja Morant will surely be offered a max rookie extension by Memphis, one that will kick in with the 2023-24 season. The Zion Williamson situation in New Orleans will be interesting, as the Pelicans decide how much to offer to — or safely structure a deal for — a No. 1 pick who has missed the majority of his first three NBA seasons because of injury issues.

Miami is planning to offer sixth man of the year Tyler Herro an extension, though the Heat will have to determine what number makes the most sense for them going forward.

And, of course, there is a LeBron James angle: The Lakers were a disaster last season and will aim to revamp their roster, plus can give James a two-year extension in August worth nearly \$100 million. But before he signs, they have far more pressing concerns.

Source: Harden declines option to give 76ers more flexibility

Associated Press

James Harden is taking less with hopes the Philadelphia 76ers can do more.

A person familiar with the situation said Harden chose not to exercise his \$47.4 million option for next season and will become a free agent — but with no designs on leaving Philadelphia.

Harden made the decision to allow the 76ers the flexibility they need to sign other players this summer, said the person who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonym-

ity because neither side confirmed those plans publicly.

That will be a major factor when the NBA opens the free agency negotiating window (which was set for 6 p.m. Eastern on Thursday), with Philadelphia among the teams that will be expected to target Miami forward P.J. Tucker, among others.

The most likely scenario for Harden now is this: The 10-time All-Star signs a new deal with Philadelphia, for something close to that \$47.4 million number, after the team has ad-

dressed other needs and improved its chances of becoming a true championship contender in 2023.

If Harden had opted in before his Wednesday afternoon deadline, Philadelphia would have had a much more difficult time in finding financial pathways toward luring free agents.

His decision Wednesday backed up what Harden said May 12, when Philadelphia's season ended in the second round of the playoffs — a six-game loss to top-seeded Miami.

"I'll be here," Harden said

that night when asked about his future. "Yeah, I'll be here. Whatever makes this team, whatever allows this team to continue to grow and get better and do the things necessary to win and compete at the highest level."

Harden is a three-time scoring champion and averaged 22.0 points and 10.3 assists during his time with Brooklyn and Philadelphia last season.

The seven-time All-NBA player was the 2018 NBA MVP and a member of the league's 75th anniversary team.

Verlander goes 8, Astros blank Mets

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Justin Verlander pitched two-hit ball for eight innings, Jason Castro lined a two-run homer in the ninth and the Houston Astros beat the Mets 2-0 Wednesday to send New York to its first three-game losing streak this season.

Astros left fielder Yordan Álvarez and shortstop Jeremy Peña were hurt when they collided in the eighth while running down Dominic Smith's popup. Both called for the ball and as Peña caught the pop they hit each other in the face with their gloves. Álvarez was removed on a cart, sitting up, and Peña walked back to the dugout during the eight-minute delay.

Verlander (10-3) became the majors' first 10-game winner, striking out six and walking one. Ryan Pressly pitched a perfect ninth for his 16th save in 19 chances.

New York's Taijuan Walker allowed four hits in a season-high 7½ innings. Drew Smith (1-2) got the loss.

Guardians 7, Twins 6 (10): Josh Naylor hit a two-run homer with two outs in the 10th inning, completing a four-run rally that gave host Cleveland a thrilling victory over Minnesota.

Amed Rosario began the comeback with a one-out double off

closer Emilio Pagán that scored automatic runner Richie Palacios, prompting the Twins to bring in Jharel Cotton (2-2).

A passed ball by Ryan Jeffers scored Steven Kwan, and Cotton retired José Ramírez before Naylor drove his first game-ending homer the other way onto the left-field porch.

Angels 4, White Sox 1: Shohei Ohtani extended his scoreless streak to 21⅓ innings while pitching five-hit ball into the sixth with 11 strikeouts in host Los Angeles' victory over Chicago.

Ohtani went 0-for-3 with a walk at the plate, but Luis Rengifo hit a two-run homer and Mike Trout had an early RBI double.

Ohtani (7-4) yielded five singles and a walk while winning his fourth consecutive start. The AL MVP hasn't allowed a run since the fifth inning of his brilliant seven-inning outing in Boston on June 9, giving him an 0.34 ERA with 36 strikeouts over 26⅓ innings in his last four starts.

Braves 4, Phillies 1: Adam Duvall homered, Kyle Wright tossed seven sharp innings and visiting Atlanta kept rolling this month by beating Philadelphia.

Wright (9-4) rebounded from two shaky outings and allowed one run on three hits with four strikeouts and three walks.

Red Sox 6, Blue Jays 5 (10):

J.D. Martinez drove in the tie-breaking run when he was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded in the 10th inning, and visiting Boston beat Toronto to prevent a three-game sweep.

Alex Verdugo hit a two-run homer and had four RBIs, and Franchy Cordero had four hits as the Red Sox won for the third time in 10 meetings with Toronto this season.

Marlins 4, Cardinals 3: Avisail García hit a two-run homer in the ninth inning and Sandy Alcantara pitched a complete game, lifting visiting Miami over St. Louis.

With two outs, García hit the first pitch he saw from Ryan Helsley (3-1) over the wall in center field for his fifth homer. Jesús Sánchez walked to begin the inning.

Pirates 8, Nationals 7: Bryan Reynolds hit a career-high three homers and drove in six runs, leading visiting Pittsburgh to the win and ending a five-game losing streak.

Yankees 5, Athletics 3: Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton homered to fuel host New York's major league-best 24th comeback victory.

Brewers 5, Rays 3: Rowdy Tellez hit two home runs and center fielder Jonathan Davis made a spectacular catch, send-

ing visiting Milwaukee to the win.

Royals 2, Rangers 1: Zack Greinke pitched six innings of one-run ball in his 500th career start, helping host Kansas City avoid a three-game sweep.

Dodgers 8, Rockies 4: Freddie Freeman, Will Smith and Cody Bellinger homered, and visiting Los Angeles took advantage of Germán Márquez's struggles and early injury exit to beat Colorado.

Padres 4, Diamondbacks 0: Mike Clevinger outpitched Madison Bumgarner by throwing one-hit ball for six innings in his longest outing of the year, leading visiting San Diego over Arizona.

Tigers 3, Giants 2: Eric Haase hit a two-run homer to break a 1-all tie in the sixth inning and visiting Detroit held off San Francisco.

Mariners 9, Orioles 3: Julio Rodríguez hit the 12th home run of his impressive rookie season during a six-run fourth inning, and host Seattle beat Baltimore for its seventh win in nine games.

Cubs 8, Reds 3: Willson Contreras homered, Christopher Morel also went deep and nailed a runner at the plate with a terrific throw from center field, and host Chicago defeated Cincinnati.

Work starts now for Avalanche in bid to repeat

Associated Press

DENVER — Nazem Kadri jubilantly waved to the fans at the parade Thursday through the streets of Denver.

He might have been waving goodbye.

Some tough decisions loom for the Colorado Avalanche after dethroning the Tampa Bay Lightning in the Stanley Cup Final.

As the players partied and mingled with the fans in the Mile High City to celebrate the franchise's third Stanley Cup title, there's this difficult reality: Quite a few of them may not get the opportunity to return and defend the crown. This could be their farewell.

The list of unrestricted free agents includes

big-time contributors such as Kadri, Darcy Kuemper, Andrew Cogliano, Andre Burakovsky, Josh Manson and Valeri Nichushkin. There are also several restricted free agents like Artturi Lehkonen and Nicolas Aube-Kubel.

It will be a tall task for general manager Joe Sakic to bring back everyone.

So they soaked up the good times on the parade route—one final memory in what's been an epic season.

"Surreal," defenseman Cale Makar said after his team beat the Lightning in Game 6 on Sunday night to secure the title. "I'm not too worried about the sentimental stuff, but just

the celebrating is the main thing with the boys."

The core group led the way: Makar, Mikko Rantanen, captain Gabriel Landeskog, Nathan MacKinnon and Erik Johnson. With the exception of Makar, they were around for the dismal 48-point season in 2016-17, when this title seemed like nothing more than a pipe dream.

"I didn't know if I was even going to be in Colorado after that," the 34-year-old Johnson said. "I sat down with Joe (Sakic) and said, 'Listen, I want to do this here. I want to get this done in Colorado. Keep me a part of it.' And we did it. Amazing. So proud of everyone."