

Documents show Iran targeting US troops

The Washington Post

Iran is arming militants in Syria for a new phase of lethal attacks against U.S. troops in the country, while also working with Russia on a broader strategy to drive Americans from the region, intelligence officials and leaked classified documents say.

Iran and its allies are building and training forces to use more powerful armor-piercing roadside bombs intended specifically to target U.S. military vehicles and kill U.S. personnel, according to classified intelligence reports obtained by *The Washington Post*. Such attacks would constitute an escalation of Iran's long-running campaign of using proxy militias to launch rocket and drone strikes on U.S. forces in Syria.

Drone attacks have wounded six U.S. service members and killed a Defense Department contractor, and the new explosive devices could add to the U.S. casualties, risking a wider military confrontation with Iran, current and former intelligence analysts and weapons experts say. The same type of weapon, called an explosively formed penetrator, or EFP, was used by pro-Iranian insurgents in lethal attacks against American military convoys during the U.S. occupation of Iraq.

Officials with Iran's elite Quds Force unit directed and oversaw testing of one of the explosives, which reportedly sliced through

a tank's armored plating in a trial run conducted in late January in Dumayr, east of Damascus, the Syrian capital, according to one of the intelligence reports. The document, part of the trove of classified materials leaked on the messaging platform Discord, appears to be based on intercepted communications by Syrian and Lebanese militants allied to Iran. One apparent attempt to use such devices against U.S. forces was apparently thwarted in late February when three bombs were seized by U.S.-allied Kurdish fighters in northeastern Syria, a second document states.

"There has been a sea change in their risk-acceptance in killing Americans in Syria," said Michael Knights, an expert on Iranian-backed militia groups and a founder of the website *Militia Spotlight*. Noting the devastating toll exacted by EFP bombs during the Iraq War, he added: "This will definitely kill people. And they're thinking very hard about how to do it."

Another document in the trove describes a new and broader effort by Moscow, Damascus and Tehran to oust the United States from Syria, a long-sought goal that could allow Syrian President Bashar Assad to reclaim eastern provinces now controlled by U.S.-backed Kurdish forces. The past three U.S. administrations have maintained a small contingent of U.S. troops in Syria —

about 900 at any given time, augmented by hundreds more contractors — to prevent a resurgence by Islamic State militants in the country, thwart Iranian and Russian ambitions, and provide leverage for other strategic objectives.

U.S. administrations have justified the deployment under the 2001 and 2002 Authorizations for Use of Military Force, which Congress passed in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks to fight al-Qaida. But the presence of U.S. troops in Syria also creates opportunities for new conflict: Another document in the trove describes how Iran and allied militias were preparing to retaliate for Israeli strikes on their forces by hitting U.S. bases in Syria.

The leaked documents describe plans for a wide-ranging campaign by U.S. opponents that would involve stoking popular resistance and supporting a grass-roots movement to carry out attacks against Americans in eastern and northeastern Syria. High-ranking Russian, Iranian and Syrian military and intelligence officials met in November 2022 and agreed on establishing a "coordination center" for directing the campaign, according to a classified intelligence assessment prepared in January.

There were no indications in the documents of direct Russian involvement in planning the bombing campaign.

NATO presses Turkey to drop objections to Sweden

Associated Press

OSLO, Norway — NATO on Thursday ramped up pressure on its member Turkey to drop its objections to Sweden's membership as the military organization seeks to deal with the issue by the time President Joe Biden and his counterparts meet next month.

Fearing that they might be targeted after Russia invaded Ukraine last year, Sweden and Finland abandoned their traditional positions of military nonalignment to seek protection under NATO's security umbrella. Finland became NATO's 31st member country in April.

NATO must agree unanimously for countries to join. Turkey's government accuses

Sweden of being too lenient on terrorist organizations and security threats, including militant Kurdish groups and people associated with a 2016 coup attempt in Turkey.

Hungary has also delayed its approval, but the reasons why have not been made publicly clear.

"It's time for Sweden to join now," Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt told reporters in Oslo, where she was hosting a meeting with her counterparts to prepare for NATO's July 11-12 summit in Lithuania.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said that he would travel to Ankara "in the near future to continue to address how we can ensure the fastest possible accession

of Sweden." He was unable to provide a precise date for his trip.

"I'm confident that also Hungary will ratify the accession protocol," Stoltenberg said.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said that "it is essential that we can finally welcome Sweden as the 32nd member." She stressed that the Swedish government has Berlin's "full support."

Sweden's foreign minister, Tobias Billström, said that "it is time for Turkey and Hungary to start the ratification of the Swedish membership to NATO." He said that "everything (that) bars Sweden joining NATO will be seen as [a] win for (Russian President Vladimir) Putin."

Guam governor: Mawar recovery 'no quick feat'

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

Hundreds of people waited for passenger flights Wednesday in an Andersen Air Force Base hangar normally reserved for military operations, one of the many consequences of Typhoon Mawar's passing last week.

The storm caused "significant damage" to Andersen's passenger terminal, where travelers arrive and depart aboard the Patriot Express, a government-contracted air service. To remedy the situation, the 734th Air Mobility Squadron turned the 4th Reconnaissance Squadron hangar into a temporary terminal, according to the Defense Visual Information Distribution Service.

Video footage posted on DVIDS by the 36th Wing showed passengers waiting on folding chairs or going through temporary security stations ahead of their flights.

All over Guam, people are making do as they find their way back to normal in Mawar's wake. More than half the island's 170,000 people were still without power Thursday afternoon, according to the gov-

ernment's Joint Information Center. And just 53% of the island's water system was in working order.

Spokespeople for FEMA and Joint Region Marianas did not immediately respond to requests for comment Thursday.

Mawar tore into Guam on May 24 with 150 mph winds and inundated the island with more than 2 feet of rain in some areas. No deaths were reported, although the typhoon was the strongest to hit the U.S. island territory in decades.

"Recovery from Typhoon Mawar is no quick feat," Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero wrote in a Facebook post Thursday. "It will take time and collaborative efforts from everyone in this community."

Thousands are left without basic needs, but the island was spared worse consequences by the rapid response that followed the storm, Leon Guerrero said.

"Within days, not weeks, power and water were restored to critical infrastructure. Our hospital was powered immediately after the typhoon to continue treating our sick," she said. "Once the typhoon passed,

essential commodities and fuel continued to come through our port."

Parts of Naval Base Guam were still without power Tuesday, base commander Capt. Michael Luckett said at a town hall meeting.

"Power restoration onboard [Naval Base Guam] will take several weeks," he said.

"It's going to be a phased approach as we start to restore systems here, probably over the next couple of weeks. This is unfortunate, but it is our reality."

At Andersen, only common access card holders, dependents and some contractors were permitted unlimited base access, according to a post on the installation's Facebook page. Other ID card holders, including retirees and veterans, among others, were permitted access after noon.

Ahead of the storm, residents stockpiled necessities and reinforced their homes, while U.S. bases sent ships to sea and aircraft to safer locations. The storm flooded streets and buildings, knocked down trees and damaged vehicles, sparing little.

Navy pilot rescued after ejecting into water from jet

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

A Navy fighter pilot was rescued Wednesday morning after ejecting from his jet over waters north of Key West, service officials said.

The pilot, assigned to Naval Air Station Key West, Fla., eject-

ed from his F-5N about 25 miles north of the air station's Boca Chica Field at about 9:20 a.m., according to a Navy statement. An F-5N is a Navy single-seat adversary fighter jet used in air-to-air combat training.

The pilot was rescued by an MH-60S helicopter search-and-

rescue crew from NAS Key West and was taken to a Miami-area hospital for "further evaluation," according to the statement. The pilot's status was not immediately available.

Additional details about the incident were scarce, including the reason the pilot chose to

eject, a service spokesperson said.

An investigation was expected to begin shortly.

The pilot is assigned to NAS Key West's Fighter Squadron Composite (VFC) 111 "Sun Downers," the Navy said. The unit is a Navy Reserve squadron.

5 minors arrested in beating of 3 Marines at California beach

Associated Press

SAN CLEMENTE, Calif. — Five juveniles have been arrested on suspicion of being involved in the beating of three Marines by a large group of youths on a Southern California pier, authorities said.

The assault happened shortly before 10 p.m. Friday in the city of San Clemente near Camp Pendleton, a Marine Corps base. Video circulating online showed a melee with the victims, who were not in uniform, on the ground being kicked until a woman and a man

broke it up.

Arriving deputies initially found two victims but then determined a third Marine was also assaulted, the Orange County Sheriff's Department said in a statement Tuesday.

Firefighters provided medical aid to the Marines, who declined to be taken to a hospital.

Four boys and one girl were arrested Tuesday and booked for investigation of assault with a deadly weapon, the statement said. Their ages were not specified.

Sheriff's Sgt. Mike Woodruff said Wednesday that investigators were still looking into what led to the incident. One account, that had not yet been confirmed, is that members of the group were setting off fireworks and the Marines tried to intervene to stop them, he said.

Woodruff said there was an "undetermined amount of remaining suspects."

"With approximately 30-plus individuals and the Marines getting engulfed, the investigators have to review all camera evidence available to determine who did what," he said.

DOD budget cap in debt deal worries hawks

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The debt-limit compromise on track to pass Congress will lock in Pentagon spending levels for the next two years, forcing lawmakers drafting annual defense policy bills to stick to a budget that some on Capitol Hill consider insufficient to meet U.S. global threats.

The House on Wednesday night approved a deal to raise the nation's debt ceiling over the reluctance of some defense hawks who for months had advocated for a significant increase to President Joe Biden's \$886 billion budget request for the Defense Department and other national security spending.

Instead, the proposed legislation caps military spending at the requested amount for fiscal 2024 — a 3.2% increase from last year — and slows national defense budget growth to 1% in fiscal 2025.

"That's the worst part of the deal," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., told reporters on Wednesday. "The defense buildup which we began in December peters out and is only up slightly."

The Senate is expected to vote on the legislation before a projected June 5 deadline when the U.S. government is expected to

run out of money and could default on its debts.

Republicans have traditionally called for defense spending increases of 3% to 5% above inflation. The Democratic chairman and top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee expressed concern in March that the Pentagon was particularly underfunding its largest service, the Army.

"I am confident my colleagues on a bipartisan basis, again, will join me to correct this inadequate budget," Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, the panel's ranking Republican, said at the time.

Congress last year added \$45 billion to President Joe Biden's defense spending request.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., vowed to find a way to again hike up the Pentagon's budget, despite the constraints set by the debt-ceiling bill. He suggested suspending the debt limit for three months to give lawmakers time to sort out military funding shortfalls.

"I will use all powers available to me in the Senate to have amendment votes to undo this catastrophe for defense," he wrote Monday on Twitter. "Have total disgust for political leaders' decision to make it remotely possible to gut our national security

apparatus at a time of great peril."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., warned on Thursday that any changes to the legislation will force it back to the House and "almost guarantee default."

Republicans and defense-minded Democrats have encouraged strong Pentagon spending to counter the threat posed by Russian aggression, compete with China's military buildup and prevent a potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

Rep. Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin, the Republican chairman of the new House Select Committee on China and a member of the House Armed Services Committee, said only Republican control of all three branches of government will be able to fix the defense funding holes in the debt-ceiling bill.

In the meantime, he said Congress can boost deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region by cutting waste and "repurposing" more than \$25 billion in annual unspent Defense Department funds for investments in ships, long-range precision fires and other weapons systems.

"This would allow us to rebuild our arsenal of deterrence in the near-term and win the new Cold War in the long-term," Gallagher said after voting for the bill.

Space Force bases 4 more units in Colorado

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Air Force announced the permanent location for many more U.S. Space Force units Wednesday — and none of them are in Huntsville, Ala., suggesting the service may be moving ahead with at least part of the design it originally sought for the new force before it became entangled in politics.

Four more Space Force missions will now be based in Colorado Springs, a notable choice amid a larger and now politicized battle over where to locate the permanent headquarters of U.S. Space Command. Colorado Springs, which is housing Space Command's temporary headquarters, was the Air Force's favored spot, but Donald Trump, in the last days of his presidency, picked Alabama instead.

While the Pentagon and White House have said the decisions are not directly linked, Alabama has strict anti-abortion laws, and its Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville earlier this year announced he would hold up all military nominations until the Department of Defense rescinds a new policy that would allow female service members to be reimbursed for travel costs if they have to go out of state for reproductive care.

Tuberville's office was not available for comment Wednesday evening.

The Space Force announcement came as President Joe Biden left for Colorado Springs to speak during Thursday's commencement ceremony at the nearby U.S. Air Force Academy.

Colorado Democratic Sen. Michael Bennet said he'll be us-

ing the president's visit as another opportunity to press for the command.

"As President Biden and his administration near a final basing decision for Space Command, we urge them to restore the integrity of this process and make a decision in the interest of our national security — to keep Space Command in Colorado Springs," his office said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the Air Force has been moving forward with getting fully dug in at Colorado Springs, where more than 20 of the military's space missions are now based.

The Air Force Academy now has a space curriculum and graduates Space Force Guardians alongside its Air Force cadets.

"Colorado Springs continues

to prove itself as the premier location for our nation's space defense operations," Colorado Republican Rep. Doug Lamborn said in a statement announcing the selection.

The Space Force, founded in December 2019, is the smallest of the military branches, with just under 8,400 personnel. But it has seen its budget rapidly rise as the United States has scrambled to defend against a rapid militarization of space, such as North Korea's failed Wednesday launch of a ballistic missile believed to be carrying a spy satellite.

The four new missions in Colorado Springs include Delta 15, a headquarters unit for the service's space operations command; Space Delta 12, a test and evaluation unit; and two surveillance squadrons.

Debt deal OK'd by House, goes to Senate

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Veering away from a default crisis, the House overwhelmingly approved a debt ceiling and budget cuts package, sending the deal that President Joe Biden and Speaker Kevin McCarthy negotiated to the Senate for swift passage in a matter of days, before a fast-approaching deadline.

The hard-fought compromise pleased few, but lawmakers assessed it was better than the alternative — a devastating economic upheaval if Congress failed to act. Tensions ran high as hard-right Republicans refused the deal, but Biden and McCarthy assembled a bipartisan coalition to push to passage on a robust 314-117 vote late Wednesday.

“We did pretty dang good,” McCarthy, R-Calif., said afterward.

Amid deep discontent from Republicans who said the spending

restrictions did not go far enough, McCarthy said it is only a “first step.”

Biden, watching the tally from Colorado Springs, Colo., where he was scheduled to deliver the commencement address at the U.S. Air Force Academy on Thursday, phoned McCarthy and the other congressional leaders after the vote. In a statement, he called the outcome “good news for the American people and the American economy.”

Washington is rushing after a long slog of debate to wrap up work on the package to ensure the government can keep paying its bills, and prevent financial upheaval at home and abroad. Monday is when the Treasury has said the United States would run short of money and risk a dangerous default.

Biden had been calling lawmakers directly to shore up backing. McCarthy worked to sell

skeptical fellow Republicans, even fending off challenges to his leadership.

A similar bipartisan effort from Democrats and Republicans will be needed in the Senate to overcome objections.

Overall, the 99-page bill would make some inroads in curbing the nation’s deficits as Republicans demanded, without rolling back Trump-era tax breaks as Biden wanted. To pass it, Biden and McCarthy counted on support from the political center, a rarity in divided Washington.

A compromise, the package restricts spending for the next two years, suspends the debt ceiling into January 2025 and changes some policies, including imposing new work requirements for older Americans receiving food aid and greenlighting an Appalachian natural gas line that many Democrats oppose. It bolsters funds for defense and veterans,

and guts new money for Internal Revenue Service agents.

Raising the nation’s debt limit, now \$31 trillion, ensures the Treasury can borrow to pay already incurred U.S. debts.

Top GOP deal negotiator Rep. Garret Graves, of Louisiana, said Republicans were fighting for budget cuts after the past years of extra spending, first during the COVID-19 crisis and later with Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act, with its historic investment to fight climate change paid for with revenues elsewhere.

But Republican Rep. Chip Roy, a member of the Freedom Caucus helping lead the opposition, said, “My beef is that you cut a deal that shouldn’t have been cut.”

One influential Republican, former President Donald Trump, held his fire: “It is what it is,” he said of the deal in an interview with Iowa radio host Simon Conway.

No verified extraterrestrials, NASA study team reiterates

The Washington Post

A panel commissioned by NASA to study what the government has called unidentified anomalous phenomena, more widely known as UFOs, said Wednesday that it needed more and better-quality information to understand and describe hundreds of mysterious objects that have been reported in the skies over the years.

But panel members also stressed they had no evidence to attribute the unidentified objects to extraterrestrial intelligence.

“There is absolutely no convincing evidence of extraterrestrial life associated with UAPs,” Daniel Evans, NASA’s assistant deputy associate administrator for research, told reporters following a public event in Washington, where the space agency’s 16-member expert panel presented some preliminary findings and fielded questions from the public.

NASA has said before that there’s no evidence UAPs, including some that Navy pilots have reported zipping through the skies, are not of this Earth. But the statement was significant coming from the first group of independent experts the esteemed space agency has ever convened to study the phenomena.

The inquiry comes amid a new openness across the government to examine the objects as potential threats to commercial aviation or U.S. national security.

A Pentagon office has led a separate government-wide effort to analyze UAP sightings. It has examined over 800 sightings based on information collected over nearly three decades. Of those, only between 2 and 5% could be described as “anomalous,” or truly inexplicable, said Sean Kirkpatrick, who heads the Defense Department All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office.

Reports: Trump talked about keeping classified document

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Justice Department prosecutors have obtained an audio recording of former President Donald Trump from after he left office in which he talks about holding onto a classified Pentagon document related to a potential attack on Iran, according to media reports.

CNN, which first reported on the tape, said Trump suggested on the recording that he wanted to share information from the document with others but that he knew there were limitations about his ability to declassify records after he left office.

The comments on the recording, made in July 2021 at his golf club in Bedminster, N.J., would seem to undercut the former president’s repeated claims that he declassified the documents he took with him from the White House to Mar-a-Lago, his Florida estate, after leaving office. The

recording could also be a key aid for prosecutors looking to prove Trump knew his ability to possess classified documents was limited.

The recording has been provided to special counsel Jack Smith, whose team of prosecutors have spent months investigating the potential mishandling of classified documents at Mar-a-Lago and whether Trump or anyone else sought to criminally obstruct the probe. The investigation shows signs of being in its final stages, with prosecutors having interviewed a broad cross-section of witnesses before the grand jury.

No one has been criminally charged.

According to the CNN report, the recording was made during a gathering at Bedminster with aides to Trump and two people who were working on the autobiography of Trump’s former chief of staff, Mark Meadows.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man's hatred of drugs may have led to shootings

AZ MESA — A man's strong dislike for drugs and homelessness may have led to five separate shootings in the Phoenix metro area that left four people dead and a woman wounded, authorities said Tuesday.

Iren Byers, 20, was taken into custody Sunday on suspicion of four counts of first-degree murder and one count of attempted first-degree murder, Mesa police said.

His next scheduled court appearance is Friday.

Byers took responsibility for the shootings and told officers where they could find the clothes and 9 mm handgun used in the crimes, police said.

Delta sued over claims of carbon neutrality

GA ATLANTA — A consumer class action lawsuit filed Tuesday claims Delta Air Lines inaccurately billed itself as the world's "first carbon-neutral airline" and should pay damages. The complaint in federal court in California alleges the airline relied on carbon offsets that were largely bogus.

Companies around the world buy carbon credits to cancel out their carbon releases with projects that promise to absorb carbon dioxide out of the air, or prevent pollution that would've happened. But they've been under the spotlight in recent months with claims their benefits are exaggerated.

The company is a big customer, purchasing credits from projects including wind and solar projects in India and an Indone-

sian swamp forest, the lawsuit says.

Delta spokesperson Grant Myatt described the lawsuit as "without legal merit."

"Since March 31, 2022, (Delta) has fully transitioned its focus away from carbon offsets toward decarbonization of our operations, focusing our efforts on investing in sustainable aviation fuel," Myatt said in an email. He added that the company is renewing its fleet with "more fuel-efficient aircraft and implementing operational efficiencies."

Supreme Court to hear drone photos dispute

MI LONG LAKE TOWNSHIP — The Michigan Supreme Court will hear a dispute over the legality of using a drone to take pictures of a salvage yard near Traverse City.

Aerial photos were used as evidence in a lawsuit against Todd and Heather Maxon, who were accused of violating a zoning ordinance and creating a nuisance with cars and other salvaged material in Long Lake Township.

The Maxons have argued that aerial photos violated their constitutional right against unreasonable searches. But a local judge and the state Court of Appeals have ruled against them.

The appeals court in 2022 said the dispute was a civil matter, not a criminal one.

Court: Manson follower should be given parole

CA LOS ANGELES — A California appeals court said Tuesday that Leslie Van Houten, who participated in two killings at the direction of cult leader Charles Manson in 1969,

should be released from prison on parole.

The appellate court's ruling reverses an earlier decision by Gov. Gavin Newsom, who rejected parole for Van Houten in 2020. She has been recommended for parole five times since 2016. All of those recommendations were rejected by either Newsom or former Gov. Jerry Brown. Newsom could request that California Attorney General Rob Bonta petition the state Supreme Court to stop her release.

Bonta's office referred questions to Newsom's office, which didn't respond to queries about possible next steps.

Van Houten, now in her 70s, is serving a life sentence for helping Manson and other followers kill Leno LaBianca, a grocer in Los Angeles, and his wife, Rosemary.

Law threatens use of goats to curb wildfires

CA SACRAMENTO — Targeted goat grazing is part of California's strategy to reduce wildfire risk because goats can eat a wide variety of vegetation and graze in steep, rocky terrain that's hard to access. Backers have said they're an eco-friendly alternative to chemical herbicides or weed-whacking machines that make noise and pollution.

But new state labor regulations are making it more expensive to provide goat-grazing services, and herding companies have said the rules threaten to put them out of business. The changes could raise the monthly salary of herders from about \$3,730 to \$14,000, according to the California Farm Bureau.

Companies have historically

been allowed to pay goat and sheepherders a monthly minimum salary rather than an hourly minimum wage, because their jobs require them to be on-call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Legislation signed in 2016, however, also entitles them to overtime pay. It effectively boosted the herders' minimum monthly pay from \$1,955 in 2019 to \$3,730 this year. It's set to hit \$4,381 in 2025, according to the California Department of Industrial Relations.

So far the herding companies, which have sued over the law, have passed along most of the increased labor costs to their customers. But in January, those labor costs are set to jump sharply again.

Art dealer gets 2 years in Warhol forgery plot

FL FORT PIERCE — A South Florida art dealer was sentenced Tuesday to two years and three months in federal prison in connection with a scheme involving the sale of fake Andy Warhol paintings.

Daniel Elie Bouaziz, 69, was sentenced in Fort Pierce federal court, according to court records. He pleaded guilty in February to a single count of money laundering, while prosecutors agreed to drop 16 other counts related to fraud and embezzlement. Bouaziz was fined \$15,000, and a restitution hearing is scheduled for Aug. 16.

Prosecutors said Bouaziz, the owner of Danieli Fine Art and Galerie Danieli in Palm Beach County, sold counterfeit artworks to a customer in October 2021 including pieces purportedly by Warhol.

— From wire reports

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Reporting
World, National
and Military News

South Florida going for NBA, NHL titles

Associated Press

They were No. 8 seeds. They barely got into the playoffs after up-and-down regular seasons. They had to face the No. 1 overall seeds in Round 1 of the postseason. They had to win Game 7s in Boston just to keep their seasons alive. They are Eastern Conference champions. They are each four wins from a championship.

This is the story of the Miami Heat and the Florida Panthers.

And it could have an ending like no other.

There's never been a season where one city — or one metro area, in this case — has gotten to celebrate winning both the NBA title and the NHL's Stanley Cup. There have been nine previous tries; in two cases there's been an NHL title and no NBA crown, in three cases there's been an NBA title and no NHL crown, and in the four other cases both teams lost.

South Florida has a chance to change that. Larry, meet Stanley. Stanley, meet Larry.

"That would be insane. ... If that would ever happen, that would truly be unbelievable," said Florida star Matthew Tkachuk, who had three game-winning goals for the Panthers in their East finals win over Car-

olina. "It's just great how both fan bases have been able to root together."

It'll continue to be that way. The NBA Finals started in Denver on Thursday night with the Heat taking on the Nuggets; the Stanley Cup Final starts in Las Vegas on Saturday night with the Vegas Golden Knights taking on the Panthers.

There could be as many as 14 games involving the Heat and Panthers in a span of 19 days. Starting Thursday, there will be eight games in a span of 10 days — no game for either sport on June 2 and June 6, and four games in a four-night span in South Florida starting June 7. And there's never two games on the same night, either.

"I know it's fun to watch," Panthers coach Paul Maurice said. "I'm not sure what they're doing, but it's 5-on-5, right? I get that. There's a connection now between the two teams through sports fans down here. So, there's hockey fans that are probably like me, but now they're dialed into that because it's just a great story. And it's fun to be a part of it."

Panthers' road

Got into the playoffs as the second wildcard from the Eastern Conference. Beat

Boston 4-3 in Round 1 (winning a Game 7 in Boston), beat Toronto 4-1 in Round 2, beat Carolina 4-0 in East finals.

Heat's road

Got into the playoffs after winning the second play-in game. Beat Milwaukee 4-1 in Round 1, beat New York 4-2 in Round 2, beat Boston 4-3 in East finals (winning a Game 7 in Boston).

Past instances of two finalists

1957: Boston Celtics won NBA Finals, Boston Bruins lost Stanley Cup Final.

1958: Celtics and Bruins both lost.

1972: New York Knicks lost NBA Finals, New York Rangers lost Stanley Cup Final.

1974: Celtics won, Bruins lost.

1980: Philadelphia 76ers lost NBA Finals, Philadelphia Flyers lost Stanley Cup Final.

1992: Chicago Bulls won NBA Finals, Chicago Blackhawks lost Stanley Cup Final.

1994: Knicks lost, Rangers won.

2003: New Jersey Nets lost NBA Finals, New Jersey Devils won Stanley Cup Final.

2016: Golden State Warriors lost NBA Finals, San Jose Sharks lost Stanley Cup Final.

Panthers' Bobrovsky puts off end-of-season ritual

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Sergei Bobrovsky needs a haircut.

The goaltender for the Florida Panthers uses a thin headband to hold some of his hair back these days. Long hair usually isn't a problem for Bobrovsky at this time of year: When a season ends, he gets most of it shaved off and keeps the cut super-short until the next season begins.

This season is still going. As such, the hair is still growing.

So, too, is the legend of Bobrovsky, who was backing up Alex Lyon when these playoffs began and now has helped carry the Panthers into the Stanley Cup Final. Bobrovsky led the way to ousting points-record-setting Boston in Round 1, Toronto in Round 2 and then Carolina in an Eastern Conference finals sweep that included a

four-OT victory in Game 1.

Games like those are why Bobrovsky has holes drilled into his skates; he sweats so much and sprays himself with so much water during games, and all that moisture running down his jersey, pants and pads has to drain out somewhere.

"He's on another planet," Florida forward Carter Verhaeghe said. "He's been playing so well this whole playoff run. I mean, seems like whenever we need a big save, he's there. Whenever something happens for (opponents) to get some momentum, he gets it back. He changes the whole game for us and he's been unbelievable. He's like a brick wall back there."

Bobrovsky's numbers in his past 12 games are brick-wall-esque, for sure: 11-1 record, 438 saves on 465 shots for a .942 save

percentage, a goals-against average of 1.95. In nearly 100 minutes of overtime hockey, he's seen 54 shots and stopped them all.

He's a two-time Vezina Trophy winner and the Panthers landed him as a free agent with a \$70 million, seven-year deal in 2019. He's worth every penny of that deal right now.

"He's been doing it all year and every year and now he finally gets rewarded to be in the Cup Final," said Florida forward Patric Hornqvist, who takes shot after shot after shot on Bobrovsky in practice, one hockey workaholic helping another. "My wife told me that he was actually crying when he knew we were going to make it. Those moments ... those are so cool when a player really recognizes what kind of position we're in."

Goalies, by nature, are quir-

ky, each with their own routine and belief about what works best. Panthers coach Paul Maurice stopped trying to figure out what makes netminders tick long ago. He often says he knows next to nothing about playing the position. He says hello to Bobrovsky in the morning, and sometimes that's all that needs to be said.

There is a trust level there. Maurice doesn't have to tell Bobrovsky to work hard. He knows the 34-year-old veteran with 13 years in the NHL will do whatever he feels is required to be at his best.

"That's definitely awesome," Bobrovsky said. "I've been in the league a little bit, you know, and I kind of know my body and my mind. I know the tools, what makes me, what prepares me. I definitely appreciate that trust."

Tshiebwe stays in draft, Edey pulls out

Associated Press

Purdue's Zach Edey decided it was the right call to go back to school instead of staying in the NBA Draft. His predecessor as national player of the year, Kentucky's Oscar Tshiebwe, is sticking with his pro pursuit.

And Connecticut's reign as NCAA champion will begin with multiple starters having left for the NBA Draft and one returning after flirting with doing the same.

The 7-foot-4 Edey and UConn guard Tristen Newton were among the notable names to announce that they were withdrawing from the draft Wednesday, the NCAA's deadline for players who declared as early entrants to pull out and retain their college eligibility.

Edey's decision came Wednesday night, in social media posts from both the center and the Boilermakers program that earned a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament behind Edey. The Associated Press men's national player of the year. He averaged 22.3 points, 12.9 rebounds.

But Tshiebwe announced late in the afternoon that he would

remain in the draft after a college career which included being named the AP national player of the year in 2022.

For the current champions, Newton (10.1 points, 4.7 assists, 4.5 rebounds) is returning after being one of four Huskies to declare for the draft after a run to UConn's fifth national championship. He scored a game-high 19 points to go with 10 rebounds in the victory over San Diego State in the title game.

The others were Final Four Most Outstanding Player Adama Sanogo, wing Jordan Hawkins and versatile guard Andre Jackson Jr. Sanogo (17.8 points) and Hawkins (16.3) have made it clear they have closed the door on their college careers, while team spokesman Phil Chardis said Wednesday night that Jackson (6.1 points, 5.8 rebounds, 4.6 assists) would remain in the draft.

The Huskies have 247sports' No. 3-ranked recruiting class for next year to restock the roster, led by McDonald's All-American Stephon Castle.

The NBA's withdrawal deadline is June 12, but is moot when it comes to players returning to

college due to the NCAA's earlier timeline to retain eligibility.

Staying in school

Trey Alexander: Creighton gets back a 6-4 guard who averaged 13.6 points and shot 41% from three-point range in his first full season as a starter.

Adem Bona: The 6-foot-10 forward and Pac-12 freshman of the year is returning to UCLA after starting 32 games and averaging 7.7 points, 5.3 rebounds and 1.7 blocks — with coach Mick Cronin praising his toughness for “competing through multiple injuries for as long as he could” in a statement Wednesday.

Josiah-Jordan James: The 6-6 guard went through the NBA G League Combine and had workouts with multiple teams before opting to return to Tennessee for a fifth season alongside teammate Santiago Vescovi.

Judah Mintz: The 6-3 freshman averaged 16.3 points and 4.6 assists for Syracuse, ranking third among Division I freshmen in scoring behind only Alabama's Brandon Miller and Lamar's Nate Calmese.

Owls' returnees: Florida At-

lantic got good news after its surprise Final Four run with the return of leading scorers Johnell Davis (13.8) and Alijah Martin (13.4).

Terrence Shannon Jr.: Illinois got a big boost with Shannon announcing his return Wednesday night in a social media post. The 6-6 guard is returning for a fifth college season after averaging 17.2 points.

Going pro

Kobe Brown: Missouri's 6-8 swingman opted against returning for a fifth season after being an AP first-team all-Southeastern Conference pick averaging 15.8 points last season.

Jaylen Clark: The third-year UCLA guard averaged 13.0 points and 6.0 rebounds. He led the Pac-12 in steals and was named the national defensive player of the year. Cronin called him a winner with strong intangibles.

Brice Sensabaugh: The Ohio State freshman averaged 16.3 points and 5.4 rebounds in 31 games before missing his final two in the Big Ten Tournament due to a knee injury. He's a potential first-round prospect.

No. 4 seed Rybakina has no trouble with Noskova

Associated Press

PARIS — Elena Rybakina's comfort on clay improved as she eased into the third round at the French Open by beating another Czech teenager on Thursday.

The Wimbledon champion and No. 4 seed at Roland Garros beat 18-year-old Linda Noskova 6-3, 6-3 on Court Suzanne Lenglen.

“I cannot say that here it's easy for me. It's still every match getting better and better,” Rybakina said on court. “It was a bit slippery for me today, I don't know why.”

She ought to be feeling cosy on dirt after winning the Italian

Open, but the 6-foot Kazakh is banking most of her confidence on her height advantage.

“This is my good weapon,” she said, “but, at the same time, to move on clay it's not easy. It's always I need more to prepare and, of course, be more patient during the rallies.”

The Australian Open runner-up hit 30 winners to Noskova's 16, though both players had 26 unforced errors. The Moscow-born Rybakina, who beat Brenda Fruhvirtova in the first round, will next face Sara Sorribes Tormo of Spain.

Teenager Mirra Andrejeva's Grand Slam debut keeps getting

better. The 16-year-old Russian beat Diane Parry of France 6-1, 6-2, to reach the third round and a matchup with Coco Gauff.

No. 20 Madison Keys committed a whopping 74 unforced errors in her 6-2, 4-6, 6-4 loss to fellow American player Kayla Day on Court Simonne Mathieu.

Day, who won the girls' title at the 2016 U.S. Open, is ranked 138th and came through qualifying to make her Roland Garros main-draw debut. She beat French wild card Kristina Mladenovic in the first round.

Injuries and the coronavirus pandemic stalled Day's career, she explained.

Later, defending champion and No. 1 seed Iga Swiatek of Poland eased past Claire Liu of the U.S., 6-4, 6-0. Gauff — last year's runner-up — beat Julia Grabher of Austria, 6-2, 6-3.

No. 7 seed Ons Jabeur of Tunisia rolled past France's Oceane Dodin, 6-2, 6-3.

On the men's side, two-time major finalist Casper Ruud, the No. 4 seed, advanced to the third round after beating Italian player Giulio Zeppieri 6-3, 6-2, 4-6, 7-5.

No. 18 Alex de Minaur of Australia lost to Tomas Martin Etcheverry of Argentina 6-3, 7-6 (2), 6-3.

SEC taking hard look at college sports betting

Associated Press

DESTIN, Fla. — When it comes to sports wagering, information is a commodity and even a morsel of news that is not widely available can be valuable.

As college sports experiences some of the negative consequences of ubiquitous legal betting on sporting events, could more transparency be among the potential safeguards?

"If everybody's giving an injury report, I have no problem giving an injury report," Georgia coach Kirby Smart said this week. "They do it in the NFL. I was in the NFL. That's not a huge deal as long as it's a level playing field."

A month highlighted by gambling-related firings and potential NCAA infractions in college sports motivated the Southeastern Conference to put extra emphasis on the issue at this week's spring meetings.

Commissioner Greg Sankey called on U.S. Integrity, a company that works with professional sports leagues and college conferences — including the SEC since 2018 — to monitor events for gambling improprieties, to give multiple presentations to SEC coaches and administrators on Wednesday and Thursday.

That was a late add to the agenda, Sankey said.

"We now have the issues emerging as it's become inculturated," he said. "We don't have a choice but to pay a high level of attention."

At Alabama, baseball coach Brad Bohannon was fired during an investigation by gaming officials in Ohio of suspicious bets on the Tide's game against LSU in late April.

Bohannon was in contact with an Indiana man who was betting on the game at a sportsbook located at the Great American

Ball Park in Cincinnati.

The Tide's starting pitcher was a late scratch because of an injury in that game.

"What we have done is we've reported to the proper people, and anything that we need to do to help cooperate and support those investigations we've done and will continue to do whatever we're asked," Alabama athletic director Greg Byrne said Wednesday.

The same Indiana man, Bert Neff, of Mooresville, is also at the center of an investigation by the University of Cincinnati that led to two members of the baseball staff being fired last month.

Conference leaders talk a lot about educating athletes and reinforcing the NCAA's strict rules against betting on most sports. An athlete that bets on a sport the NCAA sponsors — at any level from college to professional — risks their eligibility.

Sports wagering is now legal in 38 states, including Iowa, where more than 40 athletes at the universities of Iowa and Iowa State were identified in an investigation of potential illegal wagering.

"We had coaches in that meeting room that were asking questions from a betting standpoint, gambling standpoint, what's legal, what's not legal?" South Carolina coach Shane Beamer said. "So if we have questions about it and I have questions about it, then surely our student-athletes do as well."

Texas A&M coach Jimbo Fisher said information can run wild on a college campus.

"The thing about college kids, they're a lot more vulnerable than pro (players) because they're out going to class and who they talk to in a casual conversation. ... It's easy to get something (from them)," Fisher said.

Top prospects Crews, Skenes leading LSU baseball

Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. — When 6-foot-6, 247-pound right-hander Paul Skenes steps on the mound at LSU's Alex Box Stadium — as he will this weekend in the NCAA baseball tournament — sellout crowds 13,000 strong buzz with anticipation of 100 mph fastballs and strikeouts galore.

Taking in that scene from center field is Dylan Crews, who might be even more coveted by Major League Baseball teams than his fireballing teammate.

Crews, hitting .420 and named the SEC player of the year, is the consensus top prospect in this year's MLB amateur draft, which will be held in Las Vegas from July 9-11. Next is Skenes (10-2), who leads the nation with 167 strikeouts and was named SEC pitcher of the year. If they are the first two drafted, it will be the first time the top two picks came from the same college baseball team.

Crews has embraced the hype.

"I love it. It's what I've worked for every day, really," he said in a recent interview with The Associated Press. "Every time I come to the field, I just know that somebody is always there to kind of watch me and Paul. So it's a

good feeling."

Pittsburgh currently holds the No. 1 overall pick in the draft, followed by Washington and Detroit.

Crews has had years to get used to the attention. He was a prominent MLB prospect while at Lake Mary High School in Florida in 2020.

He opted for college because he "wanted to be the best player that I could be leading up to the draft. And I felt like, at the time, I wasn't."

"A lot of people think that college is like, not a good route" for top high school-age prospects, Crews added. "I think kids don't realize college is an unbelievable experience, you know? So I took a different route."

In LSU, Crews saw a place where he could develop lifelong ties, where he could always come back — and give back.

He has provided tickets to special needs children and embraces chances to connect with fans because it "lets people see a different side of you."

The majors seemed like more of a long shot to Skenes during high school in Lake Forest, Calif.

While he could throw in the mid-90s as a senior, that hardly guaranteed big-league suc-

cess. Having thrived academically, and following the example of uncles who had joined the Navy and Coast Guard, he chose to enroll at the Air Force Academy.

"I wanted to serve. I wanted to have a guaranteed job after college," Skenes said. "I was like, 'I want to play four more years in college ... and have a really cool job and fly \$100 million jets.'"

Skenes didn't specialize in pitching until he transferred to LSU last summer. At Air Force, he was also a designated hitter, catcher and first baseman. He received the 2022 John Ole-rud Award as college baseball's top two-way player. But as got he stronger and threw harder, Skenes reached a crossroads: remain at Air Force "and kind of bite the bullet there, or leave" and try to maximize his pitching potential.

Around that time, LSU coach Jay Johnson lured pitching coach Wes Johnson to his staff from the Minnesota Twins.

"If he weren't here, I don't think I would have come," Skenes said, crediting Wes Johnson for improving his slider with a new grip and a quicker unwinding of his body, creating more lateral break.