

Helo accident injures 22 US troops

By J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

A helicopter accident on Sunday in northeastern Syria injured 22 U.S. service members, according to U.S. Central Command.

The troops suffered “injuries of various degrees” and were receiving treatment, the command said Monday evening in a statement. Ten were evacuated to higher-care facilities outside the region.

On Tuesday, an unspecified number of

troops arrived at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, hospital spokesman Marcy Sanchez said.

Their conditions had not yet been determined, Sanchez said.

No enemy fire was reported and the accident’s cause is under investigation, according to the command.

The United States has about 900 service members in Syria, part of joint efforts with Kurdish fighters to prevent the resurgence of Islamic State, according to the command.

The U.S. also has about 170 contractors in Syria, CENTCOM spokesman Lt. Col. Dave Eastburn said in March.

A contractor died and at least 23 troops were injured in March by a drone attack on a U.S. base by groups linked to Iran’s Revolutionary Guard.

The U.S. responded with airstrikes on sites facilities used by the groups.

U.S. troops have been in the region since ISIS swept through Iraq and Syria in 2014, taking control of large swaths of territory.

CNO nominee has extensive Indo-Pacific experience

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Navy admiral with extensive experience in the Indo-Pacific has been recommended to be the service’s next top leader, officials said Monday.

Adm. Samuel Paparo, current commander of the Navy’s Pacific Fleet, was recommended by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and is on tap to be nominated as the next chief of naval operations, although President Joe Biden has not yet formally signed off on it, the officials said. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because no public announcement has been made.

The selection of Paparo comes as a bit of a surprise, since he had long been expected to move up to take over U.S. Indo-Pacific

Command. Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the current vice chief of naval operations, had been widely mentioned as a leading candidate for the top Navy job.

If Franchetti were selected she would have become the first woman to be a military service chief and the first woman to serve on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Women have served as military service secretaries as political appointees, but never as their top uniformed officer. This was seen as a chance for a women to break another all-male precedent.

Biden is expected to approve the recommendation, but all nominations for senior military jobs are currently stalled because one U.S. senator disagrees with Austin’s decision to have the Defense Department

pay for travel when a service member has to go out of state to get an abortion or other reproductive care.

Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville, of Alabama, has brought virtually all key senior military promotions to a halt due to his opposition to that policy.

Paparo is a naval aviator and a TOPGUN graduate with more than 6,000 flight hours in Navy fighter jets and 1,100 landings on aircraft carriers. A Pennsylvania native, he graduated from Villanova University and was commissioned into the Navy in 1987.

Prior to his Pacific tour, he was commander of naval forces in the Middle East, based in Bahrain, and also previously served as director of operations at U.S. Central Command in Florida.

New US aid to Ukraine includes Strykers, Bradleys

By MATTHEW ADAMS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The United States is sending up to \$325 million in additional aid to Ukraine that includes more Stryker and Bradley armored vehicles, the Pentagon announced Tuesday.

The military aid also includes Javelin missiles and munitions for National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems, or NASAMS, and High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS.

The aid is the 40th time that the U.S. has

provided weapons and equipment through the presidential drawdown authority, which means it will come directly from Pentagon stocks and sent quickly on an emergency basis. Aid given this way typically means it reaches Ukraine in a matter of weeks.

The new aid follows news reports that Ukraine has lost more than a dozen Bradley Fighting Vehicles after its troops began a long-anticipated counteroffensive last week against invading Russian forces. The announcement also comes after the Pentagon

announced Friday a long-term U.S. arms sale of \$2.1 billion focused on air-defense munitions.

Including the last two aid packages, the U.S. has provided more than \$40 billion to Ukraine since the war began in February 2022.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is traveling to Brussels with Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to meet with the Ukraine Defense Contact Group on Thursday and NATO defense ministers on Friday.

2 Marines plead guilty to Jan. 6 charges

Associated Press

Two men who were active-duty members of the Marine Corps when they stormed the U.S. Capitol pleaded guilty on Monday to riot-related criminal charges.

Joshua Abate and Dodge Dale Hellonen are scheduled to be sentenced in September by U.S. District Judge Ana Reyes. Both pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor count of parading, demonstrating or picketing in a Capitol building, according to a spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney's office for the District of Columbia.

Many Capitol rioters are military veterans, but only a few were actively serving in the armed forces when they joined a mob's attack on Jan. 6, 2021.

A third active-duty Marine, Micah Coomer, was also charged with Abate and Hello-

nen. Coomer pleaded guilty to the same misdemeanor charge in May and is scheduled to be sentenced by Reyes on Aug. 30.

All three men face a maximum sentence of six months of imprisonment.

As of May 19, the Marines were still in the service. No additional information was available Monday.

David Dischley, an attorney for Abate, declined to comment on his client's guilty plea. An assistant public defender who represents Hellonen didn't immediately respond to an email seeking comment. Authorities arrested the three men in January: Abate at Fort Meade, Md.; Coomer in Oceanside, Calif.; and Hellonen in Jacksonville, N.C.

Witnesses stationed with

Coomer at Marine Corps Base Quantico in Virginia and with Hellonen at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina identified them in videos of the Jan. 6 riot, according to the FBI. A third witness — also a Marine — identified Abate from footage captured inside the Capitol, the FBI said.

During a June 2022 interview for his security clearance, Abate said he and two "buddies" had walked through the Capitol on Jan. 6 "and tried not to get hit with tear gas," according to an FBI special agent.

"Abate also admitted he heard how the event was being portrayed negatively and decided that he should not tell anybody about going into the U.S. Capitol Building," the agent wrote in an affidavit.

After the riot, Coomer posted photos on Instagram with the caption "Glad to be (a part) of history." The angles of the photos and the caption indicated he had been inside the Capitol on Jan. 6, the FBI said. The phone number listed for Coomer in his military personal file matched the Instagram account.

Coomer drove to Washington on the morning of Jan. 6 from his military post in Virginia. He attended then-President Donald Trump's "Stop the Steal" rally with Abate and Hellonen before they entered the Capitol. Inside the Rotunda, they placed a red "Make America Great Again" hat on a statute before taking photos of it, prosecutors said. The three men spent nearly an hour inside the Capitol before leaving.

Conservative group: Navy should investigate drag queen

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

A conservative legal organization is demanding top U.S. Navy officials investigate an active-duty sailor and drag queen whom the service used as a "digital ambassador."

In a Monday letter to Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro and other senior administrators, the nonprofit America First Legal alleged misconduct by Petty Officer 2nd Class Joshua Kelley that included inappropriate political activity, contempt toward superiors and misuse of a service member's uniform.

Kelley, who performs as a drag queen with the stage name Harpy Daniels, was one of five members of the Navy's Digital Ambassador Pilot Program, a recruitment effort between October and March.

The letter alleged that Kelley, who identifies as nonbinary and is a self-described advocate for

the military's LGBTQ+ community, routinely "engaged in partisan activity, behaved in ways that discredit the military, publicly criticized his command and misused his uniform for personal gain" through social media.

"In order to preserve the Navy's reputation, swift action must be taken to restore good order and discipline and to prevent further partisan activity that implies Navy endorsement of particular candidates and causes," Jacob Meckler, the group's legal adviser, said in a Monday news release.

America First Legal, based in Washington, D.C., is led by former Trump administration officials, including Stephen Miller, a former senior adviser to President Donald Trump, and Gene Hamilton, counselor to the U.S. Attorney General from 2017 to 2021, according to the group's website.

The organization did not immediately respond to an email seeking further comment early Tuesday. Kelley, whose social media profiles are set to private, did not respond to a request for comment via Facebook.

The letter included screenshots of Kelley's "Harpy Daniels" social media pages and alleged that the sailor posted sexually explicit material, politically charged posts and statements of contempt for his superiors.

The group alleges that Kelley tweeted in June 2019 that "All of 7th Fleet is lazy," according to the letter. Naval Forces Japan on Tuesday confirmed Kelley was previously assigned to 7th Fleet.

The following year, according to America First Legal, Kelley accused then-President Trump of being a white supremacist and asked their followers to vote for Democratic candidates.

Stars and Stripes could not verify those posts.

Naval Forces Japan spokeswoman Cmdr. Katie Cerezo referred all questions to the Office of the Secretary of Defense and Navy Office of Information, neither of which immediately responded to requests for comment early Tuesday. Kelley came under fire last month when 14 Republican senators wrote to Del Toro highlighting Kelley's use of TikTok, which was banned on Defense Department devices last year, and questioned whether the Navy should promote "influencers who post behaviors or activities many Americans deem inappropriate," according to their May 3 letter.

The Pentagon came under fire earlier this year from conservative lawmakers who criticized drag shows on military bases. The Biden administration on June 1 — the start of Pride month — banned the shows on U.S. bases, resulting in event cancellations.

Trump in Fla. court facing secret documents charges

Associated Press

MIAMI — Former President Donald Trump arrived Tuesday afternoon at the federal courthouse in Miami to formally surrender to authorities on charges accusing him of illegally hoarding classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida.

The U.S. Marshals Service said Trump and Walt Nauta were booked shortly after they arrived Tuesday afternoon.

They were expected to face a magistrate judge, kickstarting a legal process that will unfold at the height of the 2024 presidential campaign and carry profound consequences not only for Trump's political future but more urgently for his own personal liberty.

Four black SUVs entered the garage beneath the Miami courthouse, followed by police officers, ahead of his scheduled 3 p.m. appearance. A fifth black SUV remained outside. Security remained tight outside the building but there were no signs of significant disruptions.

Trump approached his arraignment with characteristic bravado, insisting as he has through years of legal woes that he has done nothing wrong and was being persecuted for political purposes. But the gravity of the

moment was unmistakable as he answers to 37 felony counts that accuse him of willfully retaining classified records that prosecutors say could have jeopardized national security if exposed, then trying to hide them from investigators who demanded them.

The case is laden with political implications for Trump, who currently holds the dominant spot in the early days of the 2024 Republican presidential primary. But it also poses profound legal consequences given the prospect of a yearslong prison sentence. Even for a defendant whose post-presidential life has been dominated by investigations, the documents probe has stood out for both the apparent volume of evidence amassed and the severity of the allegations.

It's also a watershed moment for a Justice Department that until last week had never before brought charges against a former president. Attorney General Merrick Garland, an appointee of President Joe Biden, sought to insulate the department from political attacks by handing ownership of the case last year to a special counsel, Jack Smith, who on Friday declared, "We have one set of laws in this country, and they apply to everyone."

Senate bill grows job benefits for military spouses

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

Two senators want to expand the pool of military spouses who can be reimbursed for job-related costs associated with moving from active-duty units to the reserves, according to legislation introduced Monday.

The Military Spouse Career Support Act of 2023 would allow the Pentagon to reimburse military spouses for certain business costs for those families moving from active-duty service into the reserves. It follows a law passed last year, the Military Spouse Licensing Relief Act, which granted such reimbursements for spouses of active-duty service members moving from one assignment to another.

The new bill was introduced by Sens. Jon Ossoff, D-Ga., and Eric Schmitt, R-Mo.

"Military families make tremendous sacrifices in defense of our nation," Ossoff said in a statement Monday. "I'm bringing Republicans and Democrats together to help military spouses have more job flexibility."

If approved, the bill would provide the same benefits to families moving from active duty into the National Guard or selected reserves of the military services as families changing stations on active duty began receiving this year. Those include reimbursements for business licenses or professional certifications required for their jobs in their new locations, according to Ossoff's office.

The Pentagon has said about 39% of its active-duty military spouses require licenses or certifications for their work in various fields including real estate, nursing and teaching. The current law does not provide reimbursement for lawyers, however, according to the Defense Department.

Ossoff and Schmitt said they hope the new bill would help with retention, giving families more incentive to remain in the military in a Reserve role after leaving active duty.

"This bill ensures military spouses are eligible for reimbursement should a service member choose to transfer to the reserves," Schmitt said in a statement. "Providing an avenue to meaningful employment for service members and military spouses as this bill does is important to maintain quality of life for our service members and hopefully boosts retention."

Military spouse employment has long been a difficult issue for the Pentagon, and it has been seen as a major driver for troops who choose to leave the service.

Russian president hints at new push to seize more land in Ukraine

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian President Vladimir Putin suggested Tuesday that he could order his troops to try to seize more land in Ukraine to protect Russian territory on the border and asserted that Ukrainian forces had suffered "catastrophic" losses in a new counteroffensive.

In some of his most detailed remarks about the war in months, the Russian leader also said he was not contemplating a new mobilization, but he did not rule it out. And he reiterated Russia's claim that Ukraine was responsible for blowing up a Dnieper River dam that caused vast flooding on both sides of the front line last week in southern Ukraine.

Putin's comments at an open meeting with military journalists and bloggers followed Kyiv's claims that Ukrainian troops had captured a handful of villages in the

early stages of the counteroffensive. The meeting, which lasted more than two hours, came after Russian missile strikes in central Ukraine killed at least 11 people overnight.

Putin said Ukraine's counteroffensive has been unsuccessful. He asserted that Ukraine lost 160 tanks and over 360 other armored vehicles, while Russia lost 54 tanks since the new assault began. Those claims could not be verified.

The White House offered no immediate reaction to Putin's claims.

A U.S. official familiar with American intelligence said Putin's comments were "not accurate" and cautioned about putting any stock in Russia's public assessments. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to offer an internal assessment, did not offer any further detail on how Putin's claims were misleading.

Beijing criticizes US sanctions on firms

Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan — China on Tuesday criticized new sanctions imposed by the United States on companies believed to be involved in training Chinese military pilots and aiding weapons development.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin urged Washington to “stop abusing export control measures” to hobble Chinese companies.

“The United States has repeatedly overstretched the concept of national security, abused state power, unwarrantedly suppressed Chinese companies, and wantonly disrupted the international economic order and trade rules,” Wang said at a dai-

ly briefing in Beijing. “It has reached a level of unscrupulous hysteria.”

China “demands that the U.S. immediately correct its wrong practice of politicizing, instrumentalizing and weaponizing economic, trade and sci-tech issues with a pretext of human rights or military-related issues,” Wang said.

On Monday, the U.S. government placed 43 “entities” on an export control list over national security and foreign policy concerns. The list includes both Chinese and foreign companies. Among them are Frontier Services Group Ltd., a security and aviation company previously run by Blackwater founder Erik

Prince, and Test Flying Academy of South Africa, a flight school under scrutiny by British authorities for hiring retired British military pilots to train Chinese fliers. The companies are barred from receiving U.S. exports for activities deemed contrary to U.S. national interest.

Other companies were sanctioned for aiding development of China’s hypersonic weapons and the modernization of its army, the Commerce Department aid.

Two companies — Beijing Ryan Wende Science and Technology Co. Ltd. and Xinjiang Kehua Hechang Biological Science and Technology Co. Ltd. —

were added for allegedly supplying items that helped the Chinese government monitor Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities. The U.S. has imposed several rounds of sanctions and import curbs over the past three years on companies believed to be aiding Beijing’s crackdown on ethnic minorities in its western Xinjiang region.

The two countries are, however, still working to keep lines of communication open to avoid an accidental conflict. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is expected in Beijing later this week, in a visit previously postponed due to an alleged Chinese spy balloon that traveled across U.S. territory in February.

Belarus leader wouldn’t hesitate to use nukes

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said Tuesday that he wouldn’t hesitate to order the use of Russian tactical nuclear weapons that are set to be deployed to Belarus if his country faces an aggression.

Earlier this year, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the planned deployment of short-range nuclear weapons to Moscow’s neighbor and ally Belarus in a move widely seen as a warning to the West as it stepped up military support for Ukraine.

Putin has emphasized that Russia will retain control of them, but Lukashenko’s statement contradicted that.

“God forbid I have to make a decision to use those weapons today, but there would be no hesitation if we face an aggression,” Lukashenko, known for his blustery statements, said in comments released by his office.

Russian officials had no immediate comment on Lukash-

enko’s remarks.

Lukashenko emphasized that it was he who had asked Putin to deploy Russian nuclear weapons to Belarus. He argued the move was necessary to deter a potential aggression.

Putin said during Friday’s meeting with Lukashenko that work on building facilities for the nuclear weapons will be completed by July 7-8, and they will be moved to Belarusian territory quickly after that.

Lukashenko said Tuesday that “everything is ready” for the Russian nuclear weapons’ deployment, adding that “it could take just a few days for us to get what we had asked for and even a bit more.”

Tactical nuclear weapons are intended to destroy enemy troops and weapons on the battlefield.

Lukashenko said Belarus doesn’t need Russia’s strategic nuclear weapons to be deployed to its territory. “Am I going to fight America? No,” he said.

Officials want S. Africa punished for Russia ‘aid’

Associated Press

A bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers wants the Biden administration to punish South Africa for what they have called its support for Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine by relocating an important trade meeting to another country, according to a letter published Tuesday in The New York Times.

The lawmakers also said South Africa’s “aid” for Russia, including allegedly supplying Moscow with weapons for its war in Ukraine, calls into question its eligibility to receive trade benefits from the United States under the African Growth and Opportunity Act.

South African Foreign Ministry spokesman Clayson Monye-la said Tuesday in a statement that the U.S. lawmakers’ letter had been “noted” but South Africa still “enjoys the support of the U.S. government” for its hosting of the AGOA meeting.

South Africa’s exports to the U.S. through AGOA were estimated at \$3 billion last year.

The U.S. is South Africa’s second-biggest trade partner behind China.

Moving November’s AGOA meeting to another country “would send a clear and important message that the United States continues to stand with Ukraine and will not accept our trading partners provision of aid to Russia’s ongoing and brutal invasion,” the letter from lawmakers said.

It said that despite the South African government’s claim of being neutral in the war in Ukraine, it had “deepened its military relationship with Russia over the past year.”

The U.S. concerns burst into the public sphere last month when U.S. Ambassador to South Africa Reuben Brigety held a news conference in the South African capital of Pretoria and accused the country of providing arms to Russia in a cargo ship that made a secret visit to South Africa’s main naval base in December.

South Africa has denied the allegation.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Suspect in 1984 killing arrested 39 years later

FL TAMPA — A man wanted in the 1984 killing of a Florida woman has been arrested in California nearly four decades later, authorities said.

Detectives from the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office were traveling to San Diego County to interview Donald Michael Santini, who was being held in jail following his arrest, the sheriff's office said in a statement.

Santini had been on the run since June 1984, when Florida authorities obtained an arrest warrant linking him to the strangling death of Cynthia Ruth Wood, 33, of Bradenton, located south of Tampa.

Wood's body was found in a watery ditch three days after she went missing. The arrest warrant said a medical examiner determined she had been strangled and Santini's fingerprints were found on her body, WFTS-TV reported.

Man sues troopers, says job offer pulled due to HIV

AK ANCHORAGE — A Salt Lake City man who said his job offer to become an Alaska State Trooper was rescinded after he disclosed he was HIV positive filed a lawsuit in state court to get his position on the statewide police force and to prevent others from suffering similar alleged discrimination.

The lawsuit was filed electronically by Anchorage civil rights attorney Caitlin Shortell on behalf of a man only identified as John Doe, whose HIV is undetectable and untransmissible.

"There are no reservations about his ability to do the duties of the job, and he is completely fit," Shortell said, adding he can work without accommodations.

Doe "seeks to challenge the constitutionality of the Alaska State Troopers' rescission of a job offer based on his being a person who lives with HIV, in light of medical advancements that render HIV status irrelevant to a person's ability to meet the criteria for entry and service at Alaska State Troopers in any capacity," the lawsuit states.

Civil rights lawyer arrested after filming traffic stop

MS JACKSON — A Mississippi civil rights lawyer was arrested after filming a traffic stop conducted by officers from a police department she is suing in federal court, her attorney said.

Jill Collen Jefferson is the president of JULIAN, the civil rights organization that filed a federal lawsuit last year against the Lexington Police Department on behalf of a group of city residents. Michael Carr, Jefferson's attorney, told The Associated Press she was arrested after she filmed officers after they pulled someone over.

Jefferson's lawsuit claims police have subjected Lexington residents to false arrests, excessive force and intimidation.

College students to be expelled for vandalism

CT STORRS — Some University of Connecticut students are getting expelled for vandalizing their campus following their men's basketball team's April 3 victory in the NCAA championship

game, a university spokesperson said.

"Although we can't address individual students' outcomes, we can say that some reviews have concluded with expulsions," UConn spokesperson Stephanie Reitz said. She said the investigations are ongoing for other students who were arrested following the vandalism at the Storrs campus, which included smashing windows and damaging a police vehicle.

The Huskies' 76-59 win over San Diego State University secured UConn's fifth NCAA title in 24 years. Most of the celebrations that followed in Storrs were peaceful, but some students pulled down signs and light poles and smashed windows.

More than a dozen students were arrested on charges that in some cases included rioting.

State rolls out education push for recreational pot

NM ALBUQUERQUE — After more than a year of recreational marijuana sales, New Mexico is rolling out its first campaign to educate people about responsible use.

The first batch of billboards is now going up around the state while TV, radio, print and digital advertisements will be running through the month of June. The media buy is worth \$400,000.

The "Yes & Know" campaign is built around the phrase "Yes — cannabis is legal. Know — the rules."

"We recognize the need for education in this new cannabis industry. This campaign opens the conversation for responsible storage and safe cannabis consumption," said Linda Trujillo, who heads the state Regulation

and Licensing Department, which oversees the state Cannabis Control Division.

High court won't review Confederate license nix

DC WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court said it won't review North Carolina's decision to stop issuing specialty license plates with the Confederate flag.

As is typical, the court did not comment in declining to hear the case, which challenged the state's decision. The dispute was similar to a case originating in Texas that the court heard in 2015, when it ruled the license plates are state property.

The current dispute stems from North Carolina's 2021 decision to stop issuing specialty license plates bearing the insignia of the North Carolina chapter of the Sons of Confederate Veterans. The chapter sued, claiming that the state's decision violated state and federal law. A lower court dismissed the case, and a federal appeals court agreed with that decision.

Mount Washington records its snowiest June

NH GORHAM — A New Hampshire mountain known for its extreme weather conditions has recorded its snowiest June in 91 years of recordkeeping.

Snowfall on Saturday atop Mount Washington brought the total amount to 8.4 inches for the month of June, according to the Mount Washington Observatory.

But with a return to warmer weather, nearly all of it had melted by early Monday.

— From wire reports

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Nuggets claim their first NBA crown

Associated Press

DENVER — Confetti flying in Denver. The Nuggets sharing hugs while passing around the NBA championship trophy.

Those scenes that, for almost a half-century, seemed impossible, then more recently started feeling inevitable, finally turned into reality Monday night.

The Nuggets outlasted the Miami Heat 94-89 in an ugly, frantic Game 5 that did nothing to derail Nikola Jokic, who bailed out his teammates with 28 points and 16 rebounds on a night when nothing else seemed to work.

Jokic became the first player in history to lead the league in points (600), rebounds (269) and assists (190) in a single post-season. Not surprisingly, he won the Bill Russell trophy as the NBA Finals MVP — an award that certainly has more meaning to him than the two overall MVPs he won in 2021 and '22 and the one that escaped him this year.

"We are not in it for ourselves, we are in it for the guy next to us," Jokic said. "And that's why this (means) even more."

Denver's clincher was a gruesome grind.

Unable to shake the tenacious Heat or their own closing-night jitters, the Nuggets missed 20 of their first 22 three-pointers. They missed seven of their first 13 free throws. They overcame that to take a late seven-point lead, only to see Miami's Jimmy Butler go off. He scored eight straight points to give the Heat a one-point lead with 2:45 left.

Butler made two free throws with 1:58 remaining to help Miami regain a one-point lead. Then, Bruce Brown got an offensive rebound and tip-in to give the Nuggets an edge they didn't give up.

Trailing by three with 15 seconds left, Butler jacked up a three, but missed it. Brown and Kentavious Caldwell-Pope made two free throws each down the stretch to clinch the title for Denver.

Butler finished with 21 points.

"Those last three or four minutes felt like a scene out of a movie," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "Two teams in the center of the ring throwing haymaker after haymaker, and it's not necessarily shot making. It's the efforts."

Grueling as it was, the aftermath was something the Nuggets and their fans could all agree was beautiful. There were fireworks exploding outside Ball Arena at the final buzzer. Denver is the home of the Larry O'Brien Trophy for the first time in the franchise's 47 years in the league.

"The fans in this town are unbelievable," said team owner Stan Kroenke, who also owns the Colorado Avalanche, the team that won its third Stanley Cup last year. "It means a lot to us to get this done."

The Heat were, as Spoelstra promised, a gritty, tenacious bunch. But their shooting wasn't great, either. Miami shot 34% from the floor and 25%

from three. Until Butler went off, he was 2-for-13 for eight points. Bam Adebayo finished with 20 points.

The Heat, who survived a loss in the play-in tournament and became only the second No. 8 seed to make the Finals, insisted they weren't into consolation prizes.

They played like they expected to win, and for a while during this game, which was settled as much by players diving onto the floor as sweet-looking jump shots, it looked like they would.

The Nuggets, who came in shooting 37.6% from three for the series, shot 18% in this one. They committed 14 turnovers.

The tone was set with 2:51 left in the first quarter, when Jokic got his second foul and joined Aaron Gordon on the bench. Jeff Green and Jamal Murray, who finished with 14 points and eight assists on an off night, joined them there, too.

It made the Nuggets tentative on both sides of the court for the rest of the half.

Jokic adds only trophies missing from his résumé

Associated Press

DENVER — There are no more holes in Nikola Jokic's impressive résumé.

Denver's do-it-all center commandeered these playoffs, smashing a 56-year-old playoff record with 10 triple-doubles, and he completed a transcendent two-month stretch by leading the Nuggets past the Miami Heat 94-89 on Monday night in a hard-fought Game 5 to secure the old ABA franchise's first basketball championship.

Jokic had 28 points, 16 rebounds and four assists in the clincher that came 55 years, seven months and 28 days after the Nuggets won the first game in franchise history. Denver struggled shooting the ball

against the pesky Heat, missing 23 of 28 shots from three-point range and 10 of 23 free throws.

"It was ugly and we couldn't make shots. But at the end we figured it out," Jokic said after hugging all of his jubilant teammates and coaches and almost all of his dejected opponents, chasing down some of them as they walked off the court. "I am just happy we won the game."

The stoic Jokic finally let loose when he greeted his two older brothers, Nemanja and Strahinja — who tossed Nuggets coach Michael Malone in the air — and his wife and toddler daughter in the stands.

Jokic acquiesced the Michael Jordan Trophy to Joel Embiid as the league's MVP this season despite being even more dom-

inant than he was in the two previous seasons when he easily won the award.

He instead walked away with the Bill Russell NBA Finals Most Valuable Player trophy after becoming the first player in league history to lead the playoffs in total points (600), rebounds (269) and assists (190).

Jokic smiled sheepishly as he held the MVP trophy in his right hand and daughter Ognjena in the other as confetti danced around him.

As the 41st pick in the 2014 draft — which occurred during a Taco Bell commercial, no less — Jokic is the lowest-drafted player to be chosen finals MVP.

"I think it's a great journey. Like you said, 41st pick," Jokic said, "but that doesn't matter.

When you're here, you're a player. The (Heat) have a couple guys that weren't even drafted."

Throughout the playoffs, Jokic dominated opponents with his array of finger-roll finishes, pull-up jump shots, long-range buzzer-beaters, amazing assists and rebounding prowess at both baskets.

When he wasn't on the court, he was his teammates' biggest supporter, jumping in jubilation as they kept the Heat at bay when he was in foul trouble in Game 4. On Monday night, he let his emotions show during a third-quarter timeout when he got on his teammates for settling for threes instead of layups, lapses that led to a 64-60 deficit.

Toughest test in golf: Explain the merger

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The U.S. Open trophy is no longer in Matt Fitzpatrick's possession. The questions about Saudi involvement in golf and the LIV Golf circuit won't go away.

Not much has changed from Brookline to Los Angeles, from one U.S. Open to the next one, only the nature of the questions and the vagueness — and fatigue — of the answers.

"The whole thing is confusing, I guess," Fitzpatrick said Monday. "It was confusing last year."

LIV Golf had just played its first tournament going into the U.S. Open last year, and the uncertainty was whether it would gain traction and who else might join. Now it's about the blockbuster announcement last week that the PGA Tour — in the midst of a bitter antitrust lawsuit with LIV and having stood its ground on legacy and the source of LIV money — has agreed to partner with the Saudi Arabia wealth fund that pays for LIV Golf.

Players were blindsided by the agreement, which has been de-

scribed as a framework because there still is no meat to the business merger. They still have no answers. No one does.

"I really know as much as you guys know, to be honest," said British Open champion Cameron Smith, who defected to LIV after the PGA Tour season ended last August. "I haven't been told much at all. I'm just taking it as it goes along."

PGA Tour players complained about getting news of the stunning development off social media (CNBC broke the embargo about the time the tour was notifying players). Smith said Yasir Al-Rumayyan, the governor of the Public Investment Fund, called him and a few other LIV players shortly before Al-Rumayyan joined PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan on CNBC.

"He didn't really explain too much. I think there's still a lot of stuff to be worked out, and as time goes on, we'll get to know more and more," Smith said. "But there's definitely a lot of curious players, I think, on both sides as to what the future is go-

ing to look like."

The timing isn't great. The U.S. Open is the third major of the year and presents a new challenge for most of the players because Los Angeles Country Club has never hosted the major known as the toughest test in golf.

Monday was the first full day of practice.

There are angles to learn. Two par 3s are longer than 280 yards, another could play as short as 80 yards. Expect to hear the term "barranca," which in simple terms is a wide ditch of native grasses and soil that winds through the front nine.

And there is LIV and the Saudi agreement, just no answers.

Billy Horschel played the front nine of LACC on Sunday in peace. He played the back nine Monday and walked right off the 18th green into a television interview.

He can talk as well as anyone, even in circles.

Yes, he was shocked when the news broke last Tuesday. Since then, he has become more patient to wait on details to figure

out what it all means.

"There's a structure of an agreement, but that's all there is," Horschel said. "Until all that information is figured out and shared with us, I'm emotionless — which is rare for me. And even more rare is I'm not going to give a thought or an opinion because I don't have enough information to speak."

Fitzpatrick thought long about whether he should be compensated for showing loyalty to the tour before saying, "I'll pass." When another question on the topic was asked, a USGA official interjected to put the focus on U.S. Open.

Oh, yes. That.

"Listen, it can be a distraction. There's no doubt about it," Horschel said. "If guys are worrying about it, thinking about it, talking about it all the time and they're not focusing on their game and what matters at the end of the day ... all you can do is play good golf, and hopefully all the other stuff works out the way it should."

Knights out to fulfill prediction of Cup by sixth year

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Golden Knights owner Bill Foley was aggressive from the beginning, saying he wanted to win the Stanley Cup in six years.

Vegas nearly won it the first year, making the Stanley Cup Final before losing in five games to the Washington Capitals. For the players on that team, high expectations came from the top and came early.

"Maybe (Foley) saw something that we didn't see," said Jonathan Marchessault, one of the players on that 2017-18 team.

Marchessault and his Vegas teammates have the opportunity to make good on the owner's projection. The Knights, who are in their sixth season, took a

3-1 series lead into Tuesday's Stanley Cup Final game against the Florida Panthers.

Meaning the Stanley Cup was in T-Mobile Arena for the second time. The first time was in 2018 when the Capitals skated around the rink holding the cherished prize.

The Knights have their own version of the Original Six, the half-dozen members still in the Vegas dressing room who were on that inaugural club. They called themselves the Golden Misfits, a collection of players assembled from teams around the league through the expansion draft and trades.

The six Misfits have ingrained in their collective memory of coming so close to what would have been a shocking

championship, and they have been working ever since to get back to that point. Those players are careful to point out no celebrations can take place unless they beat the Panthers.

"It would be sweet, but at the same time, we can't get ahead of ourselves," said Shea Theodore, an original Knight. "It's good to be at this point, but at the same time, it's not done."

The Misfits have their fingerprints all over these playoffs.

Marchessault is the overwhelming favorite, according to FanDuel Sportsbook, to win the Conn Smythe Trophy for MVP of the playoffs. His 13 goals are tied for the league postseason high as are his 24 points.

William Karlsson has scored 11 goals, and his defense has

been key. Coach Bruce Cassidy usually rolls his four lines, but played a little bit of a matchup game in the second-round series against the Edmonton Oilers by often putting Karlsson's line on the ice with Connor McDavid.

Theodore's nine assists are third among playoff defensemen. He snapped a 27-game goal drought with a key score in Game 1 against Florida.

William Carrier, Brayden McNabb and Reilly Smith also made important contributions.

"All the guys have stepped out, had big moments and played solid," McNabb said. "I think it kind of (speaks) to the depth on our team. When you have that buy-in, it's a pretty hard team to beat."

Ohtani's 2nd homer lifts Angels over Rangers

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Shohei Ohtani took another sweet swing and went deep again for the Los Angeles Angels.

After tying the game with a solo homer in the seventh, Ohtani went the opposite way for a two-run shot leading off the 12th inning to give the Angels their first lead as they rallied to beat the AL West-leading Texas Rangers 9-6 on Monday night.

"I saw the ball really well and the results came with it," Ohtani said through his translator.

Ohtani hit the first pitch of the 12th off Cole Ragans (2-3) over the left-field wall. It was Ohtani's eighth homer in 13 games, and his 20th of the season to overtake Aaron Judge for the American League lead. It was

his 10th career multihomer game, the second in his recent surge.

"He's on a nice little streak. It's fun to watch," manager Phil Nevin said. "I see him having a lot of fun. ... His emotion is showing."

Mariners 8, Marlins 1: Rookie Bryce Miller and two relievers combined on a one-hitter, Ty France, Eugenio Suárez and Tom Murphy homered, and host Seattle beat Miami.

Miller was superb, throwing six innings and allowing only Nick Fortes' solo home run with two outs in the fifth inning. Ty Adcock pitched two innings of relief in his major league debut, and Gabe Speier worked the ninth, finishing off the one-hitter.

Giants 4, Cardinals 3: Mitch Haniger drove in two runs and Brandon Crawford hit a tie-breaking RBI single in the eighth inning to lead visiting San Francisco.

Wilmer Flores had three hits for the Giants, who have won five of seven.

Tigers 6, Braves 5 (10): Spencer Torkelson keyed a three-run, ninth-inning rally against Raisel Iglesias with a two-run homer and hit a game-ending single in the 10th, lifting host Detroit over Atlanta and ending a nine-game losing streak.

Rockies 4, Red Sox 3 (10): Nick Pivetta walked Randal Grichuk to force in the go-ahead run in the 10th inning, first baseman Triston Casas booted a po-

tential inning-ending grounder and visiting Colorado beat Boston in a matchup of last-place teams.

Reds 5, Royals 4 (10): TJ Friedl scored the tiebreaking run in the 10th inning on Jonathan India's grounder, and visiting Cincinnati handed Kansas City its seventh straight defeat.

Athletics 4, Rays 3: Shea Langeliers hit a three-run double in the fifth inning to break up a scoreless game, and host Oakland won its season-high sixth straight.

Diamondbacks 9, Phillies 8: Evan Longoria hit a three-run homer to finish with four RBIs, and host Arizona withstood Philadelphia's J.T. Realmuto hitting for the team's first cycle in nearly 20 years.

Newcomers bring different look to College World Series

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — The College World Series has its usual mix of regulars in the eight-team field, but it's a couple of relative newcomers that could provide the biggest storylines at the two-week party at Charles Schwab Field.

Wake Forest has been the dominant team in the country since February and is the first No. 1 national seed since 2018 to reach the CWS. The Demon Deacons haven't gone this far since their 1955 team won the national championship.

Oral Roberts is the lowest seed to make it to Omaha since Stony Brook in 2012 and is in the field for the first time since its only other appearance in 1978.

As for those familiar names, LSU is in for the 19th time, Stanford for the 18th time and third straight and Florida for the 13th. TCU will make its sixth appearance since 2010 and Virginia its sixth since 2009.

Tennessee is back for the second time in three years.

Stanford punched its ticket with a 7-6 win over Texas on Monday in a game that ended in odd fashion. With two outs in the bottom of the ninth, Texas outfielders Dylan Campbell and Eric Kennedy lost Drew Bowser's high fly in the twilight sky. The ball dropped about 15 feet in front of Campbell, allowing Alberto Rios to score from second base.

Tennessee advanced with a 5-0 win over Southern Mississippi in a game that started four hours late because of rain and lightning. Drew Beam pitched six innings, and Zane Denton's three-run homer in the fifth broke open a 1-0 game.

Wake Forest has showed no obvious weaknesses this season and is tied for the sixth-most wins entering a CWS.

The Deacons' pitching staff leads the nation with a season ERA of 2.84 and has struck out 79 in the tournament. Ace Rhett Lowder leads the nation in wins with his 15-0 record.

The Deacons have averaged 15 runs, hit 19 homers and batted .359 in their five tournament games. Their prodigious offense was on full display in the super regional clinching 22-5 win over Alabama on Sunday. They tied the tournament record with nine home runs, three by projected first-round draft pick Brock Wilken.

"I think that dogpile was surreal," he said. "Not a lot of people get to do that, and being able to do that with my best friends, that meant the world to me. Job's not finished, but we got a huge step along the way."

Oral Roberts is from the Summit League, one of the weakest conferences, and that is a big reason for its No. 4 regional seeding. The Golden Eagles are no joke, though. Wins in 23 of their last 24 games, including a three-

game regional sweep and super regional win at Oregon, say as much.

Ryan Folmar's Eagles are mostly a collection of transfers. Senior first baseman Jake McMurray is the only everyday player who has been at ORU his entire career.

The star is center fielder Jonah Cox, who will enter the CWS on a 47-game hitting streak, tied for third-longest in Division I history. He has had a hit in 62 of 63 games.

LSU features the top two prospects for next month's amateur draft. Center fielder Dylan Crews, the projected No. 1 pick, is batting .434 for the season to lead all CWS players. Pitcher Paul Skenes has 188 strikeouts, the most since 2011, and is threatening LSU alum Ben McDonald's SEC record of 202.

Florida left fielder Wyatt Langford is expected to be drafted right behind Crews and Skenes and is batting .373 with 17 homers and 24 doubles, and two-way sensation Jac Caglianone leads the nation with 31 homers and has held down the No. 3 spot in the rotation.

Catcher Kyle Teel and third baseman Jake Gelof are returning starters from Virginia's 2021 CWS team, and they headline an offense batting a nation-leading .335. Teel's .418 average is best in the ACC, and Gelof has 23 homers and a conference-high 89 RBIs.