

Navy struggling to retain its top talent

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

High stress, overwhelming administrative requirements and a “toxic culture,” among other factors, are discouraging junior surface warfare officers from aspiring to command, according to the results of a Navy survey released this month.

Just 44% of the junior officers polled were interested in serving as a commander. They also cited too much time away from home and a “lack of control,” Naval Surface Forces said June 9 in a report about the survey conducted last year.

Surface warfare officers are trained in the operation of Navy ships at sea and the management of shipboard systems.

The survey is the first of its kind in terms of its depth, according to the Naval Surface Forces report. Additional factors, including challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic and changes to division officer billets, should be considered when interpreting the results.

The survey, which included responses from 2,550 surface warfare officers — ensigns to captains — established that “most officers believe we are not retaining top talent,” and that administrative requirements

and the number of unqualified junior officers are adding to frustrations with the service.

The Navy, much like the rest of the U.S. armed services, is grappling with recruitment and retention issues. The Defense Department is “facing its most challenging recruitment environment in 50 years,” according to a March 28 report from the Government Accountability Office.

Factors affecting recruitment include declining interest in the military, education, aptitude and medical and physical fitness. Factors influencing retention include job dissatisfaction, quality of life, and sexual harassment and sexual assault, according to the GAO.

“We know our people are our greatest strength and the asymmetric advantage we bring to conflict,” Naval Surface Forces said in its report. “Dismantling the barriers that prevent their success and satisfaction is the surest way to build connectedness in our Force, while producing more positive recruiting and retention outcomes.”

Of the junior officers — ensigns to lieutenant commanders — the least satisfied group is lieutenant junior grade; they were also the most likely to want to leave the Na-

vy, the least likely to desire command and the most likely to report dissatisfaction as a surface warfare officer.

“Many, if not most, of our officers are making the decision to leave the Navy as [lieutenant junior grades] and we need these officers leading our ships,” the report said.

Senior officers — commanders and captains — responded more favorably in a separate survey included with the report.

Of the 855 respondents, 65% were interested in attaining command and most plan to serve beyond 20 years.

Junior and senior officers both indicated they “appreciate the amount of challenge in their work,” take pride in the responsibility they are given, enjoy working with junior sailors and have positive relationships with their peers.

They also responded positively to compensation, education, retirement and health care benefits.

“Conversely, both junior and senior officers are frustrated with the amount of friction caused by administrative tasks, believe work is not equitably distributed, and are displeased with the working hours during shipyard availabilities,” the report said.

Senators probe retired military work for foreign powers

The Washington Post

Two key senators said they will introduce a bipartisan bill Tuesday to clamp down on the secretive practice of retired U.S. service members who cash in their military expertise by working as consultants and contractors for foreign governments.

The bill, co-sponsored by Sens. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., and Charles E. Grassley, R-Iowa, would impose an array of new restrictions, including a prohibition on troops negotiating post-retirement jobs with foreign powers while still on active duty; a ban on

military intelligence personnel working for any countries except for close allies such as Britain, Canada and Australia; and stiffer financial penalties for those who violate the law.

The proposed legislation would also require the federal government to publicly disclose the names, job duties and salary details for all retired service members who receive compensation from foreign governments — something the Pentagon and State Department have long resisted.

The senators said they were acting in response to investigations by The Washington Post

and the nonprofit Project on Government Oversight, which found that more than 500 retired U.S. military personnel — including scores of generals and admirals — have gone to work for foreign governments since 2015, mostly in countries known for political repression.

Under federal law, retired troops are permitted to work for foreign governments if they first obtain approval from their service branch and the State Department. But federal agencies have fought to keep virtually all details about the arrangements a secret. The Post had to sue the Army, Na-

vy, Air Force, Marine Corps and State Department under the Freedom of Information Act to obtain more than 4,000 pages of documents that shed light on the matter.

“The Department of Defense is letting too many retired military officers trade their military service and experience to foreign governments for cash — creating serious risks to our national security,” said Warren, who leads the Senate Armed Services subcommittee on personnel. “This system needs serious transparency and accountability.”

House panel cuts \$20B, boosts F-35s

Bloomberg News

A U.S. House panel, seeking to advance competing priorities while adhering to spending caps under debt limit law, wants to prevent two amphibious assault ships from being retired and boost the Air Force's F-35 Joint Strike Fighter fleet.

At the same time, the House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee would shift as much as \$20 billion from what it sees as poorly justified funding requests — including parts of the Pentagon's top priority to buy munitions in bulk.

"We have \$20 billion of money we are rearranging and putting that into priorities to make this a better and stronger force," subcommittee Chairman Ken Calvert, a California Republican, said in an interview. The defense cap in the debt limit bill is \$886

billion, and the panel's allocation for national security programs is \$826 billion.

The defense spending proposal is the first salvo in what is likely to be a fight in Congress over national security spending and competing priorities for the GOP and Democrats. The U.S. is the linchpin for security assistance to Ukraine's fight against Russia's invasion, at the same time Washington prepares for competition and conflict with China in the Pacific region. The House version must be reconciled with the still-to-be-disclosed Senate bill.

One of the panel's biggest economies would authorize the Pentagon to enter into contracts of typically five years, for five of seven requested munitions programs, intended to signal a long-term commitment to the industry — but with caveats.

The Pentagon is working to help the industry ramp up and build sufficient munitions stockpiles for future conflicts. As Washington sent Ukraine Raytheon Technologies' Stinger surface-to-air missiles and Javelin antitank missiles, made by Raytheon and Lockheed Martin, along with Howitzers and ammunition, it started to deplete its own stockpiles.

While the defense panel allowed multiyear contracts for munitions, it denied the military the ability to place bulk orders in the early years of the contracts for components — so-called Economic Order Quantities — on the promise of cost savings, which the panel assessed haven't been adequately documented and won't materialize. Forgoing the block buys would save \$1.9 billion that can be shifted to other programs.

Instead, the panel's draft spending proposal requires the military services to request annually the specific dollars used to buy components. The munitions that received committee backing are the Naval Strike Missile made by Raytheon and Kongsberg Defence Aerospace, Patriot Pac-3 missile Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System, Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile, and Long-range anti-ship missiles — all made by Lockheed Martin.

The spending proposal would boost the Air Force's fleet by three Lockheed F-35 Joint Strike Fighters, above the Pentagon's request of 48 planes for the service. While the defense committee wasn't able to fund an additional amphibious assault ship because of budgetary limits, it plans to prevent the Navy from retiring two of the vessels.

1,000 new claims related to contaminated Red Hill water filed

BY DOUG G. WARE
Stars and Stripes

Another 1,000 military family members and civilians filed legal claims against the federal government Tuesday stemming from illnesses that they suffered after drinking water that was contaminated with jet fuel near the Navy's Red Hill storage facility in Hawaii, their attorneys said.

"The Navy has long promoted secrecy over truth when it comes to water contamination and toxic exposure," said attorney Kristina Baehr, who is representing military and civilian families in the case. "Now, 1,002 new claimants seek truth and accountability for the Navy's failure to warn them to stop using the water the Navy knew was toxic."

The Navy's Red Hill Underground Fuel Storage Facility on Oahu, about 5 miles northwest of Honolulu, was closed a year ago after jet fuel was found in a well

that supplied water to tens of thousands of people in military communities in the area, such as Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam. Hundreds of people already have filed legal complaints against the government over the contaminated water.

The new additions are now in the administrative complaint phase under the Federal Tort Claims Act, which means the government could still settle with them, the attorneys said.

"The affected military and civilian families suffer from a widening range of frightening, debilitating health effects because of the U.S. Navy's allegedly reluctant, inconsistent delivery of medical care and its seeming secrecy," said a joint statement by the plaintiffs' attorneys at the Motley Rice, Just Well Law and Hosoda law firms.

"The Navy has taken responsibility for the contamination itself

and promised to make it right. These claims give the Navy the chance to do so," said Baehr, the founder of Just Well Law.

Jet fuel at Red Hill spilled into the water supply at least twice in 2021, and people who drank the contaminated water experienced problems such as seizures, gastrointestinal disorders, neurological issues, burns, rashes, lesions, thyroid abnormalities, migraines and neurobehavioral challenges, according to the lawsuit already filed against the government. The government said in a court document filed in May that it doesn't dispute there was a "breach of duty of care" at Red Hill and acknowledged people "suffered injuries compensable under the Federal Tort Claims Act."

If the government doesn't settle with the 1,002 new complainants, the cases could join the pending lawsuit — Patrick Feindt Jr. et al., v. the United States of

America — in U.S. District Court, the attorneys said. The lawsuit already includes about 300 people who are suing the government over the Red Hill spill.

The attorneys said the military failed to provide adequate medical care for those who became sick, though the government has specific testing and care standards for those exposed to hazardous chemicals such as jet fuel.

"These families are still sick, and 67% of our clients report that they still have adverse health symptoms," Baehr said.

The Pentagon and the Navy have not publicly responded to the complaints because the legal process is ongoing. But the Navy has promised Red Hill will never contaminate the community's water supply again. The service is dismantling the storage depot, which could take about three years and cost \$120 million, officials have said.

Russia says drones downed near Moscow

Associated Press

Two drones were brought down outside Moscow as they approached the warehouses of a military unit, Russian authorities said Wednesday, in what could be the latest attempt by Ukraine to strike targets inside Russia during the early stages of Kyiv's most recent counteroffensive.

At the same time, Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed the Ukrainian forces were regrouping after what he described as a failed counteroffensive and could be readying new attempts to attack Russian positions.

The two drones came down near the village of Lukino, administratively part of the city of Moscow, Russian media reported. The wreckage of a third drone was reportedly found about 12 miles away. No damage or casualties were reported.

Russia's Defense Ministry claimed it was "an unsuccessful attempt at a terrorist attack" by "the Kyiv regime" on its facilities in the Moscow region, adding in a statement that all three drones were brought down by electronic jamming.

Ukraine, which doesn't usually confirm attacks on Russian soil, made no immediate

comment. Previously, Ukrainian officials have emphasized the country's right to strike any target in response to Russia's invasion and war that started in February 2022.

Last month, two drone attacks jolted the Russian capital, in what appeared to be Kyiv's deepest and most daring strikes into Russia.

The first one, on May 3, targeted the Kremlin itself but the Russian authorities announced the devices were shot down before they could do any damage. The second one, on May 30, brought the war home to Muscovites, although the actual damage was minimal.

At the time of the attack on the Kremlin, Putin said Moscow's air defense "worked in a satisfactory way," but added it was "clear what we need to do to plug the gaps" in the system.

Other drones have reportedly flown deep into Russia multiple times. Since February, when a UJ-22 crashed 60 miles from Moscow, Ukrainian drones have repeatedly approached the Russian capital.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, confirming Wednesday's drone attack, said on-

ly that "the means of combatting drones did their job."

Meanwhile, train traffic was briefly disrupted on the Crimean Peninsula on Wednesday, according to its Russian-installed governor, Sergei Aksyonov.

Aksyonov didn't say what caused the disruption, but some Russian media outlets reported the rail lines were blown up overnight in apparent sabotage operations. A few hours later, the authorities said the service was restored. Rail lines through Crimea are crucial for supplying Russian forces at the front line in southern and eastern Ukraine.

Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, a move that most of the world considers illegal. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said his country aims to reclaim the peninsula in a counteroffensive that began in recent weeks.

In response to Ukraine's military threat using advanced weapons supplied by Western allies, Russia has in recent weeks expended "significant effort" on assembling "elaborate" defensive lines on the approaches to Crimea, according to the U.K. Defense Ministry.

Biden calls Xi a dictator; Beijing calls it 'absurd'

The Washington Post

China called President Biden's suggestion that its leader is a dictator "extremely absurd and irresponsible," potentially undoing the hard-won efforts to calm tensions between the two superpowers.

Biden's comments came barely a day after Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Xi Jinping in Beijing, forging a tentative way past the tensions that have bedeviled relations since a Chinese spy balloon floated across the United States in February. Biden referred to Xi as a dictator while explaining how he had been embarrassed by the spy balloon because he was unaware it had gone off course.

"The reason why Xi Jinping got very upset in terms of when I shot that balloon down with

two boxcars full of spy equipment in it is he didn't know it was there," Biden said. "That's what's a great embarrassment for dictators, when they didn't know what happened."

The downing of the balloon in February further escalated tensions between Washington and Beijing, which were already at odds over economic and military issues. But following his meetings in Beijing this week, Blinken said that the Biden administration considered the matter of the balloon closed.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Mao Ning, said at a briefing Wednesday that China considered Biden's statements "an open political provocation" to which "China is strongly dissatisfied and firmly opposed."

Cost of Ukraine weapons aid overestimated by DOD

BY MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department overestimated the value of the weapons and equipment sent to Ukraine by \$6.2 billion, an accounting error that would allow the United States to provide more military aid to Ukrainian forces without asking Congress for additional money, the Pentagon said Tuesday.

"In a significant number of cases, [the military] services used replacement costs rather than net book value, thereby overestimating the value of equipment drawn down from U.S. stocks," Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh told reporters. "These evaluation errors in no way limited or restricted the size of any of our

[presidential drawdown authorities], or provision of support to Ukraine."

Most weapons and equipment provided to Ukraine in its war against invading Russian forces have come through the presidential drawdown authority, which means the aid comes directly from Pentagon stocks and is sent quickly on an emergency basis.

Aid given this way typically means it reaches Ukraine in a matter of weeks.

To date, the U.S. has provided more than \$40 billion to Ukraine since Russia invaded the country in February 2022. The aid provided has included weapons, millions of munition and ammunition rounds, trucks, sensors, radars and other equipment.

Judge strikes down Arkansas gender care ban

Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — A federal judge struck down Arkansas' first-in-the-nation ban on gender-affirming care for children as unconstitutional Tuesday, the first ruling to overturn such a prohibition as a growing number of Republican-led states adopt similar restrictions.

U.S. District Judge Jay Moody issued a permanent injunction against the Arkansas law, which would have prohibited doctors from providing gender-affirming hormone treatment, puberty blockers or surgery to anyone under 18.

Arkansas' law, which Moody temporarily blocked in 2021, would also have prohibited doc-

tors from referring patients elsewhere for such care. At least 19 other states have enacted laws restricting or banning gender-affirming care for minors following Arkansas' law, and nearly all of them have been challenged in court.

In his order, Moody ruled that the prohibition violated the due process and equal protection rights of transgender youth and families. He said the law also violated the First Amendment rights of medical providers.

"Rather than protecting children or safeguarding medical ethics, the evidence showed that the prohibited medical care improves the mental health and well-being of patients and that,

by prohibiting it, the state undermined the interests it claims to be advancing," Moody wrote in his ruling.

Moody's ruling echoed remarks that judges have made in other decisions temporarily blocking similar bans in Alabama and Indiana.

Republican Attorney General Tim Griffin said in a statement that he planned to appeal Moody's ruling to the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which last year upheld the judge's temporary order against the law. Griffin said he was disappointed in the ruling, calling the health care "experimentation," an argument the judge's ruling said was refuted by decades of clini-

cal experience and scientific research.

The ruling affects only the Arkansas ban but may carry implications for the fates of similar prohibitions, or discourage attempts to enact them, in other states.

"This decision sends a clear message. Fear-mongering and misinformation about this health care do not hold up to scrutiny; it hurts trans youth and must end," said Holly Dickson, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Arkansas. "Science, medicine, and law are clear: gender-affirming care is necessary to ensure these young Arkansans can thrive and be healthy."

Many in South still without electricity amid heat wave

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas' power grid operator asked residents Tuesday to voluntarily cut back on electricity due to anticipated record demand on the system as a heat wave kept large swaths of the state and southern U.S. in triple-digit temperatures.

On the last day of spring, the sweltering heat felt more like the middle of summer across the South, where patience was growing thin over outages that have persisted since weekend storms and tornadoes caused widespread damage.

In the Mississippi capital of Jackson, some residents said Tuesday that they had been without power and air conditioning for almost 100 hours, which is longer than the outages caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Entergy Mississippi, the state's largest electric utility, said its crews had worked 16-hour shifts since Friday, but some officials expressed doubts about its preparedness. High temperatures

in the state were expected to reach 90 degrees on Tuesday.

The request by the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, which serves most of that state's nearly 30 million residents, was its first of the year to cut energy consumption. ERCOT said it was "not experiencing emergency conditions," but it noted that the state set an unofficial June record on Monday for energy demand.

In the oil patch of West Texas, temperatures in San Angelo soared to an all-time high of 114 degrees on Tuesday, according to the National Weather Service.

In Oklahoma, more than 100,000 customers were eagerly awaiting the restoration of power and air conditioning following weekend storms that downed trees and snapped hundreds of utility poles. Officials said at least one person in Oklahoma has died because of the prolonged outages, which could last into the weekend for some residents.

Pandemic strain dips reading, math scores for 13-year-olds

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Math and reading scores among America's 13-year-olds fell to their lowest levels in decades, with math scores plunging by the largest margin ever recorded, according to the results of a test known as the nation's report card.

The results, released Wednesday, are the latest measure of the deep learning setbacks incurred during the pandemic. While earlier testing revealed the magnitude of America's learning loss, the latest test casts light on the persistence of those setbacks, dimming hopes of swift academic recovery.

Over two years after most students returned to in-person class, there are still "worrisome signs about student achievement," said Peggy G. Carr, commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, a branch of the federal Education Department.

"The 'green shoots' of academic recovery that we had hoped to see have not materialized," Carr said in a statement.

In the national sample of 13-year-old students, average math

scores fell by 9 points between 2020 and 2023. Reading scores fell by 4 points. The test, formally called the National Assessment of Educational Progress, was administered from October to December last year to 8,700 students in each subject.

Similar setbacks were reported last year when NAEP released broader results showing the pandemic's impact on America's fourth- and eighth-grade students.

Math and reading scores had been sliding before the pandemic, but the latest results show a precipitous drop that erases earlier gains in the years leading up to 2012. Scores on the math exam, which has been given since 1973, are now at their lowest levels since 1990. Reading scores are their lowest since 2004.

Especially alarming to officials were outsize decreases among the lowest-performing students. Students at all achievement levels saw decreases, but while stronger students saw slides of 6 to 8 points, lower performing students saw decreases of 12 to 14 points, the results show.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Governor signs law ending water dispute

AZ PHOENIX — Legislation that resolves the water supply problem of a small unincorporated community outside the upscale city of Scottsdale was signed into law Monday by Gov. Katie Hobbs.

The bill approved last month by the state Legislature obliges Scottsdale to provide Rio Verde Foothills with access to city water. The law aims to ensure that small communities like Rio Verde Foothills have access to water in a state plagued with water supply problems.

The several hundred people living in the community had been anxious for a solution after Scottsdale cut off water access on Jan. 1, saying it needed to ensure its own residents had enough water during a severe drought. Before the cutoff, Scottsdale had allowed water haulers to use a city standpipe to take water to residents of Rio Verde Foothills, who store their water in big tanks.

LGBTQ+ pride flags vandalized at Stonewall

NY NEW YORK — Dozens of LGBTQ+ pride flags were damaged and ripped down at the Stonewall National Monument over the weekend, the third such bout of vandalism at the LGBTQ+ landmark during this Pride month, police said.

The latest occurrence happened Sunday, after others on June 9 and last Thursday. No arrests have been made in any of the incidents, and it's unclear whether they are connected. The New York Police Depart-

ment's Hate Crimes Task Force is investigating.

On Sunday, officers were called around 8 a.m. and found about 33 pride flags broken and tossed to the ground, police said.

Park volunteer Steven Menendez told New York's Fox 5 News that, in all, 68 flags — nearly a quarter of those displayed — were damaged in some way.

Man arrested after shooting man, dog

WI MILWAUKEE — Police arrested a Milwaukee man who allegedly shot a man and his dog after the animal attacked the shooter's dog.

According to police, the 32-year-old man's dog got loose and was fighting another dog Monday afternoon. The man was trying to retrieve his dog when the other dog's owner shot them, wounding the man and killing the man's dog.

The wounded man was treated at a hospital. The dog that was attacked died of its injuries.

The alleged shooter, described as a 43-year-old Milwaukee man, was arrested. Charges are pending.

Lawmakers sent letters with white powder

KS TOPEKA — About 100 letters containing suspicious white powder have been sent to lawmakers and other public officials across Kansas, officials said.

No injuries have been reported, according to the Kansas Bureau of Investigation. It had counted more than 30 letters Friday afternoon and increased the tally to 100 as of Sunday.

In a Facebook post, the bureau said preliminary tests on the substance were negative for common dangerous toxins.

In emails sent to legislators and obtained by The Topeka Capital-Journal, Tom Day, director of Legislative Administrative Services, said the Kansas Highway Patrol had informed his office of the letters, which contain a return address of either Kansas City or Topeka.

The letters were sent to legislators at their homes and have been turned over to the KBI and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Day wrote.

4 dead after e-bike shop fire spreads to buildings

NY NEW YORK — A fire at a New York City e-bike shop quickly spread to upper-floor apartments and killed four people early Tuesday in the latest deadly blaze linked to exploding lithium ion batteries.

The fire, reported shortly after midnight, happened at a shop that was cited last summer for safety violations related to the storage and charging of batteries, officials said. Investigators determined that it was an accident caused by a lithium ion battery, which can overheat while being charged and explode in an intensely hot flare of flame, fire officials said.

A pile of burned bikes, scooters and other debris lay on the sidewalk outside the shop, HQ E-Bike Repair, which was on the ground floor of a six-story building in Manhattan's Chinatown neighborhood.

So far this year, there have been more than 100 fires and 13 deaths linked to battery explosions in the city, said Fire Com-

missioner Laura Kavanaugh.

Two men and two women died in the fire. Two other women were hospitalized in critical condition, officials said. A firefighter suffered minor injuries.

State officials downplay novel climate trial

MT HELENA — Montana officials sought to downplay a first-of-its-kind trial taking place over the state's obligations to protect residents from climate change, saying Monday that a victory by the young plaintiffs would not change approvals for fossil fuel projects.

Attorneys for Montana's Republican attorney general laid out their defense following a week of often emotional testimony in state court from young people who sued the state in 2020. The 16 plaintiffs, ranging in age from 5 to 22 years old, say they're being harmed by wildfire smoke, excessive heat and other effects of climate change. They're asking a judge to declare unconstitutional a state law that prevents agencies from considering the impacts of greenhouse gases when issuing permits for fossil fuel development.

Final arguments were expected Tuesday — days earlier than scheduled after the state did not call one expert witness who was expected to testify and sharply limited the testimony of a second expert. Plaintiffs' attorneys had questioned the credibility of the two witnesses, who said Montana's greenhouse gas contributions were of little significance versus global totals.

— From wire reports

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No doubt who will be NBA's top pick

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Victor Wembanyama's towering shadow has hung over this NBA Draft for months, blocking much of what is usually part of the process.

There has been no debate about who the San Antonio Spurs should take with the No. 1 pick Thursday night, no discussion of which player might be a better fit, no real attempts to raise any red flags about the presumed selection.

When a player like Wembanyama comes along — and maybe none ever has — there's no real reason to drum up any drama. The Spurs are not going to pass up someone who is listed at 7-foot-4 but has the skills of a player much smaller.

The 19-year-old from France has been called the best prospect since LeBron James came out of high school 20 years ago, perhaps with some physical gifts that even the NBA's career scoring leader didn't possess.

Expectations from the outside world are sky-high. Wem-

banyama insists that won't bother him.

"I have such high expectations for myself and I'm so determined that the expectations of others are nothing compared to what I place on myself," Wembanyama said in an interview aired Wednesday on ABC's "Good Morning America."

He arrived Monday in the New York area, surprised that some fans were waiting for him when he landed at Newark Liberty International Airport. On Tuesday, there was his first subway ride — even hopping a turnstile as he exited, though the police who were flanking him didn't complain — and a trip to Yankee Stadium to throw out the ceremonial first pitch; it was well out of the strike zone. Nobody seemed to mind.

He has been a big kid in a grown-up world. He signs autographs with a smile, pokes fun at himself, doesn't mind that everyone tends to stare at someone of his height.

"Crazy," he said of that first

subway ride, with New Yorkers all around him.

Let the craziness begin. The draft is Thursday night. Commissioner Adam Silver will call his name, shake his hand, and before too long Wembanyama will be on a plane to San Antonio to start the first chapter of his NBA life.

"Wembanyama is built for the modern game," said analyst Jay Bilas, who has been part of ESPN's coverage for every draft since James topped the 2003 one. "We've never seen anything quite like him on a basketball floor."

The modern NBA game requires big men to be comfortable playing away from the basket, able to handle the ball and defend opponents on the perimeter. It's a league where 7-footer Nikola Jokic just guided the Denver Nuggets to their first championship by becoming the first player to lead the postseason in total points, rebounds and assists, where first-team All-Defensive team centers Jaren Jackson Jr. and Brook Lopez

block shots on one end and shoot three-pointers on the other.

Wembanyama can seemingly do all that. He was the MVP and Defensive Player of the Year in the French league, leading the league in scoring, rebounding and blocks. The almost-unbelievable highlights of some of those plays, a slam or a swat when he seemed too far away to pull it off even with his enormous wingspan, had basketball fans and even future opponents on both sides of the Atlantic buzzing throughout the season.

He will go to a San Antonio team that won five titles after selecting Tim Duncan the last time it had the No. 1 pick in 1997. Duncan is a Hall of Famer and one of the best power forwards in NBA history, and maybe it's too much to ask Wembanyama to become quite like that.

Charlotte is expected to decide between Alabama forward Brandon Miller and G League Ignite guard Scoot Henderson with No. 2, with Portland perhaps taking the other at No. 3.

US reveals roster picks for Women's World Cup

Associated Press

Eighteen-year-old Alyssa Thompson was among the 23 players selected Wednesday for the United States team that will defend its title at the Women's World Cup next month.

Thompson, who has been impressive this season as a rookie for Angel City in the National Women's Soccer League, was called onto the team in early April for a match against Ireland, taking the place of injured forward Mallory Swanson.

The roster selected by Vlatko Andonovski includes a mix of both familiar faces and newcomers like Thompson.

The veterans include national team stalwart Megan Rapinoe, who will be making her fourth World Cup appearance at age 37, and Alex Morgan, 33, another four-time World Cup veteran. Defender Kelley O'Hara, 34, also earned a spot on the roster as a veteran presence to shore up the backline in

the absence of veteran defender and team captain Becky Sauerbrunn, who announced last week she won't play in the World Cup because of a lingering foot injury.

The United States has won the last two World Cups and is vying for an unprecedented third title when the tournament kicks off on July 20 in Australia and New Zealand. The Americans are in Group E with Vietnam, the Netherlands and Portugal. The United States opens with Vietnam on July 22 in Auckland.

The U.S. will be without Sauerbrunn and Swanson, who injured the patella tendon in her left knee. Her injury is another big blow to the United States — she led the team with seven goals this year.

In addition to Swanson and Sauerbrunn, Catarina Macario will be missing. Macario is a talented forward who tore her ACL last year while playing for her French club, Lyon. Midfielder Samewis also has a lin-

gering injury and wasn't available for the World Cup.

Some of the youngsters include 22-year-old Sophia Smith, who was named both the NWSL Most Valuable Player and the U.S. Soccer Player of the Year for 2022, and 21-year-old Trinity Rodman, U.S. Soccer's Young Player of the Year in 2021 and the daughter of former NBA star Dennis Rodman.

Midfielder Julie Ertz, who was on the team that won the title in 2019, made the squad after returning to the team in April following a long layoff for the birth of her son.

A surprise inclusion on the roster was 25-year-old Savannah DeMelo, who has yet to appear in a match for the United States. DeMelo plays for Racing Louisville in the NWSL, and has scored in three of her last four matches. She has five total goals this season.

Ackenhausen shines as LSU tops Vols

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Jay Johnson texted Nate Ackenhausen at 8:56 a.m. Tuesday to let him know he would make his first start for LSU less than 12 hours later in a game against Tennessee with the Tigers' season on the line.

Ackenhausen said he slept in and didn't get back to his coach until shortly after 11.

"I texted him that I would give it all I've got," the big left-hander said.

Ackenhausen did that and then some, pitching six innings and combining with Riley Cooper for the Tigers' nation-leading 11th shutout of the season, a 5-0 victory in the College World Series.

"When you're on this side of the bracket, you need that," Johnson said. "If you're going to do something here, you need a performance like Nate gave us."

LSU (50-16) beat its Southeastern Conference rival for the fourth time in five meetings — and the second time in Omaha — and were set to play No. 1 national seed Wake Forest on Wednesday night. The Tigers have to beat the Demon Deacons in that game and again Thursday to reach the CWS finals.

Tennessee (44-22) was eliminated after it failed to score for the first time in 133 games since a 6-0 loss to Virginia in the 2021 CWS.

Ackenhausen came into the game having logged 22⅓ innings over 15 relief appearances. He had not gone more than 3⅓ innings since he was a starter for Eastern Ok-

lahoma State last year.

LSU's third starter has been fluid most of the season, and Johnson said he played a hunch and went with Ackenhausen because the Tigers were 13-2 in games in which he appeared. Johnson also said he liked some of the matchups and was confident the laid-back Ackenhausen would not be fazed by the stage.

The 6-foot-2, 240-pounder ended up out-dueling Drew Beam, a projected high pick in the 2024 draft who was coming off strong starts in regionals and super regionals.

"That's a good ballclub over there," Beam said. "But it was never out of reach. It didn't happen today. It's baseball. Just the way the tree falls sometimes."

The Tigers scored single runs in the first and sixth innings and another in the eighth when Tennessee relievers hit three batters and Tre' Morgan came home on a wild pitch. Dylan Crews' two-run homer in the ninth put the game away. Ackenhausen had allowed four hits, walked none and struck out seven when he left to a standing ovation from fans behind the LSU dugout after he hit Blake Burke to start the seventh.

Burke was the third batter he plunked, and pitchers for both teams combined for seven hit batters, the third most in a CWS game.

"He had excellent command at the start of the game, and then as the game went on a little bit, there were some mistakes he made out of the zone, whether it be hit by pitch or

something like that," Vols coach Tony Vitello said. "But then he kept his composure, re-gathered and did well. It takes two to tango. We didn't capitalize on mistakes as well as they did."

TCU 6, Oral Roberts 1: The Horned Frogs used a four-run fifth inning to take control of the game and went on to beat the Golden Eagles in an elimination game, ending their surprising postseason run.

TCU (44-23) will play Florida next and needs to defeat the No. 2 national seed Wednesday and again Thursday to reach the best-of-three finals.

The Horned Frogs avenged Friday's 6-5 loss to the Golden Eagles and have won two straight to put themselves in position to play for their bracket title.

TCU coach Kirk Saarloos said his team's midseason struggles prepared it for pressure games. The Frogs had a run of losses in six of seven games in April, putting their NCAA Tournament hopes in peril.

They ended up with the Big 12's automatic bid by winning the conference tournament, but they didn't feel good about their at-large chances until they won their final regular-season series at Kansas State.

It was a rough ending for ORU (52-14), the first No. 4 regional seed in 11 years to reach the CWS.

The Eagles of the Summit League scored their fewest runs since March 12 and lost consecutive games for the first time since that same date.

Messi expected to make Inter Miami debut July 21

Associated Press

MIAMI — Lionel Messi is expected to make his Major League Soccer debut with Inter Miami at a July 21 home game, the team confirmed Tuesday.

Owner Jorge Mas told selected outlets on Monday that his club and Messi have agreed to terms and are finalizing paperwork and a visa. The team confirmed certain details Tuesday, including that Messi will be signing a contract through the end of the 2025 season with an option for 2026.

Messi's contract will be worth \$50 million to \$60 million per year, the team said Tuesday. He cannot sign until sometime in July, after his contract with Paris Saint-Germain expires.

Messi, 35, announced on June 7 that he

was joining Miami. The Argentinian great's first game in Fort Lauderdale would be against Cruz Azul in the Leagues Cup. The team also confirmed Tuesday that it is increasing capacity at DRV PNK Stadium by 3,000 to 3,200 seats in the next four weeks by filling in the corners, raising capacity to about 22,000.

Miami also is finalizing a contract with midfielder Sergio Busquets, Messi's former Barcelona teammate, the Miami Herald said, citing a league source.

Dolphins WR Hill under investigation for assault

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Miami Dolphins receiver Tyreek Hill is under investigation by Miami-Dade police for assault

and battery after he allegedly hit a man on Sunday.

The incident was first reported by WPLG-TV in Miami after the station received a tip Sunday night. Miami-Dade police spokesman Angel Rodriguez confirmed Tuesday via email that police are investigating an "assault/battery" involving Hill from Sunday.

The station reported that Hill got into an argument with an employee of a charter company at Haulover Marina in Miami, which apparently ended with Hill hitting the man.

"We are aware of the situation and have been in contact with Tyreek, his representatives and the NFL," a Dolphins spokesperson said Tuesday via email. "We will reserve further comment at this time."

Hicks, Orioles hold on to beat MLB-best Rays

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Aaron Hicks homered and had four RBIs as the Baltimore Orioles beat the Tampa Bay Rays 8-6 after nearly blowing a seven-run lead Tuesday night in a matchup of the top two teams in the AL East.

Anthony Santander and Ryan O'Hearn also went deep, and Kyle Bradish (3-3) gave up two runs and four hits over five innings for the Orioles, who moved within four games of the first-place Rays. Félix Bautista, the fifth Baltimore reliever, got four outs to earn his 20th save on his 28th birthday.

"I just think we've just got to keep playing good baseball," Hicks said. "You can't really worry about the standings, what other teams are doing. You just have to go out and play hard, and get as many wins as you can."

Baltimore's Austin Hays, who started the day leading the AL in batting, went 3 for 4 and raised his average from .320 to .327. He has a career-high streak of five multiple-hit games.

Reds 8, Rockies 6: TJ Friedl had a three-run homer on a four-hit night, rookie Elly De La Cruz added a solo shot and host Cincinnati extended its winning streak to 10 games while handing Colorado its seventh straight loss.

Will Benson hit a solo homer in the sixth, helping the NL Central-

leading Reds to their longest winning streak since 2012, when they also won 10 straight. De La Cruz had three hits as fans chanted "Elly! Elly!"

Giants 4, Padres 3: Joc Pederson hit a tying home run in the eighth inning and drew the winning walk in the ninth against San Diego's Josh Hader as host San Francisco won its ninth straight.

Luis Matos drew a one-out walk off Nick Martinez (3-3). Patrick Bailey followed with a single to left. Hader replaced Martinez and walked pinch-hitter Casey Schmitt after being called for a pitch-clock violation. Hader struck out David Villar before Pederson drew a seven-pitch walk.

Dodgers 2, Angels 0: Miguel Rojas doubled and scored on Michael Busch's high-bouncing single in the eighth after Clayton Kershaw and Reid Detmers dueled through seven scoreless innings, and the visiting Dodgers beat the Angels in the Freeway Series opener.

Yankees 3, Mariners 1: Gerrit Cole (8-1) stared down José Caballero and wagged a finger at Seattle's dugout 15 times after striking out the side in the seventh inning as host New York snapped a four-game skid.

Cole's finger-wagging was a pointed response to repeated step-outs by Caballero. The Yankees' ace got Caballero swinging

on a full-count fastball in the seventh, allowing one run and four hits in 7½ innings with eight strikeouts and a walk total.

Astros 4, Mets 2: Alex Bregman hit a two-run homer and Framber Valdez threw eight strong innings to outpitch former teammate Justin Verlander as host Houston beat New York to snap a five-game skid.

Blue Jays 2, Marlins 0: Ernie Clement and George Springer hit consecutive RBI singles in the eighth inning and visiting Toronto beat Miami.

Miami's Luis Arraez went 1-for-4, dropping his major league-leading batting average to .398. The Marlins had won five in a row.

Braves 4, Phillies 2: Spencer Strider struck out nine over six innings in his first start in Philadelphia since last year's postseason implosion, and Austin Riley and Matt Olson homered for visiting Atlanta.

Red Sox 10, Twins 4: Christian Arroyo had a career-high five hits and drove in four runs, Kutter Crawford (2-3) pitched five scoreless innings and visiting Boston beat Minnesota for its sixth straight win.

White Sox 7, Rangers 6: Zach Remillard singled in Elvis Andrus with the go-ahead run on a play that was overturned by video review, and host Chicago rallied with three runs in the eighth

inning to beat Texas.

Andrus tied the game with a single off Grant Anderson (1-1) that plated two runs with two outs. Remillard followed with a line drive to left field, and Andrus was initially called out at the plate by umpire D.J. Reyburn on Travis Jankowski's throw. Rangers manager Bruce Bochy was ejected after the call was overturned.

Guardians 3, Athletics 2 (10): Andrés Giménez's single in the 10th brought home José Ramírez from third base and host Cleveland handed Oakland its sixth straight loss.

Cubs 4, Pirates 0: Marcus Stroman allowed five hits over seven innings as visiting Chicago handed Pittsburgh its eighth straight loss.

Royals 1, Tigers 0: Daniel Lynch allowed one hit over seven innings for his first major league win in almost 11 months and visiting Kansas City beat Detroit.

Brewers 7, Diamondbacks 5: William Contreras hit a go-ahead, two-run double in the seventh inning and host Milwaukee rallied from a 4-0 deficit to beat Arizona.

Cardinals 9, Nationals 3: Dylan Carlson homered twice, Willson Contreras went 3-for-4 with two doubles to break out of a slump and visiting St. Louis beat skidding Washington for its fourth straight win.

Angels unlikely to trade Ohtani if they stay in contention

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — The Los Angeles Angels are highly unlikely to trade Shohei Ohtani if they remain in playoff contention this summer, general manager Perry Minasian said Tuesday.

Minasian didn't unequivocally vow he won't trade Ohtani, who is scheduled to enter unrestricted free agency after the season. But the GM underlined his season-long stance on the issue while strongly indicating he still intends to do everything possible to end the Angels' eight-year playoff drought — and that includes taking the massive risk of losing their

two-way superstar in free agency.

"It's pretty self-explanatory with where we're at (in the standings)," Minasian said while speaking to reporters before the Angels opened a two-game Freeway Series against the Los Angeles Dodgers, who are likely to be one of the top contenders for Ohtani's services in free agency.

The second-place Angels are 41-33 entering Tuesday's games, holding one of the AL's wild-card playoff spots and trailing AL West-leading Texas by five games after being nine back only two weeks ago. The Halos took three of four from the Rangers in Arlington last

week as part of an 11-3 surge that has boosted their chances of making the playoffs for the first time in Ohtani's career.

Ohtani is making \$30 million this season in his final year of Angels team control. He has been in Anaheim for six seasons since he chose the club for his move from Japan in late 2017, but the Angels have yet to make the postseason or even post a winning record during his tenure alongside Mike Trout.

The MLB trade deadline is Aug. 1. If the Angels don't move Ohtani, they could get only a compensatory draft pick if he signs with another team as a free agent.