

Documents leak suspect pleads not guilty

Associated Press

WORCESTER, Mass. — Jack Teixeira, the Massachusetts Air National Guard member accused of leaking highly classified military documents on a social media platform, pleaded not guilty Wednesday to federal felony charges.

Teixeira, 21, entered the pleas during a hearing in Worcester's federal court days after he was indicted by a grand jury on six counts of willful retention and transmission of national defense information. Each count is punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

Handcuffed and wearing orange jail garb, Teixeira smiled at family seated in the gallery at the start of the hearing. He stood at the defense table next to his lawyers and leaned over to say "not guilty, your honor" into the microphone after the judge read each count. The judge also denied a defense request to reconsider his detention order.

Teixeira, of North Dighton, has been behind bars since his April arrest on charges stemming from the most consequential intelligence leak in years. A magistrate judge ruled last month that Teixeira must remain in jail while the case plays out, saying that releasing him would pose a risk he would

attempt to flee the country or obstruct justice.

The leak left the Biden administration scrambling to assess and contain the damage among the international community and reassure allies that their secrets are safe with the United States.

Teixeira's family said in a statement Wednesday that they "remain committed as ever" to supporting him. "The important thing is Jack will now have his day in court," they said. "We are hopeful that Jack will be getting the fair and just treatment he deserves."

Teixeira's attorney has said his client "will answer the charges" and "will be judged by his fellow citizens." In pushing for his release, Teixeira's attorneys argued that the government isn't alleging Teixeira ever intended for the information to be widely disseminated.

Teixeira is accused of sharing classified military documents about Russia's war in Ukraine and other sensitive national security topics on Discord, a social media platform popular with people playing online games. Investigators believe he was the leader of a private chat group called Thug Shaker Central, where enthusiasts shared jokes, talked about their favorite types of

guns and discussed wars, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Authorities have said Teixeira, who enlisted in the Air National Guard in 2019, began around January sharing military secrets with other Discord users — first by typing out classified documents and then sharing photographs of files that bore SECRET and TOP SECRET markings. Teixeira worked as a "cyber transport systems specialist," essentially an IT specialist responsible for military communications networks.

Prosecutors said he continued to leak government secrets even after he was warned by superiors about mishandling and improper viewing of classified information. After being admonished by superiors last year, he was again seen in February viewing information not related to the intelligence field, not his primary duty, according to internal Air National Guard memos filed in court.

Justice Department lawyers revealed in earlier court filings that Teixeira had a history of disturbing online remarks. He wrote in November that he would "kill a (expletive) ton of people" if he had his way, because it would be "culling the weak minded."

DOD to cover up to \$2K to transport military pets

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

A new Pentagon policy to reimburse military families for pet moving expenses will fall short of the amount allowed by law when it goes into effect Jan. 1.

The policy, announced Wednesday by the Defense Department, states that service members relocating to and from overseas locations will be eligible for a maximum of \$2,000 to cover pet transportation expenses. That is half the amount approved by Congress late last year. For moves within the continental United States, the maximum is \$555.

The reimbursements cover costs associated with moving one household pet, either a cat or dog, the policy states.

"The services estimate that this new al-

lowance may be used by an estimated 227,000 service members," the Defense Department said in a statement.

The allowance gives a boost to military families, as troops currently pay out of pocket to transport pets.

"This policy reduces that financial burden while recognizing the important role a pet plays in a military family's household," the DOD statement said.

Still, the Pentagon was authorized to make the relocation benefit more generous. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2023 set the maximum for pet moves outside the continental U.S. at \$4,000. DOD did not say why it elected to put the maximum at half that amount.

Costs for shipping pets are based on a sliding scale, according to the animal's weight.

The Patriot Express, a government-contracted air service between the United States and overseas military bases, is an option for travelers that tends to be most affordable. On such flights, pet moving costs are \$125 for those under 70 pounds, \$250 for 71-140 pounds and \$350 for 141-150 pounds. The weight of the pet and the carrier are included in the pricing. Pet space on Patriot Express flights, however, is available only on a first-come, first-served basis. And when pets exceed the weight amount limit, commercial airliners are needed.

Prices vary greatly among airlines when shipping pets. In 2022, an Air Force couple used crowdfunding to help pay the \$15,000 needed to move their 145-pound Great Dane named Henry and his 50-pound carrier from Japan to New Mexico.

Modi visit to US sends signal to China

The Washington Post

Joint statements issued by the United States and India over the last several years have condemned North Korea's missile tests, called for the Taliban to respect human rights and appealed for an end to the violence in Myanmar. But never has there been an outright mention of India's primary adversary: China.

Yet it is China in recent years that has supplanted Pakistan as India's main security threat. While Delhi may wish to minimize accusations that can heighten tensions with leadership in Beijing, China's clashes with India along its border have turned the world's two most populous countries into rivals again in the Indo-Pacific.

It is the resurgence of that rivalry — after decades of detente — that has made for a convergence of strategic interests between the United States and In-

dia.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in Washington this week, with the full pomp and circumstance of a state visit that comes on the heels of Secretary of State Antony Blinken's tense trip to China, followed by President Joe Biden's comments on Tuesday calling Xi Jinping a "dictator."

Neither Biden nor Modi would frame their engagement as primarily being about containing the China challenge, but the subtext is plain. Rather, officials say, it is about lifting up a rising power — the world's largest democracy, if an imperfect one — and showcasing the momentum in the relationship based on a set of shared interests.

"This visit is not about China," national security adviser Jake Sullivan said in an interview with reporters this week. "But the question of China's role in the military domain, the technology

domain, the economic domain will be on the agenda."

Thousands gathered on the White House South Lawn for the welcoming ceremony, listening to performances by violinist Vibha Janakiraman and the a cappella group Penn Masala.

"All eyes are on the two largest democracies in the world, India and America," Modi said as the leaders met in the Oval Office. "I believe that our strategic partnership is important. I'm confident that working together will be successful."

A series of major announcements were expected Thursday, including a major joint venture to manufacture General Electric fighter-jet engines in India and a deal in which New Delhi will buy General Atomics armed drones, a platform the Indians have wanted for years and which can help them detect and counter moves by China's military.

The GE deal, anticipated to be worth billions of dollars, involves the provision of sophisticated jet engine technology that has never been shared even with treaty allies, and has the potential to bind the two countries' defense industries for years to come.

Officials in Washington are clear that India will never be a treaty ally in the manner of Japan or Australia. And they understand that New Delhi has no intention to give up its strategic autonomy or seek to be seen as aligned with NATO and the West.

Though observers are tempted to reduce the U.S.-India relationship to a shared interest in countering China, the U.S. investment in India does not involve any expectation that New Delhi will aid Washington in defending Taiwan should China invade, administration officials said.

House panel advances bill with pay boost for troops

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

Service members would see a 5.2% pay boost and junior enlisted troops could get economy-driven bonuses in the annual defense authorization legislation approved Thursday by the House Armed Services Committee.

The committee passed the \$886 billion Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act in a 38-1 vote just after midnight Thursday at the end of a marathon hearing to finalize the bill that sets annual policy and spending priorities for the Pentagon.

The vote sent the bill to the full House for future consideration as the Senate Armed Services Committee worked behind closed doors this week to finalize its version of the must-pass legislation. Once passed in both chambers,

the two bills must be reconciled before the NDAA can be sent to President Joe Biden's desk for his signature into law.

"Providing for our nation's defense is the top priority for the House Armed Services Committee, and I am incredibly proud of the bipartisan work we've accomplished in the FY24 NDAA," Chairman Mike Rogers, R-Ala., said after the committee approved the bill.

The House committee's 2024 NDAA would bump all troops' pay by 5.2%, authorize the defense secretary to provide "monthly bonus payments" to enlisted troops E-6 and lower "as economic conditions dictate," and remove Basic Housing Allowance payments from household income calculations in an effort to grant more troops eligibility for

the Basic Needs Allowance, which is meant to boost income for low-paid service members with families. The bill would also establish a Space National Guard, authorize the Air Force to retire dozens of aging A-10 and F-15 fighter aircraft, modernize U.S. nuclear weapons, and includes more than \$9 billion of funding for the military's efforts to check Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific region.

Committee leaders touted the bill as overwhelmingly bipartisan, but the NDAA hearing Wednesday was at times dominated by contentious debate over culture and diversity issues, which have been a priority for Biden's administration. Republican lawmakers added several measures to the defense bill that aimed to counter so called "wo-

keism" in the military and others to protect service members who were booted from the military for refusing the coronavirus vaccine.

Republicans successfully added amendments to the bill that would eliminate the Pentagon's top diversity, equity and inclusion officer position, prohibit federal funds for teaching or training associated with critical race theory and require Pentagon reports on money spent on critical race theory, and how policies on transgender service members have impacted the military.

But other Republican-proposed efforts to strip all funding for diversity, equity and inclusion training within the Defense Department and eliminate the position of deputy inspector general for diversity and inclusion and extremism in the military failed.

Blast damages bridge linking Ukraine, Crimea

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — An explosion damaged a bridge that is one of the few links between Crimea and Ukraine's mainland, Russia-backed officials said Thursday, while Ukraine's prime minister appealed for patience as Kyiv's armed forces move ahead with their closely watched counteroffensive.

Russian forces in Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014, use the Chongar bridge to reach southern Ukraine's Kherson province. Russia and Ukraine control different sides of the province, which is a focus of fighting and attacks as Ukrainian troops try to reclaim Russian-occupied territory.

Ukrainian authorities have said that for the country's nearly 16-month war to end, Moscow must withdraw its forces from Crimea as well as from areas they

seized during last year's full-scale invasion.

The damage to the bridge was not severe and will likely be repaired within several days, according to Vladimir Konstantinov, chairman of Crimea's parliament.

Vladimir Saldo, who heads the Russian-occupied parts of Kherson province, said the explosion appeared to have been caused by a type of long-range cruise missile that both France and the United Kingdom have given to Ukraine's military. The claim could not be independently verified. Numerous military analysts have said recent Ukrainian actions in the country's south and east indicated that Kyiv's troops were in the beginning of a long-anticipated counteroffensive.

Asked about the reported damage to the Chongar Bridge, Andrii Yusov, a spokesperson for Uk-

raine's Ministry of Defense Main Intelligence Directorate, did not confirm Ukraine's involvement but said on TV that a blow to the span would be part of an "ongoing process."

"If the stars are lit, it means it was done for a reason, right? We can only say that there will be a continuation," Yusov said, paraphrasing the opening of a well-known work by Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky.

Russian state news agency RIA-Novosti cited an unnamed representative of Russia's Investigative Committee as saying Thursday that preliminary information indicates there were four missiles fired and the remains of one of them showed markings of being French-made.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu alleged this week that Ukraine planned to use U.S.-made HIMARS and U.K.-provid-

ed Storm Shadow missiles to attack Russian territory, including Crimea. He warned that use of those missiles against targets outside the main war zone would "trigger immediate strikes on the decision-making centers on the territory of Ukraine."

In the opening days of Russia's February 2022 invasion, Russian troops in Crimea pushed north and captured Kherson province's capital, the city of Kherson, and surrounding areas. Ukraine took the territory back in November after forcing the Russians to retreat across the Dnieper River, which bisects the province.

Russia still occupies the east side, and Ukraine the west. The destruction of an upriver dam this month caused deaths and flooding on both sides. Ukrainian commanders have said it also got in the way of some of their plans for taking Russian positions.

Tokyo solicits new bids for USMC runway on Okinawa

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND KEISHI KOJA

Stars and Stripes

CAMP SCHWAB, Okinawa — Japan's Defense Ministry is moving forward to complete a U.S. military runway on Okinawa, even as lawsuits attempting to stop the project play out in Japanese courts.

The ministry solicited bids April 28 to fill two areas of Oura Bay at Camp Schwab, a Marine Corps base in rural northeastern Okinawa. The notice specifies 350,000 tons of stone to be in place by Sept. 30, 2024. The runway is to replace Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in Ginowan, which Japanese officials consider inherently dangerous due to its proximity to homes and businesses.

Landfill in one area of the construction zone is nearly complete but a second, much larger parcel has been delayed by a flurry of lawsuits by Okinawa prefecture.

"It is unbelievable because we are under dispute with the government," Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki said during a press conference Friday, according to a report by public broadcaster NHK.

The construction zone is divided into two main sections, 279 acres on the north side of Schwab and 91 acres to the south, according to the prefecture's website. Development on the smaller parcel was 92% complete as of April 18, Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada said at the time.

The larger parcel has been on hold since April 2020, when the Okinawa Defense Bureau, which represents the Defense Ministry on the island, asked Tamaki to approve changes to the construction plans. Tamaki declined, which spurred Tokyo to intervene. The prefecture then filed three lawsuits; two were dismissed and are on appeal. The work was only 14% complete in April.

Navy weapons tests in Va. spark environmental suit

The Washington Post

At a bend in the Potomac River about 50 miles south of Washington, a Navy base sits next to the small town of Dahlgren, Va. On the base is the Naval Surface Warfare Center, where beginning in 1918, the Navy has tested large-caliber weapons and explosives by firing them into the Potomac.

By the Navy's own count, it fired about 33 million pounds of ordnance into the river in the first 90 years of operation, including 225 tons of the toxic heavy metal manganese and 15,000 tons of iron. It is still testing today. The Navy calls the Potomac River Test Range "the nation's largest fully instrumented over-water gun-firing range."

Now, as the Navy is moving to expand its test range, moving it closer to the Maryland shore, two environmental groups are suing the Navy and alleging it failed to abide by the Clean Water Act,

which requires anyone discharging pollutants into a river to get a permit, and to regularly test the water to ensure it is safe for humans and wildlife. The suit was filed Wednesday in federal court in Maryland, because Maryland has jurisdiction over the river almost up to the Virginia waterline.

The suit was filed by the Potomac Riverkeeper Network and the Natural Resources Defense Council. Dean Naujoks, the Lower Potomac riverkeeper, said the Navy agreed to protect endangered species in the river such as Atlantic sturgeon, but made no commitment to other species.

The Navy did a large environmental impact study in 2013. NRDC officials say that effort was not adequate.

At a meeting earlier this year, the Navy declined to tell the NRDC whether it had actually tested any water in the river, an NRDC official said.

Debris field found near Titanic amid sub search

Associated Press

The search for a missing submersible with five people aboard took a bleak turn Thursday when the U.S. Coast Guard said a debris field was found at the bottom of the ocean near the Titanic, an announcement that came after the critical 96-hour mark when breathable air could have run out.

The Coast Guard's post on Twitter gave no details, such as whether officials believe the debris is connected to the Titan, which was on an expedition to view the wreckage of the Titanic. It said the debris was discovered within the search area by a remotely operated underwater robot, and was being evaluated.

The Titan was estimated to

have about a four-day supply of breathable air when it launched Sunday morning in the North Atlantic — but experts have emphasized that was an imprecise approximation to begin with and could be extended if passengers have taken measures to conserve breathable air. And it's not known if they survived since the sub's disappearance.

Rescuers have rushed ships, planes and other equipment to the site of the disappearance. On Thursday, the U.S. Coast Guard said an undersea robot sent by a Canadian ship had reached the sea floor, while a French research institute said a deep-diving robot with cameras, lights and arms also joined the operation.

Authorities are hoping underwater sounds might help narrow their search, whose coverage area has been expanded to thousands of miles — twice the size of Connecticut and in waters 2½ miles deep. Coast Guard officials said underwater noises were detected in the search area Tuesday and Wednesday.

Jamie Pringle, an expert in Forensic Geosciences at Keele University, in England, said even if the noises came from the submersible, "The lack of oxygen is key now; even if they find it, they still need to get to the surface and unbolt it."

By Thursday morning, hope was running out that anyone on board the vessel would be found alive.

Many obstacles still remain: from pinpointing the vessel's location, to reaching it with rescue equipment, to bringing it to the surface — assuming it's still intact. And all that has to happen before the passengers' oxygen supply runs out.

Dr. Rob Larter, a marine geophysicist with the British Antarctic Survey, emphasized the difficulty of even finding something the size of the sub — which is about 22 feet long and 9 feet high.

"You're talking about totally dark environments," in which an object several dozen feet away can be missed, he said. "It's just a needle in a haystack situation unless you've got a pretty precise location."

Tornadoes kill 4, damage town in western Texas

Associated Press

A line of severe storms produced what a meteorologist called a rare combination of multiple tornadoes, hurricane-force winds and softball-sized hail in west Texas, killing at least four people, injuring nine and causing significant damage around the town of Matador, a meteorologist said Thursday.

The storms produced strong winds that swept across Texas, from the Panhandle to Houston, causing damage north of the city, according to weather officials.

A supercell developed about 8 p.m. Wednesday near Amarillo before striking the small town of Matador, said senior forecaster Matt Ziebell with the National Weather Service in Lubbock. He called it "certainly rare to see all at the same time — killer tornadoes, hurricane-force winds and softball-sized hail."

The damage was concentrated on a 1-mile stretch with businesses and homes demolished

along the west side of Matador, a town where "everybody knows everybody," said Brandon Moore, Matador's water superintendent who is also a volunteer firefighter.

"It was supposed to move east of us and within a five-minute timespan, it all changed and switched directions and came straight through Matador," Moore said. "We probably had about two minutes of warning to get everybody together and get to safety. There's a few people that didn't make it out of the house, but we did rescue several people and they made it out alright."

The storm produced 109 mph winds at Jayton in addition to hail more than 4-inches wide, Ziebell said, and the weather service reported a 97 mph wind gust — the strongest ever recorded at Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston since data collection began there in 1969. The previous record there was 82 mph during Hurricane Ike in 2008.

House censures Schiff for Trump-Russia comments

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House voted Wednesday to censure California Rep. Adam Schiff for comments he made several years ago about investigations into Donald Trump's ties to Russia, rebuking the Democrat and frequent critic of the former president along party lines.

Schiff becomes the 25th House lawmaker to be censured. He was defiant ahead of the vote, saying he will wear the formal disapproval as a "badge of honor" and charging his GOP colleagues of doing the former president's bidding.

"I will not yield," Schiff, who is running for the Senate in his home state, said during debate over the measure. "Not one inch."

When it was time for Schiff to come to the front of the chamber to be formally censured, immediately after the vote, the normally solemn ceremony turned into more of a celebratory atmosphere. Dozens of Democrats

crowded to the front, clapping and cheering for Schiff and patting him on the back. They chanted "No!," "Shame!" and "Adam! Adam!"

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., read the resolution out loud, as is tradition after a censure. But he only read part of the document before leaving the chamber as Democrats heckled and interrupted him.

"Censure all of us," one Democrat yelled.

Schiff, the former Democratic chairman of the House Intelligence Committee and the lead prosecutor in Trump's first impeachment trial, has long been a top Republican political target. Soon after taking back the majority this year, Republicans blocked him from sitting on the intelligence panel.

The censure itself carries no practical effect, except to provide a historic footnote that marks a lawmaker's career. But the GOP resolution would also launch an ethics investigation into Schiff's conduct.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

City approves fines for too many 911 calls

IN FISHERS — A suburban Indianapolis community has passed an ordinance approving fines against businesses that make too many 911 calls for police help.

The Fishers City Council on Monday unanimously approved the ordinance allowing \$250 fines against businesses making 16 or more such calls in a three-month period, The Indianapolis Star reported.

Businesses that make seven calls during that period will receive a warning. A 10th call mandates a meeting with the city to discuss solutions.

The ordinance takes effect Aug. 1. It applies to most commercial and industrial businesses, including bars and day care centers.

Some large retailers and hotels are chronic offenders, Police Chief Ed Gebhart said. They were not identified.

Transgender patient records given in probe

TN NASHVILLE — Vanderbilt University Medical Center has turned over medical records for transgender patients to the Tennessee attorney general's team in what his office confirmed is an investigation into potential medical billing fraud.

A Vanderbilt University Medical Center spokesperson confirmed to The Tennessean on Tuesday that the hospital provided the records to Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti's office.

In a state that has moved to ban gender-affirming care for transgender youth, the revelation that

their records were handed over to the state spurred fear for some families — despite assurances from the attorney general's office that the records would remain confidential and that patients aren't the target of the investigation.

The state ban doesn't take effect until July 1, and it is being challenged in federal court by the U.S. Department of Justice and others.

State House speaker sued over alleged affair

NC RALEIGH — North Carolina's state House speaker is being sued by a local elected official who has alleged the powerful Republican ruined his marriage by having an affair with his wife.

Lawyers for Scott Lassiter claim that for more than three years, Speaker Tim Moore "willfully interfered in the marital relationship" between Lassiter and his wife, who leads an agency within the state courts system.

In a television interview on Tuesday, Moore acknowledged having a "casual" relationship with her but rejected other legal claims filed against him as "absolutely 100% false."

Moore "used his position as one of the most powerful elected officials in North Carolina to entice the Plaintiff's wife ... to participate in an illicit relationship with him," according to the lawsuit filed over the weekend in Wake County Superior Court. Lassiter's lawsuit alleges that his wife, Jamie Liles Lassiter, wouldn't end her relationship with Moore for fear of losing her job — leading to their separation in January.

Jamie Lassiter is executive director of the North Carolina Con-

ference of Clerks of Superior Court. She called the lawsuit "outrageous and defamatory" and said her husband is "lashing out" at the end of their divorce proceedings.

Volcano stops erupting, ending stunning show

HI HONOLULU — The nearly two-week eruption of a Hawaii volcano, one of the most active in the world, has come to a pause, scientists said.

After a three-month hiatus, Kilauea began erupting again June 7 — displaying fountains of glowing red lava without threatening any communities or structures. Crowds of people flocked to the Big Island's Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, which offered safe views of the lava.

Scientists declared the eruption paused again Monday when it rapidly declined in the afternoon, the U.S. Geological Survey's Hawaiian Volcano Observatory said.

Kilauea, Hawaii's second-largest volcano, erupted from September 2021 until last December. For about two weeks in December, Hawaii's biggest volcano, Mauna Loa, was also erupting on Hawaii's Big Island.

After a short pause, Kilauea began erupting again in January. That eruption lasted for 61 days, ending in March.

County cuts power to data center construction

ND WILLISTON — Construction of a crypto mining data center in northwest North Dakota will be delayed after a county commission voted Tuesday to ask a utility company to cut power to the project be-

cause of repeated construction delays.

FX Solutions Inc. is building the \$1.9 billion center near Williston in Williams County. It will be owned and operated by Atlas Power.

The county commission voted Tuesday to ask the Mountrail-Williams Electric Co-Operative to cut power to phase two of the project, KFGO reported. Commission chairman Cory Hanson said construction leaders missed a June 16 deadline to meet several county stipulations for the project and had not offered any explanation for the delays.

Lawmakers pass \$15 minimum wage bill

PA HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania's Democratic-controlled House of Representatives approved a measure by a close vote Tuesday that would raise the minimum wage to \$15 by 2026, fulfilling a long-held party campaign plank that has run up against Republican legislative majorities for years.

The bill passed 103-100 with all but one Democrat voting for it and two Republicans joining them. But it has an uncertain future in the Republican-controlled Senate.

Pennsylvania's minimum wage is set at the federal minimum of \$7.25, and last increased in 2009.

The measure would gradually increase the minimum wage to \$15 by changing from \$7.25 to \$11 in its first year, then to \$13 in 2025 and finally to \$15 in 2026. The bill ties future increases to inflation, which sponsors have said mirrors action taken by 15 other states.

— From wire reports

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MLB sees London as gateway to Europe

Associated Press

London seems like a no-brainer for a European road trip. Paris is all but assured next. Why not throw in Germany and the Netherlands?

Major League Baseball has big plans for Europe, starting with an English reintroduction to the sport this weekend when the St. Louis Cardinals and Chicago Cubs play a two-game series in London.

The New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox were featured in London four years ago, smashing six home runs in a European debut for MLB that was higher scoring — the Yankees won 17-13 — than the NFL's first one in London in 2007, when the New York Giants beat the Miami Dolphins 13-10.

Though the coronavirus pandemic threw a curveball — the Cards-Cubs series was slated for 2020 — the success of the World Baseball Classic has provided a boost. Britain won a game at the tournament for the first time and found a star in Seattle Mariners prospect Harry Ford, who was born in Atlanta but has parents from the United Kingdom.

"The U.K. has really been identified for us, London in particular, as the jumping off point for us to get into Europe," Chris Marinak, MLB's chief operations and strategy officer, told The Associated Press. "We feel like we proved that out in 2019. By coming back and having a really strong showing ... we're going to have the opportunity to really make some headway for growth both in the U.K. and throughout Europe."

Britain is MLB's biggest market in Europe in terms of broadcast revenue, merchandise sales and subscribers to digital products, though it trails the likes of Mexico, Japan, South Korea, China and Australia.

Audience research company GWI's data showed that interest in baseball among British sports fans increased from 4% in 2019 to 5.9% last year, the league said. It added that MLB Europe's social media channels since the 2019 series have more than tripled their followers to 452,000.

The New York-Boston series, a two-game set that drew nearly 119,000 fans to London Stadium, was a driver in the BBC signing a deal last fall to begin broadcasting a handful of games, including the London series, each season. MLB's lead broadcaster in the U.K., the pay-TV service BT Sport, last year renewed its agreement to broadcast 15 games per season.

"We feel like the U.K. offers us a good model for growth in the Europe market," Marinak said.

MLB's first regular-season game outside of the United States — including Puerto Rico — and Canada was in 1996 when the New York Mets and San Diego Padres played a three-game series in Monterrey, Mexico. The league has also staged games in Tokyo and Australia. Earlier this season, Mexico City hosted a two-game series between the Padres and San Francisco Giants.

The Yankees are lobbying to play in Paris in 2025. The league hasn't announced the City of Light just yet, but Marinak noted: "We see a lot of engagement in France." The players' association signed off on MLB holding a game in Paris in 2025 as part of last year's collective bargaining agreement.

London is locked in for a series next year and another in 2026.

The Netherlands — bolstered by baseball's popularity in Aruba and Curacao —

and Italy boast the best national teams in Europe, though the Czech Republic is improving. Germany — which has become the NFL's leading market in Europe — has a big U.S. military presence and has produced several big leaguers, including Minnesota's Max Kepler.

"We've really focused on looking into Europe as once a year, maybe max twice a year ... just because it's such an effort to get over there, and it doesn't really fit into the normal cadence of the major league schedule, but we really do think it's important to bring live game content to the market," Marinak said.

"We want to hit our priority markets but we may rotate around to a Germany in the long run or if there's a facility in the Netherlands that we could potentially look at, France we've talked about, the UK," he continued. "But for the medium term we're really focused on the UK as our primary vehicle."

A suitable venue is the tricky part. Olympic-style, multi-use stadiums are possibilities, like Stade de France. Baseball was a demonstration sport at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin's Olympiastadion. Renovating the Sydney Cricket Ground for the Australia series in 2014 "was sort of a complicated endeavor," Marinak said.

The NFL, NBA and NHL have been staging games in Europe for years, leaving MLB playing catch-up. Thirty years ago, MLB scheduled exhibitions between Mets and Red Sox minor leaguers at the Oval, but rain at the London cricket venue washed out the first two days. Technically, baseball's connection with Britain goes way back, starting with exhibitions between the Boston Red Stockings and Philadel-

phia Athletics in 1874.

In a more modern development, MLB is giving individual teams certain marketing rights abroad, like the NFL does.

"They have the opportunity to pick a few markets and do sponsorships," Marinak said. "We think that's an opportunity to grow, where teams can activate in local markets and really pick places where they can bring their brand to bear and then also bring those relationships with some of those international partners back to the United States."

Having a star player from abroad is vital, said sports economist Victor Matheson, a professor at the College of the Holy Cross. Pro leagues "tend to generate a reasonable amount of revenue in those players' home countries." Japanese phenom Shohei Ohtani of the Los Angeles Angels is the shining example.

"That being said, with so few MLB players hailing from the UK or the rest of the EU, it's my impression that MLB has made almost no inroads into Europe," Matheson said.

MLB hopes Britain's relative success in the WBC planted a seed. The 20-year-old Ford, whose parents are British, was Seattle's top pick in the 2021 draft and hit a home run in Britain's 7-5 win over Colombia — which qualified the team for the next WBC.

"You need that type of star to create the engagement and the interest in the local market," Marinak said.

For now, the focus is on the weekend games at London Stadium.

"We're optimistic that this is the next step in a long journey of linking Major League Baseball to the U.K. and the rest of Europe."

Porzingis traded to Celtics in 3-team deal

Associated Press

The Washington Wizards have agreed to trade center Kristaps Porzingis to the Boston Celtics as part of a three-team trade that also includes Marcus Smart heading to the Memphis Grizzlies, two people with knowledge of the deal said Thursday morning.

The people spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because the agreements hadn't been announced. The trade comes with Porzingis accepting his player option for next season.

The deal also includes the Grizzlies acquiring Smart, the 2022 Defensive Player of the Year, from Boston in exchange for first-round draft picks in 2023 and 2024. ESPN reported the Wizards are also receiving guard Tyus Jones from Memphis, and forwards Mike Muscala and Danilo Gallinari and a second-round pick this year from Boston.

The Celtics add the 7-foot-3 Porzingis after they lost in seven games to Miami in the Eastern Conference finals. Porzingis is coming off a solid season

in Washington in which he averaged a career-high 23.2 points per game along with 8.4 rebounds. Most importantly, he stayed healthy enough to play in 66 games.

Porzingis' departure completes a swift breakup of the Wizards' core after they agreed to trade Bradley Beal to Phoenix, and Kyle Kuzma declined his option.

Smart has played in Boston all nine of his NBA seasons, was its longest-tenured player and one of the strongest presences in the locker room. His

departure leaves the Celtics with Derrick White and reigning Sixth Man of the Year Malcolm Brogdon as the top two candidates to replace Smart.

Smart brings much-needed experience to a young Memphis team that needs help at point guard following the announcement of Ja Morant's 25-game suspension for next season. Smart also brings postseason experience to the Grizzlies, who haven't won a playoff series despite finishing second in the West the past two seasons.

Florida edges TCU, earns spot in CWS finals

Associated Press

One-run baseball games never get old as long as you're winning — and Florida is doing plenty of that right now.

Florida reached the College World Series finals with a 3-2 victory over TCU on Wednesday, making the Gators the fourth team in history to win their bracket with three straight one-run wins.

"It's not easy to get to this point. It's just not," coach Kevin O'Sullivan said. "I know I overstate it and say it over and over, but we just played three one-run games and they're all nail-biters down to the end."

Cade Kurland, who had struggled at the plate in the CWS, reached on an infield single to drive in the tiebreaking run in the ninth. Michael Robertson, who scored the winning run as a pinch runner and stayed in the game to play center field, ran down Brayden Taylor's deep fly to make a dazzling catch at the wall to end the game.

"There's a lot of things that have to go right," O'Sullivan said.

Florida joined Eastern Michigan in 1976, South Carolina in 1977 and Texas in 2002 as the only teams in the 76-year history of the CWS to win their first three games by a single run.

The Gators have won eight in a row since facing elimination in the regional they hosted. They're hot at the right time, and TCU's Taylor could see it Wednesday.

"Florida is going to be the team to win this thing," he said.

The Gators (53-15) will play either No. 1 national seed Wake Forest or LSU in the best-of-three championship series starting

Saturday.

Florida is in the finals for the fourth time, and first since it won the championship in 2017.

TCU (44-24) staved off elimination twice to get to Wednesday's game, and it finished the season with wins in 21 of 25 games.

"Obviously ran up against a great Florida team and just came up one run short," Horned Frogs coach Kirk Saarloos said. "But like I told them, just the story and the journey that they took us on this year will never be forgotten. I think it completely changes our program in terms of what they did from the middle part of the season until now. It just stinks that it's over."

Florida led 2-1 after the first inning, and neither team scored again until TCU tied it in the bottom of the eighth when Tre Richardson singled and came home on Anthony Silva's deep fly to left-center that bounced over the fence for a ground-rule double.

Tyler Shelnut doubled off the right-center wall leading off the Florida ninth against Ben Abeldt. Garrett Wright relieved, and pinch hitter Dale Thomas popped out trying to bunt before Colby Halter's deep flyout allowed Robertson to take third.

Robertson scored when Kurland's grounder to short pulled Silva to his right. Silva bounced a throw to first that was far too late to get Kurland, who had been 1-for-14 in the CWS.

"A lot of times in baseball things may not go your way, but I think baseball always has a way to come back around," Kurland said. "It's really important to stay in the moment

for when you do get the opportunity. He got me 0-2 quick, and I just knew he wasn't going to get me out. I wasn't going to go down."

Josh Rivera, the Gators' shortstop, hit a two-run homer in the first inning and made a perfect relay throw home to prevent TCU from scoring the tying run in the fourth.

Meanwhile, LSU staved off elimination from the College World Series for a second time. And now the Tigers are right where they expected to be all along.

Cade Beloso hit a go-ahead three-run homer, freshman Griffin Herring pitched 4⅓ innings of shutout relief in his longest outing and LSU forced a second bracket final with a 5-2 victory over No. 1 national seed Wake Forest on Wednesday night.

"We expect to be playing important baseball in June," Tigers coach Jay Johnson said. "We play every game like we're playing important baseball in June. Like, the Tuesday on March 22nd against McNeese is a playoff game to us. The thought process behind that is if you do that all year long, then you can just stay in character when you get to the postseason."

Wake Forest (54-11) will look to bounce back from its first loss in its eight NCAA Tournament games. The Demon Deacons, who have not lost consecutive games this season, are trying to reach the championship round in their first CWS appearance since the 1955 team won the national title.

"We'll come out ready to play (Thursday) like we've done all year," Wake Forest coach Tom Walter said. "We've responded to adversity all year. Tomorrow will be no different."

Lundqvist headlines HoF's class of 2023

Associated Press

Henrik Lundqvist had posters of Mike Vernon and Tom Barrasso on a wall in his bedroom when he was growing up in Sweden hoping to play in the NHL.

Decades later, they are going into the Hockey Hall of Fame together this November as part of a goaltender-heavy class of 2023.

Lundqvist was elected Wednesday in his first year of eligibility and Vernon and Barrasso after lengthy waits to get the call, making nearly half the inductees guys who keep the puck out of the net for a living.

"Of course as a kid when you grow up, you look at the goalies that are playing well and how they play the game and how they compete and that's how you get inspired," Lundqvist said. "Thinking about players in the Hall of Fame, it's such a big inspiration to me, why I started playing hockey."

Former NHL forward Pierre Turgeon and Canadian women's hockey star Caroline Ouellette were the other players

chosen by the 18-person selection committee. Stanley Cup-winning coach Ken Hitchcock and late executive Pierre Lacroix were picked to be inducted in the builder category.

Lundqvist, elected in his first year of eligibility, backstopped Sweden to an Olympic gold medal in 2006 and led the New York Rangers to the playoffs in 11 of 12 years. That included a trip to the Stanley Cup Final in 2014 and two Eastern Conference finals appearances.

A seventh-round pick in the 2000 draft, Lundqvist ranks fifth on the NHL career victories list with 459 and won the Vezina Trophy as the league's top goalie in 2011-12. He won 61 more games in the playoffs before halting his hockey career in 2020 because of a heart condition — and on Nov. 13 will become just the third European goalie inducted after Dominik Hasek and Vladislav Tretiak.

Barrasso won the Cup with Pittsburgh back to back in 1991 and '92. He had been eligible

since 2006 and long ago came to peace with the idea of not making the Hall. Selection committee chairman Mike Gartner and board chairman Lanny McDonald had a difficult time reaching him to deliver the news.

"I was definitely not waiting by the phone," said Barrasso, who won the Vezina and the Calder Trophy as rookie of the year in 1983-84 to start a nearly 20-year NHL career. "Do you make that grade or not is not for you to decide. It's for others to decide. ... It's a tremendous honor to have been selected by the committee, and it puts a bit of validation on the idea of what I thought along the way of my career."

Vernon was so surprised he thought McDonald, a teammate when they won the Cup together with Calgary in 1989, was calling to ask him to play golf. The two-time Cup champion who was also playoff MVP when he won it in 1997 with Detroit had been eligible since 2005.

Ouellette got in on her second

chance after helping Canada win a gold medal in all four of her Olympic appearances. She had 30 points in 20 games during those tournaments and also was part of six teams that won the IIHF women's world championship.

Turgeon was selected after being eligible for more than a decade. The 1993 winner of the Lady Byng Trophy as the most gentlemanly player in the league, Turgeon had 1,327 points in 1,294 regular-season NHL games, with nearly all of those coming with Buffalo and St. Louis.

Hitchcock finally got in 24 years since coaching the Dallas Stars to their first championship in franchise history. He also ranks fourth in regular-season wins among coaches, and yet still the now-71-year-old was shocked to get the call.

Lacroix, the architect of the first two Colorado Avalanche Cup-winning teams in 1996 and 2001, was elected posthumously. He died in December 2020 at the age of 72.

PGA stars travel across country for \$20 million purse

Associated Press

CROMWELL, Conn. — Nathan Grube, the tournament director of the Travelers Championship, used to worry about the years when the U.S. Open took place on the West Coast.

Many of the world's top golfers would make a decision to take a break the week following the major or head to Europe to begin preparing for the Open Championship, rather than travel across the country to play at TPC River Highlands in Connecticut.

But this year, in response to LIV Golf, the Travelers was elevated to one of 17 so-called "designated" PGA Tour events, with a much bigger purse and a near mandate for top golfers

to play, giving the tournament the guarantee of a strong field.

"I can tell you with certain confidence that I probably wouldn't have been here even though I love the tournament so much," Masters champion Jon Rahm said Tuesday. "With that said, they've done a great job making players comfortable. Having a charter flight always makes it a lot easier, maybe not for the best two or three players in the world, but for other people that are high quality players as well that come and compete in this event."

This week's tournament field includes the top eight golfers in the world rankings and 38 of the top 50.

Grube and his team have

gotten a reputation of pampering golfers in an effort to get them to Connecticut, including running those free charter flights for players from the Open.

Once in the state, there are perks including free laundry and haircuts for caddies, day care on site, and day trips for spouses and children to amusement parks. This year, the tournament added a coffee and ice cream bar and lounge on the driving range.

Grube said it was in part because of its player-friendly reputation that the Travelers was chosen last fall to be among the first events to win elevated status.

"We've been auditioning for this for 16 years," Grube said, a

reference to the length of time Travelers has been the event's title sponsor. "And when it came time to go ... We showed up."

The designated status means the total purse has increased from \$8.3 to \$20 million, with the winner taking home \$3.6 million rather than the just under \$1.5 million Xander Schauffele took home last June.

The top PGA Tour players are required to play in 16 of the 17 designated events.

Thirteen of the 17 designated tournaments, including the four majors, have that status in perpetuity. The other four events, such as the Travelers, were originally expected to rotate from year to year.