

Biden marks D-Day at Normandy cemetery

By PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

COLLEVILLE-SUR-MER, France — President Joe Biden praised American and allied troops at a ceremony in Normandy on Thursday to mark the 80th anniversary of D-Day, drawing parallels between the struggles against tyranny during World War II and Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine.

Speaking before a crowd at Normandy American Cemetery that included WWII veterans, dignitaries and celebrities, Biden vowed that the U.S. would not walk away from Ukraine.

"To surrender to bullies, to bow down to dictators is simply unthinkable," Biden said. "Were we to do that, it means we would forget what happened here at these hallowed beaches.

"Make no mistake, we will not bow down, we will not forget."

The anniversary of the D-Day invasion comes as even the youngest veterans of that day are approaching their 100th

birthday, making today's event an opportunity to pass the living memory of WWII on to younger generations.

Dozens of veterans were welcomed with fanfare and applause at the cemetery, whose roughly 9,400 white grave markers in the shape of crosses and Stars of David stretch for acres on a bluff overlooking Omaha Beach.

Three C-130 aircraft flew overhead as Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron led the veterans onto the ceremony grounds.

After a short speech, Macron awarded the Legion of Honor, the highest national decoration in France, to 11 of the veterans.

"You came here because the free world needed each and every one of you, and you answered the call," Macron said.

Actor Tom Hanks and director Steven Spielberg were also among the spectators who arrived at the cemetery early Thursday morning.

Secretary of Defense Lloyd

Austin, who spoke to the crowd, said it was important to defend the principles that the Allied forces fought for eight decades ago.

"At this hinge of history, we must stand firm against aggression and tyranny," Austin said.

Addressing the veterans, he added: "You saved the world, and we must only defend it ... our gratitude must never fade, our memories must never dim, and our resolve must never fail."

Members of the 529th Military Police Company, Honor Guard, performed a 21-gun salute with small cannons pointed toward Omaha Beach.

Speaking on the sidelines of the event, the head of U.S. Africa Command, Gen. Michael Langley, one of many top military officials in attendance, lauded the veterans who turned the tide of the war.

"That had a common purpose, to come and achieve the planned mission in the face of danger," Langley said. "We re-

member that today generations later, the sacrifices they made."

A larger international ceremony at nearby Omaha Beach, where many Americans lost their lives on D-Day as they stormed the shore in the face of heavy fire, followed the cemetery memorial.

American, Canadian and British troops also landed at beaches code-named Utah, Gold, Juno and Sword.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was embraced by Macron as dignitaries arrived at the international remembrance Thursday.

King Charles III and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak were scheduled to honor British troops at Sword, and Prince William and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will participate in a ceremony for Canadian troops who landed at Juno.

Hundreds of smaller memorials and commemoration events have been held throughout Normandy in the run-up to the anniversary.

Houthis unveil 'Palestine' missile similar to Iran's

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Yemen's Houthi rebels have unveiled a new, solid-fuel missile in their arsenal that resembles aspects of one earlier displayed by Iran that Tehran described as flying at hypersonic speeds.

The rebels fired its new "Palestine" missile, complete with a warhead painted like a Palestinian keffiyeh checkered scarf, at the southern Gulf of Aqaba port of Eilat in Israel on Monday. The attack set off air raid sirens but caused no reported

damage or injuries.

Footage released by the Houthis late Wednesday showed the Palestine being raised on what appeared to be a mobile launcher and rising quickly into the air with plumes of white smoke coming from its engine. White smoke is common with solid-fuel missiles.

Solid-fuel missiles can be set up and fired faster than those containing liquid fuel. That's a key concern for the Houthis as their missile launch sites have been repeatedly targeted by U.S. and allied forces in recent

months over the rebels' attacks on shipping through the Red Sea corridor. One such strike hit the Houthis even before they were able to launch their missile.

For their part, the Houthis described the Palestine as a "locally made" missile. However, the Houthis are not known to possess the ability to manufacture complicated missile and guidance systems locally in Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, which been gripped by war since the rebels seized the capital, Sanaa, nearly a decade ago.

The Houthis have, however, been repeatedly armed by Iran during the war despite a United Nations arms embargo. While Iran claims it doesn't arm the Houthis, ships seized by the U.S. and its allies have found Iranian weaponry, missile fuel and components on board.

Iranian media reported the launch of the Palestine and described it as locally manufactured, citing the Houthis. However, design elements on the missile resemble other missiles developed by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

Detained US soldier goes on trial in Russia

Reuters

VLADIVOSTOK, Russia — A U.S. soldier, stationed in South Korea but detained in Russia on suspicion of stealing from his girlfriend and threatening to kill her, went on trial Thursday, the state news agency RIA reported.

Gordon Black was detained May 2 in Vladivostok in Russia's far east on suspicion of stealing from his Russian girlfriend. Citing local prosecutors, Russian independent media reported he had also subsequently been charged with threatening to kill her.

Black, a U.S. Army staff sergeant posted at Camp Hum-

phreys outside Seoul, pleaded guilty to theft in May, RIA reported at the time, citing interior ministry officials.

As his trial in Vladivostok began, Black said he understood the charges against him and agreed to testify.

When the judge asked him if he admitted guilt, RIA quoted Black as saying he would enter a plea later.

The interior ministry said Black had met the Russian woman in South Korea and later traveled to Vladivostok to be with her.

The Pentagon said he had broken Army rules by traveling to

Russia without authorization, having passed through China.

Black's wife, Megan Black, with whom he is finalizing a divorce, and his mother, Melody Jones, told Reuters last month that he and the Russian woman had a tempestuous and sometimes violent relationship.

Prosecutors said the couple had quarreled and the American had subsequently "forcibly grabbed the girl by the neck, which she perceived as a real threat to her life."

Black is then alleged to have stolen \$110 from her purse and fled their shared apartment, according to media reports. He

was later arrested at a local hotel, where he had purchased plane tickets and intended to fly back to the U.S.

Megan Black said she and their daughter had no idea he was in Russia and had been expecting him back in Texas as his tour in South Korea had just ended.

She said she got a message from her husband May 2, the day Russian authorities say they arrested him, "telling me that he wasn't coming home." She said they were already finalizing their divorce at the time and that she had not heard from him since.

Court orders probe of woman's rape lawsuit as worker's comp

By ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

A federal judge Tuesday halted a lawsuit from a civilian engineer who claims she was raped aboard a Navy ship so the Labor Department can determine whether the incident should be treated as a work-related injury.

Elsie Dominguez filed the lawsuit against the U.S. government in November, claiming the captain of the ship within the Navy's Military Sealift Command raped her in December 2021.

The suit also claims the Navy's inadequate security allowed for the assault, and the service failed to care for and protect her when she reported the attack the next morning using the proper reporting procedures.

A 2014 graduate of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, Dominguez is a career mariner who worked aboard the USNS Carson City, an expeditionary fast transport vessel, as the first assistant engineer, according to court documents.

During a stop in Brindisi, Italy,

Dominguez left the ship and said she felt overly intoxicated after one beer and one shot of liquor. She returned to the ship and passed out in her room, where she claims the captain used a master key code to enter her room during the night and assault her while she was unconscious.

The Justice Department has argued Dominguez's time working on the ship fell within a temporary travel status, and anything that occurred in that time while on her employer's premises, even when off duty, is covered by the Federal Employees' Compensation Act, or FECA, according to court documents.

The Labor Department manages claims under FECA, the federal law that pays medical expenses and compensation benefits to workers for injuries obtained while performing their duties.

Dominguez's legal team has argued this was her permanent duty station because she had no other work site, and her time aboard the ship was indefinite.

Atlantic Council report calls for revamped NATO structure

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The U.S. 7th Army should be reactivated in Germany and the Navy's European headquarters in Naples, Italy, should be relocated to the United Kingdom as part of a revamped NATO structure, according to a new Atlantic Council report.

"As presently constituted, the NATO Command Structure is not fit for purpose in a post-2022 NATO," the Washington-based think tank said in the report, which was released Wednesday.

Since Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine, NATO has already gone through numerous changes to its command structure. Among the additions are a headquarters in Ulm, Germany, focused on ensuring that military forces and gear can quickly be mobilized around the Continent in a crisis.

Gen. Christopher Cavoli, NATO's top military commander and head of U.S. European Command, has also overhauled his headquarters based out of

Mons, Belgium. Those moves have involved modified NATO command-and-control arrangements for the purpose of carrying out new regional defense plans.

Even so, more measures would be advisable, the Atlantic Council report argues, saying it's time to consider improvements "both to deter and, if necessary, to contain and defeat a dangerous adversary."

The analysis calls for a series of changes in how the alliance does business, including moving a NATO strategic headquarters situated in Norfolk, Va., to either Washington or Paris.

Doing so would give the Virginia-based command, which is focused on military modernization but said by some experts to have "second class" status, more political clout in the NATO bureaucracy, the report said.

Another move would have Joint Force Command Brunssum shift from the Netherlands to Poland, where a four-star Polish general would take charge.

Tornado hits Michigan without warning

Associated Press

LIVONIA, Mich. — Tornado-spawning storms tearing across the eastern U.S. killed a toddler in a Detroit suburb and injured five in Maryland on Wednesday and left another eight people hurt in Ohio early Thursday.

A suspected tornado ripped away a gas station canopy and heavily damaged a restaurant and a discount store early Thursday in the eastern Ohio village of Frazeyburg. Eight people suffered minor injuries, mostly from flying debris, said

Jeff Jadwin, the emergency management director in Muskingum County.

The storm's path followed the village's main street, leaving a trail of uprooted trees and damaged homes from one end to the other, he said. He estimated that at least 100 homes were hit, several of which were destroyed. The village of 1,500 people is about 50 miles east of Columbus.

Officials in Livonia, Mich., said the tornado tore through several neighborhoods on Wednesday afternoon and de-

veloped so quickly that there was no advance notice from the National Weather Service or others that would have normally led to the activation of warning sirens.

The storm uprooted a massive tree that fell on one family's house and came through the roof, landing on a bed where a woman and her 2-year-old were sleeping, officials said in a post on the city's website. Crews worked for nearly an hour to remove the roof and parts of the tree and then lift the tree to get

the victims out.

The toddler was pronounced dead at the scene, officials said. The mother was transported to a local hospital in critical condition.

A 2-week-old sibling who was in a crib in a separate room was not injured but taken to a hospital for evaluation, Livonia Fire Department Chief Robert Jensen told WDIV-TV.

"This is a terrible tragedy for our community," Mayor Maureen Miller Brosnan said in the statement.

Hallie Biden testifies that she got rid of Hunter's gun

Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. — The widow of Hunter Biden's brother told jurors in his federal gun trial Thursday about the moment she found the revolver in his truck, describing how she put it into a leather pouch, stuffed it into a shopping bag and tossed it in a trash can outside a market near her home.

"I panicked, and I wanted to get rid of them," she testified about finding the gun and ammunition in October 2018. "I didn't want him to hurt himself, and I didn't

want my kids to find it and hurt themselves."

The purchase of the Colt revolver by Hunter Biden — and Hallie Biden's frenzied disposal of it — are the fulcrum of the case against him. Federal prosecutors say President Joe Biden's son was in the throes of a heavy crack addiction when he bought the gun. He's been charged with three felonies: lying to a federally licensed gun dealer, making a false claim on the application by saying he was not a drug user and illegally having the gun for 11 days.

Hunter Biden, who has pleaded not guilty, has said the Justice Department is bending to political pressure from Republicans and that he's being unfairly targeted.

Hallie, who had a brief romantic relationship with Hunter after Beau Biden died, said she considered hiding the gun but thought her kids might find it, so she decided to throw it away.

"I realize it was a stupid idea now, but I was panicking," she said.

Hunter Biden watched expres-

sionless from the courtroom during her testimony. She told jurors that she found crack at her home and saw him using it. She was with him occasionally when he saw dealers. Prosecutor Leo Wise asked Hallie about a 2018 trip to California, where she visited Hunter at the Roosevelt Hotel, and asked her whether she was also using drugs.

"Yes, I was," she said.

"And who introduced you to it?"

"Hunter did," Hallie said as Hunter rested his face on his hand and looked down.

Appeals court halts Trump's Georgia election case

Associated Press

ATLANTA — An appeals court has halted the Georgia election interference case against former President Donald Trump and others while it reviews the lower court judge's ruling allowing Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis to remain on the case.

The Georgia Court of Appeals' order on Wednesday prevents Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee from moving forward with pretrial motions as he had planned while the appeal is pending. While it was already unlikely that the case would go to trial

before the November general election, this makes that even more certain.

The appeals court on Monday docketed the appeals filed by Trump and eight others and said that "if oral argument is requested and granted" it is tentatively scheduled for Oct. 4. The court will then have until mid-March to rule, and the losing side will be able to appeal to the Georgia Supreme Court.

A spokesperson for Willis declined to comment on the appeals court ruling.

A Fulton County grand jury in August indicted Trump and 18 others, accusing them of partici-

pating in a sprawling scheme to illegally try to overturn the 2020 presidential election in Georgia. Four defendants have pleaded guilty after reaching deals with prosecutors, but Trump and the others have pleaded not guilty. It is one of four criminal cases against Trump.

Trump and eight other defendants had tried to get Willis and her office removed from the case, arguing that a romantic relationship she had with special prosecutor Nathan Wade created a conflict of interest. McAfee in March found that no conflict of interest existed that should force Willis off the case,

but he granted a request from Trump and the other defendants to seek an appeal of his ruling from the state Court of Appeals.

McAfee wrote that "an odor of mendacity remains." He said "reasonable questions" over whether Willis and Wade had testified truthfully about the timing of their relationship "further underpin the finding of an appearance of impropriety and the need to make proportional efforts to cure it." He said Willis could remain on the case only if Wade left, and the special prosecutor submitted his resignation hours later.

Putin warns of reciprocal moves on weapons

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia — President Vladimir Putin warned Wednesday that Russia could provide long-range weapons to others to strike Western targets in response to NATO allies allowing Ukraine to use their arms to attack Russian territory.

Putin also reaffirmed Moscow's readiness to use nuclear weapons if it sees a threat to its sovereignty.

The recent actions by the West will further undermine international security and could lead to "very serious problems," he said, taking questions from international journalists — something that has become extremely rare since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine.

"That would mark their direct

involvement in the war against the Russian Federation, and we reserve the right to act the same way," Putin added.

The United States and Germany recently authorized Ukraine to hit some targets on Russian soil with the long-range weapons they are supplying to Kyiv.

On Wednesday, a Western official and a U.S. senator said Ukraine has used U.S. weapons to strike inside Russia under newly approved guidance from President Joe Biden that allows American arms to be used for the limited purpose of defending Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. The official was not authorized to comment publicly on the sensitive matter and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Putin claimed that using some Western-supplied weapons in-

volves military personnel of those countries controlling the missiles and selecting targets, and therefore he said Moscow could take "asymmetrical" steps elsewhere in the world. The U.S. military said it does not control the missiles it provides to Ukraine or the targets.

"If they consider it possible to deliver such weapons to the combat zone to launch strikes on our territory and create problems for us, why don't we have the right to supply weapons of the same type to some regions of the world where they can be used to launch strikes on sensitive facilities of the countries that do it to Russia?" he said.

"We will think about it," he told the journalists on the sidelines of the annual St. Petersburg International Economic

Forum.

Asked whether Russia could resort to using nuclear arms, Putin said the conditions for utilizing that arsenal are clearly spelled out in Moscow's security doctrine.

"For some reason, they believe in the West that Russia will never use it," he said.

Even Russia's battlefield nuclear weapons are much more powerful than what the U.S. used against Japan in World War II, Putin said.

Speaking to senior news leaders of international news agencies, including The Associated Press, for more than three hours, Putin also said nothing will change in terms of Russia-U.S. relations regardless of the outcome of the American presidential election in November.

US: Russia to deploy assets for training in Caribbean

Miami Herald

WASHINGTON — Russia is preparing to deploy aircraft and combat naval vessels to the Caribbean to conduct military exercises in the coming weeks, its first exercises in the Western Hemisphere involving both air and sea activity in five years, a senior administration official told McClatchy and the Miami Herald.

The Biden administration is not expressing concern over the deployment, with the official stating it poses "no direct threat to the United States." But the administration believes Moscow intends to use the exercises as a "messaging tactic" after President Joe Biden gave Ukraine permission last week to fire U.S.-made weapons across its border into Russia to defend its territory.

The official said the administration expects Moscow will "conduct heightened naval and air activity near the United States" that will likely include

port calls by combat naval vessels in Cuba, and possibly Venezuela — two longstanding Russian allies that have seen occasional visits from Russian naval assets in the past two decades. The exercises may also include "aircraft deployments" and flights in the region, the official said.

Administration officials suspect that Cuba approved the Russian port call "at least in part" over an incident last year in which a U.S. nuclear submarine docked at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, angering the Cubans, a second U.S. official said.

Russia has sailed ships into the Western Hemisphere every year from 2013 to 2020, and has sent flights through the region that have violated the airspace of U.S. allies. But the anticipated activity would be the first coordinated air and sea exercise of its kind since 2019, the official noted.

The U.S. Navy is tracking the Russian movements closely, the official added.

Israel strikes Gaza school it says Hamas was using

Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — An Israeli strike early Thursday on a school sheltering displaced Palestinians in central Gaza killed more than 30 people, including 23 women and children, according to local health officials. The Israeli military said that Hamas militants were operating from within the school.

It was the latest instance of mass casualties among Palestinians trying to find refuge as Israel expands its offensive. A day earlier, the military announced a new ground and air assault in central Gaza, pursuing Hamas militants it says have regrouped there. Troops repeatedly have swept back into parts of the Gaza Strip they have previously invaded, underscoring the resilience of the militant group despite Israel's nearly eight-month onslaught.

Witnesses and hospital officials said the predawn strike hit the al-Sardi School, run by the United Nations agency for Palestinian

refugees known by the acronym UNRWA. The school was filled with Palestinians who had fled Israeli operations and bombardment in northern Gaza, they said.

Philippe Lazzarini, UNRWA commissioner-general, said in a post on X that 6,000 people were sheltering in the school when it was hit without prior warning. He said UNRWA was unable to verify claims that armed groups were inside.

An Israeli military spokesman, Lt. Col. Peter Lerner, said that the army wasn't aware of any civilian casualties in the strike. He said that intelligence indicated that militants had used the school compound to orchestrate some of the Oct. 7 attacks on Israel and that at least 20 militants there were using it currently as a "staging realm" to launch attacks on Israeli soldiers. The military said it took steps before the strike "to reduce the risk of harming uninvolved civilians ... including conducting aerial surveillance."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man sentenced for killing mom after volume fight

NH MANCHESTER — A New Hampshire man has been sentenced to 40 years to life in prison for fatally stabbing his mother after the two had argued about the volume on the video games he was playing.

Thomas Humphrey, 47, was sentenced after pleading guilty to second-degree murder and arson in the November death of Linda Tufts, 70, inside their Goffstown home.

"The brutality of this crime simply makes it too dangerous not to impose a very lengthy state prison sentence," Judge William Delker said.

A prosecutor said Humphrey, who lived in the basement, stabbed Tufts multiple times and then lit her body on fire. The prosecutor said the two had recently argued about how loud he was playing video games on the PlayStation she had just given him for his birthday, WMUR-TV reported.

Feds seek woman who left \$120K as juror bribe

MN MINNEAPOLIS — Federal authorities in Minnesota have confiscated cellphones and taken all seven defendants into custody as investigators try to determine who attempted to bribe a juror with a bag of cash containing \$120,000 to get her to acquit them on charges of stealing more than \$40 million from a program meant to feed children during the pandemic.

The case went to the jury after the juror, who promptly reported the attempted bribe to police,

was dismissed and replaced with an alternate. The incident had further ripple effects before deliberations resumed — when another juror was replaced after a family member asked about the attempted bribe.

The woman who left the bag knew the juror's first name, the agent said. Names of the jurors have not been made public, but the list of people who had access to it included prosecutors and defense lawyers — and the seven defendants themselves.

Before the case went to the jury, U.S. District Judge Nancy Brasel ordered them sequestered for deliberations.

Valedictorian lived in shelter as he rose to top

LA NEW ORLEANS — From a New Orleans homeless shelter to the top of his high school class, Elijah Hogan has already conquered much in life.

Hogan recently graduated as one of two valedictorians at Walter L. Cohen charter high school, despite living in a homeless shelter for youth for more than a year.

"It's been tough and rough" but he's alright, Hogan told "Good Morning America."

Hogan, 19, was just 8 when his mother died. He had been living with his grandmother but he ended up in the Covenant House shelter before his senior year of high school.

Despite the housing insecurity, Hogan pushed through to finish with a 3.93 GPA. In a speech at the school's graduation ceremony, Hogan applauded his classmates for pushing themselves "to reach the pinnacle of success."

The group started high school amid the pandemic.

Group: US agencies failed to assess plant's impact

GA SAVANNAH — A Georgia conservation group filed notice of its intent to sue two U.S. government agencies, saying they failed to properly assess the environmental impacts of the \$7.6 billion electric vehicle and battery plant Hyundai is building outside Savannah.

The Ogeechee Riverkeeper accuses the Army Corps of Engineers of issuing a permit to fill or dredge wetlands on the plant site using outdated data that failed to consider the project's final scale. And it said the agency wrongly assumed the project would have a negligible impact on the region's groundwater supply.

The environmental group also said the U.S. Treasury Department dispersed millions of dollars in infrastructure funding that benefited the project without performing required environmental reviews.

Asylum-seekers looking for shelter set up camp

WA BELLINGHAM — Asylum-seekers who have been looking for shelter in Washington state, mainly from Angola, Congo and Venezuela, have set up an encampment in a Seattle suburb.

The asylum-seekers moved to the site next to an empty motel south of Seattle in Kent, The Seattle Times reported.

The motel is owned by King County and was used as a place for homeless people to quaran-

tine if they contracted COVID-19 during the pandemic.

Signs near the encampment asked for the motel to open so they can stay there.

Some of the asylum-seekers camping at the site had been sheltered in a church in the nearby suburb of Tukwila while others lost their short-term motel or rental housing when it expired June 1.

Riverton Park United Methodist Church's pastor, Rev. Jan Bolerjack, told the newspaper it has taken in asylum-seekers for nearly two years and that its resources are overloaded.

Muhammad Ali's home turned museum for sale

KY LOUISVILLE — The pink house where Muhammad Ali grew up dreaming of boxing fame — and where hundreds of fans gathered for an emotional send-off as his funeral procession passed by decades later — is up for sale.

The two-bedroom, one-bathroom house in Louisville was converted into a museum that offered a glimpse into the formative years of the boxing champion and humanitarian known worldwide as The Greatest. The house went on the market Tuesday along with two neighboring homes — one was turned into a welcome center-gift shop and the other was meant to become a short-term rental.

The owners are asking \$1.5 million for the three properties. Finding a buyer willing to maintain Ali's childhood home as a museum would be "the best possible result," co-owner George Bochetto said.

— From wire reports

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Swiatek to face Paolini for French Open title

Associated Press

PARIS — Iga Swiatek is as good as it gets in tennis at the moment, especially at the French Open. It's been that way for quite some time, so her unyielding success against Coco Gauff just about everywhere — and certainly at Roland Garros — should come as no surprise by now.

Swiatek continued her mastery over Gauff and extended her winning streak in Paris to 20 matches with a 6-2, 6-4 victory in the semifinals on Thursday.

"For sure, it was intense," said the No. 1-ranked Swiatek, who claimed five of the last six games after trailing 3-1 in the second set. "I'm happy that I just was consistent with my tactics and didn't overthink stuff and just went for it at the end."

In Saturday's title match, Swiatek will face No. 12 Jasmine Paolini of Italy, a 6-3, 6-1 winner against unseeded 17-year-old Mirra Andrejeva of Russia in the second semifinal.

Swiatek is trying to earn her fourth championship in five years at the French Open and

can become the first woman with three in a row since Justine Henin from 2007-09.

Swiatek improved to 11-1 overall against No. 3 seed Gauff, the reigning U.S. Open champion. That is more victories than Swiatek has accumulated against any other player — and includes head-to-head wins at the clay-court Grand Slam tournament three years in a row, including in the 2022 final and last year's quarterfinals.

"She is progressing a lot. You can see by her results. Last year's U.S. Open, for sure, showed that she's tough. At this age, it's kind of obvious that she's going to just grow. So it's nice to see her handling well everything around her, because it's not easy," said Swiatek, who turned 23 last week. "I'm sure we're going to have plenty more really intense matches on the really highest level."

As far as Gauff is concerned, perhaps a different opponent would be preferable.

Swiatek, who is 4-0 in major finals, has been at her dominant best for most of the past two

weeks, following up on titles at clay events in Rome and Madrid.

Putting aside a three-set, second-round victory over four-time major champion Naomi Osaka, when she was forced to save a match point, Swiatek has ceded a total of merely 17 games in her other five matches in Paris.

Displaying her usual brand of powerful-but-clean groundstrokes, Swiatek needed only 10 winners to advance on Thursday, in part because she made only 14 unforced errors — while Gauff finished with 39.

This is what Swiatek does to whoever is across the net, particularly on clay: With defense and precision, she makes them hit so many shots that eventually the mistakes are bound to come.

There was a similar dynamic in the other semifinal. The key statistics were these: Paolini saved all six break points she faced, and she made just 10 unforced errors to Andrejeva's 29.

"I was nervous in the first set," Paolini said, "but ball after ball, I was getting relaxed."

It did not take long for Swiatek to assert herself on a sunny afternoon in Court Philippe Chatrier, where several spectators waved red-and-white flags of her native Poland — even drawing an admonition from chair umpire Aurélie Tourte in the second set.

When Gauff missed the mark early, she really missed. One return went off her racket frame. Another flew 10 feet long. The opening game ended when Gauff wildly hit a swinging volley that landed way out, too, handing over a break.

Swiatek went up by a double break at 4-1 when Gauff netted a backhand, then slapped her thigh and smacked her racket against a bag on her sideline bench. There were other examples of negative body language from Gauff: a bowed head here, slumped shoulders there.

It's not as though she did not have some chances to make more of a match of this.

In each of Swiatek's first two service games, she faced a break point. But each time, Gauff failed to convert.

Oklahoma a win away from 4th straight Women's CWS title

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Oklahoma needs just one more win to make softball history.

Tiare Jennings' two-run homer in the first inning sparked an 8-3 win over Texas on Wednesday night that left the Sooners one victory short of a record fourth straight Women's College World Series title.

Oklahoma (58-7) had nine hits and three home runs against a Texas squad that had thrown three one-hit shutouts in three World Series games.

Sooners coach Patty Gasso said the plan was to help pitcher Kelly Maxwell by scoring early. Maxwell had pitched a complete game the previous day in a semifinal win over Florida, and Gasso felt the senior might need some support.

"It's something that we really talked about, is trying to set the tone, give Kelly an opportunity to get settled," Gasso said. "Very, very important. It was a goal of ours. They checked a lot of boxes tonight."

Jennings had two hits and three RBIs and Kinzie Hansen had two hits, including a two-run homer, for the Sooners in Game 1 of the best-of-three series. The second-seeded Sooners could clinch their eighth overall championship in Game 2 on Thursday night.

Oklahoma was calm after the first game.

"You see us here and we're not over-jubilant because we know there's still a lot of work to do against a very, very good team that has very good pitchers, very good hitters," Gasso said. "I mean, we know what's in front of us still. So you don't see us celebrating. There's still a lot of work to do."

Mia Scott hit a solo homer for No. 1 Texas (55-9), but there weren't many more highlights. Now, the Longhorns will embrace the role of underdog.

"It's a mind game," Texas coach Mike White said. "Champions reframe. How can we reframe from this loss, what we're fac-

ing right now, come out and have a better game and see if we can play some good softball?"

It was another chapter in the storied rivalry between the programs, which will both leave the Big 12 for the Southeastern Conference next year. Oklahoma beat Texas in the national championship series in 2022. Texas won the Big 12 regular-season title this year, but Oklahoma won the conference tournament.

The Sooners played Tuesday while Texas had the day off, but Maxwell negated any edge the rest might have provided for the Longhorns. A day after tossing 148 pitches against Florida, she threw 119 against the Longhorns. She gave up one earned run and four hits and struck out eight.

"This is it," Maxwell said. "This is my last opportunity. I'm just going to do everything I can to keep this team in it. I know that they have my back and I've got theirs."

Oilers' Perry chasing his second Cup

Associated Press

Corey Perry won his first Stanley Cup championship in his second NHL season with the Anaheim Ducks. Seventeen years later, he is still looking for ring No. 2.

It is not for lack of trying.

The veteran Edmonton forward is about to play in his fourth Cup Final in the last five years after falling short as a member of the Dallas Stars, Montreal Canadiens and Tampa Bay Lightning. He is the first NHL player to play in the Final with five different teams. Going 1-3 has sparked chatter about the "Perry Curse" online.

"I never had the opportunity to play for a Stanley Cup (again) until five years ago," said Perry, who is 39. "So, there was 12 years, 13 years, in between. You never really know if you're going to get back there. Every year goes by and you're out in the first round, second round, third round. And you're just like, 'ugh, maybe next year.' And they just keep adding up."

The Oilers open this year's Final in Florida against the Panthers on Saturday night.

Perry spent 14 years in Anaheim, collect-

ing 776 points across 988 games. A two-time first-team All-Star, he won the Hart and the Maurice Richard trophies after his 50-goal, 98-point season in 2010-11. He is among the select group of players to win a Cup, Olympic gold (twice) and a world championship for Team Canada.

By now familiar with reaching the Final, this is the first time Perry can savor being on a Canadian team at the pinnacle of the sport. Sure, he was with the Canadiens in 2021 when they came back from 3-1 deficit in the first round against Toronto and lost to Tampa Bay in the Final. But games then were played in empty or nearly empty arenas because of the pandemic.

"When I was in Montreal, it was COVID I think we had 3,000 or 4,000 fans, that was it in a place like the Bell Centre," Perry told the Canadian Press. "It's not quite the same. It's a different atmosphere, a different animal, when you have fans."

Perry has lost three Cup Finals in the last half-decade, but he isn't alone. Adam Henrique, Mattias Janmark and Mattias Ekholm are among the Oilers who have fallen

short in Finals. They hope that experience can drive them to victory this time.

Henrique was a rookie when he got to his first Final. He was part of a New Jersey Devils team that lost to Los Angeles in 2012. At the time, he was naive about just how hard it is to get that far.

"You think we'll just be in the playoffs next year and hopefully get back here and get another opportunity," Henrique said. "But that doesn't happen. There's a lot that goes in behind the scenes and with contract situations. There is so much that changes team to team, every single year. To be here and go on a run has been a lot of fun."

The Panthers, of course, lost the 2023 Final to Vegas. It was not a close series. The Golden Knights won it in five — and three of the four wins were blowouts. Will Florida be able to take that experience forward?

"Experience is good," Oilers coach Kris Knoblauch. "I don't know how much experience is beneficial. You can ask the Buffalo Bills how important Super Bowl experience is."

Celtics follow Mazzulla's 'craziness' until very end

Associated Press

BOSTON — When Celtics guard Derrick White stood in the corner behind the 3-point line late in Game 4 of the Eastern Conference finals as teammate Jaylen Brown drove into the lane, drew defenders and flipped a pass toward him, White felt prepared for the moment.

That's because Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla had simulated scenarios just like it throughout the season.

"It starts in practice with them championship situations that Joe loves to do," White recalled. "It starts there and then just continue to trust one another."

White trusted that Brown would make the correct basketball play. He did, and it ended with White connecting on a tie-breaking 3 that ultimately secured Boston's place in the NBA Finals and a matchup with the

Dallas Mavericks.

The play may also be a perfect example of how in his second year as coach, Mazzulla has managed to help the Celtics recover from the disappointment of a season that ended on the cusp of the Finals a year ago, to a run this season that again has them four wins away from capturing the franchise's 18th championship.

White's shot, Mazzulla said, is a microcosm of the kind of a team culture he's tried to cultivate over the past two years. One that puts details first.

"Things that you can't take for granted," said Mazzulla, who at age 35 is the youngest head coach to reach the NBA Finals since Bill Russell (also 35) did it in 1969. "Sometimes it's as small as getting the ball in-bounds. But just try to pick little things that we see on a nightly basis that can impact winning and can affect losing. And we

just practice them over, over and over again until they become second nature."

What's equally become central to the Celtics' success this season is the buy-in to an egoless, team-first philosophy in which individual credit is secondary on a roster loaded with current and past All-Stars like Jayson Tatum, Jaylen Brown and Jrue Holiday, along with White, 7-footer Kristaps Porzingis, and a deep bench.

Meanwhile, Mazzulla has also benefited from working alongside a coaching staff he was able to choose this offseason. That's something he didn't have last season after being thrust into a job he didn't expect to have following predecessor Ime Udoka's suspension just days before the start of training camp.

Lead assistant Charles Lee and Sam Cassell have helped Mazzulla tweak a system built around 3-point shooting and de-

fense, which saw the Celtics rank first and third, respectively, in offensive and defensive rating during the regular season.

Those rankings have remained the same this postseason for a team that is 6-0 on the road and 3-0 in close-out games.

But as much as Mazzulla and his staff have been driving home their philosophies via X's and O's, they've also continued to focus on the mental aspects of the game.

Last season it was in film sessions that began with Mazzulla showing the team images of sand castles, which he used as a metaphor that even the best castles get washed away by the daily tide — requiring them to be rebuilt.

It was something Tatum said was "a little cheesy" but "something we bought into."

"You go with it. You go with the craziness," Holiday said.

Title still elusive for dominant Vols

Associated Press

No. 1 national seed Tennessee has established itself as the dominant post-pandemic baseball program.

All that's missing is a national title.

The Volunteers' 204 victories and 540 home runs since the start of the 2021 season are the most of any Division I program. They've won two SEC regular-season titles and two conference tournament championships.

Their nation-leading and program-record 159 homers this season are the most since the 1997 LSU "Gorilla Ball" team hit a record 188.

Now the Vols are trying to slug their way to two more victories to reach a third College World Series in four years and second straight. The Vols will host Evansville (38-24), who knocked off No. 16 East Carolina for its first regional championship, in the best-of-three

Knoxville Super Regional starting Friday.

Coach Tony Vitello, hired by Tennessee in June 2017, has the Vols rolling, going 12-0 to win four straight regionals.

"I think the last three years have been a compound effect of some lessons learned and some things gained by other people that came before these guys," Vitello said.

The Vols will still have to deal with the nation's top seed not winning the national title since 1999 when the CWS began its current format. For now, they're focused on trying to be among the eight teams advancing to the CWS starting June 14 in Omaha, Neb.

Centerfielder Hunter Ensley, who played in Omaha last June, said the Vols put together three pretty complete offensive games in the regional. The message after advancing was enjoy briefly as just another step.

"There's a lot to do for the rest of the week to get better for this weekend regardless of who we play," Ensley said.

Evansville left fielder Mark Shallenberger said the key to pulling off big upsets is focusing on one pitch and hit at a time. That's what helped the Aces make program history.

"Pressure's off of us," Shallenberger said before double-checking to make sure Evansville's next stop is Knoxville. "We're playing baseball. We're enjoying this awesome atmosphere. ... This ship ain't sunk yet."

Evansville will have to do something that few opponents have managed against the Vols, who've shown off their power all season. They've homered in 57 of 64 games, including 12 while winning three games in the regional.

Worse for opponents is trying to figure out who to avoid with Tennessee's power spread

throughout the lineup. All-SEC second baseman Christian Moore has a team-high 29, and he's just one of 15 different Vols with at least one home run. Six have at least 11 home runs.

Nine different Vols have had a grand slam with Tennessee tying 1996 Oklahoma (66 games) with 12 grand slams. Only 2003 Arizona State (14 in 68 games) has had more.

Vitello knows he has a large group of infielders led by 6-foot-3 first baseman Blake Burke and a pair of 6-foot-1 players in Moore and third baseman Billy Amick, who transferred from Clemson last summer. He also sees teammates who take pride and trust each other to come through with big hits, almost coaching each other.

"You never know who it's going to be that day, but I think everyone is involved and contributing, which makes it fun," Vitello said.

Expanded College Football Playoff to begin Dec. 20

Associated Press

The first year of the 12-team College Football Playoff will kick off with a first-round game on Dec. 20 and conclude with the title game one month later in Atlanta.

The CFP announced its entire schedule Wednesday. The four first-round games will be Dec. 20 and 21. ABC and ESPN will televise games Friday and Saturday night with an 8 p.m. EST kickoff, while TNT will have the Dec. 21 afternoon games at 12 p.m. and 4 p.m. The afternoon games will go up against a pair of NFL games with Houston-Kansas City at 1 p.m. and Baltimore-Pittsburgh at 4:30 p.m.

The four first-round games, which will be played on college campuses, will be announced Dec. 8. TNT has a pair of games through a sublicense with ESPN.

ESPN's \$7.8 billion deal with the CFP, which was announced in March, allowed it to sublicense games to other networks. Financial terms of the sublicense were not announced.

The quarterfinals, semifinals and championship will air on ESPN.

The top four conference champions will receive first-round byes. The quarterfinals will begin Dec. 31 with the Fiesta Bowl at 7:30 p.m. New Year's Day will kickoff with the Peach Bowl at 1 p.m. followed by the Rose Bowl in its traditional 5 p.m. spot and the Sugar Bowl at 8:45 p.m.

The semifinals are the Orange Bowl on Jan. 9 and Cotton Bowl on Jan. 10. Both have 7:30 p.m. start times before the championship game takes place Jan. 20 in Atlanta.

Athletes complete track sweeps

EUGENE, Ore. — Kentucky pole vaulter Keaton Daniel and shot putter Tarik Robinson-O'Hagan of Mississippi both completed NCAA indoor/outdoor sweeps on Wednesday night at the outdoor track and field championships.

Daniel cleared 18 feet, 7¼ inches to become the first Wildcat to win both indoor and outdoor NCAA pole vault championships in the same season.

Robinson-O'Hagan led wire to wire in reaching 68-6 on his final throw to become the 17th thrower in Division I history to

claim indoor and outdoor titles in a season.

USC topped the team standings with 19 points. Georgia was second with 13, followed by California with 12.5.

JC Stevenson of USC won the long jump with a personal record of 26-11¾. Stevenson, whose previous best was 26-5, moved from seventh place to win the event on his final attempt with the third-best mark in program history.

Rowan Hamilton became Cal's first men's hammer champion since 1922 with a collegiate-best throw, and a school record of 253.2. It was his fourth national collegiate title, with the previous three coming while at the NAIA-member British Columbia.

New Mexico freshman Habtom Samuel took a tumble in the 10,000-meter race before finishing with a winning time of 28 minutes, 7.82 seconds. Samuel became the first male in school history to win an NCAA outdoor 5,000 or 10,000 title. Weini Kelati won the women's 10,000 in 2019 for the Lobos.

Marc Minichello led from the first javelin throw and put it away with a 264-9 for his second NCAA title — but first with Georgia.