

Russian ships, sub reach Cuban waters

Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela — A fleet of Russian warships reached Cuban waters on Wednesday ahead of planned military exercises in the Caribbean in what some see as a projection of strength as tensions grow over Western support for Ukraine.

Three ships slowly crossed the mouth of the Havana Bay accompanied by small boats that guided them through the narrow channel. The flagship frigate, adorned with the Russian and Cuban flags, was greeted by 21 cannon salutes. Sailors in dress uniform stood in military formation as they approached the island.

A nuclear-powered submarine was expected to arrive behind them.

The U.S. military expects the exercises will involve a handful

of Russian ships and support vessels, which may also stop in Venezuela.

Russia is a longtime ally of Venezuela and Cuba, and its warships and aircraft have periodically made forays into the Caribbean. But this mission comes less than two weeks after President Joe Biden authorized Ukraine to use U.S.-provided weapons to strike inside Russia to protect Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, prompting President Vladimir Putin to suggest his military could respond with "asymmetrical steps" elsewhere in the world.

"Most of all, the warships are a reminder to Washington that it is unpleasant when an adversary meddles in your near abroad," said Benjamin Gedan, director of the Latin America Program at the Washington-based Wilson Center think tank, referring to

the Western involvement in Russia's war in Ukraine. "It also reminds Russia's friends in the region, including U.S. antagonists Cuba and Venezuela, that Moscow is on their side."

Although the fleet includes a nuclear-powered submarine, a senior U.S. administration official said the intelligence community has determined no vessel is carrying nuclear weapons. The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide details that had not been announced publicly, said Russia's deployments "pose no direct threat to the United States."

U.S. officials last week said the Russian ships were expected to remain in the region through the summer.

Russian ships have occasionally docked in Havana since 2008, when a group of Russian vessels entered Cuban waters in

what state media described as the first such visit in almost two decades. In 2015, a reconnaissance and communications ship arrived unannounced in Havana a day before the start of discussions between U.S. and Cuban officials on the reopening of diplomatic relations.

A State Department spokesperson told the AP that Russia's port calls in Cuba are "routine naval visits," while acknowledging its military exercises "have ratcheted up because of U.S. support to Ukraine and exercise activity in support of our NATO allies."

On Wednesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov hosted his Cuban counterpart, Bruno Rodríguez, for talks in Moscow. Speaking to reporters after the talks, Lavrov thanked the Cuban authorities for their position on Ukraine.

Biden and Zelenskyy set to sign security agreement

Associated Press

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE — President Joe Biden and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will sign a bilateral security agreement between the U.S. and Ukraine on Thursday when they meet on the sidelines of the Group of Seven summit in Italy, aiming to send signal to Russia of American resolve to supporting Kyiv, the White House said as Biden was headed to Europe.

National security adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters that the agreement would not commit U.S. troops directly to Ukraine's defense against Russia's invasion — a red line drawn by Biden, who is fearful of being drawn into direct conflict between the nuclear-armed pow-

ers.

The announcement of the agreement comes as Biden heads to the summit of the world's leading democracies with an urgency to get big things done, including turning frozen Russian assets into billions of dollars to help Ukraine as it fights off Russian President Vladimir Putin's war machine.

"We want to demonstrate that the U.S. supports the people of Ukraine, that we stand with them and that we'll continue to help address their security needs," Sullivan said, adding "this agreement will show our resolve."

This year's meeting comes three years after Biden declared at his first such gathering

that America was back as a global leader following the disruptions to Western alliances that occurred when Donald Trump was president.

Now, there's a chance this gathering could be the final G7 for Biden and other G7 leaders, depending on the results of elections this year.

Biden and his counterparts from Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Japan will use the summit to discuss challenges related to the spread of artificial intelligence, migration, the Russian military's resurgence and China's economic might, among other topics. Pope Francis, Zelenskyy and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan are joining the gathering at

the Borgo Egnazia resort in the Puglia region of southern Italy.

The summit, which opens Thursday, will play out after far-right parties across the continent racked up gains of surprising scale in just-concluded European Union elections. Those victories, coupled with upcoming elections in the United Kingdom, France and the United States, have rattled the global political establishment and added weightiness to this year's summit.

The G7 is an informal bloc of industrialized democracies that meets annually to discuss shared issues and concerns. Biden was to arrive in Italy on Wednesday, his second trip outside the U.S. in as many weeks.

Official: Osprey missions limited until 2025

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The military's hundreds of V-22 Ospreys will not be permitted to fly their full range of missions until at least 2025 as the Pentagon continues to address safety concerns in the fleet, the head of the program told lawmakers at a hearing Wednesday.

Vice Adm. Carl Chebi, the head of U.S. Naval Air Systems Command, which has responsi-

bility for the V-22 military-wide, told lawmakers at a House oversight hearing into the program's recent crashes that it will be at least another six to nine months before the command will be able to complete all of the safety and performance assessments for the Osprey.

Over the lifespan of the program, Chebi said a total of 64 service members have been killed in air and ground accidents, and

93 have been injured.

But over the last two years, four separate crashes killed a total of 20 service members and two of those crashes involved catastrophic materiel or mechanical failures the program had not experienced before.

Following a November crash off the coast of Japan that killed eight service members, the fleet was grounded for months. The Ospreys were returned to flight

status in March, but in a very limited format, and do not perform the full range of missions, including carrier operations, that the aircraft was made to carry out.

In use since only 2007, the Osprey can fly like an airplane and land like a helicopter. Critics of the aircraft have said its innovative design has systemic flaws that are driving the unexpected failures.

White House rejects 20% pay raise for junior troops

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The White House on Tuesday objected to a congressional proposal to give junior enlisted service members a nearly 20% pay raise and eliminate marijuana testing for military applicants.

Both provisions are part of the House's draft of the National Defense Authorization Act, a bill that will set policies for the Pentagon for fiscal 2025. The pay increase in particular is a key element of House lawmakers' efforts to improve quality of life for service members.

The White House said it "strongly opposes" making significant, permanent changes to the basic pay schedule ahead of a qua-

drennial review of military compensation expected to be completed early next year.

"The House proposed changes would lead to pay compression in some parts of the enlisted military basic pay table," the Office of Management and Budget wrote in a statement of administration policy.

House lawmakers are proposing a 15% pay hike for junior enlisted service members on top of a 4.5% pay raise the White House is requesting for all troops. The House plan would cost \$3.3 billion in fiscal 2025 and more than \$21.9 billion from 2025 to 2029, according to the White House.

Rep. Adam Smith of Washington, the top Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, defended the additional pay in-

creases while advocating for the authorization bill before the House Rules Committee on Tuesday.

"Many of our junior enlisted are struggling to afford housing. As housing costs have gone up, their pay has not kept pace," he said. "This is a bold step to try to make sure that we support them, which incidentally will also help with recruitment and retention."

Rep. Austin Scott, R-Ga., called the targeted pay increase for junior enlisted troops "extremely necessary" and said he was aware of the announcement of the White House's opposition.

"I wish the president had not done that," he said.

Ex-sergeant gets 3 years in prison for rideshare scam

Stars and Stripes

A former Army sergeant was sentenced to three years in prison for defrauding millions of dollars from the service in a rideshare scam using illegally obtained personal information from more than 800 soldiers, the Justice Department announced Tuesday.

Kevin Romulus Pelayo, 45, co-owned and operated a rideshare company, Soldiers Vanpools LLC, out of Killeen with his wife, Cristine Furio Fredericks, 40, according to court documents. The

company claimed to shuttle military personnel to and from Fort Cavazos, then known as Fort Hood, from Jan. 1, 2014, through June 10, 2020. Killeen is the city just outside the gates of Fort Cavazos.

The rideshare company was funded by the Army's Mass Transportation Benefit Program, a federal subsidy for government workers to use mass transit, according to a statement from the U.S. Attorney's Office of Western District of Texas.

"Pelayo and Fredericks sub-

mitted the names, Social Security numbers and other identifying information of active-duty soldiers to the MTBP on a monthly basis from 2014 to midway through 2020, falsely claiming that the soldiers were active participants in the rideshare program," according to federal authorities.

Pelayo was sentenced to three years in prison for one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and two counts of engaging in monetary transactions in criminally derived property, accord-

ing to the Justice Department. Fredericks was sentenced to five years of probation for two counts engaging in monetary transactions in criminally derived property.

"The couple spent a large portion of the millions of dollars in funds they received on real estate, personal vehicles, and other property," the Justice Department said. "In total, Pelayo and Fredericks purchased 43 vehicles, 129 luxury purses and jewelry items, and 12 real properties in Bell County and Coryell County."

Blinken: Some Hamas requests unworkable

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday that mediators would keep trying to close an elusive cease-fire deal after Hamas proposed numerous changes to a U.S.-backed plan, some of which he said were “workable” and some not.

The back-and-forth laid bare frustration over the difficulty of reaching an accord that can bring an end to eight months of war that has decimated Gaza, killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and left scores of Israeli hostages still languishing in militant captivity. Previous moments of optimism have been repeatedly dashed by the differences between the two sides.

The cease-fire proposal has global support but has not been fully embraced by Israel or Hamas. Blinken did not spell out what changes Hamas was seeking but he said the mediators —

Qatar, Egypt and the U.S. — will keep trying to “close this deal.” He put the onus on Hamas, accusing it of changing its demands.

“Hamas has proposed numerous changes to the proposal that was on the table. ... Some of the changes are workable. Some are not,” Blinken told reporters in Qatar. “I believe that they (the differences) are bridgeable, but that doesn’t mean they will be bridged because ultimately Hamas has to decide.”

Blinken’s comments came as Lebanon’s Hezbollah fired a massive barrage of rockets into northern Israel to avenge the killing of a top commander, further escalating regional tensions.

Hezbollah, an Iran-backed ally of Hamas, has traded fire with Israel nearly every day since the 8-month-long Israel-Hamas war began and says it will only stop if

there is a truce in Gaza. That has raised fears of an even more devastating regional conflagration.

Hamas conveyed its official reply to the proposal to mediators on Tuesday. Hamas spokesman Jihad Taha told the Lebanese news outlet *ElNashra* that the “amendments” requested by the group aim to guarantee a permanent cease-fire and complete Israeli troop withdrawal from Gaza.

The proposal announced by President Joe Biden includes those provisions, but Hamas has expressed wariness whether Israel will implement the terms. While the U.S. says Israel has accepted the proposal, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has given conflicting statements, saying Israel is still intent on its goal of destroying Hamas.

Blinken, on his eighth visit to the region since the start of the

war, said the deal on the table was “virtually identical” to one Hamas put forth on May 6. The U.N. Security Council voted overwhelmingly in favor of the plan on Monday.

The proposal’s three-phase plan would begin with a six-week cease-fire and the release of some hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. Israeli forces would withdraw from populated areas and Palestinian civilians would be allowed to return to their homes. Aid distribution would also increase.

At the same time, negotiations would start over the second phase, which is to bring “a permanent end to hostilities” and “full withdrawal” of Israeli troops from Gaza in exchange for the release of all remaining hostages. Phase three would see the launch of a reconstruction plan for Gaza and the return of remains of deceased hostages.

Retired Army officer wins GOP US Senate primary

Associated Press

RENO, Nev. — Republican Sam Brown overcame a crowded field of primary opponents to win Nevada’s GOP U.S. Senate primary Tuesday, setting up a fierce general election battle against incumbent Democratic Sen. Jacky Rosen that could decide which party controls the U.S. Senate.

In a speech to supporters at a Reno watch party, Brown thanked his wife, Amy, their three young children and his parents. He described an America “at a crossroads,” where he said his children “have no voice” and “have no vote” in the country that they will inherit.

Brown, a retired Army captain making his second try in two years for the U.S. Senate, emerged from a field of 12 Republicans to challenge Rosen, a first-term moderate in a presidential battleground state and one of the

GOP’s top targets in 2024. Democrats are defending far more Senate seats than Republicans this year as they look to maintain their narrow Senate majority.

Brown held a decisive fundraising edge throughout the campaign and received a late endorsement from former President Donald Trump. His compelling personal story — Brown was nearly killed by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan — has been a cornerstone of his campaign.

In Reno, Brown vowed to provide leadership to secure the borders, provide energy security, lower taxes and reform the judiciary. He also recounted the explosion that nearly killed him in Afghanistan and the dozens of surgeries that followed, touting the leadership skills he learned in the Army and the Christian faith that sustained him through his recovery.

Ohio win grows razor-thin majority for GOP in House

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Republican state Sen. Michael Rulli won a special election Tuesday in eastern Ohio for a U.S. House seat that has sat vacant for months, expanding the GOP’s narrow majority in the congressional chamber.

Rulli, 55, defeated Democrat Michael Kripchak to fill the remainder of Republican Bill Johnson’s unexpired term. The two face off again Nov. 5 for a full two-year congressional term.

Rulli’s victory by roughly 10 percentage points was much closer than earlier GOP performances in Ohio’s 6th District. Johnson won his last four elections by more than 30 percentage points. Former President Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee this year, also carried the district by around 30 percentage points in

2020. While this was a special election held in the summer, when turnout traditionally dips, the results could offer hope for Democrats looking to be competitive this fall in Ohio and neighboring Pennsylvania.

“We knew the polls were going to be close, and the guy I ran against really worked. He’s a really hard worker,” Rulli said. “But this is a blue-collar district, this is Bruce Springsteen, the forgotten man, ‘Joe Bag of Donuts.’ They don’t trust the Democrats and Republicans, and they look at the individual. And I’m really good at retail politics.”

The second-term state senator directs operations for his family’s 100-year-old chain of grocery stores.

Johnson resigned in January after 13 years in Congress to take a position as president of Youngstown State University.

8 with likely ISIS ties arrested in US

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Eight people from Tajikistan with suspected ties to Islamic State have been arrested in the United States in recent days, according to multiple people familiar with the matter.

The arrests took place in New York, Philadelphia and Los Angeles and the individuals, who entered the U.S. through the southern border, are being held on immigration violations, said the people, who were not authorized to discuss the ongoing investigation by name and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

The nature of their suspected connections to ISIS was not immediately clear, but the individuals were being tracked by the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, or JTTF. They were in the custody of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which made the arrests while working with the JTTF, pending proceedings to remove them from the country.

The individuals from Tajikis-

tan entered the country last spring and passed through the U.S. government's screening process without turning up information that would have identified them as potential terrorism-related concerns, said one of the people familiar with the matter.

The FBI and Department of Homeland Security issued a statement confirming the immigration-related arrests of "several non-citizens" but did not detail specifics. The agencies noted that the U.S. has been in a "heightened threat environment."

FBI Director Christopher Wray has said the U.S. is facing accelerating threats from homegrown violent extremists as well as foreign terrorist organizations, particularly in the aftermath of the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas on Israel.

"The FBI and DHS will continue working around the clock with our partners to identify, investigate, and disrupt potential threats to national security," the agencies said.

Dozens arrested in rally for Palestinians at UCLA

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Police thwarted attempts by pro-Palestinian demonstrators to set up a new encampment at the University of California, Los Angeles, where officers cleared a previous camp this spring after it was attacked by counter-protesters.

Officers arrested 27 people late Monday during the demonstration, Rick Braziel, UCLA associate vice chancellor for campus safety, said in a statement.

The individuals were cited for willful disruption of university operations and one for interfering with an officer, according to UCLA police.

They were issued 14-day orders to stay away from UCLA and then released.

Any student arrested will face disciplinary action, which could include being banned from campus and not being able to take finals or participate in commencement ceremonies, Braziel said.

The demonstrators repeatedly tried to set up tents, canopies and barriers as they moved to various locations, disrupting

nearby final exams. The group also damaged a fountain, spray-painted brick walkways, tampered with fire safety equipment, damaged patio furniture, stripped wire from electrical fixtures and vandalized vehicles, police said.

During the demonstration, there were also attacks that led to six UCLA police being injured, as well as a security guard left bleeding from the head after being struck, according to Braziel.

"Simply put, these acts of non-peaceful protest are abhorrent and cannot continue," Braziel said in the statement.

Protest camps have sprung up on university campuses across the U.S. and in Europe as students demand their universities stop doing business with Israel or companies that support its war efforts. Organizers have sought to amplify calls to end Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza, which they describe as a genocide against the Palestinians.

UCLA has been repeatedly roiled by protests and the university administration's handling of the situation.

Chestnut cut from eating contest over brand dispute

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Joey "Jaws" Chestnut, the reigning champion of the Nathan's Famous Fourth of July hot dog eating contest, will not participate in this year's event after signing a deal with a rival brand, organizers said Tuesday.

Chestnut, 40, has long been the face — not to mention the mouth — of the competition. He has vied for the dog-downing contest's coveted Mustard Belt since 2005 and has won it almost every year since 2007, with the exception of a rare loss in 2015. In 2021, the Westfield, Ind., resident ingested 76 franks and

buns in 10 minutes, a record that still stands.

But Major League Eating event organizer George Shea says Chestnut is moving away from the contest due to a contract dispute.

"We love him. The fans love him," Shea said, adding: "He made the choice."

Chestnut disputed who made the choice, saying on the social platform X, "I do not have a contract with MLE or Nathans and they are looking to change the rules from past years as it relates to other partners I can work with."

In a thread posted Tuesday

night after the news broke, Chestnut said he had been training to defend his title at this year's Independence Day event and only learned through media reports that he wouldn't be allowed to compete.

"I was gutted to learn from the media that after 19 years I'm banned," Chestnut said on X. "To my fans, I love you and appreciate you. Rest assured that you'll see me eat again soon!! STAY HUNGRY!"

Shea says Chestnut struck a deal with a competing brand — a red line for the Nathan's-sponsored event. He wouldn't say which brand but told The New

York Times that Chestnut will be representing Impossible Foods, which makes vegan sausages. The company declined to comment. So did Chestnut.

Shea said the dispute came down to exclusivity, not money.

"It would be like Michael Jordan saying to Nike, 'I'm going to represent Adidas, too,'" Shea said.

In response, Impossible Foods released a statement that didn't address a deal with Chestnut but said that the company supports him in "any contest he chooses," adding "Meat eaters shouldn't have to be exclusive to just one wiener."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

No charges for woman said to have taught drunk

CA SACRAMENTO — A Northern California teacher who made national headlines last year after being accused of teaching her second-grade class while drunk will not face criminal charges in connection to the incident following a months-long investigation, prosecutors said Monday.

Sutter County deputies were called Oct. 2 to Nuestro Elementary School in Live Oak after a caller reported a woman drove under the influence to school and began teaching students. She had a blood alcohol level of about 0.20% more than two hours after her arrest, said Sutter County District Attorney Jennifer Dupre in an email. California's legal limit is 0.08%.

A subsequent investigation could not substantiate that the 57-year-old woman drove to school while drunk; she may have started drinking "only after arriving there," Sutter County prosecutors said Monday in a news release.

There was also not enough evidence to prove a child endangerment charge, Dupre wrote in the news release.

Ex-police officer gets life in prison for 4 murders

NY NEW YORK — A retired police officer convicted of murdering four people, including a man he tortured and strangled over stolen drug money, was sentenced Monday to four consecutive life terms in prison.

Nicholas Tartaglione, 56, who had been an officer in the Hudson River Valley village of Briarcliff

Manor, was convicted last year.

The man Tartaglione tortured was Martin Luna, who he believed had stolen \$250,000 from him that was meant to buy cocaine, prosecutors said. The other three victims were friends or family who happened to be out at a club with Luna when Tartaglione and two associates kidnapped them in 2016.

Prosecutors said Urbano Santiago, Miguel Luna and Hector Gutierrez were forced to watch as Tartaglione strangled Martin Luna with a zip tie. They were then killed by gunfire. Investigators found the bodies of the four men buried together on Tartaglione's property in Otisville, N.Y.

DA drops charges in \$500K casino theft

CO DENVER — Prosecutors on Friday dropped all charges against a former Monarch Casino Resort and Spa employee who took \$500,000 in cash from the casino, conceding that the woman was scammed by likely international thieves.

During a court hearing Friday, prosecutors with the First Judicial District Attorney's office said an extensive investigation into the theft revealed the casino employee fell victim to a likely international conspiracy to scam casino employees into removing money from the casino and delivering that money to thieves, and that similar schemes were perpetrated across the United States in the summer of 2023.

Prosecutors said they could not ethically proceed with the case against former casino employee Sabrina Eddy, who did not profit from the theft.

The half-million-dollar heist last year was the biggest casino

theft in Colorado since gambling was legalized in 1991, state regulators said. Eddy was arrested and charged with a single count of felony theft after the March 12, 2023, heist — but she maintained that she thought she was doing what her bosses wanted when she loaded cash bricks of \$50,000 into boxes in the middle of the night and handed them to a man she'd never met.

Pardoned felon ineligible for elected state office

MO COLUMBIA — The Missouri Supreme Court ruled on Monday that a Cass County man cannot run for elected office even though he was pardoned by Gov. Mike Parson.

The state's highest court ruled that Herschel Young's pardon did not exempt him from the fact that Missouri law bans from elected office people who have pleaded guilty to felonies.

Young, who was attempting to run for the Cass County Commission, pleaded guilty to second-degree assault in 1995 and was sentenced to one year in prison. Parson, a Republican, pardoned him in November 2023.

Dog helped get help for owner after ravine crash

OR BAKER COUNTY — A dog helped his owner get rescued after a car crash in a steep ravine in mountainous northeastern Oregon, authorities said.

A man was driving with his four dogs on a remote U.S. Forest Service road on June 2 when he crashed into a ravine below, the Baker County Sheriff's Office said in a news release on Face-

book. One of the dogs traveled nearly four miles to the campsite where the man was staying with family, which alerted them that something was wrong, the release said.

His family located his car the following day and called 911 as they couldn't reach it in the steep terrain.

When authorities arrived, they found the man about 100 yards from the car after they heard him yell for help. The man was airlifted to a regional hospital, authorities said. His three other dogs were found alive at the scene of the crash.

Medical pot users get break from high taxes

WA OLYMPIA — Thanks to a new state law, Washingtonians with a medical cannabis card can get a break from the nation's highest tax on the drug.

The change, which took effect this month, could nudge more people to get medical cards and potentially depress revenues from the cannabis tax, which generated nearly \$470 million in fiscal year 2023 at a 37% rate.

While the state is developing formal rules, a trade group representing cannabis businesses in Washington said the state needs to act faster to help them adapt to the new law and prevent the tax exemption from bolstering the illicit market for cannabis.

It's unclear how much state cannabis taxes could decrease under the new law, but if assuming there's a demand for medical products and the supply meets the demand, state fiscal analysts predict "a significant negative impact."

— From wire reports

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Americans on big run going into US Open

Associated Press

The list starts with Brooks Koepka winning his fifth major in the PGA Championship at Oak Hill. The most recent addition is Xander Schauffele winning his first major in the PGA at Valhalla.

The streak hasn't been the main topic of conversation in a golf world filled with endless drama, from conflict between the PGA Tour and LIV Golf, private equity and increasing riches. But this much should be noted going into the U.S. Open:

The Americans are on a roll in the majors, and not just any one of the players.

Five different Americans — Koepka, U.S. Open champion Wyndham Clark, British Open champion Brian Harman, Masters champion Scottie Scheffler and Schauffele — have won the last five majors.

It's the longest such streak in 40 years, when the quintet of Americans was Larry Nelson (1983 U.S. Open), Tom Watson (1983 British Open), Hal Sutton (1983 PGA Championship), Ben Crenshaw (1984 Masters) and Fuzzy Zoeller (1984 U.S. Open).

A revolving door of Americans winning majors would seem to suggest a great depth of talent, which is increasingly true in golf, and perhaps parity.

The latter requires pause for two reasons. Three of the most recent American

winners were first-time major champions. Secondly, any conversation about parity at the top would require a blind eye to what Scheffler is doing.

Scheffler has been No. 1 in the world rankings for 13 months and is assured of being at the top of the rankings for the longest of anyone since Tiger Woods ruled from 2005 until 2010.

He is a clear favorite to add another major when the 124th U.S. Open returns to Pinehurst No. 2 in the sand hills of North Carolina.

This has already been an unforgettable year for Scheffler in so many ways.

He hasn't been out of the top 10 since the third week in January. About the only thing that has slowed him was getting arrested and briefly jailed — it's still hard to erase the memory of golf's No. 1 player in handcuffs — before the second round of the PGA Championship. He got out of jail in time to make his tee time and still managed to tie for eighth by the end of the week. And authorities in Louisville, Ky., eventually dismissed all charges.

So that's all behind him. Or is it?

"That's something that will always, I think, kind of stick with me," Scheffler said. "That mug shot (from jail) I'm sure is not going anywhere anytime soon."

Scheffler was clean-shaven at the Memorial the week before the U.S. Open.

He has never seen Pinehurst No. 2 except for the flyover video of the Donald Ross gem a week before his arrival. Most major championship courses, except for Augusta National, are relatively new to him in his only his fifth year on the PGA Tour.

And he's not alone. Slightly more than two dozen players were at Pinehurst No. 2 in 2014 the last time the U.S. Open was there. Phil Mickelson and Matt Kuchar are the only players in the 156-man field to compete in all four U.S. Opens at Pinehurst No. 2.

The course has been around for more than a century. Pinehurst No. 2 held the 1936 PGA Championship and the 1951 Ryder Cup, back when the matches were so much an exhibition that players were given Saturday off to attend a college football game.

And then it was 48 years later before it entered the U.S. Open landscape in a major way. Not only is this the fourth U.S. Open in the last 25 years, four more U.S. Opens already are booked for Pinehurst No. 2 through 2047.

"I always loved No. 2. It's a tree-lined course without a tree in play," Jack Nicklaus said.

Hall of Fame player, NBA executive West dies at 86

Associated Press

Jerry West, who was selected to the Basketball Hall of Fame three times in a storied career as a player and executive, and whose silhouette is considered to be the basis of the NBA logo, died Wednesday morning, the Los Angeles Clippers announced.

He was 86.

West, nicknamed "Mr. Clutch" for his late-game exploits as a player, was an NBA champion who went into the Hall of Fame as a player in 1980 and again as a member of the gold medal-winning 1960 U.S. Olympic Team in 2010. He will be enshrined for a third time later this year as a contributor.

West was "the personification of basketball excellence and a friend to all who knew him," the

Clippers said in announcing his death. West's wife, Karen, was by his side when he died, the Clippers said. West worked for the Clippers as a consultant for the last seven years.

He was an All-Star in all 14 of his NBA seasons, a 12-time All-NBA selection, part of the 1972 Lakers team that won a championship, an NBA Finals MVP as part of a losing team in 1969 and was selected as part of the NBA's 75th anniversary team.

West was general manager of eight NBA championship teams with the Los Angeles Lakers, helping build the "Showtime" dynasty. He also worked in the front offices of the Memphis Grizzlies, the Golden State Warriors and the Clippers. Among his many, many highlights as an executive with the Lakers: he

drafted Magic Johnson and James Worthy, then brought in Kobe Bryant and eventually Shaquille O'Neal to play alongside Bryant.

Even in the final years of his life, West was considered basketball royalty. He routinely sat courtside at Summer League games in Las Vegas, often watching many games in a day while greeting long lines of players — LeBron James among them — who would approach to shake his hand and pay him respect.

"The game transcends many things," West said while attending Summer League last year. "The players change, the style of play may change, but the respect that you learn in this game never changes."

He's 25th on the NBA's all-

time scoring list, and while the league has never confirmed that West was in fact the model for its logo — a player dribbling a ball, set against a red-and-blue background — the league has never said otherwise, either.

"While it's never been officially declared that the logo is Jerry West," NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said in 2021, "it sure looks a lot like him."

Tributes from across the sports world started quickly after the announcement of West's death. The Los Angeles Dodgers released a statement calling West "an indelible figure on the Los Angeles sports landscape for more than 60 years," and the NBA was planning a pregame tribute to West before Game 3 of the NBA Finals on Wednesday night.

Oilers' potent offense held in check

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — The Edmonton Oilers left Game 1 of the Stanley Cup Final feeling pretty good.

They were shut out three goals to none, but it took a monumental performance from Florida Panthers goalie Sergei Bobrovsky to neutralize their offensive firepower.

The Oilers weren't shut out Monday night, but the result was the same — another loss, this one putting Edmonton in an 0-2 hole as the series shifts to Canada.

"We just have to take it one game at a time," said Oilers coach Kris Knoblauch. "I don't see any reason to panic or do anything drastic. If we win one of these, which I think we were capable of doing, we're really happy. So I don't want to get too caught up in we're down two-nothing."

One of the highest-scoring teams in the NHL, Edmonton has managed just one goal in the first two games of the Final.

The Panthers outshot the Oilers 22-7 through the first two periods Monday.

Edmonton's seven shots on goal through 40 minutes were the fewest by a team through two periods of a Stanley Cup Final since Game 6 of the 2006 championship series when the Carolina Hurricanes managed that many on goal against the Oilers.

That's one game after Edmonton outshot the Panthers 32-18 in a Game 1 performance that star Connor McDavid described as a confidence booster.

McDavid, who was kept off the scoresheet in Game 1, assisted Mattias Ekholm on Edmonton's only goal of the night. It was a 4-on-4 shot on the Oilers' first shot on goal of the game.

McDavid leads all postseason scorers with 32 points but still has not scored in this series despite numerous opportunities, including on a breakaway late in the third Monday night, only to be denied by Bobrovsky again.

"We've got to be better,"

McDavid said. "I thought they went up a level (from Game 1) and we didn't match them today."

Knoblauch said the Panthers have made it tough on Edmonton defensively, but playing shorthanded also hurt them.

Edmonton's Warren Foegele was ejected in the first period for a knee-on-knee hit that knocked Florida's Eetu Luostarinen from the game briefly.

Defenseman Darnell Nurse was injured in that period, leaving the Oilers with only 11 forwards and five defensemen for much of the game.

"We missed Foegele with his speed," Knoblauch said, "the amount of penalties took away the flow of the game a little bit, but I think we weren't as efficient breaking the puck out as we were in the first game."

Edmonton's other star, the 2020 league MVP Leon Draisaitl, still has no points in the series and hasn't been much of a factor. Draisaitl was penalized for roughing in the third period

when he shoved Florida captain Aleksander Barkov.

"I certainly have a lot more to give," Draisaitl said. "Not my best tonight. Obviously I'm owning that. We'll regroup and make sure I'll be better in Game 3."

Despite no goals from the Oilers' powerful duo so far in the series, Knoblauch indicated he was happy with the play of his stars.

"Yeah we'd like some more goals, but I think our top guys have been pretty good," he said.

The experience of the Panthers, who were in the Final just a year ago, has clearly frustrated the Oilers. Edmonton came into the series with the best power play in the postseason at 37.3%, but is now 0-for-7.

Edmonton, down 0-2 for the first time in the postseason, now has to accomplish a feat that few teams have ever done in Stanley Cup Final history. Only five teams in 54 tries have lost the first two games of the Final and come back to win.

Mavs need to hit more 3s in a long-shot bid to rally

Associated Press

DALLAS — Luka Dončić's message is simple for the struggling 3-point shooters around him, and with Dallas trailing Boston 2-0 while coming home for the NBA Finals.

"Just one thing: Keep shooting," the Mavericks superstar said. "We all believe in those shots. That's how we came to the Finals. That's how we played the whole season. We believe in those guys."

Dallas faced several daunting numbers going into Game 3 on Wednesday night.

The Celtics are on a nine-game playoff winning streak, a franchise record in pursuit of an NBA-best 18th banner. Just five of the previous 36 teams to face this deficit (14%) have come back to win the title.

One number has to change for the Mavs to rally. Players not named Dončić are 5-for-32 from beyond the arc, with co-star Kyrie Irving misfiring on all eight attempts.

When it comes to 3s, the supporting cast is just about as important as Irving. P.J. Washington Jr., a catalyst for the deep playoff run with his deep ball and defense, is 1-for-8. Derrick Jones Jr. is 1-for-5.

Dončić, who is 8-for-21 from deep, is the only Dallas player with more than one bucket from 3. His role-playing partners have to figure out how to produce without forcing things.

"I think it's just taking good shots, taking open ones," said Washington, who shot 47% from 3 in a second-round victory over top-seeded Oklahoma City but

is at 23% since then. "Obviously, we haven't been making shots. We feel pretty good coming home. It's all about just making open ones, taking open ones."

Let's not forget the defense of Jaylen Brown, Jayson Tatum and Jrue Holiday, among others. Boston had the second-best defensive rating in the regular season, and has the size and tenacity on the perimeter to make Dončić and Irving uncomfortable.

While Dončić just had the first playoff triple-double in Dallas history with 32 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists in a 105-98 loss in Game 2, the five-time All-Star has 12 turnovers in the series. Irving is shooting 35% with significantly more shots (37) than points (28).

Brown has guarded both, of-

ten picking up Dončić at half court and occasionally poking the ball loose for easy buckets the other way.

"He's been one of the emotional leaders on the team," Irving said of his former teammate. "Defensively, he's making it difficult. For the past few years, he's tried to make his mark on that end. When you take pride in what you do on the defensive end, it's going to show."

"I sound like I'm repeating myself," Mavs coach Jason Kidd said. "But if we can take care of the ball and not give them live-ball turnovers where they are not just laying up the ball or dunking, it puts us in a better seat. We've got to take care of the ball. That's the next step in the series."

Rays rally to walk off Cubs on Lowe's homer

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Brandon Lowe capped Tampa Bay's four-run ninth inning with a three-run homer, lifting the Rays to a 5-2 victory over the struggling Chicago Cubs on Tuesday night.

Richie Palacios started the rally with a leadoff double against Héctor Neris (6-1). Ben Rortved reached on a one-out walk before José Caballero's RBI single tied it at 2.

Yandy Díaz then struck out swinging before Lowe drove a full-count splitter deep to right-center for his third homer of the season.

"You understand what a guy's got out on the mound ... a very good splitter," Lowe said. "Sit it and hope that he leaves one up, and thankfully kind of left one elevated there."

It was Neris' third blown save in 12 chances.

"Today was a day he fell behind (in the count)," Chicago manager Craig Counsell said.

Chris Devenski (2-1) worked a scoreless ninth for the win.

The Rays were swept in a four-game series against Baltimore that concluded Monday night. Tampa Bay scored just seven times in the set.

"It was awesome, and it's exactly what we needed with what we've been going through the past week," Rays starter Zach Eflin said. "It was a great way to fire everyone up."

"We needed a win," Rays manager Kevin Cash added.

Chicago wasted a sharp performance by Jameson Taillon, who pitched six scoreless innings of four-hit ball. The Cubs, who have dropped 13 of 18 overall, had 10 hits, but they went 1-for-7 with runners in scoring position.

"We had a bunch of singles today, really," Counsell said. "We had some balls hit well kind of to the wall and not enough."

Dodgers 15, Rangers 2: Shohei Ohtani, Freddie Freeman, Teoscar Hernández and Jason

Heyward homered in a seven-run sixth inning as host Los Angeles routed defending World Series champion Texas.

Will Smith blasted a three-run shot in the first, giving the Dodgers a lead they never relinquished in the opener of the interleague series. Their 15 runs were a season high.

Nationals 5, Tigers 4 (10): Lane Thomas hit a sacrifice fly in the top of the 10th inning and visiting Washington beat Detroit.

Andrew Chafin (3-2) struck out C.J. Abrams to start the 10th, but Jacob Young took third and Abrams reached first when the pitch sailed past Tigers catcher Jake Rogers.

Phillies 4, Red Sox 1: Kyle Schwarber homered on the first pitch of the game — then added another solo shot in the fifth inning — and Zack Wheeler won his eighth straight decision leading visiting Philadelphia to a victory over Boston.

Wheeler (8-3) has not lost in 10 starts since April 14. He allowed one run on three hits over seven innings, striking out four and walking one to help Philadelphia improve to a season-high 10 games in front of the six-time defending NL East champion Atlanta Braves.

Orioles 4, Braves 0: Jorge Mateo hit a three-run homer in his first plate appearance after returning to the lineup, and Albert Suarez (3-0) allowed four hits in 5½ innings to lead host Baltimore over Atlanta.

Mateo was reinstated from the concussion injured list and played for the first time since he was hit in the head by teammate Cedric Mullins' bat in a freak accident at the on-deck circle in a June 2 game. He hit a drive into the Baltimore bullpen in the second inning off Max Fried (6-3).

Rockies 5, Twins 4: Ezequiel Tovar hit a three-run homer, Cal Quantrill kept his strong run going with six scoreless innings and visiting Colorado

held on to beat Minnesota.

Quantrill (6-4), who's allowed more than two runs just once in his last eight starts, gave up three hits and walked one, while striking out five batters. The 29-year-old right-hander has allowed 10 earned runs in 47 innings (1.92 ERA) since the start of May.

Marlins 4, Mets 2: Tim Anderson returned from the bereavement list and produced his first two-hit game in three weeks, sparking visiting Miami to a win over New York.

The 2019 AL batting champion, who entered hitting .188 this season, had an RBI single in the second inning before singling and scoring in the fifth when Bryan De La Cruz doubled off the glove of Harrison Bader in deep center field.

Guardians 5, Reds 3: Josh Naylor hit his 17th homer and Tyler Freeman made two impressive defensive plays, helping visiting Cleveland beat Cincinnati in the opener of the Ohio Cup series.

Steven Kwan hit a two-run double for the AL Central-leading Guardians, who earned their third consecutive win. Triston McKenzie (3-3) pitched 5½ innings of two-run ball, and Emmanuel Clase worked a shaky ninth for his 20th save.

Pirates 2, Cardinals 1: Connor Joe and Oneil Cruz drove in runs in the ninth inning, lifting visiting Pittsburgh to victory over St. Louis.

Colin Holderman (2-0) gave up two hits but no runs in the eighth and David Bednar earned his 14th save by pitching the ninth despite giving up a first-pitch leadoff home run to Nolan Gorman.

Yankees 10, Royals 1: Aaron Judge hit his major league-leading 25th home run with a 436-foot, two-run drive into the fountain behind the center-field seats, and visiting New York routed Kansas City for its 11th win in 14 games.

Giancarlo Stanton followed

Judge with a 446-foot shot to center off reliever Nick Anderson for his 16th home run of the season, and Austin Wells hit a three-run homer off starter Brady Singer.

Blue Jays 3, Brewers 0: Yu-sei Kikuchi and four Toronto relievers combined to shut out host Milwaukee.

Kikuchi (4-5) gave up three hits in five innings, walked four and struck out five to record consecutive wins for the first time since April.

Astros 3, Giants 1: Ronel Blanco had eight strikeouts in six innings, Mauricio Dubon scored twice and visiting Houston beat San Francisco.

Blanco (6-2) allowed one run on three hits and became the first pitcher in Astros history to go undefeated in his first nine career road starts, improving to 6-0 away from home. His eight strikeouts tied a season high.

Padres 4, Athletics 3: Kyle Higashioka homered leading off the ninth inning and host San Diego beat Oakland.

Fernando Tatis Jr. extended his hitting streak to a career-high 17 games, but Jurickson Profar, who entered second in the big leagues in batting and first in the NL in on-base percentage, hurt himself swinging at a pitch leading off the eighth. Profar was replaced by pinch-hitter David Peralta, who flied out to center field.

Diamondbacks 9, Angels 4: Randal Grichuk had a two-run homer as part of a three-hit night, Corbin Carroll, Gabriel Moreno and Lourdes Gurriel Jr. all added three more hits and host Arizona beat Los Angeles.

Grichuk finished a single short of the cycle, while Carroll was a homer shy of the feat. Moreno hit two doubles and had two RBIs.

Mariners 4, White Sox 3: Cal Raleigh hit a go-ahead, two-run double in the seventh inning and host Seattle earned a comeback win over Chicago.