

UN poses new challenge for Gaza pier

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S.-built pier to bring food to Gaza is facing one of its most serious challenges yet — its humanitarian partner is deciding if it's safe to keep delivering supplies arriving by sea to starving Palestinians.

The United Nations, the player with the widest reach delivering aid within Gaza, has paused its work with the pier after a June 8 operation by Israeli security forces that rescued four Israeli hostages and killed more than 270 Palestinians.

Rushing out a mortally wounded Israeli commando after the raid, Israeli rescuers opted against returning the way they came, across a land border, Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, an Israeli military spokesman, told reporters. Instead, they sped toward the beach and the site of the U.S. aid hub on Gaza's coast, he said. An Israeli helicopter touched down near the U.S.-built pier and helped whisk away hostages, according to the

U.S. and Israeli militaries.

For the U.N. and independent humanitarian groups, the event made real one of their main doubts about the U.S. sea route: Whether aid workers could cooperate with the U.S. military-backed, Israeli military-secured project without violating core humanitarian principles of neutrality and independence and without risking aid workers becoming seen as U.S. and Israeli allies — and in turn, targets in their own right.

Israel and the U.S. deny that any aspect of the month-old U.S. pier was used in the Israeli raid.

The U.N. World Food Program, which works with the U.S. to transfer aid from the \$230 million pier to warehouses and local aid teams for distribution within Gaza, suspended cooperation as it conducts a security review. Aid has been piling up on the beach since.

"You can be damn sure we are going to be very careful about what we assess and what we conclude," U.N. humanitar-

ian chief Martin Griffiths said.

Griffiths told reporters at an aid conference in Jordan this week that determining whether the Israeli raid improperly used either the beach or roads around the pier "would put at risk any future humanitarian engagement in that operation."

The U.N. has to look at the facts as well as what the Palestinian public and militants believe about any U.S., pier or aid worker involvement in the raid, spokesman Farhan Haq told reporters in New York.

"Humanitarian aid must not be used and must not be perceived as taking any side in a conflict," Haq said. "The safety of our humanitarian workers depends on all sides and the communities on the ground trusting their impartiality."

Rumors have swirled on social media, deepening the danger to aid workers, humanitarian groups say.

"Whether or not we've seen the pier used for military purposes is almost irrelevant. Be-

cause the perception of people in Gaza, civilians and armed groups, is that humanitarian aid has been instrumentalized" by parties in the conflict, said Suze van Meegen, head of operations in Gaza for the Norwegian Refugee Council.

Oxfam International and some other aid organizations said they are waiting for answers from the U.S. government because it's responsible for the agreements with the U.N. and other humanitarian groups on how the pier and aid deliveries would function.

Questions include whether the Israeli helicopters and security forces used what the U.S. had said would be a no-go area for the Israeli military around the pier, said Scott Paul, an associate director at Oxfam.

The pier has brought to Gaza more than 2,500 metric tons of aid, Singh said. About 1,000 metric tons of that was brought by ship Tuesday and Wednesday and is being stored on the beach awaiting distribution.

US sub pulls into Gitmo after Russians arrive in Cuba

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A U.S. Navy submarine has arrived in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in a show of force as a fleet of Russian warships gather for planned military exercises in the Caribbean.

U.S. Southern Command said the USS Helena, a fast attack submarine, pulled into the waters near the U.S. base in Cuba on Thursday, just a day after a Russian frigate, a nuclear-powered submarine, an oil tanker and a rescue tug crossed into

Havana Bay after drills in the Atlantic Ocean.

The stop is part of a "routine port visit" as the submarine travels through Southern Command's region, it said in a social media post.

Other U.S. ships also have been tracking and monitoring the Russian drills, which Pentagon officials say do not represent a threat to the United States.

"This is not a surprise. We've seen them do these type of port calls before," Pentagon spokes-

woman Sabrina Singh said Wednesday when asked about the Russian drills. "We of course take it seriously, but these exercises don't pose a threat to the United States."

The exercises, however, come 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.

Russian President Vladimir Putin then suggested his military could respond with "asym-

metrical steps" elsewhere in the world.

Singh said it wouldn't be a surprise to see more Russian activity around the United States in such exercises. The drills are in international waters, and U.S. officials expect the Russian ships to remain in the region through the summer and possibly 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.

Putin offers ‘absurd’ truce deal ahead of Swiss meeting

Associated Press

Russian President Vladimir Putin promised Friday to “immediately” order a cease-fire in Ukraine and begin negotiations if Kyiv started withdrawing troops from the four regions annexed by Moscow in 2022 and renounced plans to join NATO. Ukraine responded by calling Putin’s proposal “manipulative” and “absurd.”

Putin’s remarks came as Switzerland prepared to host scores of world leaders — but not from Moscow — this weekend to try to map out first steps toward peace in Ukraine.

They also coincided with a meeting of leaders of the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations in Italy and after the U.S. and Ukraine this week also signed a 10-year security agreement that Russian officials, including Putin, denounced as “null and void.”

Putin blasted the Switzerland conference as “just another ploy to divert everyone’s attention, reverse the cause and effect of the Ukrainian crisis (and) set

the discussion on the wrong track.”

His proposal came in a speech at the Russian Foreign Ministry and was aimed at what he called a “final resolution” of the conflict rather than “freezing it,” and stressed the Kremlin is “ready to start negotiations without delay.”

Broader demands for peace that Putin listed included Ukraine’s recognition of Crimea as part of Russia, keeping the country’s non-nuclear status, restricting its military force and protecting the interests of the Russian-speaking population. All of these should become part of “fundamental international agreements,” and all Western sanctions against Russia should be lifted, Putin said.

“We’re urging to turn this tragic page of history and to begin restoring, step-by-step, the unity between Russia and Ukraine and in Europe in general,” he said.

Putin’s remarks, made to a group of somber Foreign Ministry officials and some senior

lawmakers, represented a rare occasion in which he clearly laid out his conditions for ending the war in Ukraine, but it didn’t include any new demands. The Kremlin has said before that Kyiv should recognize its territorial gains and drop its bid to join NATO.

But Ukraine’s Foreign Ministry called Putin’s plan “manipulative,” “absurd” and designed to “mislead the international community, undermine diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving a just peace, and split the unity of the world majority around the goals and principles of the U.N. Charter.”

Besides seeking to join NATO, Ukraine wants Russian forces out of its territory, including the Crimean Peninsula that was illegally annexed in 2014; the restoration of Ukraine’s territorial integrity; and that Russia be held accountable for war crimes and for Moscow to pay reparations to Kyiv.

Russia launched its a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

G7 leaders debate migration

Associated Press

BARI, Italy — Leaders of the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations turned their attention to migration at the start of the second day of their summit Friday, seeking ways to combat trafficking and increase investment in countries from where migrants start out on often life-threatening journeys.

The gathering in a luxury resort in Italy’s southern Puglia region is also discussing other major topics, such as financial support for Ukraine, the war in Gaza, artificial intelligence, climate change, as well as China’s industrial policy and economic security.

But some divisions also appeared to emerge over the wording of the summit’s final declaration, with disagreement reported over the inclusion of a reference to abortion.

Migration is of particular interest to summit host Italy, which lies on one of the major routes into the European Union for people fleeing war and poverty in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Right-wing Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, known for her hard-line stance on the issue, has been eager to increase investment and funding for African nations as a means of reducing migratory pressure on Europe.

Italy “wanted to dedicate ample space to another continent that is fundamental to the future of all of us, which is Africa, with its difficulties, its opportunities,” Meloni said at the summit opening Thursday.

More than 22,000 people have arrived in Italy by sea so far in 2024, according to UNHCR figures.

Canada’s defense investment in Arctic puts it on track to meet NATO goals

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — Canada looks on track to meet NATO’s military spending guideline soon, Defense Minister Bill Blair said Friday, notably by boosting investment in the Arctic near its shared border with Russia as the region warms quickly due to climate change.

After Russia annexed Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula in

2014, NATO allies agreed to halt budget cuts and move toward spending 2% of their gross domestic product on defense within a decade. Canada was barely spending 1% at the time.

Last year, as it became clear that Russia’s war with Ukraine would grind on, they decided that 2% should be a spending minimum. According to NATO figures, Canada was estimated

to be spending 1.33% of GDP on its military budget in 2023.

“My defense spending budget will increase by 27% next year over this year,” Blair said at a meeting with his NATO counterparts in Brussels. “We’ve begun the important processes of acquiring the additional capabilities that we require (and) to meet NATO’s requirements of us.”

Court strikes down bump stock ban

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Friday struck down a Trump-era ban on bump stocks, a gun accessory that allows semiautomatic weapons to fire rapidly like machine guns and was used in the deadliest mass shooting

in modern U.S. history.

The high court found 6-3 the Trump administration did not follow federal law when it reversed course and banned bump stocks after a gunman in Las Vegas attacked a country music festival with assault rifles in 2017. He fired more

than 1,000 rounds in the crowd in 11 minutes, leaving 60 people dead and injuring hundreds more.

A Texas gun shop owner challenged the ban, arguing the Justice Department wrongly classified the accessories as illegal machine

guns.

The Biden administration said that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives made the right choice for the accessories that can allow weapons to fire at a rate of hundreds of rounds a minute.

Judge blocks Biden's Title IX rule in 4 states

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration's new Title IX rule expanding protections for LGBTQ+ students has been temporarily blocked in four states after a federal judge in Louisiana found that it overstepped the Education Department's authority.

In a preliminary injunction granted Thursday, U.S. District Judge Terry A. Doughty called the new rule an "abuse of power" and a "threat to democracy." His order blocks the rule in Louisiana, which filed a challenge to the rule in April, and in Mississippi, Montana and Idaho, which joined the suit.

The Education Department defended the rule and said it's reviewing the judge's order.

"The Department stands by the final Title IX regulations released in April 2024, and we will continue to fight for every student," the agency said in a statement.

The Louisiana case is among at least seven backed by more than 20 Republican-led states fighting Biden's rule. The rule, set to take hold in August, expands Title IX civil rights protections to LGBTQ+ students, expands the definition of sexual harassment at schools and colleges, and adds safeguards for victims.

Doughty, who was appointed by former President Donald Trump, is the first judge to

block the rule. It deals a major blow to the new protections, which were praised by civil rights advocates but drew backlash from opponents who say they undermine the spirit of Title IX, a 1972 law barring sex discrimination in education.

Louisiana is among several Republican states with laws requiring people to use bathrooms and locker rooms based on their sex assigned at birth, restricting transgender students from using facilities that align with their gender identity. President Joe Biden's rule clashes with those laws and claimed to supersede them.

The Louisiana lawsuit argued that the new rule would force schools across the four states to pay millions of dollars to update their facilities. In his decision, the judge called it an "invasion of state sovereignty" and concluded that the states were likely to succeed on the merits of the case.

His order says the rule likely violates free speech laws by requiring schools to use pronouns requested by students. It also questions whether the Biden administration has legal authority to expand Title IX to LGBTQ+ students.

"The Court finds that the term 'sex discrimination' only included discrimination against biological males and females at the time of enactment," Doughty wrote in his order.

Justice Thomas took more trips paid for by donor, Senate committee reveals

Associated Press

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin says his committee has uncovered at least three additional trips given to Justice Clarence Thomas by Republican megadonor Harlan Crow as part of the panel's ethics investigation into the Supreme Court.

Durbin, D-Ill., said Thursday the committee obtained information from Crow that Thomas took three trips, and at least six flights, on Crow's private jet in 2017, 2019 and 2021. The panel also found evidence of private jet travel during trips to Indonesia and California that Thomas recently disclosed in an amendment to a 2019 financial disclosure report.

The Democratic-led Judiciary panel launched the investigation last year after several reports that Thomas had for years received undisclosed expensive gifts, including international travel, from Crow. The committee has since pushed the Supreme Court to adopt a stronger ethics code as trips by Thomas and Justice Samuel Alito came to light, along with six-figure book deals received by other justices.

The new information "makes it crystal clear that the highest court needs an enforceable code of conduct, because its members continue to choose not to

meet the moment," Durbin said in a statement.

There was no immediate comment from the court on the Senate report. In the past, Thomas has maintained that he is not required to disclose the many trips he and his wife took that were paid for the Texas megadonor because Crow and his wife Kathy are "among our dearest friends." Thomas said in an April 2023 statement that he was advised by colleagues on the nation's highest court and others in the federal judiciary that "this sort of personal hospitality from close personal friends, who did not have business before the Court, was not reportable."

Thomas, 75, and his wife, Virginia, have traveled on Crow's yacht and private jet in Indonesia and stayed at his private resort in New York's Adirondack Mountains, ProPublica reported last year. ProPublica wrote that it could have cost more than \$500,000 had Thomas chartered a plane and yacht himself.

Last week, Thomas said in his annual financial disclosure that Crow paid for a hotel room in Bali, Indonesia, for a single night in 2019, and food and lodging at a private club in Sonoma County, Calif., the same year. But he did not report the plane flights or the stay on Crow's yacht.

Fla. prepares for next round of rainfall

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Forecasters warned Floridians to prepare for additional flash flooding after a tropical disturbance dumped as much as 20 inches of rainfall in the southern parts of the state, with worsening conditions expected Friday.

The disorganized storm system was pushing across Florida from the Gulf of Mexico at roughly the same time as the early June start of hurricane

season, which this year is forecast to be among the most active in recent memory amid concerns that climate change is increasing storm intensity.

The downpours hit Tuesday and continued into Wednesday, delaying flights at two of the state's largest airports and leaving vehicles stalled in some of the region's lowest-lying streets. On Thursday, travelers tried to salvage their plans as residents cleared debris before the next round of rain.

The National Weather Service cautioned even smaller amounts of precipitation could impact saturated areas, causing flash floods on Friday before the region has a chance to recover.

Ticket and security lines snaked around a domestic concourse at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport Thursday. The travel boards showed about half of a terminal's flights had been canceled or postponed.

Bill Carlisle, a Navy Petty Of-

ficer 1st Class, spent his morning trying to catch a flight back to Norfolk, Va. He arrived at Miami International Airport at about 6:30 a.m., but 90 minutes later he was still in line and realized he couldn't get his bags checked and through security in time to catch his flight.

"It was a zoo," said Carlisle, a public affairs specialist. He was speaking for himself, not the Navy. "Nothing against the (airport) employees; there is only so much they can do."

Trump's 78th birthday becomes a show of loyalty

Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — Donald Trump spent the day before his 78th birthday being feted by Republicans in Congress who sang "Happy Birthday" and presented him with a cake and gifts. It was a remarkable show of loyalty for a former president who was shunned by many of the same lawmakers after the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot.

On Friday, Trump will get another birthday celebration, this time with thousands of supporters in his adopted home state.

Members of the "Club 47" fan group will hear from Trump in West Palm Beach, Fla., a short drive from his Mar-a-Lago residence. The event sold out of 5,000 tickets at about \$35 apiece, with closer spots to the stage costing \$60, according to Club 47 President Larry Snowden.

Weeks after becoming the

first former president to have been convicted of a felony, Trump has tightened his grip of much of his party's base and elected officials. Next month, he is scheduled to accept his party's presidential nomination for the third time.

Trump is now three years younger than Democratic President Joe Biden, who is 81.

Trump was in Washington Thursday to meet with House and Senate Republicans in his first visit to Capitol Hill since the riot, which was carried out by Trump supporters seeking to overturn his 2020 loss to Biden. A room of House Republicans sang "Happy Birthday" to Trump and gifted him with a baseball and bat from the annual congressional game.

Senators later presented an American flag cake with 45 candles, referencing that Trump

was the 45th president. Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming then added two more candles with the numerals 4 and 7.

"We're all committed to make sure he becomes the 47th president," Barrasso told reporters later, adding: "As he was sitting there, I pull them out, put them on. He loved it. And that was the last big applause at the end when you heard that."

Among the senators who attended the gathering was Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, who endorsed Trump earlier this year despite not having spoken since 2020. Barrasso told reporters that Trump and McConnell spoke and exchanged a fist bump.

Snowden and others said they expect Trump to talk about the verdict in New York as part of his regular campaign message.

Trump will be sentenced July 11.

"Our people are anxious to hear his expression of his commitment to move ahead. I know that he is committed to continue to move ahead no matter what the left-wing side of our country throws at him," Snowden said.

Club 47 is based in Palm Beach County and says on its website that the club's goal is to keep Trump's supporters "in our area connected and engaged." Trump most recently spoke to the club in October, days after the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks on Israel.

Lydia Maldonado, a local Hispanic activist who plans to attend Friday, said she's frequently attended events at Club 47 and been surrounded by a crowd adorned in U.S. flag shirts, Trump 2024 gear and U.S.-themed costumes.

Biden says he won't offer commutation to son Hunter

Associated Press

FASANO, Italy — President Joe Biden said Thursday that he will not use his presidential powers to lessen the eventual sentence that his son Hunter will receive for his federal felony conviction on gun crimes.

Biden, following the conclu-

sion of a news conference held at the Group of Seven summit of the world's wealthiest democracies, responded he would not when asked whether he plans to commute the sentence for his son. Hunter Biden's sentencing date has not been set, and the three counts carry up to 25

years in prison, though that's unlikely as a first-time offender.

Ultimately, it will be up to U.S. District Judge Maryellen Noreika, who was nominated to the bench by former Republican President Donald Trump, to decide how much time, if any, Hunter Biden serves behind

bars.

Biden's remarks came one day after the White House declined to rule out a potential commutation for Hunter Biden. Both the president and the White House have said for months that Biden would not pardon his son.

Panthers a win away from lifting Cup

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Aleksander Barkov led the way offensively, Sergei Bobrovsky was in peak form in goal once again and the Florida Panthers are on the verge of lifting the Stanley Cup.

Barkov set up a goal and scored another, Bobrovsky made 32 saves to extend his run of dominance and the Panthers held on to beat the Edmonton Oilers 4-3 in Game 3 of the Cup final Thursday night.

They can win the first title in franchise history as soon as Game 4 on Saturday night in Edmonton.

“We know it’s going to be the hardest game for sure,” Barkov said. “We don’t take anything for granted. Every single day is one day at a time. Whether it’s one period, one shift, we take it one at a time. That’s how we’ve been all year.”

Florida took another step toward hockey’s mountaintop by pouncing on a handful of Edmonton turnovers and keeping Connor McDavid from scoring a goal. A late Oilers rally cut the lead to one goal, but Edmonton fell short.

Long before that, Barkov forced one of the giveaways by Evan Bouchard seconds before Sam Reinhart’s goal, netminder Stuart Skinner coughed up the puck on Vladimir Tarasenko’s, and Darnell Nurse gave it away on Sam Bennett’s.

“It takes away momentum,” Oilers coach Kris Knoblauch said.

Barkov had one of the signature moments by getting past the defense and beating Skinner on a breakaway, quieting for some time the crowd fired up for the first Stanley Cup Final game with fans in Edmonton since 2006.

It will take the Oilers completing a comeback done just four times in NHL playoff history — and once in the final all the way back in 1942 — to end Canada’s Cup drought.

The last year a team based in Canada won it was Montreal in 1993, months before the Panthers’ inaugural season. Until this series, they had gone 1-8 in the final.

Behind Barkov and Bobrovsky, Florida has totally flipped that script.

The two leading candidates

for the Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP were arguably the two best players on the ice in Game 3, including Barkov bouncing back from a high hit from Leon Draisaitl that knocked him out of Game 2 on Monday night.

“Just from the start, our compete and our will and the want to win this one was huge,” Bennett said.

“Everyone down to our goalie were battling their butts off. It was nice to see the effort. You either have it, or you don’t. We have 23 dogs on our team that have that will. You either have it, or you don’t.”

Another big reason the Panthers got here, winger Matthew Tkachuk, also had a big assist and was responsible for turning up the pressure on Edmonton.

The Oilers wilted under it, losing a game in which they were largely the better team but could not overcome ill-timed miscues.

Skinner allowed four goals on 23 shots and Warren Foegele, Philip Broberg and Ryan McLeod scored, while McDavid for the first time all playoffs looked frustrated and out of sorts.

“The finishing, a lot of it is just confidence: shooting the puck,” Knoblauch said.

Doing that to elite opponents, defending them to the point of second-guessing their ability to score, is a huge part of the Panthers’ style and a big reason they are on the league’s biggest stage and putting the cold ones on ice for a potential championship celebration 2,500 miles from home.

By holding on to beat Edmonton on Thursday night, they also showed no ill effects from waiting to fly from South Florida to Alberta, a decision that was questioned when their plane was delayed by storms and got in a few hours late Wednesday — less than 24 hours before puck drop.

Instead of looking jet-lagged, the Panthers were primed to pounce on opportunities to score and delivered when it mattered most.

“We keep staying with the moment,” Bobrovsky said. “We don’t think too much ahead of ourselves.”

“We’re just staying with the moment and enjoying the moment.”

McGregor out of UFC 303 with an undisclosed injury

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Conor McGregor, long the face of the UFC, is injured and out of the upcoming pay-per-view event June 29 in Las Vegas that he was scheduled to headline.

Organization President Dana White announced the change Thursday night on X, saying

light heavyweight champion Alex Pereira will face top-ranked challenger Jiri Prochazka in UFC 303.

McGregor was scheduled to fight Michael Chandler, the sixth-ranked lightweight challenger, but the first indication that the bout was in trouble was when his news conference June

3 in Dublin was abruptly canceled. No immediate explanation was provided.

White didn’t elaborate on the nature of McGregor’s injury.

Losing McGregor, who hasn’t competed inside the octagon in three years, is quite a blow to the UFC. At 35, he is past his prime, but remains a strong attraction

for gate and pay-per-view sales.

The UFC is at a crossroads, with stars such as McGregor, Jon Jones and Amanda Nunes either near the end of their careers or having already retired. There is a group of younger fighters still building their fan bases that the UFC is counting on to lead the next generation.

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Celtics on the brink of their 18th title

Associated Press

DALLAS — It's over. That's what the numbers say. There will be a record-setting 18th championship for the Boston Celtics to celebrate soon, maybe very soon. They have a 3-0 lead in the NBA Finals, a lead that has never been wasted in any NBA series, ever.

The Celtics, to their credit, are taking nothing for granted.

On perhaps the next-to-last day of the NBA's 78th season, the Celtics — who could finish off the Dallas Mavericks in Game 4 on Friday night — were desperately trying to keep things as close to business as usual as could be expected, given that the team's first title in 16 years is now just one win away.

"At the end of the day we're the most vulnerable in this," said Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla, who, at 35, could be the youngest coach to win a title since Bill Russell won one as a player-coach for Boston in 1969. "So, we have to remain with a sense of urgency. We have to have an understanding of our environment. We have to know that we're just as vulnerable as anybody else in this situation, and how we handle that will determine our fate."

His point: Don't let up. A team that has gone 79-20 in its first 99 games of the season — on pace for the second-best single-season record in Celtics history — would likely be wise to keep doing what's worked all year, one more time.

"Either you survive, or you don't," said Celtics forward Jaylen Brown, repeating something Mazzulla told the team Thursday. "That resonates with me."

It might seem puzzling that it's the Celtics — the team up 3-0 — talking about survival and vulnerability. The reality is, obviously, that it's the Mavericks who are backed into the corner that no NBA team has ever successfully escaped from.

They're 0-5 against Boston this season. They've been outscored nearly 2-to-1 from 3-point range in this series. They saw a 13-point lead turn into a 21-point deficit on their home floor in Game 3. It's hard to find the proverbial silver lining right now, though the Mavs insisted they still have hope.

"We're not in the offseason yet," Mavericks star Luka Dončić said. "They've still got to win one more game. Like I said, we're going to believe until the end."

There were no concession speeches from the Dallas side on Thursday, no outward signs of surrender. But there was an understanding of how tall this mountain — down 0-3 — is to climb, and how nobody in the NBA has managed to scale it.

Boston came close last year, rallying from a three-game deficit to force a Game 7 at home against Miami in the Eastern Conference Finals, only to lose. And that came after the Celtics lost the 2022 NBA Finals to Golden State, that series ending in Boston as well. Those were learning experiences. These finals will be one as well for the Mavs.

"When you look at the Celtics, they lose to the Warriors two years ago. They lose to Miami in Game 7 (last season). So, it's just experience of understanding that you're not promised to get back, that you've got to work," Mavericks coach Jason Kidd said. "You see the group that is out there today. They know how to play. They're a really good team."

By Friday night, they could be a championship team.

The only way for the Celtics to lose this series, obviously, is if they lose the next four games.

Never mind the stat about how teams with 3-0 series leads in a best-of-seven series are unbeatable — 156 teams have gone up 3-0, 156 teams have eventually prevailed in that series. Consider this one instead — the last time the Celtics lost four consecutive games in the same season was in May 2021, two coaching changes and a whole slew of roster turnover ago.

"I think from our experiences over the past couple of years, the thing that we've really gotten a lot better at is not relaxing, not being complacent. From game to game or series to series, we always want more," Celtics forward Jayson Tatum said. "Maybe in recent years we took things for granted at some points or were happy to make it to certain rounds, where (now) we're not satisfied. Even now up 3-0, nobody is celebrating or anything. We still feel like there's a lot more that we can do. There's a lot more that we want to do."

There's really only one thing left for this Celtics team to do. One more win and Banner 18 — one that'll break the tie with the Los Angeles Lakers for the most championships in NBA history — will finally be secured.

McIlroy shares US Open lead with Cantlay at 5-under

Associated Press

PINEHURST, N.C. — Rory McIlroy sent his 20-foot birdie putt on its way at the 18th hole Thursday and started walking toward the cup when the ball was still some 6 feet away from falling. It looked like the walk of a four-time major champion in control of his game on a Pinehurst No. 2 course that demanded every bit of that in the U.S. Open.

Turns out that was about the only thing that didn't go according to plan.

"I thought I'd left it short.

That's why I walked after it — full disclosure," McIlroy said. "It looked good, though."

He looked as good as ever, posting a bogey-free opening round in a major for the first time since last winning one 10 years ago in the British Open. His 5-under 65 gave him a share of the lead with nemesis Patrick Cantlay in a first round that had a little bit of everything.

Scottie Scheffler was over par in the opening round of a major for the first time in two years, Collin Morikawa had two double bogeys and still shot 70. Tyr-

rell Hatton dropped his club on impact at the par-3 17th hole, kicked his club, watched it land on the green and made birdie.

The final touch was McIlroy's final birdie.

"A great way to finish," he said. "The way I played today, the way I hit the ball, the way I managed myself, I felt like that score was pretty deserved."

Cantlay played in the morning beneath a full sun, holing out from a bunker for birdie on his second hole and making a pair of birdie putts in the 20-foot range in an otherwise tidy

round marred by only one bogey.

Pinehurst No. 2 was both playable and punishing, yielding 15 rounds under par, the same number as the last time on this Donald Ross gem in 2014.

Scheffler did not have one of them. The world's No. 1 player, coming off his fifth win of the year at the Memorial, was a picture of frustration — clean-shaven and with a fresh haircut — as he didn't have his usual control off the tee.

He still managed a 71 and remains very much in the game.

Royals beat Yankees to avoid sweep

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Maikel Garcia hit a game-ending two-run double off Yankees closer Clay Holmes, and the Kansas City Royals recovered after squandering a brilliant start by Alec Marsh to beat New York 4-3 on Thursday and avoid a four-game sweep.

Marsh took a no-hit bid into the seventh inning against the major league-best Yankees (49-22), who had outscored the Royals 25-8 in the first three games of the series. He allowed Juan Soto's leadoff single in that frame and then retired the next three batters to conclude his 96-pitch outing.

New York immediately went to work in the eighth against reliever John Schreiber. Anthony Rizzo homered for the Yankees to cut it to 2-1. An error by second baseman Garrett Hampson set up Anthony Volpe's RBI grounder. Angel Zerpa came in and gave up Soto's go-ahead RBI single.

With one out in the ninth against Holmes (1-2), Drew Waters hit a grounder that went for an infield hit after Holmes and first baseman Rizzo were confused about who would field the ball. After a fielder's grounder, Kyle Isbel singled to bring up Garcia, who hit a liner down the left-field line to score MJ Melendez from third and Isbel from first.

Braves 6, Orioles 5: Reynaldo Lopez matched his season high with eight strikeouts over six shutout innings, Ozzie Albies had four hits and visiting Atlanta held on for a victory.

Marcell Ozuna's had a two-run, first-inning double off Baltimore left-hander Cole Irvin (6-3) as the Braves halted a five-game slide and the Orioles' six-game winning streak.

Atlanta added a run in the fourth and sixth innings, then produced two more in the ninth en route to 12 hits, its most since June 1.

Tigers 7, Nationals 2: Justyn-Henry Malloy homered and drove in three RBIs and host Detroit ended Washington's five-game winning streak with a victory.

After striking out in the third inning, Malloy was hitting .143 in the first 10 days of his big-league career.

However, he hit his second career homer in the sixth and added a two-run double in the seventh.

The Tigers had lost five of six while the Nationals were trying for their longest winning streak since an eight-game run from Sept. 23-29, 2019 — the season they won the World Series.

Cardinals 4, Pirates 3: Paul Goldschmidt and Brendan Donovan homered, and host St. Louis beat Pittsburgh.

Donovan's homer to lead off the sixth snapped a 3-all tie and extended his hitting streak to eight games as the Cardinals won back-to-back games for the first time since May 29.

Lance Lynn went 4½ innings, snapping a string of four straight quality starts by Cardinals pitchers. Lynn allowed three runs on four hits, walked three and struck out five.

Rays 3, Cubs 2: Taj Bradley tied a career high with 11 strikeouts over seven innings and host Tampa Bay rallied to beat Chicago.

Bradley (2-4) gave up two unearned runs and three hits.

After starter Justin Steele pitched six scoreless innings for the Cubs, the Rays scored three times in the seventh off Mark Leiter Jr. (2-4). Pinch-hitter Josh Lowe had an RBI single and pinch-hitter Ben Rortvedt drove in a run on a groundout before Yandy Díaz made it 3-2 with another RBI single.

Mets 3, Marlins 2: J.D. Martinez hit a two-run homer in the bottom of the ninth inning to give host New York a victory over Miami.

The one-out drive off Tanner

Scott made a winner of Edwin Díaz (2-1) in his return from the injured list. The star closer pitched a perfect inning with one strikeout.

Díaz threw 15 pitches and averaged 98.4 mph on his seven four-seam fastballs before the Mets got their sixth walk-off win by rallying against Scott (5-5), who hadn't allowed a run since April 16.

Twins 6, Athletics 2: Joe Ryan struck out five in seven innings and Carlos Correa had a two-run homer among his three hits for host Minnesota.

One day after the Twins had a season-high 24 hits against the Rockies, Minnesota banged out 13 hits — 12 singles and Correa's homer in the seventh inning.

Byron Buxton had three hits and drove in two runs, and Royce Lewis and Austin Martin had two hits apiece as the Twins won for the fourth time in five games.

Red Sox 9, Phillies 3: Tanner Houck allowed three runs in six strong innings and Tyler O'Neill hit a three-run homer as host Boston defeated Philadelphia.

Jarren Duran doubled in his first two at-bats and also drove in two runs as the Red Sox secured a series win against the NL-leading Phillies. David Hamilton, Reese McGuire, Dominic Smith and Emmanuel Valdez also drove in runs for Boston.

Houck (7-5) scattered eight hits, struck out five and walked none while lowering his ERA to 2.08.

Diamondbacks 11, Angels 1: Christian Walker hit two homers, Joc Pederson added a late grand slam and host Arizona coasted past Los Angeles.

Arizona won two of three in the series and eight of its last 12 overall.

Walker got the D-backs' offense started in the first inning with a three-run blast on a full count. The first baseman turned on an inside fastball from Griffin Canning and hit a high-arch-

ing shot deep into the left field seats for his 14th homer of the season.

His 15th long ball came just two innings later when another powerful swing sent Canning's hanging slider 464 feet and over the left-center wall to give the D-backs a 4-0 lead.

Arizona righty Brandon Pfaadt (3-5) gave up one run on six hits and three walks, striking out eight.

White Sox 3, Mariners 2 (10): Garrett Crochet struck out a career-high 13 over seven dominant innings, Andrew Vaughn homered and drove in the tiebreaking run in the 10th, and visiting Chicago beat Seattle.

Chicago avoided being swept in the four-game series, but needed extra innings after Seattle star Julio Rodríguez tied it at 2 in the bottom of the ninth with a solo homer off closer Michael Kopech. Rodríguez laid off a couple of high fastballs from Kopech (2-6) and drove a 3-1 pitch to right-center for his sixth home run.

Rangers 3, Dodgers 1: Michael Lorenzen pitched seven smooth innings, rookie Wyatt Langford had two RBI singles and Texas defeated Los Angeles to win a series at Dodger Stadium for the first time since 1999.

For the second consecutive night, Rangers reliever David Robertson struck out MVPs Mookie Betts, Shohei Ohtani and Freddie Freeman in succession to preserve a 3-1 lead in the eighth.

Texas took two of three from the NL West leaders after getting routed 15-2 in the opener, when the Dodgers slugged five homers — including four in one inning.

But the Rangers' pitching short-circuited LA's offense this time.

Betts, Ohtani — who homered in each of the first two games — and Freeman were a combined 2 for 12 with three strikeouts.

Falcons forfeit fifth-round pick, are fined for tampering

Associated Press

The Atlanta Falcons were stripped of a fifth-round pick in next year's draft on Thursday for violating the NFL's anti-tampering rules prior to signing quarterback Kirk Cousins, wide receiver Darnell Mooney and tight end Charlie Woerner in free agency in March.

The NFL also fined the team \$250,000, while general manager Terry Fontenot has been fined \$50,000.

The Falcons and Cousins agreed on a four-year, \$180 million contract with \$100 million guaranteed shortly after the league's 52-hour legal tampering window opened on March 11. Woerner agreed on a \$12 million, three-year deal later that day and Mooney agreed on a \$39 million, three-year deal a day later.

The league didn't penalize the Philadelphia Eagles for having

impermissible contact with running back Saquon Barkley, saying its investigation "did not discover sufficient evidence to support a finding that the anti-tampering policy was violated."

It's normal for teams and players to reach agreements quickly and there were other players who agreed to deals even before Cousins. But Cousins' comments at his introductory news conference raised questions that led to the NFL's investigation.

Cousins, who is returning from a torn right Achilles tendon that ended his 2023 season after eight games, indicated he spoke to the team's medical staff before they were permitted to have contact.

"There's great people here," Cousins said. "And it's not just the football team. I mean, I'm looking at the support staff. Meeting — calling, yesterday,

calling our head athletic trainer, talking to our head of PR. I'm thinking, we got good people here. And that's exciting to be a part of."

Teams are allowed to talk directly with agents — but not the players — during that two-day negotiation period unless the player represents himself.

"While the policy permits clubs to engage with and negotiate all aspects of an NFL player contract with the certified agent of any prospective unrestricted free agent during the two-day negotiating period, any direct contact between the player and an employee or representative of the club is prohibited," the league said in a statement. "This includes discussion of travel arrangements or other logistical matters, which the club acknowledges took place with regard to these three players."

Lawrence signs 5-year extension with Jags

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Trevor Lawrence is getting paid more for his potential than his performance.

Lawrence and the Jacksonville Jaguars agreed Thursday to a five-year, \$275 million contract extension that makes him one of the highest-paid quarterbacks in NFL history, according to a person familiar with negotiations.

Lawrence's deal includes \$142 million fully guaranteed and a \$37.5 million signing bonus, said the person who spoke on condition of anonymity because neither side had announced the contract publicly.

Lawrence will get an average of \$55 million annually during the deal, tying him with Cincinnati's Joe Burrow for the most in NFL history.

The deal comes nearly a month after Detroit gave Jared Goff a four-year extension worth \$212 million that made him the second-highest paid quarterback in the league. Goff's average salary is \$53 million.

Lawrence is now the sixth QB making more than \$50 million a year, joining Burrow, Goff, Justin Herbert of the Los Angeles Chargers, Baltimore's Lamar Jackson and Philadelphia's Jalen Hurts. Lawrence is the 14th to top \$40 million annually, and he's the youngest on the list.

The 24-year-old is 21-31 as a starter in three seasons, including 1-1 in the playoffs, and has a whopping 60 turnovers in three seasons.

The Georgia native and former Clemson star has completed nearly 64% of his passes for 11,770 yards, with 58 touchdowns and 39 interceptions. He also has 11 rushing scores and 21 fumbles lost.

Chiefs give nod to 'Tom & Jerry' play with new jewel-filled Super Bowl rings

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs showed off their glitzy new Super Bowl rings that sparkled with diamonds, rubies — and "Tom & Jerry."

The championship-winning Chiefs gathered inside the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art on Thursday night to receive the flashy jewelry that celebrates their 25-22 overtime victory over the San Francisco 49ers in Las Vegas in February.

The ring features 529 diamonds and 38 rubies and totals 14.8 carats. Four marquise diamonds represent the franchise's four Lombardi Trophies, including the past two seasons. The base of the trophies are

made from 19 custom-cut baguette diamonds distinguishing the Chiefs as the first team to win back-to-back Super Bowls in 19 seasons.

And the top of the ring opens to reveal an inscription of the "Tom & Jerry" play, the nickname given to Mahomes' 3-yard touchdown pass to Mecole Hardman to win the Super Bowl. The design on the ring depicts head coach Andy Reid's handwritten sketch of the play.

Chiefs chairman and CEO Clark Hunt, who also wore the team's 2019 and 2022 Super Bowl rings before the ceremony, said this year's version told the story of last season.

"You can think about some of the cool things that happened

this year and they'll be incorporated one way or another," Hunt said.

The inside of the ring also includes a Lombardi Trophy depending on the recipient's time with the Chiefs. The inside band features the word "United," which was the team's motto last season, along with the scores of Kansas City's four playoff wins and each player's signature.

Other clever touches include 28 diamonds that celebrate the defense for holding every opponent to fewer than 28 points, 17 miniature gold leaf confetti marking the Chiefs' points scored in the AFC championship game to beat Baltimore and 16 rubies that recognize the club's number of division titles.