

Russia, N. Korea sign partnership deal

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un signed a new partnership that includes a vow of mutual aid if either country is attacked, during a Wednesday summit that came as both face escalating standoffs with the West.

The deal, which the leaders said covered areas including security, trade, investment, and cultural and humanitarian ties, could mark the strongest connection between Moscow and Pyongyang since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Both leaders described it as a major upgrade of their ties.

The two met as Putin visited North Korea for the first time in 24 years. The summit came as the

U.S. and its allies express growing concerns over an arms arrangement in which the country provides Moscow with badly needed munitions for its war in Ukraine in exchange for economic assistance and technology transfers that could enhance the threat posed by Kim's nuclear weapons and missile program.

Kim said that the deal was the "strongest ever treaty" between the two nations, putting the relationship at the level of an alliance, and vowed full support for Russia's war in Ukraine. Putin said that it was a "breakthrough document" reflecting shared desire to move relations to a higher level.

The North Korean leader gave Putin a lavish welcome, meeting him at the airport Tuesday night, where the two shook hands,

hugged twice and then rode together in a limousine in a huge motorcade that rolled through the capital's brightly illuminated streets, where buildings were decorated with giant Russian flags and portraits of Putin.

After spending the rest of the night at a state guest house, Putin attended a welcoming ceremony at the city's main square, filled with what appeared to be tens of thousands of spectators, including children holding balloons and people wearing coordinated t-shirts in the red, white and blue of the Russian and North Korean flags. Huge crowds lined up on the streets to greet Putin's motorcade, chanting "Welcome Putin" and waving flowers and North Korean and Russian flags.

Putin and Kim saluted an hon-

or guard and walked across a red carpet. Kim then introduced key members of his leadership including Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui; top aide and ruling party secretary Jo Yong Won; and the leader's powerful sister, Kim Yo Jong.

As the talks began, Putin thanked Kim for North Korea's support for his war in Ukraine, part of what he said was a "fight against the imperialist hegemonic policies of the U.S. and its satellites against the Russian Federation."

Putin hailed ties that he traced back to the Soviet army fighting the Japanese military on the Korean Peninsula in the closing moments of World War II, and Moscow's support for Pyongyang during the Korean War.

Russian flyovers part of BALTOPS mix for US, allies

BY ALISON BATH

Stars and Stripes

USTKA, Poland — Russian bomber flyovers made the preparations for a Marine amphibious landing off the Polish coast a little more interesting, but no less effective.

The four-nation beach assault over the weekend was part of Baltic Operations, an annual exercise that showcased the capabilities of 20 allied countries, as well as Moscow's irritation with NATO's growing strength.

On Saturday, two Russian Su-24 bombers flew over the amphibious transport dock ship USS New York and the amphibious assault ship USS Wasp between 10:20 a.m. and 10:40 a.m., while they were operating in the Baltic Sea, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa said in a statement to Stars and Stripes on Tuesday.

One of the planes flew over Wasp at about 500 feet, causing the ship to suspend the takeoff of an MV-22 Osprey, said Capt. Clayton Doss, a spokesman for NAVEUR-AF.

On June 10, three Russian Su-24s made seven passes over the command-and-control ship USS Mount Whitney, said Doss, who characterized most of the interactions as safe and professional.

The flyover involving Wasp was determined to be safe but unprofessional by U.S. Navy officials because the ship was conducting flight operations.

Sailors aboard Wasp took the flyovers in stride. Russia wanted to let them know they were around, but they weren't going to do anything to stop them, the sailors told Stars and Stripes during the exercise.

Russia's interest wasn't limit-

ed to American forces. On Tuesday, the Spanish landing helicopter dock ship Juan Carlos I spotted Russian activity nearby while operating off the coast of Poland. The ship shut down its Wi-Fi, among other security precautions.

Russian observance by air, surface or submarine was frequent in the Baltic, sailors aboard Juan Carlos said.

Tensions in the region have grown since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 spurred Finland and Sweden to join NATO, leaving Russia as the only non-NATO country among the nine that border the Baltic Sea. Finland and Sweden joined BALTOPS this year for the first time as alliance members.

The city of Kaliningrad is the only Russian port that remains ice-free all year and is home to

Russia's Baltic Fleet. Ustka is about 198 miles from Kaliningrad.

This year's BALTOPS includes more than 9,000 personnel, 50 ships and 85 aircraft. The exercise, led by NAVEUR-AF/U.S. 6th Fleet and commanded by Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO, ends Thursday.

U.S., Polish, Spanish and Romanian forces successfully conducted a simultaneous amphibious assault Saturday and Sunday that included seizing and controlling a beach, and land and air insertions within a Polish air force training base, Navy officials said.

The two-day segment included about 350 U.S. Marines from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit embarked on Wasp and New York. The Marines played assault team and opposition forces roles.

Ship sank days after fatal Houthi attack

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A bulk carrier sank days after an attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels believed to have killed one mariner on board, authorities said early Wednesday, the second ship sunk in the rebels' campaign.

The sinking of the Tutor in the Red Sea marks what appears to be a new escalation by the Iranian-backed Houthis in their campaign targeting shipping through the vital maritime corridor over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

The attack comes despite a monthslong U.S.-led campaign in the region that has seen the Navy face its most-intense maritime fighting since World War II, with near-daily attacks targeting commercial vessels and warships.

The Liberian-flagged, Greek-owned-and-operated Tutor sank in the Red Sea, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said in a warning to sailors in the region.

"Military authorities report maritime debris and oil sighted in the last reported location," the UKMTO said. "The vessel is believed to have sunk."

The Houthis, quoting foreign reports in media outlets they control, acknowledged the sinking. The U.S. military did not acknowledge the sinking, nor did it respond to requests for comment.

The Tutor came under attack about a week ago by a bomb-carrying Houthi drone boat in the Red Sea. John Kirby, a White House national security spokesman, said Monday that the attack killed "a crew member who hailed from the Philippines." The Philippines has yet to acknowledge the death, but the man who had been aboard the Tutor has been missing for over a week in the Red Sea, which faces intense summer-time heat.

Meanwhile Wednesday, the Houthis said U.S.-led airstrikes targeted Raymah, a province in Yemen under rebel control.

US soldier is convicted of theft and threats in Russia

Associated Press

MOSCOW — A court in Russia's far eastern city of Vladivostok on Wednesday convicted a visiting American soldier of stealing and making threats of murder, and it sentenced him to three years and nine months in prison.

Staff Sgt. Gordon Black, 34, flew to the Pacific port city to see his girlfriend and was arrested last month after she accused him of stealing from her, according to U.S. officials and Russian authorities.

Russia's state news agencies Tass and RIA Novosti reported that the judge in Pervomaisky District Court in Vladivostok also ordered Black to pay 10,000 rubles (\$115) in damages. Prosecutors had asked for a sentence of four years and eight months in prison.

Black's case occurs amid tensions over Russia's arrests of American journalists and other U.S. nationals as the fighting in Ukraine continues.

Russia has jailed a number of Americans, including corporate security executive Paul Whelan and Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich. The U.S.

government has designated both men as wrongfully detained and has been trying to negotiate their release.

Others detained include Travis Leake, a musician who has been living in Russia for years and was arrested last year on drug-related charges; Marc Fogel, a teacher in Moscow who was sentenced to 14 years in prison, also on drug charges; and dual nationals Alsu Kurmasheva and Ksenia Khavana.

Black was on leave and in the process of returning to his home base at Fort Cavazos, Texas, from South Korea, where he had been stationed.

Cynthia Smith, an Army spokesperson, said Black signed out for his move back home and, "instead of returning to the continental United States, Black flew from Incheon, Republic of Korea, through China to Vladivostok, Russia, for personal reasons."

On Wednesday, Black's girlfriend, Alexandra Vashchuk, told Russian news outlet Gazeta.ru that she considers the sentence "quite humane" and described Black as "violent and unable to control himself."

National Guard chief criticizes border deployments

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The chief of the National Guard Bureau said Tuesday that stationing Guard members on the U.S.-Mexico border detracts from their military mission and underutilizes troops.

About 2,500 members of the National Guard are assisting U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents in monitoring border crossings. Gen. Daniel Hokanson, the chief of the force, said their time and effort would be better spent elsewhere.

"There is no military training value for what we do," he told the Senate Appropriations Committee during a hearing on the

National Guard's budget. "That time, I think, would be better utilized building readiness to deter our adversaries."

U.S. troops have supported the Department of Homeland Security's work at the southwest border since 2018, when then-President Donald Trump deployed units to "stop the flow of deadly drugs and other contraband, gang members and other criminals, and illegal aliens."

President Joe Biden has kept troops in place since taking office in 2021, and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin last year extended the mission through September.

The Guard members are serving under U.S. Northern Command, which is respon-

sible for defending the continental U.S. and Alaska. There are additional Guard members who were deployed to the border by governors and are under state control.

Hokanson said he knows the National Guard is helping border patrol fill manpower gaps, allowing agents to focus on detention and processing, but the deployments are personally frustrating for many troops.

"They might as well be deployed to Kuwait or somewhere overseas because they're away from their families," he said. "They're there doing mission sets that are not directly applicable to their military skill set."

Biden orders citizenship path for some in US

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden ordered expansive election-year action Tuesday to offer potential citizenship to hundreds of thousands of immigrants without legal status in the United States, aiming to balance his recent aggressive crackdown on the southern border that enraged advocates and many Democratic lawmakers.

The president announced that his administration will, in the coming months, allow certain U.S. citizens' spouses without legal status to apply for permanent residency and eventually citizenship without having to first depart the country. The action by Biden, a Democrat, could affect upward of half a million immigrants, according to senior administration officials.

"The Statue of Liberty is not some relic of American history. It still stands for who we are," Biden said from a crowded East Room at

the White House, filled with advocates, congressional Democrats and immigrants who would be eligible for the program. "But I also refuse to believe that for us to continue to be America that embraces immigration, we have to give up securing our border. They're false choices."

Biden's action, which amounts to the most expansive federal protection for immigrants in over a decade, sets up a significant political contrast with presumptive GOP presidential nominee Donald Trump, whose hardline stance on immigration includes a push for mass deportations and rhetoric casting migrants as dangerous criminals "poisoning the blood" of America.

On Tuesday, Biden accused "my predecessor" of preying on fears about immigrants as he chastised Trump administration moves, such as a zero-tolerance policy at the southern border that led to the separation of families.

But Trump has leaned into his own policies as Biden has faced disapproval of his handling of immigration throughout his presidency. At a rally in Racine, Wis., on Tuesday, Trump proclaimed, "When I'm reelected, Joe Biden's illegal amnesty plan will be ripped up and thrown out on the very first day that we're back in office."

Because the shadow of a second Trump administration looms over Biden's new policy, Tuesday's actions will set off a months-long sprint by Latino organizations to get as many people to apply for the program as possible before next January.

To qualify for Biden's actions, an immigrant must have lived in the U.S. for 10 years and be married to a U.S. citizen, both as of Monday. If a qualifying immigrant's application is approved, he or she would have three years to apply for a green card and receive a temporary work permit

and be shielded from deportation in the meantime.

About 50,000 noncitizen children with parents who are married to U.S. citizens could also potentially qualify for the process, according to senior administration officials who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity. There is no requirement on how long the couple must have been married, but no one becomes eligible after Monday.

Senior administration officials said they anticipate the process will be open for applications by the end of the summer. Fees to apply have yet to be determined.

Biden formally unveiled his plans at a Tuesday event at the White House, which also marked the 12th anniversary of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, a popular Obama-era directive that offered deportation protections and temporary work permits for young immigrants who lack legal status.

Boeing CEO defends safety record, spars with senators

Associated Press

Boeing CEO David Calhoun defended the company's safety record during a contentious Senate hearing Tuesday, while lawmakers accused him of placing profits over safety, failing to protect whistleblowers and even getting paid too much.

Relatives of people who died in two crashes of Boeing 737 Max jetliners were in the room, some holding photos of their loved ones, to remind the CEO of the stakes. Calhoun began his remarks by standing, turning to face the families and apologizing "for the grief that we have caused," and vowing to focus on safety.

Calhoun's appearance was the first before Congress by any high-ranking Boeing official since a panel blew out of a 737 Max during an Alaska Airlines

flight in January. No one was seriously injured in the incident, but it raised fresh concerns about the company's best-selling commercial aircraft.

The tone of the hearing before the Senate investigations subcommittee was set hours earlier, when the panel released a 204-page report with new allegations from a whistleblower who said he fears defective parts could be going into 737s.

Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., repeatedly mentioned Calhoun's compensation for last year, valued at \$32.8 million, and asked the CEO why he hasn't resigned.

"Senator, I'm sticking this through. I'm proud of having taken this job. I'm proud of our safety record, and I'm proud of our Boeing people," replied Calhoun, who has announced that he will step down by the end of the year.

Man who killed 5 at LGBTQ+ club also guilty of hate crimes

Associated Press

DENVER — The shooter who killed five people and injured 19 others at an LGBTQ+ club that was a refuge in the conservative city of Colorado Springs pleaded guilty to federal hate crimes and was sentenced to 55 life terms in prison on Tuesday, but once again declined to apologize or say anything to the victims' families.

Prosecutors nevertheless highlighted the importance of Anderson Lee Aldrich being forced to take responsibility for the hatred toward LGBTQ+ people have said motivated the mass shooting. As part of a plea agreement, Aldrich repeatedly admitted to evidence of hate.

"The admission that these were hate crimes is important to the government, and it's important to the community of Club Q," said prosecutor Alison Connaughty.

Aldrich attacked a place that

was much more than a bar, according to Connaughty, who described Club Q as a safe space for people in the LGBTQ+ community.

"We met people who said 'this venue saved my life and I was able to feel normal again,'" she said. The sentence against Aldrich "sends a message that acts of hate will be met with severe consequences."

Aldrich, 24, is already serving life in prison after pleading guilty to state charges last year. Federal prosecutors focused on proving that the Nov. 19, 2022, attack at the haven for LGBTQ+ people was premeditated and fueled by bias.

U.S. District Judge Charlotte Sweeney, the first openly gay federal judge in Colorado, heard testimony from victims before accepting the agreement, which also includes a total of 190 years on gun-related charges.

At least 9 dead in blasts at Chad military depot

Associated Press

N'DJAMENA, Chad — Nine people were killed and more than 40 injured when a fire set off explosions at a military ammunition depot in Chad's capital, an official said Wednesday.

Government spokesperson Abderaman Koulamallah said 46 people were being treated for various injuries after the explosions jolted residents from their sleep late Tuesday in the Goudji district of the capital, N'Djamena. The situation has been brought under control, Koulamallah said.

The explosions lit up the sky as thick smoke covered the clouds in the West African nation, setting off frantic efforts to extinguish the fire as residents fled their homes for safety.

The cause of the fire was not immediately clear, and President Mahamat Deby Itno said an investigation would be conducted.

"Peace to the souls of the victims, sincere condolences to the bereaved families and quick recovery to the injured," Deby Itno said on Facebook. He later visited the scene of the accident

as well as hospitals where the injured were being treated.

Local media reported the blasts started just before midnight as nearby buildings shook and ammunition was thrown from the depot with explosive force.

Authorities called on residents to stay out of the area, which was taken over by security forces gathering the scattered artillery shells.

Chad, a country of nearly 18 million people, has been reeling from political turmoil before and after a controversial presi-

dential election that resulted in Deby Itno's victory. He had led the country as interim president during the period of military rule that followed the death of his father in 2021.

Cameron Hudson, an Africa expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the explosions might not be entirely coincidental and "feels more like a message" to the government, which has been embroiled in internal political tensions and as well as regional tensions over the war in neighboring Sudan.

3rd trial in alleged far-right coup plot opens in Germany

Associated Press

BERLIN — Eight people accused of involvement in a suspected far-right plot to topple the German government went on trial in Munich on Tuesday, in the last of three trials in the sprawling case.

The eight Germans, six men and two women, are charged with "preparation of high treasonous undertaking." They also face charges of membership in or founding a terrorist organization, and some of them are charged with preparing a serious act of violence.

The case came to light in late 2022, and a total of 26 people are now in court. The alleged ringleaders and most prominent suspects, among them a self-styled prince and a former far-right lawmaker, went on trial in Frankfurt last month. A trial of nine people in Stuttgart that began at the end of April is focusing on the "military arm" of the plot.

All are expected to be lengthy proceedings. At the Munich state court, 55 trial sessions have been set so far through the end of January, German news agency dpa reported.

Prosecutors have said the

suspects believed in "conspiracy myths" including Reich Citizens and QAnon ideology, and were convinced that Germany is ruled by a so-called deep state. Adherents of the Reich Citizens movement reject Germany's postwar constitution and have called for bringing down the government, while QAnon is a global conspiracy theory with roots in the United States.

The defendants in the Munich case include Ruth L. and Thomas T., alleged founding members of the group who prosecutors have said co-led a so-called "transcommunication" department in the group's extended leadership. That was allegedly responsible for the "spiritual examination" of new members and for advising Heinrich XIII Prince Reuss, whom investigators say the group planned to install as Germany's provisional new leader.

The group planned to storm into the parliament building in Berlin and arrest lawmakers, according to prosecutors. It allegedly intended to negotiate a post-coup order primarily with Russia, as one of the allied victors of World War II.

Inspections stop after assault on avocado auditors in Mexico

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — Two employees of the U.S. Agriculture Department were assaulted and temporarily held by assailants in the Mexican state of Michoacan, prompting the U.S. government to suspend inspections of avocado and mango shipments, the U.S. ambassador to Mexico said Tuesday.

Ambassador Ken Salazar said in a statement that the assault occurred while the employees were inspecting avocados in Michoacan. He said they were no longer being held.

U.S. officials had confirmed the pause in inspections Monday, citing security concerns.

The employees work for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Because the United States also grows avocados, U.S. inspectors work in Mexico to ensure exported avocados don't carry diseases that could hurt U.S. crops.

"To guarantee the safety of our agricultural inspection teams, APHIS has suspended the avocado and mango inspections in Michoacan until

these security problems have been resolved," Salazar said.

Michoacan is Mexico's biggest exporter of avocados.

Michoacan Gov. Alfredo Ramírez Bedolla told Mexico's Radio Formula on Tuesday that the inspectors had been stopped in a protest by residents of Aranza in western Michoacan on June 14. He downplayed the situation, suggesting they were never at risk. He said he got in touch with the U.S. Embassy the following day and that state forces were providing security for the state's avocado producers and packers.

"I hope we have good news in the coming hours," he said, referring to a potential resumption of inspections.

Inspections in other Mexican states are not affected, Salazar said.

Mexico's Producers and Packers Association said in a statement Tuesday that it was working closely with government officials from Mexico and the U.S. to resume avocado exports from Michoacan.

It said the incident that spurred the suspension was "unconnected to the avocado industry."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Trump adviser pleads not guilty in fake elector case

AZ PHOENIX — Lawyers Boris Epshteyn and Jenna Ellis and former U.S. Senate candidate James Lamon have pleaded not guilty to nine felony charges for their roles in trying to overturn former President Donald Trump's Arizona election loss to Joe Biden.

The hearing Tuesday in a Phoenix courtroom marked the last of 18 arraignments in the fake elector case. Fifteen other people, including former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani and former Trump chief of staff Mark Meadows, pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Epshteyn, a Trump adviser, is accused of assisting Giuliani in carrying out the scheme to submit fake electors for Trump in Arizona and obstruct the certification of election results by Congress on Jan. 6, 2021.

Prosecutors in Michigan, Nevada, Georgia and Wisconsin have also filed criminal charges related to the fake electors scheme.

McDonald's ends test of AI-powered drive-thrus

NY NEW YORK — Ever get your McDonald's order mixed up at an AI-powered drive-thru? The experiment behind the fast food giant's current automated order taker will soon be coming to a close.

McDonald's confirmed late Monday that it decided to end a global partnership with IBM, which has been testing this artificial intelligence technology at select McDonald's drive-thrus since late 2021.

That doesn't mean you'll never

encounter some sort of chatbot while picking up fries on your car ride home again. While the IBM partnership for McDonald's current automated order taker test is winding down, the Chicago-based company suggested that it wasn't ruling out any other potential AI drive-thru plans down the road — pointing to “an opportunity to explore voice ordering solutions more broadly.”

EV maker Fisker files for bankruptcy protection

DE WILMINGTON — Electric vehicle maker Fisker filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, the second electric startup to do so in the last year as even industry leaders struggle to lure more buyers beyond the early adapters of the technology.

Fisker Group Inc. said in a filing with the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Delaware that its estimated assets are between \$500 million and \$1 billion. It estimated liabilities are between \$100 million and \$500 million, with between 200 and 999 creditors.

The 7-year-old electric car company was founded by designer Henrik Fisker, who has been its chairman and CEO. He designed the company's 2022 Ocean all electric SUV as well as the luxury plug-in hybrid Karma that was launched in 2011. Fisker is also known for leading the development of the BMW Z8 sports car.

Fisker, based in Manhattan Beach, Calif., sought to take on industry leaders like Tesla, and big automakers in Detroit, which have entered the market aggressively. But EV sales have slowed as manufacturers have attempted to push electric vehicles into

the mainstream. Those sales have been curbed both by a lack of infrastructure, as well as rising inflation that have made taking on car loans more expensive.

Vintage airplane crashes, 3 on board hospitalized

GA ATLANTA — A vintage airplane crashed while the pilot was trying to land at an airport in central Georgia on Monday night, sending all three people on board to the hospital with injuries, the Federal Aviation Administration said.

The twin-engine Lockheed 12A, built in 1936, crashed into a tree near the Seven Lakes Airport in Jackson, about 50 miles southeast of Atlanta, WAGA-TV reported.

Butts County Sheriff Gary Long said fire personnel and sheriff's deputies were proficient in getting the occupants out of the plane and stabilized.

All three are expected to pull through, but they have a long road ahead, Long said by telephone on Tuesday. The pilot was most seriously hurt with head and chest injuries and each of the two passengers has a broken leg, he said.

The National Transportation Safety Board will investigate the cause of the crash.

Secret Service agent robbed on Biden's LA visit

CA LOS ANGELES — A U.S. Secret Service agent was robbed at gunpoint as President Joe Biden was visiting Los Angeles for a fundraising event over the weekend, officials said.

The agent was returning from work Saturday night when he

was accosted in a residential community in Tustin, about an hour's drive southeast of Los Angeles, according to the U.S. Secret Service.

Someone called the Tustin Police Department shortly after 9:30 p.m. to report the robbery. Police said the agent had his bag stolen at gunpoint. The agent, who was not injured, fired his gun during the confrontation, police said. The Secret Service said they did not know if anyone was shot.

Tustin Police said Monday that they had not found a suspect. Officers did find some of the agent's stolen belongings in the area. Police reported a silver Infiniti FX35 was seen leaving the scene.

Man gets 25 years in prison for kidnapping

VT BURLINGTON — A Vermont man has been sentenced to 25 years in prison after he was convicted of kidnapping a woman and her 4-year-old son by forcing them into her car outside a New Hampshire mall and bringing them to Vermont while he was searching for his estranged wife.

Everett Simpson, 46, was convicted by a jury in federal court last year on two counts of kidnapping and two counts of interstate car theft. He had acted as his own attorney during the trial and at his sentencing Monday.

The sentencing “closes a dark period in two victims' lives and hopefully allows their healing process to continue and provides a sense of security to them and others,” U.S. Attorney for Vermont Nikolas Kerest said in a statement.

— From wire reports

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All-time baseball legend Mays dies at 93

Associated Press

Willie Mays, the electrifying “Say Hey Kid” whose singular combination of talent, drive and exuberance made him one of baseball’s greatest and most beloved players, has died. He was 93.

Mays’ family and the San Francisco Giants jointly announced Tuesday night that he had died earlier in the afternoon in the Bay Area.

“My father has passed away peacefully and among loved ones,” son Michael Mays said in a statement released by the club. “I want to thank you all from the bottom of my broken heart for the unwavering love you have shown him over the years. You have been his life’s blood.”

The center fielder, who began his professional career in the Negro Leagues in 1948, was baseball’s oldest living Hall of Famer. He was voted into the Hall in 1979, his first year of eligibility, and in 1999 followed only Babe Ruth on The Sporting News’ list of the game’s top stars. The Giants retired his uniform number, 24, and set their AT&T Park in San Francisco on Willie Mays Plaza.

Mays died two days before a game between the Giants and St. Louis Cardinals to honor the Negro Leagues at Rickwood Field in Birmingham, Ala.

“All of Major League Baseball is in mourning today as we are gathered at the very ballpark where a career and a legacy like no other began,” Commissioner Rob Manfred said. “Willie Mays took his all-around brilliance from the Birmingham Black Barons of the Negro American League to the historic Giants franchise. From coast to coast ... Willie inspired generations of players and fans as the game grew and truly earned its place as our National Pastime.”

Over 23 major league seasons, virtually all with the New York/San Francisco Giants but

also including one in the Negro Leagues, Mays batted .301, hit 660 home runs, totaled 3,293 hits, scored 2,068 runs and won 12 Gold Gloves. He was Rookie of the Year in 1951, twice was named the Most Valuable Player and finished in the top 10 for the MVP 10 other times. His lightning sprint and over-the-shoulder grab of an apparent extra base hit in the 1954 World Series remains the most celebrated defensive play in baseball history.

“When I played ball, I tried to make sure everybody enjoyed what I was doing,” Mays told NPR in 2010. “I made the clubhouse guy fit me a cap that when I ran, the wind gets up in the bottom and it flies right off. People love that kind of stuff.”

For millions in the 1950s and ’60s and after, the smiling ball player with the friendly, high-pitched voice was a signature athlete and showman during an era when baseball was still the signature pastime. Awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama in 2015, Mays left his fans with countless memories. But a single feat served to capture his magic — one so unstoppable it was simply called “The Catch.”

In Game 1 of the 1954 World Series, the then-New York Giants hosted the then-Cleveland Indians, who had won 111 games in the regular season and were strong favorites in the postseason. The score was 2-2 in the top of the eighth inning. Cleveland’s Vic Wertz faced reliever Don Liddle with none out, Larry Doby on second and Al Rosen on first.

With the count 1-2, Wertz smashed a fastball to deep center field. In an average park, with an average center fielder, Wertz would have homered, or at least had an easy triple. But the center field wall in the eccentrically shaped Polo Grounds was more than 450 feet away. And there was nothing close to average about the skills

of Willie Mays.

Decades of taped replays have not diminished the astonishment of watching Mays race toward the wall, his back to home plate; reach out his glove and haul in the drive. What followed was also extraordinary: Mays managed to turn around while still moving forward, heave the ball to the infield and prevent Doby from scoring even as Mays spun to the ground. Mays himself would proudly point out that “the throw” was as important as “the catch.”

“Soon as it got hit, I knew I’d catch the ball,” Mays told biographer James S. Hirsch, whose book came out in 2010.

“All the time I’m running back, I’m thinking, ‘Willie, you’ve got to get this ball back to the infield.’”

“The Catch” was seen and heard by millions through radio and the then-emerging medium of television, and Mays became one of the first Black athletes with mass media appeal. He was a guest star on “The Donna Reed Show,” “Bewitched” and other sitcoms. He inspired a handful of songs and was named first in Terry Cashman’s 1980s novelty hit, “Talkin’ Baseball (Willie, Mickey & The Duke),” a tribute in part to the brief era when New York had three future Hall of Famers in center: Mays, Mantle of the New York Yankees and Snider of the Brooklyn Dodgers.

The Giants went on to sweep the Indians, with many citing Mays’ play as the turning point. The impact was so powerful that 63 years later, in 2017, baseball named the World Series Most Valuable Player after him even though it was his only moment of postseason greatness. He appeared in three other World Series, in 1951 and 1962 for the Giants and 1973 for the Mets, batting just .239 with no home runs in the four series. (His one postseason homer was in the 1971 National League

playoffs, when the Giants lost to the Pittsburgh Pirates).

But “The Catch” and his achievements during the regular season were greatness enough. Yankees and Dodgers fans may have fiercely challenged Mays’ eminence, but Mantle and Snider did not. At a 1995 baseball writers dinner in Manhattan, with all three at the dais, Mantle raised the eternal question: Which of the three was better?

“We don’t mind being second, do we, Duke?” he added.

Between 1954 and 1966, Mays drove in 100 or more runs 10 times, scored 100 or more 12 times, hit 40 or more homers six times, more than 50 homers twice and led the league in stolen bases four times. His numbers might have been bigger. He missed most of 1952 and all of 1953 because of military service, quite possibly costing him the chance to overtake Ruth’s career home run record of 714, an honor that first went to Henry Aaron; then Mays’ godson, Barry Bonds. He likely would have won more Gold Gloves if the award had been established before 1956. He insisted he would have led the league in steals more often had he tried.

Asked about career highlights, Mays inevitably mentioned “The Catch,” but also cherished hitting four home runs in a game against the Braves; falling over a canvas fence to make a catch in the minors; and running into a fence in Brooklyn’s Ebbets Field while chasing a bases-loaded drive, knocking himself out, but still holding on to the ball.

Most of the time, he was happy just being on the field, especially when the sun went down.

“I mean, you had the lights out there and all you do is go out there, and you’re out there by yourself in center field,” he told the achievement academy. “And, I just felt that it was such a beautiful game that I just wanted to play it forever, you know.”

Lodolo cruises to another win, Reds top Pirates

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Nick Lodolo allowed one run in seven innings to win a fifth straight start, Santiago Espinal hit a two-run homer and the Cincinnati Reds beat the Pittsburgh Pirates 2-1 on Tuesday night.

Lodolo (8-2) struck out eight without issuing a walk and gave up four hits. The left-hander has been tagged for seven runs in 30⅓ innings in five starts since May 27.

“I thought, overall, I just felt in control,” Lodolo said. “I just want to go out there and give us a good chance to win. ... The goal is for me to go out there and get myself in position to win. So tonight was definitely a good one.”

“I’m really just five days at a time. I feel like you start looking ahead, you never know. I just have to stay present and do it again in five days.”

Espinal put the Reds ahead in the fifth inning, driving a fastball from Bailey Falter just over a leaping Bryan Reynolds at the wall and 376 feet into the left field bleachers.

Marlins 9, Cardinals 8 (10): Vidal Bruján hit a winning RBI single in the bottom of the 10th inning and host Miami beat St. Louis to snap a six-game skid.

Nick Gordon reached on a one-out infield single against Chris Roycroft (1-1) that advanced automatic runner Jesús

Sánchez to third. Tim Anderson followed with an RBI infield single, tying it at 8-all. Otto Lopez’s groundout advanced Gordon and Anderson before Bruján soft liner to center field gave Miami its sixth walk-off win of the season.

Phillies 4, Padres 3: Nick Castellanos hit a bloop ground-rule double down the right field line to cap four consecutive ninth-inning hits and host Philadelphia rallied from a two-run deficit for a win over San Diego.

Kyle Schwarber hit an eighth inning solo home run for the Phillies, who had a chance to finish off a season series sweep over the Padres on Wednesday. It was the fifth loss in a row for San Diego.

Braves 2, Tigers 1: Braves rookie Spencer Schwellenbach had his best start and Ozzie Albies had an RBI triple and a run scored as host Atlanta downed Detroit.

Schwellenbach (1-2) allowed just one run and three hits over six innings. He struck out seven, walked two and hit two batters with pitches in his fourth career start.

Mariners 8, Guardians 5: J.P. Crawford hit a two-run homer, Luke Raley and Dylan Moore added solo shots and visiting Seattle stayed baseball’s hottest team with a win over AL Central-leading Cleveland.

With their fourth straight win

and eighth in nine games, the Mariners improved to an MLB-best 17-5 since May 26.

Yankees 4, Orioles 2: Aaron Judge left the game after being hit on the left hand by a pitch in host New York’s win over Baltimore in a series opener between the American League’s winningest teams.

Nestor Cortes (4-5) pitched six scoreless innings and Anthony Volpe, Giancarlo Stanton, Gleyber Torres and DJ LeMahieu drove in runs for the Yankees (51-24), who have the best record in the major leagues but are just 10-10 against AL East rivals.

Diamondbacks 5, Nationals 0: Ketel Marte homered, Slade Cecconi pitched six sharp innings and visiting Arizona defeated Washington in the opener of a three-game series.

Corbin Carroll reached base four times and scored twice for Arizona, which has won six of eight to improve to 36-37. The defending NL champion Diamondbacks have not been this close to .500 since they were 12-13 on April 23.

Red Sox 4, Blue Jays 3: Cedanne Rafaela had three hits, including a tiebreaking single in the eighth-inning, and visiting Boston beat Toronto to earn a third straight series win.

White Sox 2, Astros 0: Jonathan Cannon (1-1) pitched seven-hit ball into the ninth in-

ning in his first major league win, helping host Chicago beat Houston.

Cubs 5, Giants 2: Cody Bellinger, Ian Happ and Christopher Morel each had RBI singles in host Chicago’s three-run eighth inning and the Cubs beat San Francisco to end a two-game slide.

Mets 7, Rangers 6: Pete Alonso hit a tiebreaking double in the ninth inning and visiting New York extended its winning streak to a season-best seven games by rallying late for a victory over slumping Texas.

Dodgers 11, Rockies 9: Jason Heyward hit a pinch-hit grand slam and Teoscar Hernandez added a three-run homer — all in a seven-run ninth inning — as visiting Los Angeles rallied for a victory over Colorado.

Twins 7, Rays 6: Carlos Santana’s pinch-hit single with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning pushed host Minnesota past Tampa Bay for its sixth straight victory.

Athletics 7, Royals 5: Zack Gelof hit his first home run in nearly three weeks and host Oakland beat Kansas City to end a nine-game losing streak.

Brewers 6, Angels 3: Sal Frelick robbed Taylor Ward of a tying home run with a leaping catch in center field for the final out of visiting Milwaukee’s victory over Los Angeles.

Seminoles’ Hults halts Heels rally in CWS elimination game

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Connor Hults felt a whole lot better walking off the mound at the end of the game Tuesday than he did three days earlier.

Hults pitched 4⅓ innings of shutout relief to thwart North Carolina’s comeback bid, and Jaxson West and Max Williams hit back-to-back homers in the ninth for insurance as Florida State beat the Tar Heels 9-5 in a College World Series elimination game.

The Seminoles (49-16) will play No. 1 national seed Tennessee on Wednesday afternoon. They would have to beat the Volunteers

then and again Thursday to reach the finals for the first time since 1999.

“Can’t wait,” Seminoles coach Link Jarrett said.

FSU took a three-run lead into the bottom of the ninth against Tennessee in its CWS opener last Saturday. A check-swing call that didn’t go the Seminoles’ way — it would have ended the game if it had — and the single by Dylan Dreiling that followed produced a 12-11 walk-off win for the Volunteers.

Hults was the guy who threw the pitch to Dreiling, the only batter he faced.

“Hults’ response — four-plus innings?

Amazing,” Jarrett said.

The junior left-hander relied on a sharp fastball and mixed it effectively with off-speed pitches, something he had spoken about with pitching coach Micah Posey.

“Being able to locate the fastball in any count was new to my game,” Hults said. “I haven’t done it in a few weeks. It’s there. But me and coach Posey had been talking about mixing some more fastball and changeups to start getting hitters off the curveball. I was able to locate some fastballs and expand on my off-speed when needed, and that worked out in our favor.”

Oilers drag Panthers back to Edmonton

Associated Press

Connor McDavid wanted the Edmonton Oilers to drag the Florida Panthers back to Alberta, then he did everything in his power to make that happen.

McDavid scored twice, including the empty-netter to seal it, and set up two goals to keep the Stanley Cup Final going with a 5-3 victory in Game 5 Tuesday night — avoiding elimination and sending the series all the way back across North America. Game 6 is Friday in Edmonton.

“I love playing in the playoffs,” McDavid said. “I love playing with this group. It’s been a fun ride, and we’re glad it’s going to go one more day. But that’s all we’ve earned here: Another day, another flight. We’ll be ready to go in Edmonton on Friday.”

With back-to-back four-point performances, McDavid joined Wayne Gretzky in 1985 as the only players to have four or more in two games of a final. His eight are the most for a player in consecutive games for

a team on the brink.

“Connor doing Connor things,” said linemate Zach Hyman, who scored his playoff-leading 15th goal with an assist from McDavid. “That’s what makes him special. He’s able to elevate his game at the most important time, the biggest reason why we’ve come so far. We’re not here without him. He continues to drive the bus.”

“Drag them back to Alberta” became the Oilers’ rallying cry, started by McDavid after he led the way in avoiding a sweep and echoed by Connor Brown hours before puck drop in Sunrise. Brown scored short-handed five minutes in after Stuart Skinner made several big-time saves on the first few shifts as the Panthers opened with a strong push in their second chance to hoist the Cup.

That will have to wait thanks to the Edmonton power play that was 0-for-the-series at 5 on 4 building the lead with goals by Hyman and Corey Perry, each one assisted on by McDavid.

“He puts this team on his

back,” Perry said. “When we’re against the wall, he puts us on his back and he plays. You see why he is the best player.”

Retired referee Kerry Fraser, who worked the final 12 times during his lengthy career, posted on social media, “Connor McDavid reminds me of how Mark Messier could take over a playoff game and ultimately a series.”

Fraser referenced Messier carrying the Oilers to the Cup in 1990 — the franchise’s last championship, which capped that dynasty’s run of five in seven years.

McDavid now has 42 points on this run. Only Gretzky (twice) and Mario Lemieux have more in a single postseason. His 42nd with 19 seconds left set off the Oilers’ victory song, “La Bamba,” playing all over Edmonton.

“We believe,” fan Trevor Savage said. “We all knew it was possible. We knew Connor could lead us. We knew the team was going to be ready, and we’re just excited for Game 6 back home.”

McDavid did not do the drag-

ging by himself.

Brown’s goal made Edmonton the first team since the 1991 Pittsburgh Penguins (Mario Lemieux and Bob Errey) to score short-handed in back-to-back games in the final. And Skinner, whose play coming into the series looked like the biggest uncertainty, stopped 29 of the 32 shots he faced.

Meanwhile, the Oilers again got to Sergei Bobrovsky, three nights after chasing him from Game 4 midway through an 8-1 rout.

More shaky Bobrovsky when the series shifts back to Edmonton could set the stage for a comeback not seen in more than 80 years. The Oilers became just the third team in Cup final history to fall behind 3-0 and win the next two games, and the only team to come all the way back to win it all was the 1942 Toronto Maple Leafs.

“It’s been a crazy story this whole year,” Hyman said. “We’ve got to continue to write it. It doesn’t make for a good story unless you finish it.”

Smith breaks world record in 100 back at US trials

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — This world record was five years in the making for Regan Smith.

What an up-and-down journey it’s been.

Bouncing back from a close-but-no-Olympics call in her first race, Smith set a world record in the women’s 100-meter backstroke at the U.S. swimming trials Tuesday night.

The 22-year-old Minnesota native touched in 57.13 seconds, easily beating the mark of 57.33 set a year ago by Australia’s Kaylee McKeown.

Smith was just 17 years old when she first set a world record in the 100 back at the 2019 world championships. But she struggled to deal with the sudden, newfound fame, ceding

dominance in the event to McKeown.

“A long time coming,” Smith said. “It’s about time.”

There was never any doubt about Smith’s talent, but a lack of confidence was almost crippling at times.

She’s been working with a sports psychologist since October, which helped turn things around from mental standpoint. Her coach, Bob Bowman, best known for his work with 23-time gold medalist Michael Phelps, took care of the physical side with a grueling training regimen.

“This is incredibly rewarding,” Smith said. “When I was a teenager, I had not done much. There was no pressure on me. I was always the youngest. No

one expected much from me. I could go into it fearless.”

Once she tasted success, it was hard to get back on top. She made the U.S. team for the Tokyo Olympics, but finished third in the backstroke as McKeown took the gold.

“I’ve always had it physically, but I didn’t have it mentally,” Smith conceded. “I just didn’t have it up here,” pointing toward her head.

Showing how much her confidence has grown, Smith bounced back emphatically after getting edged for a spot on the U.S. team in the 100 butterfly, where she finished third behind Gretchen Walsh and Torri Huske.

Flipping to her back, Smith set the second world record of

the trials, following Walsh’s mark in the semifinals of the 100 fly.

In the night’s other final, Bobby Finke earned the right to defend the 800 freestyle gold he won in Tokyo with a time of 7 minutes, 44.22 seconds.

Finke had to work hard to get to the wall ahead of 18-year-old Indiana phenom Luke Whitlock, who set a national age-group record at 7:45.19 and will likely head to his first Olympics with the second U.S. spot.

No one else was within 4 seconds of the top two.

“I find I need pressure to do well, at least in my eyes,” Finke said. “So I feel like the more pressure I feel, then the more likely I am to do well. Happy with the time we got.”