

## Japan to resume Okinawa runway work

By KEISHI KOJA

*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Japanese government plans to resume major construction, delayed more than four years, on an airfield for the Marine Corps at Camp Schwab, according to Okinawa prefecture.

The Okinawa Defense Bureau on Tuesday notified the prefecture that work on the Oura Bay section of the site will resume in August, a spokesman for the prefecture's Seashore Disaster Prevention Division told Stars and Stripes by phone Thursday. The defense bureau represents the Japan Defense Ministry on Okinawa.

The runway being built on reclaimed land in Oura Bay in the Henoko area of Okinawa is

meant to replace Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in urban Ginowan. That base, surrounded by homes and schools, is considered inherently dangerous by some Japanese officials.

The construction zone at Schwab is divided into two main sections: 279 acres on the base's north side and 91 acres in the south, according to the prefecture's website.

Work on the Oura Bay side, or north side, has been on hold since April 21, 2020, when Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki refused to approve changes to the construction plans to solidify the soft seabed.

Japanese Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Tetsuo Saito eventually approved the permits Dec. 28

after Tamaki ignored a Dec. 25 deadline from Fukuoka High Court. The court handed Saito that authority if Tamaki refused.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi in January announced that work to reclaim land from the bay would resume. The Japanese government in January created a storage yard at the site for construction materials, the seashore division spokesman said Thursday.

The prefecture and the bureau have gone back and forth on design details and environmental preservation measures along the Oura Bay side since February, according to the spokesman.

The prefecture filed its most recent questions June 5 and the

bureau responded Tuesday with the August start time, he said.

"The prefecture just noticed us that will start work on the places that are under discussion, which means the Oura Bay side," the spokesman said. "We don't have any details at the moment, we don't know if these works mean about the seawall constructions or the soil improvement work."

He said the prefecture asked the bureau to delay construction until their discussions had concluded.

Some government officials in Japan may speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

The bureau did not respond to a phone call from Stars and Stripes seeking comment Thursday.

## US reassures Philippines of 'ironclad commitments'

By SETH ROBSON

*Stars and Stripes*

The U.S. secretary of state reassured his Philippine counterpart of the "United States' ironclad commitments to the Philippines" two days after a violent clash between Philippine sailors and China's coast guard in the South China Sea.

The State Department described China's actions as "escalatory," and "dangerous and irresponsible," according to a readout of Secretary Antony Blinken's phone call Wednesday with Philippine Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo.

"Secretary Blinken emphasized that [China's] actions undermine regional peace and stability and underscored the United States' ironclad commitments to the Philippines under our Mutual Defense Treaty," the

readout stated.

Chinese coast guard personnel on more than eight motorboats repeatedly rammed then boarded two Philippine navy inflatable boats Monday to prevent Filipino personnel from transferring food and other supplies, including firearms, to the BRP Sierra Madre, The Associated Press reported Tuesday.

The grounded warship serves as a Philippine territorial outpost on Second Thomas Shoal, which Beijing also claims.

After a scuffle and repeated collisions, the Chinese seized the boats and damaged them with machetes, knives and hammers. They also seized eight M4 rifles packed in cases, navigation equipment and other supplies and wounded several Filipino sailors, including one who lost his right thumb, two Philippine

security officials told the AP.

A spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry laid responsibility for the incident on the Philippines.

"Let me stress that what directly led to this situation is the Philippines' ignoring of China's dissuasion and deliberate intrusion into the waters" around the shoal, spokesman Lin Jian told reporters Wednesday, according to his remarks posted on the ministry website.

"The law enforcement action taken by China Coast Guard on the scene was professional and restrained and aimed at stopping the illegal 'resupply mission.'"

Further escalation at the shoal is possible, according to Carlyle Thayer, an emeritus professor at the University of New South Wales and a lecturer at the Aus-

tralian Defence Force Academy.

"In recent days China has pushed the envelope beyond dangerous maneuvers, water cannons and ramming to seizing and vandalizing Philippine supplies for its detachment on the BRP Sierra Madre and now boarding and seizing weapons carried by uniformed Philippine officials," he told Stars and Stripes by email Thursday.

Escalation could result in a Filipino fatality or sinking a Philippine vessel as the Philippines increases the scope and tempo of naval patrols in its territorial waters in the South China Sea, he said.

However, if China holds short of an armed attack on Philippine military ships and public vessels, the risk of U.S. involvement is low, Thayer said.

# Some debate how long Eisenhower, crew can hold out

*Associated Press*

**ABOARD THE USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER IN THE RED SEA** — The combat markings emblazoned on the F/A-18 fighter jet tell the story: 15 missiles and six drones, painted in black just below the cockpit windshield.

As the jet sits on the deck of the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier in the Red Sea, its markings illuminate the enemy targets that it's destroyed in recent months and underscore the intensity of the fight to protect commercial shipping from persistent missile and drone attacks by the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen.

But they also hint at the fatigue setting in, as the carrier, its strike group and about 7,000 sailors close in on their ninth month waging the most intense running sea battle since World War II. That raises difficult questions about what comes next as U.S. military and defense leaders wrangle over how they will replicate the carrier's combat power if the ship returns home to Norfolk, Va.

Already, the carrier's deployment has been extended twice, and sailors post dark memes around the ship about only getting one short break during their steadily growing tour. Some worry they could be ordered to stay out even longer as the campaign drags on to protect global trade in the vital Red Sea corridor.

At the Pentagon, leaders are wrestling with what has become a thorny but familiar debate. Do they bow to Navy pressure to bring the Eisenhower and the other three warships in its strike

group home or heed U.S. Central Command's plea to keep them there longer? And if they bring them home — what can replace them?

U.S. officials say that they're weighing all options and that a decision is expected in the coming weeks.

U.S. commanders in the Middle East have long argued that they need an aircraft carrier in the volatile region. They say that it's an effective deterrent to keep Iran in check and that the ship gives them critical and unique war-fighting capabilities against the Houthis.

Navy leaders worry about the sailors, who actually have been able to see incoming Houthi-launched missiles seconds before they are destroyed by the ship's defensive strikes. And officials in the Pentagon are talking about how to care for the sailors when they return home, including counseling and treatment for possible post-traumatic stress.

Rear Adm. Marc Miguez — who commands Carrier Strike Group Two, which includes the Eisenhower and supporting ships — also notes the strain on the ships themselves.

"We are constantly reminding the Department of Defense that we're going to need to take a respite and a break, to try and get back to maintenance," he said. "These ships are floating around in seawater. They're steel, and they require a lot of maintenance. And when you run them past red lines, when you run them past scheduled maintenance activities, you have to pay those off somewhere down the line."

# Putin inks deals with Vietnam on Asia swing

*Associated Press*

**HANOI, Vietnam** — Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a series of deals with his Vietnamese counterpart To Lam on Thursday, during a state visit that comes as Moscow is seeking to bolster ties in Asia to offset growing international isolation over its military actions in Ukraine.

The two signed agreements to further cooperation on education, science and technology, oil and gas exploration and health. They agreed to work on a roadmap for a nuclear science and technology center in Vietnam.

Following the talks, Putin said that the two countries share an interest in "developing a reliable security architecture" in the Asia-Pacific Region based on not using force and

peacefully settling disputes with no room for "closed military-political blocs."

This was echoed by Vietnam's new President To Lam, who said they seek to "further cooperate in defense and security to cope with non-traditional security challenges" while implementing energy projects and expanding investments. He also congratulated Putin on his reelection and praised Russia's "domestic political stability."

The agreements between Russia and Vietnam were not as substantial as an agreement Putin signed with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un the previous day, pledging mutual aid in the event of invasion said Nigel Gould-Davies, a senior fellow for Russia and Eurasia with the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London.

# S. Korea may send arms to Ukraine in wake of pact

*Associated Press*

**SEOUL, South Korea** — South Korea said Thursday that it would consider sending arms to Ukraine, a major policy change suggested after Russia and North Korea rattled the region and beyond by signing a pact to come to each other's defense in the event of war.

The comments from a senior presidential official came hours after North Korea's state media released the details of the agreement, which observers said could mark the strongest connection between Moscow and Pyongyang since the end of the Cold War. It comes a time when Russia faces growing isolation over its war in Ukraine and both countries face escalating standoffs with the West.

According to the text of the

deal published by the North's official Korean Central News Agency, if either country gets invaded and is pushed into a state of war, the other must deploy "all means at its disposal without delay" to provide "military and other assistance."

But the agreement also says that such actions must be in accordance with the laws of both countries and Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which recognizes a U.N. member state's right to self-defense.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the pact at a summit Wednesday in Pyongyang. Both described it as a major upgrade of bilateral relations, covering security, trade, investment, cultural and humanitarian ties.

# First named storm dumps rain on Texas, Mexico

Associated Press

Tropical Storm Alberto, the season's first named storm, rumbled ashore early Thursday and moved inland over northeast Mexico, bringing heavy rains to the parched region and leaving at least three dead.

The storm was expected to weaken rapidly over land, but carry several inches of desperately needed rain inland to Mexico's Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon and Coahuila states, as well as south Texas.

Alberto had spurred tropical storm warnings covering most of the western Gulf of Mexico's coastline from Texas to Veracruz. The storm made landfall with maximum sustained winds of 45 mph.

Schools were closed across Tamaulipas state where Alberto

came ashore and would be through Friday. Shelters were prepared across the state to receive residents trying to escape high water.

As much as 5 inches to 10 inches of rain was expected in some parts of northeast Mexico and southern Texas, with even higher isolated totals possible, according to the National Hurricane Center. Some higher locations in Mexico could see as much as 20 inches of rain, which could result in mudslides and flash flooding, especially in the states of Tamaulipas, Coahuila and Nuevo Leon.

Alberto had rumbled toward northeast Mexico as the first named storm of the season, carrying heavy rains that left three people dead. But the storm also brought hope to a region suffer-

ing under a prolonged, severe drought.

Mexican authorities downplayed the risk posed by Alberto and instead pinned their hopes on its ability to ease the parched region's water needs.

"The (wind) speeds are not such as to consider it a risk," said Tamaulipas state Secretary of Hydrological Resources Raúl Quiroga Álvarez during a news conference late Wednesday. Instead, he suggested people greet Alberto happily. "This is what we've been waiting for for eight years in all of Tamaulipas."

But in nearby Nuevo Leon state, civil protection authorities reported three deaths linked to Alberto's rains. They said one man died in the La Silla river in the city of Monterrey, the state capital, and that two minors died

from electric shocks in the municipality of Allende. Local media reported that the minors were riding a bicycle in the rain.

Alberto was bringing rains and flooding to the coast of Texas as well.

The U.S. National Weather Service said the main hazard for southern coastal Texas is flooding from excess rain. On Wednesday the NWS said there is "a high probability" of flash flooding in southern coastal Texas. Tornadoes or waterspouts are possible.

Areas along the Texas coast were seeing some road flooding and dangerous rip currents Wednesday, and waterspouts were spotted offshore.

Alberto was expected to rapidly weaken over land and dissipate Thursday.

## Rain offers hope to those fighting fatal NM wildfires

Associated Press

ROSWELL, N.M. — Heavy rain and hail fell Wednesday around an evacuated village in New Mexico threatened by wildfires that have killed at least two people and damaged more than 1,400 structures, offering the hope of some assistance for firefighters but adding the threat of high winds and flash floods.

Air tankers dropped water and red retardant earlier on the pair of fires growing in a mountainous part of the state where earlier in the week residents of Ruidoso were forced to flee the larger of the two blazes with little notice.

New Mexico State Police spokesman Wilson Silver said Wednesday that officers discovered the skeletal remains of an unidentified second person in the driver's seat of a burned vehicle. It's the second confirmed death in the blazes. The first victim was a badly burned 60-year-old man found by the side of the road near the Swiss Chalet Inn in Ruidoso.

Weather patterns were shifting Wednesday with moisture arriving from the Gulf of Mexico, said Bladen Breitreiter of the National Weather Service office in Albuquerque.

"It will be a challenging situation going into the late afternoon and evening," said Breitreiter, who has been an incident meteorologist at past wildfires. "The potential for scattered to isolated thunderstorms could help, but it depends on where they hit. If the rain misses the fires, downward winds could cause problems for firefighters on the ground."

He said rain could also lead to dangerous flash flooding in newly burned areas.

It wasn't immediately clear if the rain and hail that started around Ruidoso on Wednesday afternoon was falling on the fires themselves, or if it would slow their progress. The National Weather Service issued a flash flood warning for the area until later Wednesday evening.

## US jobless claims fall to 238K from 10-month high

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits slipped last week as the U.S. labor market remained resilient.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that jobless claims fell by 5,000 to 238,000 from a 10-month high of 243,000 the week before. The four-week average of claims, which evens out weekly ups and downs, rose by 5,500 to 232,750, highest since September.

Weekly unemployment claims — a proxy for layoffs — remain at low levels by historical standards, a sign that most Americans enjoy unusual job security. Still, after mostly staying below 220,000 this year, weekly claims have moved up recently.

"Layoffs are still low overall suggesting businesses remain reluctant to reduce headcount in large numbers," said Rubee-la Farooqi, chief U.S. economist

at High Frequency Economics. "However, there has been a gradual increase in recent weeks that merits watching for signals about a more material [weakening] in demand for workers going forward."

Nearly 1.83 million people were collecting unemployment benefits the week of June 8, up by 15,000 the week before and the seventh straight weekly uptick.

The U.S. economy and job market have proven remarkably resilient in the face of high interest rates. Employers are adding a strong average of 248,000 jobs a month this year. Unemployment is still low at 4%.

But the economy has lately showed signs of slowing, perhaps offering evidence that higher borrowing costs are finally taking a toll. For instance, the Commerce Department reported Tuesday that retail sales barely grew last month.



# La. requires Ten Commandments in classrooms

Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. — Louisiana has become the first state to require that the Ten Commandments be displayed in every public school classroom, the latest move from a GOP-dominated Legislature pushing a conservative agenda under a new governor.

The legislation that Republican Gov. Jeff Landry signed into law on Wednesday requires a poster-sized display of the Ten Commandments in “large, easily readable font” in all public classrooms, from kindergarten to state-funded universities.

“If you want to respect the rule

of law, you’ve got to start from the original lawgiver, which was Moses” who got the commandments from God, Landry said.

Opponents questioned the law’s constitutionality and vowed to challenge it in court. Proponents said the measure is not solely religious, but that it has historical significance. In the language of the law, the Ten Commandments are “foundational documents of our state and national government.”

The posters, which will be paired with a four-paragraph “context statement” describing how the Ten Commandments “were a prominent part of Amer-

ican public education for almost three centuries,” must be in place in classrooms by the start of 2025.

The law also “authorizes” but does not require the display of other items in K-12 public schools, including: The Mayflower Compact, which was signed by religious pilgrims aboard the Mayflower in 1620 and is often referred to as America’s “First Constitution”; the Declaration of Independence; and the Northwest Ordinance, which established a government in the Northwest Territory — in the present day Midwest — and created a pathway for admitting new states to the Union.

The law prevents students from getting an equal education and will keep children who have different beliefs from feeling safe at school, the American Civil Liberties Union, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and the Freedom from Religion Foundation said in a joint statement Wednesday afternoon.

“Even among those who may believe in some version of the Ten Commandments, the particular text that they adhere to can differ by religious denomination or tradition. The government should not be taking sides in this theological debate,” the groups said.

## Oregon nurses strike for better staffing, pay

Associated Press

More than 3,000 nurses at six Oregon hospitals spent a second day on the picket lines Wednesday carrying signs that say, “Patients over profits” and “We’re out to ensure it’s safe in there,” as they continued to demand fair wages and better staffing levels.

Nurses are striking at six Providence medical facilities across the state — from St. Vincent Medical Center in Portland in the north down to the Medford Medical Center in the south.

Organizers have said it’s the largest nurses strike in the state’s history, while Providence emphasized that no patient’s health is being put at risk, since it has hired contract workers to temporarily fill the void.

Scott Palmer, chief of staff with the Oregon Nurses Association, said nurses have been in negotiations since December but they “have not been able to get Providence to come to a fair contract.”

Palmer said the focus of negotiations is on “recruitment and

retention issues,” including wages, benefits and sufficient staffing standards.

Jennifer Gentry, chief nursing officer for Providence’s Central Division, said the organization contracted with a company to provide replacement workers to ensure patient care does not suffer. Gary Walker, a spokesperson for the company, said the strike has not affected their facilities. They treated about 800 people in their Emergency Departments on Tuesday and no elective surgeries have been postponed.

Palmer said the striking nurses want people to get the care they need, but they want the caregivers to be supported.

“It’s really important for people to know from the nurses and from the American Nurses Association that if you’re sick, don’t delay getting medical care,” Palmer told The Associated Press.

Staffing and competitive wages are the focus of their demands, Palmer said.

The strike was scheduled to run through Thursday.

## Baby moose trapped in lake saved by Alaska man, police

Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — An Alaska man and two police officers rescued a baby moose from what police described as “a sure demise” after it fell into a lake and got stuck in a narrow space between a floatplane and a dock.

Spencer Warren, who works for the outdoor tourism company Destination Alaska Adventure Co., had arrived at work about 6:30 a.m. June 14 to prepare a floatplane for the day’s trip when he heard what he thought was an odd-sounding bird.

He quickly spotted the moose calf stuck between the floats of the plane and the dock at Beluga Lake in Homer, a Kenai Peninsula community about 220 miles south of Anchorage. The floats replace the wheels on a plane, allowing it to take off and land on water.

He immediately thought, “Oh, man, where is mama? I know she’s nearby,” before spotting the worried mother about 4 feet away with another calf. Mother moose can be dangerously protective of their calves — a photographer was

killed by a mother moose protecting her young just last month in Homer.

The baby moose tried to get out of the lake, but couldn’t get its footing on the top of the metal float with its hooves. Its wary mother was keeping Warren, the would-be rescuer, from getting too close as it struggled.

“It’s like an ice rink for the moose and its hooves,” Warren said of Friday’s rescue. “So he just kept slipping and slipping and could not get up.”

Warren checked in with his boss, who called Homer police.

One officer eventually positioned his police cruiser between the mama moose and the floatplane to allow another officer and Warren to rescue the calf, Homer Police Lt. Ryan Browning told The Associated Press.

The calf had one leg outstretched across the top of the plane’s float, where it was stuck.

“You know, kind of thankfully, he wasn’t moving so that it made the rescue a little bit easier,” Warren said. “We just lifted him straight out and, put him on the dock there.”

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### 911 system restored after being down for hours

**MA** BOSTON — The 911 system across Massachusetts was restored Tuesday after going down for several hours, which made it impossible for anyone to reach emergency services through the call number.

The Massachusetts State Police announced around 3:45 p.m. that the system had been restored and that people could resume calling emergency services. They didn't provide any details behind the cause of the outage.

It was unclear how many communities were affected by outage, said Elaine Driscoll, director of communications and policy at the state's Executive Office of Public Safety and Security. It first was reported by several law enforcement agencies after 1 p.m.

At the time of the outage, Boston Police Commissioner Michael Cox said it was important for residents to know alternate ways of getting help, particularly given the hot weather heading toward the Northeast. He advised the public to contact local police departments if necessary.

### Man accused in Bulger killing gets time served

**WV** CLARKSBURG — The man accused of acting as lookout during the prison killing of notorious Boston gangster James "Whitey" Bulger was sentenced to time served Monday after pleading guilty to a charge of lying to federal agents.

Sean McKinnon was accused

along with two other inmates in the 2018 killing at a troubled West Virginia prison.

The other two inmates, Fotios "Freddy" Geas and Paul J. DeCologero, are accused of repeatedly hitting Bulger in the head within hours of Bulger being transferred to the prison.

Bulger, who ran the largely Irish mob in Boston in the 1970s and '80s, became one of the nation's most wanted fugitives after fleeing Boston in 1994. He was captured at age 81 after more than 16 years on the run and convicted in 2013 in a string of 11 killings and dozens of other gangland crimes.

### Preacher who touted his connections gets 9 years

**NY** NEW YORK — A flashy Brooklyn preacher who has played up connections to New York City's mayor was sentenced Monday to nine years in prison for multiple frauds.

Lamar Miller-Whitehead, 45, of Paramus, N.J., was sentenced in Manhattan federal court by Judge Lorna G. Schofield, who said she didn't see meaningful remorse from the Rolls Royce-driving bishop convicted of fleecing one parishioner out of \$90,000 in retirement savings, among other scams.

In a rambling statement, Miller-Whitehead claimed he was "very remorseful" but boasted of his good deeds for his community and expressed regrets about his trial, prompting the judge to interrupt him with a reminder that sentencing isn't a time to relitigate the case.

In March, a jury convicted Miller-Whitehead of all charges, including wire fraud, attempted extortion and mak-

ing false statements. Schofield said the preacher committed perjury when he testified.

Miller-Whitehead developed a friendship with Mayor Eric Adams while Adams served as Brooklyn's borough president before his election to the city's top job. Prosecutors contended that Miller-Whitehead used the name of Adams to commit fraud and attempted extortion. Adams was not accused of any wrongdoing in the case.

### FDA: Recalled applesauce stayed on store shelves

**MD** SILVER SPRING — Dollar Tree failed to effectively recall lead-tainted applesauce pouches linked to reports of illness in more than 500 children, leaving the products on some stores shelves for two months, the Food and Drug Administration said Tuesday.

The FDA sent a warning letter to Dollar Tree this month and placed Negasmart, the Ecuadorian distributor of WanaBana apple cinnamon pouches, under import alerts following the October 2023 recall of the products found to be contaminated with "extremely high" levels of lead and chromium.

Children in 44 states had probable or confirmed cases of elevated blood lead levels after eating the applesauce pouches marketed for toddlers, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The outbreak was declared over in April.

FDA officials sent a warning letter to Dollar Tree Inc. last week saying the WanaBana apple puree products remained on store shelves in several states

through late December, two months after the firm was told about the recall.

Dollar Tree officials said in an email Tuesday that the company is operating under new management and is taking steps to bolster its process "for quickly and effectively executing product recalls." The company operates more than 16,000 discount stores in 48 states.

### Officials release autopsy of Missouri student

**TN** NASHVILLE — Riley Strain, a University of Missouri student whose body was recovered from a river after going missing in Tennessee's capital for nearly two weeks, died from accidental drowning and intoxication, according to a newly released autopsy report.

News outlets report that Davidson County Medical Examiner's office released Strain's autopsy report Tuesday. The autopsy states that Strain's blood alcohol level was 0.228, nearly three times the legal limit for driving. He also had delta-9, a THC compound, in his system.

Strain, 22, was last seen just before 10 p.m. on March 8 after drinking in downtown Nashville. A massive search was quickly launched, with just small clues available to help investigators trying to find him.

University of Missouri officials said in a statement that Strain was traveling to Nashville to attend a private event.

Strain's body was recovered from the Cumberland River about 8 miles west of downtown on March 22. No foul play was suspected, investigators said.

— From wire reports

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# Dressel, Manuel settle for relay spots

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Coming back from lengthy layoffs, American swimming stars Caeleb Dressel and Simone Manuel were eager to claim their first individual events of the Paris Olympics.

Instead, they had to settle for supporting roles.

Dressel finished third in the men's 100-meter freestyle at the U.S. Olympic trials on Wednesday night, while Manuel touched fourth in the women's 100 free.

Only the top two will get to swim the events individually in Paris, but Dressel and Manuel will both be part of the 4x100 freestyle relays.

"I think Paris is going to be a blast," said Manuel, who has endured a long road back after being diagnosed with overtraining syndrome ahead of the Tokyo Games. "It's a different spot than I'm used to right now with only being a relay swimmer. But it's my third Olympic team and that's something that's really

hard to accomplish."

Potential breakout star Kate Douglass claimed the victory and Torri Huske took the runner-up position, with Gretchen Walsh also finishing ahead of Manuel.

Dressel, the winner of five gold medals in Tokyo, won't get a chance to defend his 100 freestyle title after reaching the wall behind Chris Guiliano and Jack Alexy.

"I'm trying to have fun; I am having fun," Dressel told the crowd of 22,209 on the deck of the temporary pool inside Lucas Oil Stadium. "You don't know how much it means to me, the love I'm getting from you. It's been tough."

Dressel walked away from swimming in the midst of the 2022 world championships, later revealing he needed an extended break to rediscover his love of the sport.

Dressel failed to even qualify for the 2023 worlds, but his times have improved significantly since last fall. He still has a shot

to qualify individually in the 50 freestyle and 100 butterfly — two more events he won at the last Summer Games.

Manuel also has the 50-meter freestyle left on her plate.

In perhaps the surest bet of the meet, Katie Ledecky claimed her third victory with another dominating performance in the 1,500 freestyle, though the time was a bit of a disappointment.

Seventeen-year-old Thomas Heilman won the men's 200 butterfly, while Matt Fallon touched first in the 200 breaststroke. Both will be first-time Olympians.

Dressel was all smiles as he hugged the guys ahead of him, saying he was pleased to be on the relay that will set its sights on taking down the world record at the Olympics.

"That's an unbelievably fast top four, top five — oh my gosh, the top six," he said, looking at the times on the massive scoreboard above the pool. "That's a great group of guys. It's fast."

Guiliano and Alexy were tied at the turn, but Guiliano got to the wall in 47.38 seconds to edge Alexy's 47.47. The margin was even closer to third, with Dressel missing an individual spot by just six-hundredths of a second.

His time of 47.53 was about a half-second off his winning performance in Tokyo (47.02).

Hunter Armstrong finished fourth, with Ryan Held and Matt King also likely to be added to the team as relay swimmers.

Manuel was the first Black woman to capture an individual swimming gold when she tied for the top spot in the 100 freestyle at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games.

She didn't get a chance to defend her title in Tokyo, and she won't swim the event in Paris either.

Still, Manuel was clearly moved just to be on a relay, breaking down in tears in front of the big crowd.

"It's a miracle that I'm even able to stand up here and be able to race again," she said.

## Ruling allows sprinter Knighton to run at US trials

Associated Press

EUGENE, Ore. — Sprinter Erriyon Knighton tested positive for a banned substance that an arbitration panel determined came from contaminated meat, a decision that keeps the 200-meter specialist eligible to run at the upcoming U.S. Olympic trials.

The 20-year-old from Florida, who holds the under-18 and under-20 records in the 200 meters, tested positive for the performance enhancer trenbolone during an out-of-competition test in March, according to the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, which revealed details of the case Wednesday.

Though the arbitration panel cleared Knighton to run in the 200, starting June 27, the deci-

sion can be appealed by either the Athletics Integrity Unit, which oversees doping in track and field, or the World Anti-Doping Agency.

WADA spokesman James Fitzgerald said "as it always does, WADA will review this case and reserves the right to take an appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, as appropriate."

"We did what the rules require us to do in all positive cases," USADA CEO Travis Tygart said. "We can take comfort that justice was served and transparency as required by the rules was achieved."

Tygart said the contaminated meat came from oxtail at a bakery in central Florida. A USADA investigation, including obtain-

ing the meat and testing it, along with interviews with the manager of the bakery, Knighton, his girlfriend and his mother, backed up the claim.

When Knighton qualified for the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, he became the youngest male since Jim Ryun in 1964 to make the U.S. Olympic team. He finished fourth in the 200 behind Andre De Grasse, Kenny Bednarek and Noah Lyles. Knighton finished second behind Lyles at last year's world championships.

Contamination cases such as Knighton's aren't unheard of, though they have come under closer scrutiny of late in the wake of a case involving 23 Chinese swimmers whose positive tests for a banned heart medication were deemed to have come

because of contamination.

WADA accepted the explanation from Chinese authorities and did not pursue that case, which became public after reporting by The New York Times and the German broadcaster ARD. That decision has been roundly criticized by USADA and others because the initial positives were not made public.

Part of WADA's argument has been to point out contamination cases that originated in the United States — which have involved everything from meat to dog medicine — have not always resulted in sanctions. USADA has insisted it has followed the rulebook in those cases, including making public any violation, even if it did not result in a penalty.



# Panthers not feeling pressure after losses

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Florida coach Paul Maurice sat behind a microphone again on Wednesday, giving his daily news conference even though basically nothing new had happened in the 13 hours between then and the last time he spoke to reporters.

He took a bunch of questions. He also had one to ask.

“How can I be the only person in a decent mood here today?” Maurice asked, sort of rhetorically, sort of seriously.

Yes, the Panthers have lost their last two games and gotten embarrassed in one of them. Yes, they’ve wasted two chances to win the Stanley Cup. Yes, a 3-0 lead in the title series against the Edmonton Oilers is down to 3-2, after the Panthers lost Game 5 on home ice 5-3 on Tuesday night. Yes, Game 6 is in Edmonton on Friday night and, yes, Oilers star Connor McDavid just had back-to-back games the likes of which have never been seen in the Cup final before.

No, that doesn’t mean the Panthers are worried about wilting under pressure.

“You’re going to think I’m lying to you,” Maurice said. “I’m more comfortable. I understand the feeling of 3-2 because most series are like that; 3-0 is more of an aberration, isn’t it? Pressure. I

think we think about these things possibly differently and I’m not sure I would agree with the assessment that the pressure has shifted so heavily to us.”

Forget the on-ice matters for a moment. Just about every historical stat that Maurice can show his team before it boarded another flight to Edmonton on Thursday says the trends over time show that Florida should be liking its chances:

■ The Panthers won Game 1. Game 1 winners win the Cup 76% of the time.

■ They led the series 2-0. Teams in that situation win the Cup at a 91% rate.

■ They led the series 3-0. The Cup rate there: 96%.

■ They led 3-1. Cup rate in that situation: 97%.

■ They lead 3-2. Cup rate in that situation: 81%.

After getting outscored 13-1 from late in Game 3 to basically midway through Game 5, after losing 8-1 in their last trip to Edmonton and falling at home on Tuesday night, the Panthers still lead the series. Nobody, if offered the chance to be in this spot on the first day of camp back in the fall, would have declined.

“It’s still 3-2,” Maurice said.

Sure, Edmonton has done what it must do. It has fended off elimination twice. It has sent the series back to Alberta and will

have a chance in front of its own rowdy, delirious, Cup-starved fans to try to force the ultimate — a Game 7 — in Florida that would be played Monday night. The Panthers are tipping their caps, yet they still believe they can make the change they need to finish this thing off.

“I think we were gripping the sticks a little tight,” Panthers forward Sam Bennett acknowledged after Game 5. “We wanted it a little too bad tonight. ... We’ve just got to win one game. It’s as simple as that.”

## Oilers’ other Connor thriving in resurgence

EDMONTON, Alberta — There is no doubt Connor McDavid is the biggest reason the Edmonton Oilers have made it a series in the Stanley Cup Final against the Florida Panthers.

Their other Connor has played a crucial role in the comeback bid, too.

Connor Brown set up the early short-handed goal that sparked the team in Game 4 on the way to an 8-1 rout that avoided a sweep, then scored one in Game 5 to send the series back across North America. Maligned for his lack of production in his first season with Edmonton, Brown finally looks like himself 20 months after tearing the ACL in his left knee, and that could not be com-

ing at a better time for the Oilers.

“It’s so nice to see a guy stick with it after going through so much adversity,” coach Kris Knoblauch said Wednesday. “It just took him a while to build his game. This should be expected because of his injury, and he just continually got better throughout the season. ... His play right now has been exceptional.”

Brown injured his knee Oct. 17, 2022, in just his fourth game with the Washington Capitals, who at the time were counting on him to bring some of the speed and scoring he showed throughout his first seven NHL seasons with Toronto and Ottawa.

Brown, who turned 30 in January, signed an incentive-heavy contract with the Oilers that paid him the league-minimum \$775,000 with \$3,225,000 in performance bonuses. He had four points through three rounds before making a major impact in the final.

“I think a lot of people lost faith, but he’s an unbelievable player,” said top-line winger Zach Hyman, who overlapped with Brown for parts of four seasons with the Maple Leafs from 2016-19. “I played with him for a long time, so I knew how good he can be. He’s showing it every night. At the highest stage, he’s one of best players. Credit to him.”

# Brink tears ACL, will miss WNBA season, Olympics 3x3

Associated Press

UNCASVILLE, Conn. — Los Angeles rookie Cameron Brink tore the ACL in her left knee, the Sparks announced Wednesday.

The rookie forward had to be helped off the court after suffering the injury in the first quarter of the Sparks’ 79-70 loss to Connecticut on Tuesday night.

Once over to the sideline, the No. 2 pick in the draft hobbled toward the locker room, but was forced to stop as a result of the pain. A pair of Sparks personnel lifted Brink off her feet and carried her to the locker room.

“You never think it will happen to you.

And despite all the hard work sometimes it does. This is hard to fathom but I know it will only make me stronger,” Brink wrote in a post to Instagram. “I will not be derailed and I will continue to love this life — I’m not defined by basketball, but it is something that I love deeply and I will work everyday to get back to it. It’s not goodbye basketball it’s just a see you later. I’m always so thankful for your thoughts and prayers.”

The 22-year-old Brink came into the game averaging 8.1 points, 5.7 rebounds and 2.5 blocks in her first season for Los Angeles (4-11). She’s tied with A’ja Wilson for the second-most blocks in the WNBA.

Brink is on the U.S. 3x3 team for the Paris Olympics along with Rhyne Howard, Ciera Burdick and Hailey Van Lith. A replacement will have to be named for her.

Brink, Burdick and Van Lith led the United States to a gold medal at the 2023 FIBA World Cup.

“Our thoughts are with Cameron as we wish her a speedy recovery. As a result of Cam’s injury, USA Basketball will begin the process of selecting an athlete to join the 2024 USA 3x3 Women’s National Team,” USA Basketball said in a statement. “We hope to see Cam back on the court and representing the red, white and blue soon.”

# Pirates' pitching staff growing up quickly

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Derek Shelton emerged from the dug-out at sweltering PNC Park and trotted toward the mound to take the ball from Mitch Keller early in the eighth inning Wednesday.

A smattering of boos greeted the move after Keller had spent most of the afternoon dominating the Reds with remarkable efficiency.

Keller, however, didn't say a word after issuing a leadoff walk in a scoreless game. Sure, he'd thrown 83 pitches over seven-plus innings, but with temperatures in the mid-90s, Keller admitted it felt more as if he'd tossed 150.

So he didn't plead his case. There was no need anyway. Keller knows as well as anyone what's lurking at the back end of a bullpen that's becoming dominant. Colin Holderman retired the next three batters to get out of the eighth unscathed.

Bryan Reynolds' solo shot in the bottom of the eighth gave the Pirates the lead. David Bednar worked a perfect ninth for his 16th save as Pittsburgh took two of three from the Reds in a series that offered a glimpse of what its staff could become as spring turns to summer.

Electrifying rookie Paul Skenes and three relievers held the Reds to one run in a victory Monday. Bailey Falter pitched seven solid innings in a losing ef-

fort Tuesday. Keller, Holderman and Bednar limited the Reds to four baserunners, none of whom made it to third.

"I don't know if we've pitched better than we did in this series," Shelton said.

It's becoming a bit of a habit. The shutout was the fourth tossed by the Pirates in June. They've allowed four runs or fewer in 12 of their 17 games this month, buoyed by not just a rotation that boasts Skenes, Keller and Jared Jones but a bullpen that has started to figure things out after a sluggish start.

Not bad considering the Pirates are essentially short a starter at the moment with Marco Gonzales, Martin Perez and Quinn Priester all on the injured list at the moment.

"Everyone's vibing and gelling together," Keller said. "Everyone's helping each other out which is really cool to see. Picking up little tidbits from someone here and there. It's really cool."

While Skenes is 4-0 with a 2.29 ERA and 53 strikeouts in 39⅓ innings during his seven starts — starts that are increasingly feeling like events in a city where the Pirates have largely been an afterthought for the past half-decade — he's hardly doing it alone.

Keller, who signed a \$77 million contract extension in February after being an All-Star last season, is 6-1 with a 1.53 ERA

since May 1. Falter's ERA is 3.74, a full run below his career average coming in. Bednar, slowed by a lat injury that forced him to miss basically all of spring training, has converted 10 saves since the start of May. Holderman has allowed just two runs in 26 appearances in a setup role.

Their emergence has helped the Pirates stay in the mix of an underwhelming NL Central despite an offense that is struggling to produce consistently. Pittsburgh is in the bottom third in the majors in most major offensive categories, including runs (22nd), homers (23rd) and OPS (28th).

"Yeah man, (the pitching is helping) us out a lot, especially today," Reynolds said. "Mitch puts up a zero all the way to the eighth and just hands it off. Helps the offense a little bit. Takes a little pressure off."

It helps to have a staff that seems to have taken ego out of the equation. There is a free exchange of ideas — from the starters to the relievers — on everything from sequencing to pitch grips to tips on how to rest and recover.

Keller makes it a point to tell Bednar regularly that he likes Bednar's splitter to help give him confidence. Holderman has been experimenting with the delivery of his sinker, willing to give just about anything a shot.

Guys who are regularly giving

opponents plenty to think about. Cincinnati manager David Bell watched emerging Reds ace Hunter Greene shut down the Pirates over 6⅓ masterful innings, only to be outdueled by Keller.

"Keller I think executed every single pitch he threw today," Bell said. "Today was a tough day with Keller, Holderman and Bednar, they executed their pitches and they have really great stuff to go with it."

Pittsburgh plans to rely on the staff heavily as it tries to gain traction to seriously contend for a postseason spot for the first time since the club won 98 games in 2015.

This group is not that group that featured proven veterans such as A.J. Burnett and J.A. Happ to go with a young Gerrit Cole. The current Pirates are still under .500 as July 4 approaches.

Still, there is an optimism in the clubhouse that's been missing for a while. It's creeping back in with impressive outings from the guys in charge of throwing the ball.

"We've got a lot of dudes in here with good stuff," Holderman said. "And the further we get in the season with some guys that don't have that much experience in the big leagues, they're only going to get better and I think our pitching is going to last pretty deep into the season."

## Volunteers first No. 1 since 2009 to reach CWS finals

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Tennessee fell flat in its two previous College World Series appearances and in between there was the crushing loss in NCAA super regionals as the No. 1 national seed.

All that has led to this year's Volunteers putting themselves in position to play for the program's first national title beginning Saturday.

Tennessee is heading to the CWS finals for the first time in the modern era after it knocked out Florida State with a 7-2 victo-

ry on Wednesday to win its bracket.

Zander Sechrist held the Seminoles (49-17) scoreless for six innings and the Volunteers struck for four early runs to become the first No. 1 national seed since 2009 to advance to the best-of-three finals.

"We always say before something happens, something happens," coach Tony Vitello said. "There's been a lot of build-up into the successes we've had this year and the failures, too, to be honest with you. And it's been fun to be a part of."

Tennessee's win assured an all-SEC fi-

nals for the second straight year and third time in four. The Volunteers (58-12) will play Texas A&M (52-13).

The Southeastern Conference has had at least one team in the finals 15 of the last 16 years. Seven different SEC teams have made it since 2009. The fact that Tennessee hadn't been among them had become more frustrating on Rocky Top in recent years. The Vols' 209 victories and 559 home runs since the start of the 2021 season are the most of any Division I program, after all.