

US: Ukraine can fire missiles deeper into Russia

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Ukraine's military is allowed to use long-range missiles provided by the U.S. to strike targets inside Russia across more than just the front lines near Kharkiv if Kyiv is acting in self-defense, the Pentagon said.

President Joe Biden initially loosened the restrictions on how Ukraine could use U.S.-provided munitions to give it another option to better defend the eastern city of Kharkiv from a relentless barrage of Russian missiles. Since the beginning of Russia's 2022 invasion, the U.S. had maintained a policy of not allowing Ukraine to use the weapons it provided to hit targets inside Russia for fear of further escalating the war.

Russia has been firing on Ukrainian targets from inside its border, treating its area as a "safe zone," said Maj. Gen. Pat

Ryder, Pentagon press secretary.

"As we see those forces conducting those types of operations from across the border, we've explained Ukraine can and does have the right to fire back to defend themselves," Ryder told reporters Thursday.

The White House also announced Thursday that it will rush delivery of air defense interceptor missiles to Ukraine by redirecting planned shipments to other allied nations, as Washington scrambles to counter increased Russian attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure.

National security spokesman John Kirby said the U.S. had taken the "difficult but necessary decision to reprioritize near-term planned deliveries of foreign military sales to other countries," though he wouldn't say which nations would be affected or how many.

"Right now, we know that Ukraine urgently needs these additional capabilities," Kirby said on a call with reporters, adding, "Obviously more is needed, and it's needed now."

The U.S. was already sending Ukraine a consistent stream of interceptors for its air defense systems, including for the Patriot missile batteries and the National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems, or NASAMS. But Kirby said that more was urgently needed as Russia's military has accelerated missile and drone attacks against cities and infrastructure centers "trying to destroy Ukraine's energy system ahead of this winter."

Russia has resumed its aerial pounding of Ukraine's power grid while Kyiv's forces are again targeting Russian oil facilities with drone strikes, as each side seeks to hinder the other's ability to continue fighting.

ing.

The number of interceptors to be sent isn't clear but Kirby said it could involve "hundreds" of Patriot interceptor missiles.

Kirby said Ukraine will get prioritized shipments as soon as systems roll off assembly lines for the next about 16 months, and those will provide the country with "enough capability" during that period.

Kirby said the move means "a range of countries" will face delays in receiving missile systems that are being diverted to Ukraine but that the shift would not affect Taiwan or what it "continues to need and receive for self-defense" in the face of potential threats from China.

Asked to describe how other countries reacted to the shift, Kirby said they were "broadly understanding of it."

"They know how serious the need is in Ukraine," he said.

Philippines won't invoke mutual defense treaty with US

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippines said Friday it has no plan to invoke its mutual defense treaty with the United States after the Chinese coast guard reportedly rammed, boarded and used machetes and axes to damage two Philippine navy boats in a chaotic faceoff that injured Filipino navy personnel at a disputed shoal in the South China Sea.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s advisers spoke at a news conference, squelching speculation that Manila might consider invoking the 1951 treaty to secure U.S. military help after Monday's confrontation at Second Thomas Shoal, where the

Chinese coast guard also seized Philippine rifles. The Philippine military chief condemned the incident, likening it to an act of piracy, and demanded that China return the rifles and pay for the damage.

The territorial disputes, which involve China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan, have long been seen as an Asian flashpoint that could pit the U.S. against China if they escalate into an armed conflict. Washington has repeatedly warned that it's obligated to help defend the Philippines, its oldest treaty ally in Asia, if its forces, ships and aircraft come under an armed attack.

"That has not been considered in our discussions," presidential assistant on maritime concerns Andres Centino said when asked if the Philippines was considering activating its treaty with the U.S.

In what critics may see as a concession to China, Bersamin said Marcos approved a recommendation for the government to publicize the schedule when navy personnel are deployed to transport food, water and other supplies to the Philippines' territorial outpost in the shoal. A small Philippine navy contingent aboard a long-grounded dilapidated warship, the BRP Sierra Madre, has occupied Second Thomas Shoal since

1999 but China later deployed coast guard, navy and suspected militia ships in a territorial standoff that has become increasingly volatile.

During the hourslong confrontation at the shoal on Monday, Chinese personnel on board more than eight motorboats reportedly rammed and then boarded the two Philippine navy inflatable boats to prevent Filipino navy personnel from transferring food and other supplies, including firearms, to the Philippine ship outpost.

After a scuffle and repeated collisions, the Chinese reportedly seized the boats and damaged them with machetes, knives and hammers.

S. Korea summons Russian ambassador

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea summoned the Russian ambassador to protest the country's new defense pact with North Korea on Friday, as border tensions continued to rise with vague threats and brief, seemingly accidental incursions by North Korean troops.

Earlier Friday, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un issued a vague threat of retaliation after South Korean activists flew balloons carrying anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets across the border, and South Korea's military said it had fired warning shots the previous day to repel North Korean soldiers who briefly

crossed the rivals' land border for the third time this month.

That came two days after Moscow and Pyongyang reached a pact vowing mutual defense assistance if either is attacked, and a day after Seoul responded by saying it would consider providing arms to Ukraine to fight Russia's invasion.

South Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Hong Kyun summoned Russian Ambassador Georgy Zinoviev to protest the deal between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un and called for Moscow to immediately halt its alleged military cooperation with Pyongyang.

Kim, the South Korean diplomat, stressed that any coopera-

tion that directly or indirectly helps the North build up its military capabilities would violate U.N. Security Council resolutions and pose a threat to the South's security, and warned of consequences for Seoul's relations with Moscow.

Zinoviev told Korean officials that any attempts to "threaten or blackmail" Russia were unacceptable and that his country's agreement with North Korea wasn't aimed at specific third countries, Russia's embassy wrote on its X account. The South Korean ministry said Zinoviev promised to convey Seoul's concerns to his superiors in Moscow.

Leafletting campaigns by

South Korean civilian activists in recent weeks have prompted a resumption of Cold War-style psychological warfare along the inter-Korean border.

The South Korean civilian activists, led by North Korean defector Park Sang-hak, said it sent 20 balloons carrying 300,000 propaganda leaflets, 5,000 USB sticks with South Korean pop songs and TV dramas, and 3,000 U.S. dollar bills from the South Korean border town of Paju on Thursday night.

Pyongyang resents such material and fears it could demoralize front-line troops and residents and eventually weaken Kim Jong Un's grip on power, analysts say.

US thanks Romania for its NATO leadership decision

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration on Friday thanked Romania for its president withdrawing from the race to lead NATO, saying the move would help ensure the Western military alliance stays properly focused.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken delivered the message to his Romanian counterpart Luminita-Teodora Odobescu. Their meeting Friday at the State Department came just a day after Romanian President Klaus Io-

hannis dropped out of the running for NATO's top job, clearing the way for outgoing Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte.

Blinken said he was "grateful" for Iohannis' leadership in the alliance, although he did not specifically mention the contest to be NATO's next secretary-general.

"Romania has played a critical role in making sure that the alliance is focused everywhere it needs to be focused, including on our eastern flank," Blinken told Odobescu. "We're grateful for that. I am grateful for President

Iohannis and his leadership and making sure the alliance is appropriately focused."

Two U.S. officials said Washington was pleased by Iohannis' decision to withdraw, suggesting it was a sign that Romania takes its alliance responsibilities seriously. Those officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal Biden administration thinking.

Iohannis is nearing the end of his second five-year term as Romania's president and had announced his intention to run for

NATO's top job in March. Romania, a NATO member since 2004, borders Ukraine and has played an increasingly prominent role in the alliance throughout Russia's full-scale invasion, including hosting a NATO meeting of foreign ministers in November 2022.

Iohannis' withdrawal means that Rutte is all but certain to replace Jens Stoltenberg at the top of the alliance when its leaders meet next month in Washington to celebrate NATO's 75th anniversary.

EU to open membership talks with Ukraine, Moldova

Bloomberg

The European Union formally agreed to open negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova over membership in the bloc, an important symbolic step in a process that will take years to play out.

EU member states cleared the final hurdle Friday and for-

mal accession discussions can begin on June 25 in Luxembourg, according to Belgium, which holds the bloc's rotating presidency.

Hungary had been blocking the move, citing concerns including the protection of Hungarian minorities in Ukraine, a long-standing demand that

Brussels and Kyiv insist has been addressed.

Back in March, the European Commission proposed a negotiating framework to establish guidelines and principles for accession negotiations, following a decision by EU leaders to open membership talks with Ukraine in Decem-

ber.

The process ahead for Ukraine and Moldova will be lengthy and complicated, particularly amid the ongoing Russian invasion. Croatia was the last country to join the bloc and its application lasted 10 years before it was formally accepted in 2013.

Rain helps slow big New Mexico blazes

Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. — More than 1,000 firefighters in New Mexico took advantage of a break in the weather on Thursday to get the upper hand — for now — on a pair of wildfires that have killed two people, destroyed hundreds of homes and forced thousands to flee.

President Joe Biden issued a disaster declaration for parts of southern New Mexico, freeing up funding and more resources as crews worked to keep the flames from spreading. Their efforts have gotten a boost from a storm system that brought with it rain, hail and cooler temperatures to the mountain village of Ruidoso and other parts

of the state.

“The fire has lost momentum,” Arthur Gonzales, the fire behavior analyst for the federal attack team, told residents at a community meeting in Alamogordo on Thursday night. “We still have a lot of work to do, but it’s really changed that fire behavior,” he said, noting that very little growth is expected over the next few days.

But firefighters know it’s a brief respite given the dry tinderbox conditions that helped fuel the fires in the first place. Within days, the fires have consumed an area half the size of Washington, D.C.

“What we’re really focusing on now at this point, is when

might we see this return to active fire spread?” Gonzales said. “Is there potential for this to start picking up and moving again?”

Federal and local officials said evacuation orders likely would remain in place for days in some places as crews snuff out hot spots around Ruidoso and law officers patrol streets to keep potential looters away.

Despite some reports that the fires were “human caused,” federal incident commander Dave Gessar said the causes are under investigation and remain “undetermined.”

The federal disaster declaration will help with recovery efforts, including temporary

housing, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property and other emergency work in Lincoln County and on lands belonging to the Mescalero Apache Tribe.

Residents fled the larger of the two fires with little notice as it swept into neighborhoods on Monday. More areas were evacuated on Tuesday as the fire ballooned, consuming homes nestled among the the ponderosa pines that dominate the hillsides.

An estimated 1,400 structures have been destroyed or damaged, and Ruidoso Mayor Lynn Crawford has estimated about half were homes. Whole portions of some communities were lost, he said.

Judge is urged to uphold parts of Trump gag order

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Prosecutors on Friday urged the judge overseeing Donald Trump’s criminal hush money case to uphold provisions of a gag order that bar him from criticizing jurors and court staff, while agreeing to lift a restriction on his public statements about trial witnesses.

In court papers filed Friday, prosecutors with the Manhattan district attorney’s office argued that portions of the gag order remained necessary given the Republican former president’s “singular history of inflammatory and threatening public statements,” as well as efforts by his supporters to “identify jurors and threaten violence against him.”

“Since the verdict in this case, defendant has not exempted the jurors from his alarming rhetoric that he would have ‘every right’ to seek retribution as president against the participants in this trial as a consequence of his conviction because ‘sometimes revenge can be justified,’” the fil-

ing states.

The gag order, issued in March, prohibited Trump from making or directing others to make public statements about witnesses, jurors and others connected to the case. It does not restrict comments about the judge, Juan M. Merchan, or Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, whose office prosecuted the case.

Attorneys for Trump have called on the judge to lift the order following the culmination of his trial last month, which ended in his conviction on 34 felony counts for falsifying records to cover up a potential sex scandal. Trump, who has denied any wrongdoing, is set to be sentenced on July 11.

Defense attorneys argue Trump should be free to fully address the case as he campaigns for the White House, pointing to comments made by President Joe Biden and the continued public criticism of him by his ex-lawyer Michael Cohen and the porn actor Stormy Daniels, both key prosecution witnesses.

Bannon asks high court to delay his prison sentence

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Steve Bannon, a longtime ally of former President Donald Trump, asked the Supreme Court on Friday to delay his prison sentence while he fights his convictions for defying a subpoena from the House committee that investigated the attack on U.S. Capitol.

The request came after a federal appeals court panel rejected Bannon’s bid to avoid reporting to prison by July 1 to serve his four-month sentence. It was addressed to Chief Justice John Roberts, who oversees emergency appeals from courts in Washington, D.C.

The high court swiftly denied a similar request from another Trump aide in March. Bannon’s request comes a week before the court is set to begin its summer recess.

Bannon was convicted nearly two years ago of two counts of contempt of Congress: one for refusing to sit for a deposition with the Jan. 6 House Committee and the other for refusing to provide documents related to

his involvement in Trump’s efforts to overturn his 2020 presidential election loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

Bannon has cast the case as politically motivated, and his attorney David Schoen has said the case raises “serious constitutional issues” that need to be examined by the Supreme Court.

If Bannon goes to prison next month, he will likely have to serve his full sentence before the high court has the chance to review those questions, since the court is due to take its summer recess at the end of June, attorney Trent McCotter wrote in his emergency application.

His lawyer says the former adviser didn’t ignore the subpoena but was still negotiating with the congressional committee when he was charged. His previous attorney told him that the subpoena was invalid because the Republican former president has asserted executive privilege and the committee would not allow a Trump lawyer in the room.

Supreme Court upholds gun control law

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Friday upheld a federal gun control law that is intended to protect victims of domestic violence.

In their first Second Amendment case since they expanded gun rights in 2022, the justices ruled 8-1 in favor of a 1994 ban on firearms for people under restraining orders to stay away from their spouses or partners. The justices reversed a ruling from the federal appeals court in New Orleans that had struck down the law.

Chief Justice John Roberts, writing for the court, said the law uses “common sense” and applies only “after a judge de-

termines that an individual poses a credible threat” of physical violence.

Justice Clarence Thomas, the author of the 2022 Bruen ruling in a New York case, dissented.

Last week, the court overturned a Trump-era ban on bump stocks, the rapid-fire gun accessories used in the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history. The court ruled that the Justice Department exceeded its authority in imposing that ban.

Friday’s case stemmed directly from the Supreme Court’s Bruen decision in June 2022. A Texas man, Zackey Rahimi, was accused of hitting his girlfriend during an argument

in a parking lot and later threatening to shoot her.

During arguments, some justices voiced concern that a ruling for Rahimi could also jeopardize the background check system that the Biden administration said has stopped more than 75,000 gun sales in the past 25 years based on domestic violence protective orders.

The case also had been closely watched for its potential to affect cases in which other gun ownership laws have been called into question, including in the high-profile prosecution of Hunter Biden. President Joe Biden’s son was convicted of lying on a form to buy a firearm while he was addicted to drugs.

His lawyers have signaled they will appeal.

A decision to strike down the domestic violence gun law might have signaled the court’s skepticism of the other laws as well. But Friday’s decision did not suggest that the court would necessarily uphold those law either.

The justices could weigh in soon in one or more of those other cases.

Many of the gun law cases grow out of the Bruen decision. That high court ruling not only expanded Americans’ gun rights under the Constitution but also changed the way courts are supposed to evaluate restrictions on firearms.

Bathers, beware: British beaches and rivers have a sewage problem

Associated Press

HENLEY-ON-THAMES, England — Britain has become notorious as a place where a casual swim could lead to an extended visit to the toilet, if not the hospital.

A torrent of news on dirty water has spilled into next month’s election to determine which party controls government for the next four or five years.

While not a top campaign issue, it stinks of a larger problem: Britain’s aging infrastructure — from aging schools, hospitals and prisons to pothole-riddled streets.

Bad water is decades in the making, tied to the privatization of waterworks under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government in 1989 and to fiscal austerity after the 2008 financial crisis that slashed budgets for watchdogs and others.

The British public discovered the extent of the mess during the COVID-19 pandemic as outdoor recreation such as canoe-

ing and wild swimming took off. The sight and smell of feces, toilet paper and other waste in streams and on beaches led to an outcry, along with clean water campaigns by some London newspapers.

“We are suffering with shockingly poor infrastructure as a consequence of long-term underinvestment by water utilities who appeared more interested in paying shareholder dividends,” said Nick Kirsop-Taylor, an environmental policy lecturer at the University of Exeter. “There’s far more to it than just that, though ... it’s the culture of poor regulation.”

Britain had such an anti-regulatory culture on the environment that it was known as the “the dirty man of Europe” in the 1970s and 1980s, Kirsop-Taylor said. That changed when it joined the European Union, but he said there has been backsliding since its vote in 2016 to leave the EU.

While private companies have run regional monopolies

providing combined water and sewage service, the population has swelled and industrial demand on the system has increased. Plumbing — dating to the Victorian era in many places — has not been updated to meet needs.

On top of that, climate change has brought heavier rainfall to overburdened sewers.

The number of untreated sewage discharges increased by more than 50% last year from the previous one to a record 464,000 spills. The cumulative duration of the spills doubled to 3.6 million hours, according to the Environment Agency, one of the two water regulators.

The increase was largely due to a wetter year and because monitors have now been installed on most sewage outflow pipes, according to Water UK, a trade group for water companies.

But there’s no similar monitoring for farm runoff like manure, an even bigger problem than sewage.

Elephant kills US tourist

Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG — A U.S. tourist was killed by an elephant in the Zambian city of Livingstone Wednesday — in the second such attack in the country this year — local officials said.

The officials said Friday that 64-year-old Juliana Gle Tourneau was killed when an elephant that was part of a herd the tourists were watching attacked their vehicle, threw Tourneau out and trampled her.

She was part of a group that had stopped near the Maramba Cultural Bridge due to the traffic caused by the elephant herd near the bridge, they added.

It is the second such attack this year after another American tourist was killed in March this year during a game drive in a Zambian national park when an elephant charged a truck, flipped it over, killed the tourist and injured five others.

Zambian authorities have called on tourists to exercise extreme caution while observing wildlife around the country.

McDavid's magic has kept final going

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Connor McDavid was surrounded by greatness.

His hair still wet from practice, he sat in Studio 99, the restaurant in the Edmonton Oilers' home arena named for Wayne Gretzky and full of memorabilia commemorating the legendary career of the "Great One." To his right was a jersey Gretzky wore during his first NHL season and on the wall to his left quotes from No. 99, who captained Edmonton to the Stanley Cup four times.

If McDavid keeps this up, the Oilers are going to have to make room for a Studio 97.

The heir apparent to Gretzky, Mario Lemieux and Sidney Crosby as the best hockey player in the world, McDavid has carried his team from the brink of elimination in the Stanley Cup Final against the Florida Panthers to a Game 6 on home ice Friday night. The only player in league history to record back-to-back four-point

games in the final, the Oilers captain gets his next chance to add to his legacy and push the series to a deciding Game 7 back across the continent.

"You spend your life working to get into a position like this," McDavid said Thursday. "You think that when you're here it's going to be some magic feeling, magic, I don't know. You don't know what to expect. To be honest, it's all been pretty normal. This has always been part of the plan for our group, to be in a position like this, playing big games at home in big moments. Just another one tomorrow night."

Just another one in front of another sellout crowd of 18,000-plus, with many more in the city of nearly a million people packing downtown in hopes of witnessing something that has not been done in nearly eight decades.

Detroit in 1945 was the last team to trail 3-0 in the final and get to a Game 7, and Toronto three years before that was the

only one to come all the way back.

The only way Edmonton is able to dream of that possibility now is because of McDavid, who at 42 points this postseason is just five shy of Gretzky's record set in 1985. He has emerged as the front-runner to win the Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP, even if the Oilers fall short and the Panthers win the Cup for the first time in franchise history.

"He's a reckless skilled player, which is a very unique quality," Hall of Famer Ken Hitchcock, who coached McDavid in 2018-19, told The Associated Press by phone. "He's not afraid to put his body in dangerous areas to score, and it's really hard to defend against. He's going to the net and taking a hit to make a play. There's no fear in his game — none."

Panthers coach Paul Maurice warned anyone who would listen to him coming into the series that the greatness of McDavid tends to get taken for granted

because it's such a constant. McDavid hasn't had a ton of goals in these playoffs, or in this title series, but his impact has been off every chart.

"Here's what happens: You get really good players, like Connor McDavid, and they get a block of time where they don't score and there seems to be something wrong," Maurice said. "There isn't. Nobody, even Connor McDavid, scores at the rate in the last three games over 82 or over every playoff game or he'd have 700 points a year. That's the way this works."

McDavid might be reinventing how this works, putting up 11 points in Games 2-5 of the final on three goals and eight assists, despite getting the toughest defensive matchup possible opposite Aleksander Barkov, Florida's captain who won the Selke Trophy as the best defensive forward this season. Earlier in the playoffs, Barkov shut down Boston's David Pastrnak and New York's Artemi Panarin to get the Panthers to this point.

Lakers are hiring JJ Redick as their new head coach

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — JJ Redick is being hired as the head coach of the Los Angeles Lakers, a person with knowledge of the decision tells The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity Thursday because the Lakers hadn't yet publicly announced the decision to hire the former guard for his first coaching job.

The 39-year-old Redick is an extraordinary choice by the

Lakers, who hired a 15-year veteran with absolutely no coaching experience to lead a franchise with 17 NBA titles, one of the biggest brand names in world sports — and LeBron James, the top scorer in league history.

Redick was a proficient outside shooter for six teams before his retirement in September 2021, when he moved into a career in broadcasting and podcasting. He joined ESPN's lead commentary team this year.

ESPN first reported the hire.

Before Redick finished broadcasting the NBA Finals, he met with the Lakers last weekend and apparently did well enough to end the franchise's lengthy coaching search. Less than two weeks after UConn coach Danny Hurley turned down the Lakers' ardent advances, Redick has accepted the job in a remarkable three-year journey from the court to the broadcast booth to the Lakers' bench.

Redick replaces Darvin Ham, who was fired May 3 despite leading the Lakers to two playoff berths and a Western Conference finals appearance in 2023.

Redick began recording a regular podcast with James two months ago, and their "Mind the Game" collaboration is already wildly popular, with listeners often emerging impressed by the duo's basketball acumen and high-level discussion of tactics and motivation.

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Orioles rout Yankees 17-5 to win series

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Cedric Mullins hit a two-run homer to spark a six-run second inning, Gunnar Henderson reached base four times and the Baltimore Orioles knocked out rookie pitcher Luis Gil early in a 17-5 rout of the New York Yankees on Thursday.

On a 90-degree day, the Orioles improved to 5-2 against the Yankees and set a major league record by winning their 22nd straight series against an AL East opponent. According to the Elias Sports Bureau, the Orioles surpassed the mark set by the Atlanta Braves (1998-2000), Milwaukee Brewers (1991-92) and Cincinnati Reds (1975, 1969-1970).

Henderson doubled twice among his three hits to extend the majors' longest active on-base streak to 27 games and his hitting streak to a career-high 13 games. He also added an RBI groundout in the sixth.

Ryan Mountcastle had a bases-clearing double and an RBI single in the ninth off New York catcher Jose Trevino. Anthony Santander hit a three-run homer for his MLB-best 10th homer this month as the Orioles moved to a half-game behind first-place New York.

Guardians 6, Mariners 3: Andrés Giménez hit a two-run homer and Will Brennan had a pair of solo shots, lifting American League Central-leading Cleveland to a victory over Seattle.

Gimenez's blast to right-center off Luis Castillo (6-8) provided the go-ahead run in the fifth inning, when Cleveland scored three times to take a 5-3 lead. Josh Naylor added an RBI double as the Guardians took two of three in the series.

Brennan went deep against Castillo in the second and Trent Thornton in the eighth for his first multi-homer game. He has eight on the season.

Logan Allen (8-3) pitched six innings, giving up three runs, in

winning his second straight start. Emmanuel Clase earned his 22nd save for Cleveland, which has the second-best home record in the majors at 23-9.

Diamondbacks 5, Nationals 2: Ryne Nelson pitched seven efficient innings, Christian Walker hit his team-high 17th home run in the eighth inning, and Arizona beat Washington.

Randal Grichuk drove in two runs for the Diamondbacks, who took two of three at Washington and have won seven of 10 overall.

Lane Thomas and Jesse Winker homered for the Nationals, which was denied their second chance in three days to get back to .500 for the first time since the team was 20-20 after the first game of a doubleheader May 14. The Nationals are 36-38.

Rays 7, Twins 6 (10): Jonny DeLuca's line-drive single to center field in the 10th inning and a mammoth throw from center fielder Jose Siri allowed visiting Tampa Bay to overcome a blown four-run lead in a victory at Minnesota.

Ninth-inning home runs by Jose Miranda and Carlos Santana had erased a 6-2 deficit before DeLuca connected on reliever Griffin Jax's sinker to score the automatic runner and give the Rays the lead for good. Tampa Bay (36-39) improved to a Major League-best 26-11 in games decided by two runs or fewer.

Astros 5, White Sox 3: Yordan Alvarez homered in the first inning and drove in a run during a four-run seventh as visiting Houston rallied past Chicago.

Alvarez made it 1-0 with a 439-foot drive to right against Chris Flexen for his 15th homer, and his single in the seventh tied the game at 3-all. The two-time All-Star finished with three hits after missing the previous two games for a family matter.

Alex Bregman added three hits and scored a run for the As-

tros, who won their second straight after dropping the opener of a three-game series against the team with the worst record in the majors.

Dodgers 5, Rockies 3: Shohei Ohtani led off the game with his 21st homer of the season, Will Smith and Freddie Freeman hit back-to-back homers in the fourth inning, and visiting Los Angeles beat Colorado.

Ohtani's homer was his fourth in five games, and Smith and Freeman each hit their 11th for a 5-0 lead off Ty Blach (3-5) to help the Dodgers take three of four from the Rockies.

Ohtani is 8 for 18 with two homers, three doubles and six RBIs in four games as the lead-off hitter, moving up a spot in the order after Mookie Betts broke his left hand when he was hit by a pitch Sunday.

Royals 3, Athletics 2: Freddy Fermin homered twice and Bobby Witt Jr. hit the go-ahead homer in the eighth inning as visiting Kansas City beat Oakland to avoid a three-game sweep.

Fermin also singled for his first three-hit game of the season.

Witt homered off Oakland reliever Vinny Nittoli (0-1) to break a 2-2 tie in the eighth, his 12th longball of the year.

Zack Gelof homered for the third straight game, but Oakland failed to sweep Kansas City for the first time since 2016.

The Royals haven't been swept this year.

Fermin took A's rookie Mitch Spence deep to left in the second inning and victimized Spence again in the fourth for his second career multi-homer game. He doubled his home run total this season.

Cardinals 6, Giants 5: Brendan Donovan hit a two-run homer and a double and St. Louis defeated San Francisco in the Negro Leagues tribute game at Rickwood Field on Thursday night.

The 114-year-old Rickwood

Field is the oldest professional ballpark in the U.S. and former home to baseball Hall of Famer Willie Mays and the Birmingham Black Barons of the Negro Leagues.

The first MLB game played at the ballpark was meant to honor Mays and many other Negro Leaguers, and it took on a more sentimental meaning when Mays, the electrifying center fielder who left an enduring mark on baseball, died Tuesday.

Tributes to Mays continued throughout the week in Birmingham, including a ceremony before Thursday's game.

Plenty of other Negro Leagues greats were honored, including former Black Barons player Bill Greason, who threw out the ceremonial first pitch. The game also featured the first all-Black umpire crew in AL/NL history.

Padres 7, Brewers 6: Jake Cronenworth homered with two outs in the ninth inning — San Diego's fourth homer — and they beat the NL Central-leading Milwaukee.

Cronenworth's homer, deep down the right field line off Joel Payamps (1-3), came after Fernando Tatis Jr. and Jurickson Profar struck out. It was the left-hander's 11th.

Tatis hit a 446-foot homer and added an emphatic bat flip in the fifth inning, and Manny Machado and rookie Jackson Merrill also homered for the Padres.

The Brewers scored two runs in the ninth off Jeremiah Estrada (3-1), who was trying for his second save. One run came in on a wild pitch and the second on Rhys Hoskins' double to left.

Tatis' 14th homer landed near the top of the second deck in left field at Petco Park with one out in the fifth for a 5-3 lead. He knew it was gone and tossed his bat at the end of his follow-through. Left fielder Christian Yelich barely turned around as Tatis' shot sailed high above him.

March Madness proposals submitted

Associated Press

The NCAA has presented a plan to Division I conference commissioners that would expand the lucrative men's and women's basketball tournaments by four or eight teams alongside an option to leave each field at 68 teams, according to a person familiar with the details.

The proposals were outlined to the commissioners this week by NCAA Senior Vice President of Basketball Dan Gavitt and NCAA Vice President for Women's Basketball Lynn Holzman, the person told The Associated Press on Thursday on condition of anonymity because no official announcements have been made. The news was first reported by Yahoo! Sports.

Under the proposal, expansion of the 68-team field included both four- and eight-team models. The NCAA would keep its 64-team bracket but would add play-in games involving the 10 through 12 seeds.

If the men's tournament were to expand, it is expected the

women's tourney would as well.

"It is appropriate to look at expansion, and we need to do that," Atlantic Coast Conference Commissioner James Phillips said Thursday during the Associated Press Sports Editors summer conference. "We're looking at it."

He didn't go into details on the proposal, which he said now "goes in front of the basketball committee, basketball oversight."

"When do you get to the point when the regular season doesn't matter?" he added. "Modest expansion is something I would prefer."

Many in college basketball have said they believe the 68-team fields and three weekends of play are ideal but pressure has grown to add teams and games to one of the most popular sports events on the U.S. calendar. Last year, the NCAA Division I board of directors approved recommendations that included allowing one quarter of teams in larger sports to compete in cham-

pionship events; in that scenario, March Madness tournaments could expand to nearly 90 teams.

The NCAA is currently in the midst of an eight-year extension of its TV deal for the men's tournament worth \$8.8 billion that runs through 2032. That would not be expected to change if a handful of teams are added.

More games would provide a small boost through ticket sales and merchandise, but the pool of money the NCAA uses to pay out conferences and member schools would essentially stay the same. What could change, however, is how that money would be divided up if the tournament broadens.

Expansion would also mean the men's tournament would have to find an additional site besides Dayton for its First Four games. The Ohio city already has games on Tuesday and Wednesday and wouldn't be able to host additional play-in games ahead of the tourney's traditional first-round opening on Thursday. Women's play-in games are at

the same campus sites as the first two rounds of the tournament.

Expansion is largely backed by larger conferences and smaller leagues do not want to lose the automatic bids that come with a conference tournament championship or face the prospect of always being slotted for the play-in games.

The earliest the NCAA Tournament could expand would be the 2025-26 season, the person told AP. The NCAA basketball oversight committee meets next week and the tournament selection committee has a meeting next month.

The men's tournament last expanded in 2011 when it went from 64 to 68 teams. The women's tournament matched that in 2022.

The women's tournament is coming off its most successful year ever that included a record audience of 18.7 million for the title game win by South Carolina over Iowa, the highest for a basketball broadcast of any kind in five years.

Messi, Argentina overcome Canada and poor surface

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Lionel Messi's passing brilliance got Argentina off to a winning start in the defense of its Copa America title, overcoming Canada and a poor playing surface at Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

Messi's through ball led to Julián Álvarez's 49th-minute goal and the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner assisted on Lautaro Martínez's 88th-minute score in a 2-0 victory on Thursday night.

"It's been a long time since we've done this," Messi said through a translator, "but we had patience to retain possession of the ball and it was hard to find the good open spaces."

Argentina is seeking its third straight major title after winning the 2021 Copa America and

the 2022 World Cup. Held scoreless in the first half, Argentina outshot Canada 12-3 in the second.

Albiceleste coach Lionel Scaloni and goalkeeper Emiliano Martínez both criticized the grass surface installed at Mercedes-Benz Stadium, one of the sites for the 2026 World Cup.

"The field was a disaster," Martínez said. "It seems like a springboard with the ball jumping. They need to improve this. If not, Copa America will always be at lower level than the Euro."

Grass was installed after a Major League Soccer game Saturday played on the usual artificial turf.

"Thank goodness we won. Otherwise it would have been a cheap excuse," Scaloni said.

"They knew seven months ago that we will be playing here and they changed the surface a few days ago. It's not an excuse, but this wasn't a good field. Sincerely, the field is not apt for these players."

Canadian defender Kamal Miller also was critical.

"It felt like walking on a stage, as if it was hollow," he said.

A crowd of 70,564 attended the opener of the 32-game tournament. The United States plays Panama at the stadium on June 27.

With South America's championship moved to the U.S. for the second time, Messi set a Copa America record with his 35th match, one more than Chile's Sergio Livingstone from 1941-53. Messi extended his own rec-

ord with his 18th assist.

Messi, who turns 37 on Monday, created the first goal when following a throw-in, he headed a pass through the defense for Alexis Mac Allister. The midfielder side-footed a pass to Álvarez while crashing into on-rushing goalkeeper Maxime Crépeau about 8 yards out. Álvarez had a virtually empty net and kicked the ball in over a sliding defender for his eighth goal in 32 international appearances.

Messi extended his Copa America record when he ran through the center of the midfield and rolled a perfectly weighted pass to Martínez, who had entered in the 76th minute and slotted it past Crépeau for his 25th international goal.

Tom Kim shoots 62 to lead Travelers, Scheffler 3 back

Associated Press

CROMWELL, Conn. — Scottie Scheffler and Tom Kim gorged themselves on pizza to get their shared birthday celebration out of the way before focusing on golf this week.

When they tee it up on the big day, they'll be fighting for the lead at the Travelers Championship.

Kim shot an 8-under-par 62 on Thursday in the first round at the TPC River Highlands, good for a two-stroke lead in the final limited field, no-cut signature event on this year's PGA Tour schedule. Scheffler, the world's No. 1 player, was tied for sixth, three shots back.

Kim turns 22 on Friday, and Scheffler is exactly six years older. The Dallas-area residents marked the occasion in advance by heading about 30 miles south to Sally's — a New Haven institution.

"I had a lot of pizza," Kim said. "I wouldn't do that in a tournament, but it's my birthday and it's kind of a tradition. Me, Scottie, we have the same birthday, so we had an early birthday celebration."

Kim birdied the last two holes to separate himself from the four players tied at minus-6 on the 6,835-yard, par-70 course: Rickie Fowler, Akshay Bhatia, Kurt Kitayama and Will Zalatoris.

Scheffler was among seven players at 5 under, looking again like the best player in the world a week after finishing tied for 41st at Pinehurst No. 2 — his worst performance of the year. Wyndham Clark, who tied for 56th in his U.S. Open defense, was another shot back at 4 under.

Scheffler has five wins already this year and has only missed the top ten twice — in-

cluding last week, when he posted his worst finish in nine majors since he missed the cut at the 2022 PGA Championship.

"Definitely feel like I'm swinging a lot better than I did last week," he said. "It's nice to get here on some familiar surfaces and hit some good putts and see some balls go in."

Kim was even par and tied for ninth through 54 holes at Pinehurst before closing with a 76 to finish tied for 26th. On Thursday, with temperatures in the mid-90s and little wind, he had five birdies on the back nine of a bogey-free round.

"Obviously a tough day on Sunday, but it wasn't like I was playing terrible," he said. "It wasn't a bad week, but a bad round cost me the week. ... That gives me confidence to go out and that actually I am playing well and just trying to keep riding this momentum."

King takes home an engagement ring at trials

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — On a night for doubling up at the U.S. Olympic swimming trials, Lilly King left with another big prize.

An engagement ring.

Ryan Murphy, Regan Smith, Kate Douglass and King all claimed a second individual event at the Paris Games with their performances Thursday in the temporary pool at Lucas Oil Stadium.

But the most dramatic moment came just off the deck.

King's boyfriend, former Indiana University swimmer James Wells, pulled out a ring, dropped to a knee and asked her to marry him.

She said yes with a kiss and a big hug.

"I didn't see it," Murphy said. "That's unbelievable. I'd love to hear her reaction to how it is to get proposed to completely out of breath and soaked. That's incredible. She must be riding an absolute high."

Murphy touched first in the men's 200-meter backstroke, adding to his triumph in the 100 back. Smith won the women's 200 butterfly after previously setting a world record in the 100 backstroke. And Douglass followed up her win a night earlier in the 100 freestyle with a victory in the 200 breaststroke.

King rallied to finish behind Douglass, edging Alex Walsh for the second U.S. spot at the Olympics. King had previously won the 100 breaststroke.

Murphy used his stunning underwater technique to hold off Keaton Jones and Jack Akins, finishing in 1 minute, 54.33 seconds. He punched the water in triumph when he saw his name atop the scoreboard for the second time in the meet.

"The last 25, you're just battling," Murphy said. "Nothing feels good the last 25."

Lexi Thompson shoots 68 to take lead at the Women's PGA Championship

Associated Press

SAMMAMISH, Wash. — Lexi Thompson knew some form of the question was coming after shooting a 4-under 68 and taking the first-round lead Thursday in the KPMG Women's PGA Championship.

Would a major title change her plans about retiring from playing full-time on the LPGA Tour?

"I'm just taking it one day at a time. I made my announcement. I'm very content with it," Thompson said. "Golf is a crazy game, so I'm not going to look too far ahead."

Thompson made six birdies on her way to a one-shot lead over Nelly Korda and Patty Ta-

vatanakit.

Teeing off in the afternoon as temperatures climbed into the 80s and dried out Sahalee Country Club, Thompson started hot with three straight birdies to open her round and built on last week when she lost in a playoff at the Meijer LPGA Classic.

The 29-year-old Thompson, who recently announced her plans to retire after the season, shot a bogey-free 32 on the front nine, capped with a 6-foot birdie on the par-3 ninth. After a bogey at No. 10, Thompson rebounded with birdies at Nos. 12 and 14 before another bogey at the 16th.

She won the last of her 11 LPGA Tour titles at the Shop-Rite LPGA Classic in June 2019.

The 68 is her lowest round in a major since a 67 in the second round of the Women's PGA two years ago at Congressional.

"My approach shots felt great," Thompson said. "They felt really good last week, so just trying to simplify things and get in a rhythm with my swing."

Korda shot 69 in the morning, and Tavatanakit matched it in the afternoon with a bogey-free round.

The top-ranked Korda missed the cuts in the U.S. Women's Open and the Meijer LPGA Classic in her last two starts after winning six of seven events, a run that started with a record-tying five straight victories.