

## EUCOM deputy offers Russia warning

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — The United States and its allies must prepare for a generational struggle with Russia that will endure for years regardless of how the war in Ukraine turns out, a three-star American general in Europe said this week.

Lt. Gen. Steven Basham, during an interview at his U.S. European Command headquarters in Stuttgart, said a top concern is that not everyone inside the NATO alliance grasps the magnitude of the stakes involved when it comes to dealing with Russia.

“If I were other countries out there, I’d be very worried,” Basham said Wednesday. “And I’m hoping that’s actually what the alliance really starts to understand. This is not about Ukraine. It’s about Russia.”

Basham’s warning comes as he wraps up two years of run-

ning day-to-day operations as EUCOM’s deputy commander. He held the same job at U.S. Air Forces Europe and Africa headquarters when Russia launched its February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Months before Russian forces began mounting on Ukraine’s border under the pretext of drills, it had already become clear to U.S. military leaders that Russian President Vladimir Putin was preparing to invade, he said.

“There are just certain things that you watch, and a military will do certain things if they’re actually going to go into conflict,” Basham said. “We won’t talk about this (intelligence) here. But there are clear signals.”

Those signals were evident as early as the summer of 2021, he said.

Although there’s no end in

sight to the war in Ukraine, now in its third year, a Russian defeat there wouldn’t mean an end to the threat Moscow poses to the Continent, Basham said.

“While we accept that here (at EUCOM headquarters), I don’t think others fully understand that. ... It could end either good with Ukraine or bad with Ukraine, but it doesn’t go away with Ukraine,” Basham said.

For many of the U.S.’s key allies in NATO, Russia’s invasion was a jolt that upended old assumptions about security in Europe. While the Kremlin’s initial armed incursion in Ukraine in 2014 also set off alarms, countries such as Germany were largely dismissive of the idea that Russia posed a major threat.

A reliance on cheap Russian gas and related economic ties also factored into Germany’s relaxed approach in the years fol-

lowing Moscow’s 2014 land grab.

“I can unequivocally say that, in hindsight, it would’ve been prudent to have a more robust response to the annexation of Crimea,” Chancellor Olaf Scholz admitted in a September 2022 interview with German radio.

Since Russia’s February 2022 invasion, there have been encouraging signs among allies, Basham said, pointing to a larger number of NATO members hitting the alliance’s benchmark of dedicating 2% of gross domestic product to military matters.

Yet militaries need to move with more urgency when it comes to energizing a defense industrial base, he said.

Top allied officials have conceded that supporting Ukraine has taken a toll on weapons stockpiles.

## Group urges Pentagon to review duty-station moves

By ROSE L. THAYER  
*Stars and Stripes*

An advocacy group on Wednesday called on the Defense Department to review how frequently it moves troops to new duty stations after survey results showed the moves impact the financial and emotional wellbeing of military families.

The Military Family Advisory Network found most families incur between \$500 and \$1,000 in expenses during a military move that are not reimbursed. The survey also showed families can spend up to two months in temporary lodging while they look for a house off base or wait for a home to open on base.

Half of the families who par-

ticipated in the survey said finding new housing is difficult or very difficult and when they end up in a home off base, more than half of them are spending at least \$250 more than their monthly stipend for rent or mortgage and utilities.

“We have to help people get to a place where these transitions are a little bit easier for them,” said Shannon Razsadin, CEO of MFAN.

These financial stressors created by moving have a trickle-down effect to other issues identified by the survey results such as not having enough food and spouse employment, she said.

The 2023 Military Family Support Programming Survey

is conducted every other year with the goal of understanding the experiences of military families and what isn’t working in support of the unique challenges that military service places on families. The survey specifically looks at the mental and physical health of families, housing and the ability to plan for education, financial stability and the transition into civilian life.

Two other recommendations from the survey call for the Defense Department to review compensation for troops and for the Pentagon to create a military family experience office similar to one established within the Department of Veterans

Affairs.

Nearly 10,150 people responded to the survey. About 39% identified themselves as the spouse of an active-duty service member, and 11% said they were an active-duty service member.

This was the first year that the survey asked about temporary lodging at new duty stations after hearing anecdotally from families that the time it took to find housing was getting longer, Razsadin said.

While most people, 33%, said they stayed in temporary lodging for less than 10 days, 29% said they needed it for 11 to 30 days and 20% said they needed it for 31 to 60 days.

# Navy group in Mediterranean; Eisenhower exiting

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy — A Navy amphibious group has entered the Mediterranean Sea ahead of the imminent exit of a carrier strike group that spent much of the year engaged in naval combat at a pace unseen since World War II.

The amphibious assault ship USS Wasp and dock landing ship USS Oak Hill, along with embarked elements of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, are in the Mediterranean, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet said Thursday.

Wasp transited the Strait of Gibraltar on Wednesday evening after a replenishment stop at Na-

val Station Rota in Spain. Oak Hill entered the sea on June 18, according to Gibraltar-based ship watcher Michael Sanchez.

The arrival of Wasp and Oak Hill comes as the Dwight D. Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group prepares to return to the United States after a nearly nine-month deployment in the Middle East and eastern Mediterranean.

On Thursday, Eisenhower, along with the destroyer USS Gravelly and the cruiser USS Philippine Sea, were at Naval Support Activity Souda Bay on the Greek Island of Crete.

The port visit was only the second for Eisenhower during its deployment, much of which was spent protecting commercial

shipping in the Red Sea from attack by Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen.

The carrier at one point was launching 100 flights a day up to seven days a week while fending off Houthi drone and missile attacks on mainly unarmed ships.

The Wasp ARG deployed June 1. Wasp and a third ship in the ARG, the amphibious transport dock ship USS New York, most recently participated in training in Poland as part of the NATO multinational exercise Baltic Operations 24.

It wasn't clear on Thursday whether New York would join the group in the Mediterranean.

On Saturday, the Pentagon announced that Eisenhower had

left the Red Sea and would spend a short amount of time in the eastern Mediterranean.

The carrier's return to the U.S. comes as Houthi drone and missile strikes continue in the Red Sea. The most recent attack came June 12 against a commercial ship, which sank six days later.

The aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, currently taking part in a military exercise near South Korea, is expected to replace Eisenhower in the Red Sea.

During a news briefing Monday, Pentagon spokesman Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder wouldn't say why Eisenhower was in the eastern Mediterranean or how long it will remain.

## US, S. Korea, Japan begin first large-scale exercise

By DAVID CHOI  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The United States, South Korea and Japan kicked off their first large-scale exercise Thursday with naval and air drills in undisclosed locations in waters near Seoul and Tokyo, according to the South's military.

Freedom Edge, the first large-scale, multidomain exercise between the three countries, began Thursday with three days of naval drills, the South's Ministry of National Defense said in a news release.

The drills come one day after North Korea fired an intermediate-range ballistic missile from near Pyongyang toward the Sea of Japan. The country's state-run Korean Central News Agency reported Thursday that the launch successfully tested a missile capable of carrying several independently targetable warheads.

South Korea's military on Wednesday said the missile failed and exploded in midair.

Warheads from North Korea's missile test Wednesday flew to three targets, KCNA reported. A decoy was reportedly also deployed from the missile.

The maritime portion of Freedom Edge will include the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, and destroyers USS Halsey and USS Daniel Inouye, the release said. The three U.S. warships arrived Saturday in Busan for a port call.

Two South Korean and two Japanese destroyers, as well as several maritime patrol aircraft from the two countries, will also participate, according to the South's military.

The three navies will practice ballistic missile defense, anti-submarine warfare, search-and-rescue, maritime interception and cyber defense scenarios, according to the release.

## US attorneys urging minimal damages to Red Hill plaintiffs

By WYATT OLSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

The U.S. government is urging a judge to award only a fraction of the \$7 million sought by 17 plaintiffs seeking compensation for a 2021 Navy fuel spill in Hawaii that contaminated their drinking water.

"The United States recognizes that the [plaintiffs] experienced stress, anxiety and worry in the days after they learned about the November 2021 fuel spill, and these harms entitle them to compensatory damages," Justice Department attorneys said in a post-trial defense brief filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Honolulu.

The millions of dollars in compensation the plaintiffs propose, however, "miss the mark" because many of the physical and psychological injuries claimed by them were not caused by the spill or predated it, the defense brief states.

About 7,500 individuals have joined several federal lawsuits claiming medical, emotional and financial injury from the jet fuel contamination, which originated with a spill in November 2021 at the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility a few miles from Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

The fuel seeped into one of three wells used by the Navy in its water distribution system for thousands of households on and near the joint base.

Two years after the initial contamination, the cases of 17 "bellwether" plaintiffs were heard last month during a two-week trial in Hawaii federal court. U.S. District Court Judge Leslie Kobayashi heard the case without a jury.

The plaintiffs' attorneys filed a post-trial brief June 6 and may file a rebuttal brief before July 12.

Kobayashi said she will issue a decision in subsequent weeks.

# Court OKs emergency abortions in Idaho

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court cleared the way Thursday for Idaho hospitals to provide emergency abortions for now in a procedural ruling that left key questions unanswered and could mean the issue ends up before the conservative-majority court again soon.

The ruling came a day after an opinion was briefly posted on the court's website accidentally and quickly taken down, but not before it was obtained by Bloomberg News.

The final opinion appears largely similar to the draft released early. It reverses the court's earlier order that had allowed an Idaho abortion ban to go into effect, even in medical emergencies.

It does not resolve the issues at the heart of the case, meaning the same justices who voted to overturn the constitutional right to abortion could soon be again considering when doctors can provide abortion in medical emergencies.

The ruling came in a case filed

against Idaho by the Biden administration, which argued that doctors must be allowed to provide emergency abortions under a federal law when a pregnant woman faces serious health risks.

Idaho had pushed back, arguing that its law does provide an exception to save the life of a pregnant patient and federal law doesn't require expanded exceptions.

Doctors in Idaho said the law wasn't clear on when they could provide abortions in emergencies, forcing them to airlift pregnant women to other states for emergency care on several occasions since the high court had allowed the ban to go into effect in January.

The justices found that the court should not have gotten involved in the case so quickly, and a 6-3 majority reinstated a lower court order that had allowed hospitals in the state to perform emergency abortions to protect a pregnant patient's health.

The opinion means the Idaho

case will continue to play out in lower courts, and could end up before the Supreme Court again. It doesn't answer key questions about whether doctors can provide emergency abortions elsewhere, a pressing issue as most Republican-controlled states have moved to restrict the procedure in the two years since the high court overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

In other decisions released Thursday, the court:

■ Put the Environmental Protection Agency's air pollution-fighting "good neighbor" plan on hold while legal challenges continue. It's the conservative-led high court's latest blow to federal regulations.

The justices rejected arguments by the Biden administration and Democratic-controlled states that the plan was cutting air pollution and saving lives in 11 states.

The regulation will remain on hold while the federal appeals court in Washington considers a challenge to the plan from industry and Republican-led

states.

The rule is intended to restrict smokestack emissions from power plants and other industrial sources that burden downwind areas with smog-causing pollution.

■ Rejected a nationwide settlement with OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma that would've shielded Sackler family members who own the company from civil lawsuits over the toll of opioids, but also would've provided billions of dollars to combat the epidemic.

The justices blocked an agreement hammered out with state and local governments and victims. The Sacklers would've contributed up to \$6 billion and relinquished ownership of the company but kept billions more.

The agreement provided that the company would emerge from bankruptcy as a different entity, with its profits used for treatment and prevention.

The high court had put the settlement on hold last summer, after the Biden administration objected.

## Air conditioners fly off shelves in Nashville

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — After June temperatures started reaching into the high 90s, Alexandra Mistekevic's two-bedroom apartment in Nashville became so sweltering that the air conditioning unit was only able to cool the shared living and kitchen areas.

Her 8-year-old son couldn't even sleep or play in his bedroom because it was so hot.

"My oldest one wants to go in his room, and he can't because I'm afraid he's going to get overheated," the mother of two said.

This week, Nashville and Memphis were under heat advisories as temperatures reached into the high 90s and the heat index in both cities got above 100 degrees Tuesday.

Cooling centers were opened in both cities, while Nashville's Office of Homeless Services and other community service organizations performed heat checks and offered rides to shelters and cooling centers.

Mistekevic found relief through Nashville's Metropolitan Action Commission, which offers free window AC units to seniors, families with young children and people with medical conditions that are affected by the heat.

On Tuesday, when the daily temperature topped out at 98 degrees, Mistekevic filled out an application and later the same day was able to pick up a 8,000 BTU window unit for her oldest son's bedroom.

Now she can rest better

knowing he's got a place to sleep and play with his toys, especially as the summer was just beginning to kick into high temperatures.

Temperatures in Nashville and Memphis are expected to rise again Friday into the mid to upper 90s, with more high heat days in the forecast for the following week.

Marvin Cox, the community outreach director who handles the air conditioner program, said the AC units lining the shelves in his office are a hot commodity this time of year. They gave away more than 200 units last summer and this summer have been sending them out as soon as they get new units because time is essential to preventing heat-related illnesses.

## US jobless claims down for the week

Associated Press

Fewer people applied for unemployment benefits last week, but the total number of Americans collecting jobless benefits rose to the highest level in more than two years.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that jobless claims for the week ending June 22 fell by 6,000 to 233,000 from 239,000 the previous week.

The total number of Americans collecting unemployment benefits, however, rose for the eighth straight week, to 1.84 million, for the week of June 15. That's the most since November of 2021.



# Chinese EVs could go through Mexico to bypass US rules

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — It's a scenario that terrifies America's auto industry.

Chinese carmakers set up shop in Mexico to exploit North American trade rules. Once in place, they send ultra-low-priced electric vehicles streaming into the United States.

As the Chinese EVs go on sale across the country, America's homegrown EVs — costing an average of \$55,000, roughly double the price of their Chinese counterparts — struggle to compete. Factories close. Workers lose jobs across America's industrial heartland.

Ultimately, it could all become a painful replay of how government-subsidized Chinese competition devastated American industries from steel to solar equipment over the past quarter-century.

This time, it would be electric vehicles, which America's automakers envision as the core of their business in the coming decades.

"Time and again, we have seen the Chinese government dump highly subsidized goods into markets for the purpose of undermining domestic manufacturing," Sen. Sherrod Brown, an Ohio Democrat, wrote in an April letter to President Joe Biden that called for an outright ban on Chinese electric vehicles in the U.S. "We cannot let the same occur when it comes to EVs."

Low-priced Chinese EVs pose a potentially "extinction-level event" for America's auto industry, the Alliance for American Manufacturing has warned.

The trade deal that Beijing could potentially exploit — the

U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement — was negotiated by the Trump administration and enacted in 2020. Its rules could let Chinese autos assembled in Mexico enter the United States, either duty-free or at a nominal 2.5% tariff rate. Either way, China could sell its EVs well below typical U.S. prices.

To defuse the threat, the U.S. does have options. Customs officials could rule that Chinese EVs don't qualify for the low-duty or duty-free benefits of being assembled in Mexico. U.S. policymakers could also pressure Mexico to keep Chinese vehicles out of that country. Or they could bar Chinese EVs from the U.S. on the grounds that they would threaten America's national security.

For his part, Donald Trump told Time magazine in April: "I will tariff them at 100%. Because I'm not going to allow them to steal the rest of our business."

Whatever steps the U.S. government might take, though, would likely face legal challenges from companies that want to import the Chinese EVs.

The threat from Beijing is emerging just as U.S. automakers face slowing EV sales even while investing billions to produce them in a high-priced bet that Americans will embrace battery-powered autos in the coming decades. Comparatively high prices, despite federal tax incentives for buyers, have weakened EV sales in the United States.

Optimists suggest that an influx of ultra-low-priced Chinese EVs could accelerate U.S. electric vehicle purchases, speed up investment in charging stations and force down prices.

# Fire spurs evacuations from Ore. vacation spot

Associated Press

A wildfire in Oregon's high desert, near the popular vacation destination of Bend, grew rapidly Wednesday, and officials urged the continued evacuations of hundreds of homes in the area best known for its microbreweries, hiking, river rafting and skiing on nearby Mount Bachelor.

The wind-driven Darlene 3 wildfire was just outside city limits of La Pine, about 30 miles south of Bend, and grew to nearly 4 square miles.

Video taken Tuesday showed a huge plume of thick smoke billowing behind homes, strip malls and grocery stores. Officials set up an evacuation center at a local high school and were working to get horses and other animals out of the area.

"We're doing much better

than we were yesterday," Geoff Wullschlager, city manager of La Pine, said Wednesday.

Firefighters were able to build a defense around the fire overnight, and fire managers listed the blaze at 30% contained Wednesday.

The concern, however, was stronger winds forecasted for later Wednesday, which again could fan the fire.

Evacuation alerts were sent to 1,100 homes and businesses Tuesday, said Lt. Jayson Janes of the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office. Those orders remained in effect Wednesday, Central Oregon Fire Info said. Janes said about 50-60 people sought refuge at a local high school serving as an evacuation center.

It was not known whether any structures had burned.

# No remains found in search of rubble from NM wildfires

Associated Press

No human remains have been found after search and rescue crews combed through 1,300 damaged and destroyed structures in a New Mexico mountain community hit hard by a pair of wildfires.

Authorities made the announcement Wednesday evening during a public meeting, easing the concerns of many who had been working to whittle down a list of people who were unaccounted for in the wake of evacuations that came with little warning.

The teams — with the help of specially trained dogs — spent the last few days going property to property, coming up with nothing but debris in areas where whole neighborhoods were reduced to ash and charred vehicles lined driveways or were buried under twisted metal carports.

Ruidoso Mayor Lynn Crawford also confirmed that there were now zero names left on the list of those who had been unaccounted for following the evacuations. Early on, authorities confirmed two fire-related deaths.

The mayor and other officials talked about work being done to ensure the drinking water system and electrical services can be restored at homes that were spared.

The community has about 8,000 permanent residents but that population can easily triple in the summer when tourists are looking to escape to the Sacramento Mountains or visit the Ruidoso Downs Race Track to watch the horses run.

Firefighters reported Wednesday evening that the threat from flames was all but quenched with the help of rain over recent days.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Detroit seeks to limit cannabis billboards

**M** DETROIT — Billboards advertising marijuana dispensaries have become nearly ubiquitous along Michigan's highways and some streets, and at least one elected leader wants to curtail the ads within the state's largest city.

Detroit City Councilwoman Angela Whitfield Calloway has directed the city's Law Department to draft an ordinance to ban, or restrict, further cannabis advertising on billboards.

The highly competitive and lucrative cannabis industry in Michigan, which generates \$3 billion a year, is limited in how it can advertise, leading to a saturated number of billboard ads that the state regulates but doesn't track. There is no database on how many cannabis billboards exist in Michigan.

Some of Michigan's largest cannabis business owners said their "vice" is being unfairly targeted and further regulations in Detroit would violate free speech rights.

## Patient awake for transplant – on purpose

**IL** CHICAGO — When John Nicolas went under the knife for his kidney transplant last month, the Chicago native was fully awake and aware. The 28-year-old participated in a major first for the Illinois hospital.

"Inside the operating room, it was an incredible experience being able to show a patient what their new kidney looked like before placing it inside the body," Dr. Satish Nadig, director of the Northwestern Medi-

cine Comprehensive Transplant Center, said.

Rather than using general anesthesia, the transplant surgeon and his team used a specialized spinal shot that allowed Nicolas to painlessly and safely remain cognizant for his procedure. It's a new operation designed to aid patients who face serious health risks when placed under general anesthesia.

A success, Nicolas was discharged less than 24 hours after the operation.

"It was a pretty cool experience to know what was happening in real time and be aware of the magnitude of what they were doing," Nicolas said in a news release.

## Double-booking of surgeries claimed

**TX** HOUSTON — Three Houston medical institutions have agreed to pay \$15 million to settle federal allegations that they looked the other way for years as three surgeons double-booked themselves for complex heart procedures, dipping in and out of concurrent operations and leaving unqualified residents in charge of dangerous procedures.

Three doctors — Joseph Coselli, 71, Joseph Lamelas, 63 and David Ott, 77 — routinely "engaged in a regular practice of running two operating rooms at once and delegating key aspects of extremely complicated and risky heart surgeries to unqualified medical residents," the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas said in a statement announcing the settlement.

A 2019 whistleblower complaint sparked the investigation

into practices at Baylor St. Luke's Medical Center, Baylor College of Medicine, and the Surgical Associates of Texas. The practice not only violated Medicare regulations but also jeopardized patient safety during "some of the most complicated operations performed at any hospital," federal officials said.

At least four patients died during overlapping surgeries under Ott's auspices, according to the whistleblower lawsuit that started it all, which was unsealed on Monday and obtained by the Houston Chronicle. Patients were anesthetized for longer periods of time and suffered complications.

## Court removes judge over ethics charges

**GA** ATLANTA — Georgia's highest court on Tuesday ordered the removal of an embattled county probate judge over ethics charges brought by the state's judicial watchdog agency.

The Georgia Supreme Court issued an opinion removing Douglas County Probate Judge Christina Peterson from office, effective immediately, and prohibiting her from holding judicial office in the state for seven years. The court noted that the Judicial Qualifications Commission found that Peterson "exhibited a pattern of judicial misconduct while in office."

Peterson, 38, was sworn in as probate judge in December 2020, after winning a contested Democratic primary that year and running unopposed in the November general election. She lost the Democratic primary last month in her bid for reelection.

Peterson has been plagued by ethics charges for much of her tenure and, last week, was arrested after she was accused of pushing a police officer during an early-morning scuffle at an Atlanta nightclub.

Less than a year into her four-year term, in September 2021, the Judicial Qualifications Commission filed formal charges against her, alleging violations of the Code of Judicial Conduct. The agency amended the charges in February 2022 and again in July 2022, bringing the total to 50 counts of alleged misconduct. Twenty counts were dismissed before and during a final hearing, leaving an agency panel to address 30 counts.

## Suspect rearrested after mistake at jail

**OH** CLEVELAND — A suspect in an Ohio killing who was mistakenly released from jail due to a clerical error was captured Wednesday, authorities said.

U.S. marshals arrested Amarrion Sanders, 22, of Cleveland, during a traffic stop in the city.

Sanders was mistakenly released Monday from the Cuyahoga County Corrections Center in Cleveland, where he was being held on \$1 million bail. The jail let him go after charges were dismissed against a man in an unrelated case, and that defendant's case number was somehow entered incorrectly.

Sanders' trial was due to start Aug. 19. He's charged with aggravated murder in connection with a September 2023 shooting in Cleveland and has maintained his innocence.

— From Associated Press

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# Frenchmen selected 1-2 in NBA Draft

Associated Press

NEW YORK — First, Victor Wembanyama, now Zaccharie Risacher.

These days, American college players have to wait their turn in the NBA Draft. It's someone else's time at the top.

Vive la France!

The Atlanta Hawks took Risacher with the No. 1 pick Wednesday night and France landed three players in the top six in a historic night for the country.

"That's amazing," Risacher said. "We try to represent our country and so, glad to be a part of it. You know there is more players coming in."

Risacher doesn't come with the enormous height or hype of Wembanyama, the towering center who went to San Antonio last year and went on to win the Rookie of the Year award.

But the Hawks saw him as the best choice in what has been viewed as a draft absent of elite talent.

The 19-year-old forward was the winner of the best young player award in the French League last season and beat out fellow Frenchman Alex Sarr in the race to be the top pick.

When he did, it made NBA Draft history. This is the first time that the draft has gone

consecutive years without the No. 1 pick being someone who played at an American college.

"Shows the amount of talent we have in France," Sarr said. "Really excited for Zach. I think our national team is going to be really good."

Sarr went second to the Washington Wizards after playing last year with Perth in Australia's National Basketball League.

The Hawks had only a 3% chance of winning the lottery to earn the No. 1 pick, and there was no obvious choice waiting once they did. Most mock drafts were split between Risacher and Sarr, and Atlanta also worked out UConn center Donovan Clingan.

Houston made Kentucky freshman Reed Sheppard the No. 3 pick. A one-and-done college player had topped the draft for 13 straight years from 2010-22 before Wembanyama ended that streak.

Now the draft is under French rule.

Stephon Castle of the two-time reigning national champion Huskies made it two straight college freshmen when San Antonio took him at No. 4, the Spurs' first of two picks in the top 10. They also held the No. 8 selection — though they dealt the rights to that pick, Kentucky guard Rob Dillingham,

to Minnesota.

But the Spurs are holding onto Castle, who had a phone call with Wembanyama and can now throw passes to him to ease his transition from Dan Hurley in his old home to Gregg Popovich in his new one.

"I was just playing for the best coach in college basketball and now flipping to the NBA and going to play for a legendary coach like Coach Pop, it's a blessing," Castle said.

The Detroit Pistons took Ron Holland of the G League Ignite with the fifth pick before the Hornets took Tidjane Salaün, who played last year for Cholet Basket in France.

"I think the basketball in France is improved. That's why we are here in this draft," Salaün said.

Clingan, who won titles in both seasons in Storrs, finally went to Portland at No. 7.

The draft moved to a two-night format this year, with the first round being held as usual at Barclays Center in Brooklyn and the second round to be held Thursday at ESPN's Seaport District studios.

Bronny James was not drafted in the first round, though LeBron James' son had one of his USC teammates taken just before the night ended, with Isaiah Collier going to Utah with the No. 29 selection.

## Celebrini expected to go No. 1 to Sharks in NHL Draft

Associated Press

Having a father working for the Golden State Warriors and former NBA star Steve Nash for an uncle, college hockey player of the year and the presumptive No. 1 NHL Draft pick Macklin Celebrini likes to think he's got game.

"I think it's pretty good," Celebrini said, referring to his basketball ability, before acknowledging his dad, Rick, might be a better judge. "Every time I play and he watches, he says I'm a hockey player playing basketball."

Celebrini will even happily admit to his shortcomings by shaking his head when asked how he'd fare against Steph Curry, saying, "No, I don't think that would go over very well."

Curry, Draymond Green and the rest of the NBA can breathe

easy.

At just under 6-feet and nearly 200 pounds, Celebrini isn't about to quit what is projected to be a successful and lucrative pro hockey day job in preparing for the next step in his ascension on Friday, when the first round of the NHL Draft opens at The Sphere in Las Vegas.

The San Jose Sharks hold the No. 1 pick and have already indicated their intention to choose the center. Celebrini represents the next major building block for a team that's gone five seasons without a playoff berth, with the added bonus of a homecoming of sorts.

Though from North Vancouver, British Columbia, Celebrini spent time in the Bay Area, where he played for the Junior Sharks after his father relocated the family in 2018 upon being

hired as the Warriors' vice president of player health and performance.

### Freshman shines at BU

Celebrini is coming off a celebrated freshman season at Boston University, where college hockey's youngest player last season — he turned 18 earlier this month — finished second in the nation with 32 goals and third with 64 points in 38 games. He became the fourth freshman to win the Hobey Baker Award as college hockey's MVP, while also earning Hockey East player and rookie of the year honors.

"I think we had a pretty good feeling he was going to be pretty good," Terriers coach and former NHL forward Jay Pandolfo said.

"To be able to actually handle

that pressure and keep getting better, that's not easy to do," Pandolfo added. "You could see from Day 1, when he stepped on campus and stepped on the ice where he was going to do what he does as a player. And that's very impressive. There was no intimidation at all to him."

### Decisions, decisions

The only lingering question is whether Celebrini will turn pro or return to BU for a second season.

"I believe he's ready to play at the National Hockey League level. He's physically mature and mentally mature," said Pandolfo, who is among those serving as a sounding board for the player.

Celebrini isn't rushing into making a decision, saying he wants to enjoy the process.



# Injured NBA stars set for Olympic camp

Associated Press

Kawhi Leonard, Tyrese Haliburton and Joel Embiid are all good to go for the start of USA Basketball's men's national team training camp in Las Vegas next week, the first step toward what the Americans hope is a fifth consecutive Olympic gold medal.

Leonard missed 12 of the Los Angeles Clippers' final 14 games this past season with right knee inflammation. Haliburton was hampered at the end of the Indiana Pacers' playoff run by issues with his left hamstring. And Embiid was dealing with left knee issues throughout his season with the Philadelphia 76ers.

"We expect everybody to be good to go," U.S. coach Steve Kerr said Thursday. "We've been in touch with everyone, not just those three guys. ... We've been in communication con-

stantly, so we expect all 12 guys to be ready to roll."

Leonard may have been the biggest question mark. Haliburton said when the Pacers' season ended that he thought he'd have enough time to get ready for the Olympic run, and Embiid was at the NBA Finals about two weeks ago and proclaimed himself ready for what will be his first Olympic experience.

But Leonard's status was a mystery. USA Basketball has been checking on Leonard, who has been working out for the past couple weeks, and likes where he's currently at.

"We will continue to stay in touch with the whole group as we head into Vegas next week," Kerr said.

It's a major sigh of relief for the Americans, who will go to the Paris Games as the favorite and the top-ranked men's team in the world — though nobody

expects these Olympics will be a cakewalk. France, featuring Victor Wembanyama, has the edge of being at home. Germany won the World Cup last year and has basically the same team this summer. Canada has its best shot at an Olympic medal since winning silver in 1936.

"We're well aware of the challenge we're facing," Kerr said. "The world of basketball has gotten so much better, so much stronger. We know how good these teams are, and we know we're going to have to be at our best. So, couldn't be more excited."

The U.S. still hasn't had to make any changes to the roster since it was originally announced in April, though there are contingency plans in place at every position. The original 12 names remain unchanged: Leonard, Haliburton, Embiid, Kevin Durant, LeBron James,

Stephen Curry, Anthony Edwards, Jrue Holiday, Jayson Tatum, Devin Booker, Bam Adebayo and Anthony Davis.

The group has seven players with Olympic gold medals; Durant has three, James has two, while Adebayo, Booker, Holiday, Tatum and Booker each have one.

"Every roster spot is important," Kerr said. "You just never know how these things are going to play out."

The Americans play their first exhibition against Canada on July 10, then have games at Abu Dhabi and London before the Paris Games start.

The U.S. opens Olympic play July 28 against Serbia, and will also face South Sudan and the winner of next month's qualifier in Puerto Rico — either Mexico, Lithuania, Ivory Coast, Italy, Bahrain or Puerto Rico — in its other group games.

# Ohtani considering Home Run Derby amid RBI streak

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Shohei Ohtani is rolling along for the Los Angeles Dodgers at the moment.

When it comes to the Home Run Derby, well, stay tuned.

Ohtani hit a leadoff drive against the Chicago White Sox for the second straight night Wednesday, extending his RBI streak to a franchise-record 10 games. The two-time AL MVP is batting .310 (27-for-87) with 11 homers, 23 RBIs and 25 runs in 23 games this month.

"Really my approach is to swing at strikes, and just making sure that my posture and everything else is lined up," Ohtani said through a translator.

Ohtani's latest tear has him contemplating another try at the Derby on July 15 as part of the All-Star festivities at Globe Life Field in Texas. He last participated in 2021 in

Denver, when he lost to Juan Soto in a memorable first-round showdown.

Asked by Japanese reporters about the Derby following Los Angeles' 4-3 victory at Chicago on Tuesday night, Ohtani expressed interest in the marquee event, but said he had to speak with the team about the possibility. A day later, he reiterated his thoughts.

"It hasn't really changed much since yesterday," Ohtani said after Wednesday night's 4-0 win over the White Sox. "It's something I have to talk to a lot of people about and make a decision."

Ohtani, who turns 30 on July 5, is in his first season with the Dodgers after agreeing to a \$700 million, 10-year contract in December. He isn't going to pitch this year after he had major elbow surgery in September during his final

season with the Angels — something that will assuredly come up during Derby discussions with his new team.

"The one side of it, for him to be in the Home Run Derby, it's great for baseball, clearly," manager Dave Roberts said. "The other side of it, on the manager of the Dodgers side of it, you're trying to be more cautious and appreciating the fact that there's a lot more swings, higher intensity, you know, going through the rehab process with his elbow."

"But for me, personally, it's just defaulting to the player and supporting Shohei in whatever he chooses."

Ohtani connected on a full-count cut fastball from Erick Fedde on Wednesday night, sending the ball soaring over the fence in right-center for his NL-high 25th homer. The 437-foot drive had a 113.9 mph exit velocity.

It was Ohtani's third leadoff homer this season and No. 9 for his career.

Ohtani also walked twice. He scored from first on Freddie Freeman's two-run double to right in the third inning.

"He's unbelievable. He's a freak," Dodgers catcher Austin Barnes said.

Ohtani had two hits and two RBIs in the Dodgers' win on Tuesday night. He went deep in the first inning against Chris Flexen, and then walked and scored in the third. He also hit a tiebreaking RBI single in the fourth.

Ohtani moved into the leadoff spot after Mookie Betts was sidelined by a broken left hand. He became the first player to hit a leadoff homer for the Dodgers in consecutive games since Betts on May 31 and June 2, 2023. He has driven in 17 runs during his RBI streak.

# Olympic track and field trials enter homestretch

Associated Press

EUGENE, Ore. — Sha'Carri Richardson and Noah Lyles are coming back for part two. Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone and Gabby Thomas are joining the show.

The second half of U.S. Olympic trials for track and field kicked off Thursday, and the final four days at Hayward Field will feature the full complement of America's biggest names in the sport.

Richardson and Lyles will try to earn spots in the 200 meters to go along with the titles they won in the 100 over the first weekend.

McLaughlin-Levrone will look to secure a spot in the 400-meter hurdles, the event where she holds the world record and is the reigning Olympic champion.

And Thomas will try to nail down a spot in her specialty, the 200 meters, where she won an Olympic bronze medal in Tokyo.

If any of them needed a refresher on what's really at stake, all they had to do was look at the race that closed the curtain on the first half of the action at Hayward Field. Another of America's brightest stars, Athing Mu, went

tumbling on the first lap of the 800 meters Monday night, denying her a chance at a repeat of her Olympic title.

In the United States, the top three finishers in each event make the Olympics — provided they have the Olympic qualifying standard in their event — and there are no free passes, even for the best at their craft.

"This is my 12th Olympic Games, my 47th national championship, and this is the hardest team in the world to make," said coach Bobby Kersee, who works with both Mu and McLaughlin-Levrone.

## The sure thing

After lowering the world record to 50.68 seconds at world championships in 2022, McLaughlin-Levrone basically took two years off from the 400 hurdles and left the track world wondering if she might move to another event.

Not to be. She rededicated herself to her main event, and if she fails to earn an Olympic spot — or fails to win Sunday's final — it would be as big a surprise as any at this meet. She knows there are

no sure things.

"Always respect your competitors, but know I can go out there and continue to do what I've been doing," McLaughlin-Levrone said. "So no anxiety. Just continuing to perform to the best of my ability."

## Fast company

Thomas knows she'll have her work cut out to return to the Olympics.

Among those the neurobiology major from Harvard is set to face are Richardson and Twanisha Terry, the third-place finisher in the 100. There's also McKenzie Long, the NCAA 100 and 200 champion from Ole Miss who has the fastest time this season at 21.83 seconds.

Thomas sees this as yet another indication of the strength of the sport on the women's side. It's why, once the Olympics are over, she's on board for an all-women's track meet in September.

"It's a big moment for women's sports. I'm really inspired by that," Thomas recently said. "It's a big moment for women's track and field, too. Soccer and basket-

ball, they're getting so much love right now. But track and field we have such an amazing product, especially the women — we are crushing it. I think we're fun to watch."

## Final hurdle

Hurdler Grant Holloway keeps his Olympic silver medal from Tokyo in a box. And while it does serve as motivation, the medal doesn't necessarily fuel him.

Still, that elusive Olympic gold is the only hole on the resume for one of the top 110-meter hurdlers ever. Holloway has won three straight world championships and turned in the second-fastest time ever in the event. He's also added two world indoor titles in the 60-meter hurdles to his portfolio.

"Do I look at (the Olympic medal) every day, saying it should have been mine? No," said Holloway, who's a favorite to make the team, with semifinals Thursday and the final Friday. "I feel like I've already solidified myself in that realm. Now it's just come out, do the practices and make it happen."

# Gymnastics stars battling health issues as trials begin

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Reigning Olympic champion Sunisa Lee, six-time world championship medalist Shilese Jones and national runner-up Skye Blakely are all facing health concerns ahead of the U.S. Olympic trials.

Lee, who has spent the better part of two years fighting multiple kidney issues, felt ill while training on Wednesday, though longtime coach Jess Graba doesn't believe it will hinder Lee's ability to compete when the trials begin on Friday night.

"She was a little nauseous this morning," Graba said. "She's fine. She got her assignment done. I was like, 'You don't need to keep going. Just be done.'"

The 21-year-old Lee has been dealing with kidney problems that have hindered her training and caused her weight to fluctuate wildly for more than 18 months. She arrived at trials in her hometown coming off a promising performance at the U.S. Championships, where

she was a solid fourth in the all-around while looking impressive on uneven bars and balance beam, her two best events.

"She competes well," Graba said. "She knows her scores transfer internationally well. So I think everybody is aware of that. So I think (trials is) just showing that she can be Suni (will be enough)."

Lee isn't the only contender coming in at less than 100%.

Jones, perhaps the best American gymnast not named Simone Biles, trained with her right shoulder taped to help her deal with a slight tear in her labrum.

The 21-year-old Jones pulled herself out of the U.S. Championships on the day the competition was scheduled to start earlier this month. She successfully petitioned to get into the trials, then took a week off to rest before building back up with the hope of being selected to the five-woman Olympic team on Sunday night.

"She's feeling pretty good," said Sarah

Korngold, Jones' coach. "The biggest issue right now is just like routine endurance. Like, just we don't have enough repetitions."

Korngold said Jones was in a significant amount of pain ahead of the U.S. Championships, but is in a better place during her second trip to the Olympic trials. Jones has been dealing with the shoulder intermittently for two years, with Korngold describing what happened earlier this month as a "flare-up."

"Hopefully she's proven enough to the selection committee that she does build fitness quickly and she does get in 'routine shape' fairly fast and we have more time (until Paris)," Korngold said. "So hopefully she does enough here to show that she's ready to go."

Blakely, who tore a ligament in her elbow at the 2021 Olympic trials, will miss the trials after suffering a right Achilles injury during training on Wednesday.

USA Gymnastics confirmed the injury Thursday.