

## US soldiers at Al Udeid had to act fast

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Patriot air defense crews had seconds to fire as a barrage of Iranian missiles headed toward their positions earlier this week at Al Udeid Air Base, the U.S. military installation in Qatar that serves as a command hub for all Middle East operations.

U.S. commanders had ordered an evacuation of the base in anticipation of the blitz launched Monday, which came in response to the American bombardment of the Fordo, Natanz and Isfahan nuclear sites in Iran.

Remaining at Al Udeid were 44 soldiers tasked with preventing the base's destruction.

"You know that you're going to have approximately two minutes, 120 seconds, to either succeed or fail," Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Dan Caine said Thursday at the Pentagon.

Caine's account of the events shed more light on the roles of

Air Force B-2 bomber pilots in the Sunday local time attack on the sites and the aftermath at Al Udeid.

Caine also detailed the clandestine campaign to map the terrain of the Fordo underground nuclear site and the push to develop bombs to destroy it.

The initiative started in 2009, when an officer with the Defense Threat Reduction Agency was brought into a vault at an undisclosed location and given a briefing on the massive construction project in the mountains of Iran.

The officer was tasked with studying the facility, and for more than 15 years he and one other teammate "lived and breathed this single target," Caine said.

The duo studied the geology and watched the Iranians dig it out for years.

Over time, it became clear that the U.S. military didn't

have a weapon that could penetrate the site.

That sparked an effort to build the Massive Ordnance Penetrator, a 30,000-pound bunker-busting bomb. Years of testing followed.

"And then, on a day in June of 2025, more than 15 years after they started their life's work, the phone rang and the president of the United States ordered the B-2 force that you've supported to go strike and kill this target," Caine said.

President Donald Trump's decision to strike in Iran came after weeks of fighting between Tehran and Israel, which initiated an offensive aimed at destroying Iran's nuclear program.

After the bunker-busting attack at Fordo, U.S. military bases in the region braced for retaliation.

And on Monday it came.

Among the soldiers on guard at Al Udeid, the oldest was a 28-

year-old captain and the youngest a 21-year-old private, Caine said. The Patriot crews had arrived in Qatar from South Korea and Japan to bolster defenses.

As scores of missiles approached the base, the Patriot crews fired to intercept. Caine said he was aware of reports that some of the incoming fire got through, but he suggested that it was debris.

"Between attacking missiles being hit by Patriots, boosters from attacking missiles being hit by Patriots, the Patriots themselves flying around and the debris from those Patriots hitting the ground, there was a lot of metal flying around," Caine said.

There were no reported injuries connected to Iran's missiles.

"We believe that this is the largest single Patriot engagement in U.S. military history," Caine said.

## DOD requests \$961B budget for 'China fight' with cuts

By SVETLANA  
SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department on Thursday called for a \$961.6 billion budget for fiscal 2026 that gives troops a pay raise and reallocates \$30 billion in savings from cuts to the civilian workforce, Ukraine assistance and diversity and climate programs to higher priorities.

Pentagon officials touted the spending plan as a \$1 trillion investment oriented to counter China, but that amount combines a proposed base budget of \$848.3 billion with \$113.3 billion

that the White House is seeking through a massive tax cut and spending bill yet to be passed by Congress.

The legislation provides \$150 billion for the Pentagon to spend in the next 10 years and is part of a politically divisive domestic policy mega-bill that Republicans are hoping to enact over the objection of Democrats through a process called reconciliation.

A top Senate official rejected a host of major provisions in the bill Thursday but a senior defense official speaking on condition of anonymity expressed confidence the legislation

would ultimately pass. Republicans have set a July 4 deadline for getting the measure to President Donald Trump's desk.

"We're very excited to see the Senate's progress on reconciliation, very happy that the House has been collaborating on the defense portion, and we have been working with HASC and SASC," the official said, referring to the congressional armed services committees.

Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, the Republican chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has criticized the Defense Department for factoring the bill into a budget request

that keeps spending the same as the current year, calling it a "sleight of hand."

Total spending on national defense, including certain nuclear programs run by the Department of Energy, would total \$892 billion without the reconciliation bill. Fiscal 2026 begins Oct. 1.

All service members would see a 3.8% pay boost.

The total request includes \$197.4 billion for the Army, \$292.2 billion for the Navy and Marine Corps, \$209.6 billion for the Air Force, \$39.9 billion for the Space Force and \$170.9 for defense-wide activities.

# DOD reveals new name for USNS Milk

By CAITLYN BURCHETT  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — A Navy replenishment ship that previously honored a gay rights icon will be renamed to recognize a Navy chief who received the Medal of Honor, the Pentagon announced Friday.

The USNS Harvey Milk will become the USNS Oscar V. Peterson, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced Friday via a recorded video shared on social media platform X. The announcement comes less than one month after defense officials confirmed Hegseth had ordered the sea service to strip Harvey Milk's name from the ship be-

cause it did not "align with President Donald Trump's and Hegseth's priorities."

"We are taking the politics out of ship naming," Hegseth said in the video.

The John Lewis-class replenishment oilers are designated by the Navy to be named for civil rights leaders and activists. The USNS Harvey Milk, the second ship in the class, was first named for the gay rights activist in 2016 by then-Navy Secretary Ray Mabus. Other oilers in the class are named after women's rights activists Lucy Stone and Sojourner Truth and Supreme Court justices Earl Warren, Thurgood Marshall and Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Oscar Peterson, the ship's new namesake, was a chief watertender in the Navy in 1942 during World War II when Japanese forces attacked fleet oiler USS Neosho in the Coral Sea. As a watertender and part of the ship's repair party, Peterson was responsible for the ship's boiler and fire room.

Peterson, despite being severely wounded in the attack, managed to single-handedly close the bulkhead stop valves and keep the ship operational. The rest of the repair party was unable to help Peterson because they were gravely injured, according to the Congressional Medal of Honor Society.

In closing the valves, Peterson was further wounded and burned. He died one week later from his injuries. Peterson was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

"His spirit of self-sacrifice and concern for his crew mates was in keeping with the finest traditions of the Navy," Hegseth said.

The new name follows a Pentagon review of military installations and assets. The review was conducted to ensure all Defense Department names are "reflective of the commander in chief's priorities, our nation's history and the warrior ethos," Sean Parnell, chief Pentagon spokesman, said June 3.

## Navy fiscal plan calls for purchase of 19 warships

By CAITLYN BURCHETT  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Navy is relying on the combination of the annual defense budget and supplemental legislation to buy 19 new ships in 2026, an increase from the five ships purchased in 2025 and eight ships purchased in 2024, service officials said.

The purchase of the 19 ships is outlined in the sea service's budget documents released Thursday. The Navy's fiscal 2026 budget request for the sea service and the Marine Corps totals \$292.2 billion, of which \$47.3 billion would go to building new ships.

The Navy's budget combines a \$248.9 billion base spending plan with an additional \$43.3 billion from a reconciliation bill moving through Congress.

The Navy's base budget outlines the procurement of three warships, with the separate funds supporting the purchase

of 16 additional ships.

The Navy's base budget will seek one Columbia-class submarine, one Virginia-class submarine and one ocean surveillance ship. An additional Virginia submarine and two surveillance ships would be purchased with reconciliation funds. The reconciliation funds would also purchase two destroyers, one amphibious transport dock and one amphibious assault ship.

The service is also requesting \$1.96 billion to purchase nine new medium landing ships used to transport Marines in 2026.

Included in the Navy's base budget is the planned purchase of 43 aircraft, including F-35 fighter jets, E-2D surveillance aircraft, heavy-lift helicopters and unmanned aircraft.

The Navy's proposed budget also calls for \$93.7 billion for maintenance and operations of warships, \$29.2 billion for research and development and \$7.4 billion for family housing.

## Marines seeking billions for aircraft, tech, housing

By CAITLYN BURCHETT  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Marine Corps' 2026 budget proposes spending billions of dollars in upgrades for new aircraft, new technology and improved housing facilities, continuing the service's multi-year modernization effort.

The service's \$57.2 billion budget request is part of the Navy's \$292.2 billion overall proposed spending plan for fiscal year 2026, which begins Oct. 1. The budget request reflects a more than 6% increase from the 2025 request.

The request builds on the prior year by continuing to prioritize the Marines' Force Design 2030 program, a long-term plan for the service to modernize and adapt for future warfare environments.

The overall Navy budget proposes \$17.1 billion for 43 new aircraft, 28 of which will go to the Marine Corps. A doz-

en CH-53K heavy-lift helicopters and 15 F-35 fighter jets are planned for the Marines, according to the budget documents. Additionally, the service is asking for one utility aircraft typically used to transport passengers and cargo.

The proposed budget also includes \$3.8 billion for amphibious combat vehicles, tactical vehicles and medium range intercept capability systems.

The Marine Corps also plans to direct a substantial amount of funding to personnel issues, and the budget proposes a 3.8% raise for service members across the Navy and Marine Corps.

Another \$3.4 billion is requested for the restoration and modernization of facilities as part of the Marine Corps' Barracks 2030 initiative. The funding includes \$495 million for the demolition of failing facilities.

# USAF focuses on new bomber, fighter

**By GARY WARNER**  
*Stars and Stripes*

A new strategic stealth bomber, modernized ICBM missiles, and a sixth-generation fighter are President Donald Trump's top priorities in the Air Force budget proposal for fiscal 2026 released by the Pentagon on Thursday.

The Air Force requests Congress spend \$209.6 billion — a 13.5% increase from fiscal 2025, which ends Sept. 30. It includes \$184.9 billion in the annual defense budget, supplemented with another \$24.9 billion in one-time spending included in legislation now before Congress.

To fund its priorities, the Air Force will reduce its planned pur-

chase of F-35A Lightning II fighters by 24 planes.

The budget also calls for retiring all 162 of its remaining A-10 Thunderbolt II ground attack aircraft by the end of 2027 instead of the previously planned phase-out over three years.

The budget was rolled out Thursday during an appearance by top Air Force officials at a congressional hearing and later in the day during a briefing at the Pentagon.

The budget calls for \$10.3 billion to fund the B-21 Raider, now undergoing final flight testing, which will become the Air Force's key manned bomber.

The budget also calls for mo-

dernization to keep B-52 Stratofortress bombers — originally designed in 1948 — for launching long-range cruise missiles.

Plans call for the eventual retirement of two other Air Force bombers — the B-1 Lancer and B-2 Spirit.

The Air Force is requesting \$4.2 billion to continue replacing the LGM-30 Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile with the LGM-35A Sentinel ICBM.

Cutting F-35A Lightning II fighter purchases will allow the Air Force to shift \$3.5 billion in funds to develop the sixth-generation F-47 stealth fighter, announced in March by Trump. The

development of small drones, which proved effective in attacks during the Russia-Ukraine war, will also see a boost in development funding.

The budget also calls for \$3.1 billion to continue buying 21 F-15EX Eagle II interceptors.

The money from the F-35A cuts will also go toward increased funding for the Long-Range Anti-Ship Missile and an extended-range version of the Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile. The Air Force officials said Thursday that the weapons are crucial to maintain air superiority in the vast regions of the Indo-Pacific, where China is rapidly building its forces.

## Army requesting funds for soldier pay, barracks

**By MATTHEW ADAMS**  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Army will increase pay for soldiers and spend more on barracks projects in its fiscal 2026 budget with a focus on initiatives that execute the service's new force restructuring plan.

"Our Army must transform now to a leaner, more lethal force by infusing technology, cutting obsolete systems and reducing overhead to defeat any adversary," Army Secretary Dan Driscoll said in the budget documents released Thursday.

The proposed budget of \$197.4 billion is a 6.9% increase from the budget enacted for fiscal 2025, which ends Sept. 30. The Pentagon rolled out a budget of \$848.3 billion for the Pentagon's discretionary budget, with an additional \$113.3 billion proposed in a reconciliation bill now in Congress. The combination would bring the total defense budget to \$961.6 billion.

The Army's budget increase factors in \$5.4 billion from the reconciliation bill for items

such as integrated air and missile defense, as well as munitions and its supply chain.

"We made some tough choices to shed outdated systems and programs that no longer meet our demands for the modern battlefield," said a senior Army official who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The service has come under scrutiny on Capitol Hill for its lack of details in the plan. Driscoll recently told a subpanel on the Senate Appropriations Committee that more information was forthcoming on the service's new force restructuring plan.

"What we hope you see in 10 days as we explain our changes and the recycling of this \$48 billion, this was not intended to simply be a cost-cutting exercise," Driscoll said June 18. "Every dollar is intended to help us innovate and move forward to face threats around the world."

The service will invest \$8.9 billion in developing warfighting capabilities.

## Space Force requests \$39.9B, with funds for 'Golden Dome'

**By ROSE L. THAYER**  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Space Force released the largest funding request in its six-year history Thursday, asking Congress to approve \$39.9 billion to spend next year as the service takes on new mission requirements including a massive "Golden Dome" missile defense shield.

It is a 30% increase in spending from fiscal 2025, according to the Defense Department.

"To be successful in our expanding mission portfolio, we must be able to control the space domain — protecting our capabilities in space while denying an adversary the opportunity to use space against us," Gen. Chance Saltzman, chief of space operations, told members of the Senate Committee on Appropriations' subpanel on defense.

Space Force accounts for about 3% of the \$961.6 billion requested for the Defense Department for fiscal 2026, which begins Oct. 1, according to a briefing Thursday with defense officials. With about 9,400 guardians, its personnel are less than 1% of all service members.

The Space Force budget includes \$26.1 billion in discretionary spending and \$13.8 billion for mandatory spending, according to the Air Force, which oversees the Space Force.

As of Thursday afternoon, the Air Force had not yet released documents detailing exactly how the Space Force planned to spend its requested funding.

However, defense officials outlined \$15.1 billion to counter cyber threats that threaten military operations.

A defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity said the service requested funds that will go toward capabilities that support the Golden Dome, though the person declined to say how much. The Golden Dome is budgeted for a \$25 billion initial investment within a separate spending proposal pending in Congress.

President Donald Trump campaigned on building the missile defense dome, which is envisioned as a ground- and space-based system that can detect and destroy missiles fired at the United States.



# Senate GOP advances Trump's big bill

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Capping a tumultuous night, the Republican-controlled Senate advanced President Donald Trump's package of tax breaks, spending cuts and increased deportation money, with more weekend work ahead as Congress races to meet his Fourth of July deadline for passage.

By a 51-49 tally and with Vice President JD Vance at the Capitol to break a potential tie, the Senate cleared a key procedural step Saturday as midnight approached. Voting had come to a standstill, dragging for more

than three hours, with holdout senators huddling for negotiations and taking private meetings off the Senate floor. In the end, two Republicans opposed the motion to move ahead on Trump's signature domestic policy plan, joining all 47 Democrats.

"Tonight we saw a GREAT VICTORY in the Senate," Trump said in a social media post afterward.

Republicans are using their majorities in Congress to push aside Democratic opposition, but they have run into a series of political and policy setbacks.

Not all GOP lawmakers are on board with proposals to reduce spending on Medicaid, food stamps and other programs as a way to help cover the cost of extending some \$3.8 trillion in Trump tax breaks.

Trump had lashed out against holdouts, threatening to campaign against one Republican, Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina, who had announced he could not support the bill because of Medicaid cuts that he worried would leave many without health care in his state. A new analysis from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office

said the Senate version of the bill would increase by 11.8 million the number of people without health insurance in 2034.

Tillis and Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., voted "no."

Renewed pressure to oppose the 940-page bill came from Elon Musk, who criticized it as "utterly insane and destructive."

Ahead for senators now was to be an all-night debate and amendments. If they are able to pass it, the bill would return to the House for a final round of votes before it could reach the White House.

## Caine visits Navy destroyer in Greece, praises crew

**BY ALISON BATH**

*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy — The nation's highest-ranking military officer met with Navy sailors aboard a destroyer supporting Israel's defense in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea on Sunday.

Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, visited USS Thomas Hudner while the ship was in port at Naval Support Activity Souda Bay on the Greek island of Crete, the Navy said in a statement the same day.

Caine and Adm. Stuart

Munsch, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa, thanked crew members for their contributions in support of Defense Department and Navy operations, the service said.

Thomas Hudner sailors "have made tremendous contributions to America's, and the region's, security," Caine said in the statement, adding that he was proud of crew members and grateful for their service.

Thomas Hudner is one of five ballistic missile defense destroyers operating in the East-

ern Mediterranean to help defend Israel against Iranian attacks and promote regional stability, according to the statement.

The other destroyers are USS Arleigh Burke, USS Paul Ignatius and USS Oscar Austin, all homeported at Naval Station Rota in Spain. The fifth destroyer, USS The Sullivans, is homeported in Mayport, Fla.

Since June 14, the destroyers, including Thomas Hudner, have shot down multiple Iranian ballistic missiles, the Navy said. It did not specify the num-

ber intercepted by each ship.

The destroyers were sent to the region as increasing hostilities between Israel and Iran earlier this month threatened to ignite a broader conflict in the Middle East. The 12-day war ended in a ceasefire on June 24.

The move also came as the U.S. bombed Iranian nuclear facilities on June 22. Iran retaliated two days later by firing a barrage of missiles at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, which resulted in no casualties. The base serves as the U.S. command hub for the Middle East.

## Trump aims to challenge blocks on his top priorities

*The Washington Post*

An emboldened Trump administration plans to aggressively challenge blocks on the president's top priorities, from immigration to education, following a major Supreme Court ruling that limits the power of federal judges to issue nationwide injunctions.

Government attorneys will press judges to pare back the dozens of sweeping rulings thwarting the president's agenda

"as soon as possible," said a White House official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe internal deliberations.

Priorities for the administration include injunctions related to the Education Department and the U.S. DOGE Service, as well as an order halting the dismantling of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the official said, detailing efforts to implement plans President Donald Trump an-

nounced Friday.

"Thanks to this decision, we can now promptly file to proceed with numerous policies that have been wrongly enjoined on a nationwide basis," Trump said at a news conference, during which he thanked by name members of the conservative high court majority he helped build.

Trump on Friday cast the narrowing of judicial power as a consequential, needed correction in his battle with a court sys-

tem that has restrained his authority.

Scholars and plaintiffs in the lawsuits over Trump's orders agreed that the high court ruling could profoundly reshape legal battles over executive power that have defined Trump's second term — even as other legal experts said the effects would be more muted. Some predicted it would embolden Trump to push his expansive view of presidential power.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Wet spring could mean more snake bites

**CO** DENVER — A relatively wet spring in Colorado could mean a more severe than usual snake-bite season, but at least half of bites are preventable, one expert said.

Most snake bites in Colorado happen between May and October, after which cold temperatures push rattlesnakes to curl up and reduce their activity, said Dr. Kennon Heard, a professor of medical toxicology and pharmacology at the University of Colorado School of Medicine.

A 2018 study involving researchers at CU Boulder and Stanford University found that relatively wet weather increased the number of snake bites, at least in California. They attributed it to an increase in populations of mice and other small rodents that snakes eat, which don't do as well in drought conditions.

About half of snake bites in Colorado originate with someone trying to handle a snake, either to move it off a trail or to play with it, Heard said. Other bites aren't as preventable, but people can reduce the risk by watching where they walk and not reaching somewhere they can't see, such as under a bush, he said.

### State redefines natural gas as green energy

**LA** BATON ROUGE — Louisiana is the latest state to redefine natural gas as green energy under a new law the Republican governor signed last week, even though it's a fossil fuel that emits planet-warming greenhouse gases.

Three other states led by Re-

publicans — Indiana, Ohio and Tennessee — have passed similar legislation. In some Democratic-led states, there have been efforts to phase out natural gas. New York and California cities like San Francisco and Berkeley have moved to ban natural gas hookups in new buildings, though some of these policies have been successfully challenged in court.

Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry, a major booster of the state's petrochemical industry, says the new law "sets the tone for the future" and will help the state "pursue energy independence and dominance."

### Suit: Anti-DEI law a threat to First Amendment

**AL** BIRMINGHAM — Professors and students at the University of Alabama testified on Thursday that a new anti-diversity, equity and inclusion law has jeopardized funding and changed curriculum, as a federal judge weighs whether the legislation is constitutional before the new school year begins.

The new state law, SB129, followed a slew of proposals from Republican lawmakers across the country taking aim at DEI programs on college campuses. Universities have shuttered or rebranded student affinity groups and DEI offices.

The law prohibits public schools and universities from using state funds for any curriculum that endorses or compels assent to viewpoints about eight "divisive concepts" related to race, religion, gender identity and religion. Instructors are also prohibited from encouraging a person to feel guilt because of those identities. Schools are still

allowed to facilitate "objective" discussions on those topics, according to the law.

### Judge blocks social media age verification law

**GA** ATLANTA — Georgia has become the latest state where a federal judge has blocked a law requiring age verification for social media accounts.

Like in seven other states where such laws have been blocked, a federal judge ruled Thursday that the Georgia law infringes on free speech rights.

The ruling by U.S. District Judge Amy Totenberg means that the Georgia measure, which passed in 2024, won't take effect this week as scheduled. Instead, Totenberg granted a preliminary injunction blocking the law until there's a full ruling on the issue.

Georgia's law would require some social media providers to take "commercially reasonable" steps to verify a user's age and require children younger than 16 to get parental permission for accounts. It was challenged by NetChoice, a trade group representing online businesses.

### Three Mile Island reactor set to reopen in 2027

**PA** HARRISBURG — Three Mile Island's Unit 1 reactor is now set to open a year ahead of schedule.

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro, energy officials, and tech executives celebrated the planned reopening and shared plans to reopen Three Mile Island Unit — now called the Crane Clean Energy Center — as early as 2027.

The 837-watt reactor was de-

commissioned in 2019, after 45 years of operation. It is located at a separate facility from Unit 2, which closed in 1979 after a partial meltdown. Constellation Energy Corp., the Baltimore-based owner of the plant, signed a 20-year contract with Microsoft, under which the tech company will buy energy from the facility to power its data centers.

Shapiro said the project is part of his goal to grow Pennsylvania's energy portfolio. Earlier this year, he introduced his "Lighting Plan," which seeks to expand renewable energy production in the state, through tax credits and more streamlined permitting processes.

### Home reportedly owned by Brad Pitt ransacked

**CA** LOS ANGELES — Police are investigating a break-in at a home reportedly owned by Brad Pitt, who has been on a globe-spanning promo tour for his new movie, "F1."

The Los Angeles Police Department confirmed they responded to a break-in Wednesday night at a house in the Los Feliz neighborhood of Los Angeles. Three suspects broke into the residence through the front window, ransacked the home and fled with miscellaneous property, said Officer Drake Madison.

Madison said he could not identify who owned or lived in the home, and no information is currently available on what was stolen.

Pitt reportedly bought the home for \$5.5 million in April 2023, according to Traded, a commercial real estate website.

— From wire reports

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# Gauff, Alcaraz give tennis 2 young stars

Associated Press

LONDON — Coco Gauff and Carlos Alcaraz are helping usher in a new era for tennis.

With Wimbledon beginning Monday, the sport's most recent Grand Slam champions are Gauff, a 21-year-old American, and Alcaraz, a 22-year-old Spaniard, who are both at No. 2 in the rankings and are both coming off French Open titles secured in riveting finals against the sport's No. 1 players.

They are young, they are charismatic as can be on the court and they are media-friendly off it.

Along with No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka and former No. 1 Iga Swiatek in the women's game and No. 1 Jannik Sinner in the men's, Gauff and Alcaraz offer a bright future for a sport's fanbase that in recent years saw all-time greats Serena Williams, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal walk away and currently might be pondering how much longer Novak Djokovic will contend for the biggest prizes.

"Tennis is just in such a great, great place right now. We are so fortunate to have not only Coco, not only Carlos, but a deep bench

of young stars that are just propelling the growth of our sport," U.S. Open tournament director Stacey Allaster said. "I've been around a long time, and when we have lost great, iconic champions in the past, there's generally been a little bit of a dip. We have had the exact opposite during this transition. ... I always like to say the champions of today are standing on the shoulders of the champions of the past. These champions have jumped off the shoulders of the past champions."

One key for a sport, especially an individual one, to gain attention and grow popularity is to have rivalries that demand buy-in.

Alcaraz vs. Sinner clearly provides that, much in the way that Federer vs. Nadal or Nadal vs. Djokovic did.

The five-set, 5½-hour men's final at Roland-Garros was as full of momentum swings, terrific tennis and athleticism as anything those greats conjured.

"The level," two-time reigning Wimbledon champion Alcaraz said, "was insane."

The way he and Sinner, 23, are

currently divvying up the biggest prizes — they've split the past six major trophies and eight of the past 11 — is certainly reminiscent of the Big Three's dominance, albeit over a much smaller sample size so far.

"Having these two guys fighting for big trophies — I think we have to be very happy about it in the sport of tennis," said Juan Carlos Ferrero, Alcaraz's main coach. "For them, for sure it's something that they raise their level every time that they go on the court. They know they have to play unbelievable tennis to beat the other guy, and it's something that is going to help for sure each player to raise the level even more."

It sure does seem as though Gauff vs. Sabalenka could provide that sort of dynamic and buzz, too.

Consider that, like Alcaraz and Sinner, they occupy the top two spots in the rankings. And consider that, like those other two, both own multiple major titles. Gauff's two Slam triumphs came via three-set victories over Sabalenka in the finals.

Plus, their latest meeting, at

Roland-Garros less than a month ago, came with some added spice because of Sabalenka's post-match comments that were seen as less than fully gracious toward Gauff.

It became such a thing that Sabalenka felt the need to issue a pair of apologies — one privately via writing to Gauff, and one publicly in an interview at her next tournament.

Add that sort of off-court intrigue to the on-court interest, and if there are rematches at the All England Club, no one who is invested in tennis will be displeased.

"There's incredible momentum and wind in our sales as we think about the sport, in total," said Lew Sherr, who is about to leave his role as the CEO of the U.S. Tennis Association. "We've had five consecutive years of participation growth ... and that certainly is being, in part, fueled by the great talent and inspiring players we have at the professional level, and also is feeding record attendance, record interest, record viewership. Those things go hand in hand. We have not missed a beat."

## Confident Djokovic seeks record 25th Grand Slam title

Associated Press

LONDON — It's become part of Novak Djokovic's routine now, particularly at Grand Slam tournaments: He shows up and gets asked — at the start of the event, during the event, after the event or sometimes all three — whether this will be his final appearance there.

It happened again Saturday at Wimbledon, and his response was the same it tends to be, which essentially amounts to: Who can tell?

"Whether it could be my 'last dance,'" the 24-time major champion began, repeating the phrase used by the reporter who posed the question, "I'm not sure — as I'm not sure about Roland Garros or any other Slam that I play next."

And then Djokovic continued, offering something of a mix of seemingly trying to quiet any talk about whether he truly is pon-

dering retirement at age 38 while also being realistic about where things stand.

"My wish is to play for several more years. I would love to be healthy physically and also mentally motivated to keep on playing at the highest level," he said. "That's the goal. But you never know at this stage."

What Djokovic did concede is that the All England Club might offer the likeliest spot for him to gather one more Grand Slam singles title, which would allow him to raise his career haul to 25 — a number that no tennis player ever has reached.

"I would probably agree that Wimbledon could be the best chance, because of the results I had, because of how I feel, how I play in Wimbledon," said Djokovic, who faces Alexandre Muller in the first round Tuesday. "Just getting that extra push mentally and motivation to perform the best tennis at the highest level."

Djokovic has won seven championships at the grass-court major and come oh-so-close to making his total eight — the same number Roger Federer won, and one behind Martina Navratilova's record nine women's trophies — but lost in the 2023 and 2024 finals to Carlos Alcaraz.

All told, Djokovic has appeared in the title match each of the past six times the tournament was held (it was canceled in 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic), winning it in 2018, 2019, 2021 and 2022. His most recent Wimbledon loss came all the way back in 2017, when he was defeated in the quarterfinals by 2010 runner-up Tomas Berdych.

As for the persistent questions about Djokovic's future, it's the same type of topic that was presented to Federer, Rafael Nadal and Serena Williams as those greats of the game neared their farewells.

Now it's just Djokovic's turn.



# Elliott ends slump with victory at Atlanta

Associated Press

HAMPTON, Ga. — Home-state favorite Chase Elliott passed Brad Keselowski on the final lap and won the crash-filled NASCAR Cup Series at Atlanta on Saturday night for his 20th career victory.

Elliott, the popular driver from Dawsonville, Ga., earned a spot in the NASCAR playoffs with his first victory since April 2024 at Texas. It was his first win in Atlanta since 2022.

"I've never in my whole life, this is unbelievable," Elliott said. "This is something I'll remember the rest of my life."

Keselowski was second, followed by Elliott's Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet teammate, Alex Bowman, and Tyler Reddick. Bowman helped block Keselowski following Elliott's last-lap pass.

"The 48 and 9 just got together," Keselowski said, referring to Bowman and Elliott. "... At they end they were able to double-team me."

Elliott climbed into the stands

to celebrate with fans after ending a 44-race winless streak.

"I'm happy for the 9 team," Bowman said. "It's a big win for him in his hometown. ... I'm glad to have a Hendrick car in victory lane. I wish it was us."

The race's second crash early in Stage 2 took out many of the sport's biggest names and left others with damaged cars.

Pole-winner Joey Logano, who led the first 36 laps before light rain forced the first caution, was among the many drivers caught up in the big crash.

Among others knocked out of the race: William Byron, Austin Cindric, Ross Chastain, Josh Berry, Corey LaJoie and Daniel Suarez.

The Atlanta race at EchoPark Speedway, formerly known as Atlanta Motor Speedway, was the debut of the 32-driver In-Season Challenge, a five-race, bracket-style tournament.

The parade of highly regarded drivers to be knocked out so early in the race showed the perils of trying to pick NASCAR

winners on a March Madness-style bracket sheet. The top two seeds were among the early casualties.

Hamlin, the No. 1 seed in the tournament, finished 31st and lost to Ty Dillon, who finished eighth.

Chase Briscoe, who held off Hamlin for his first win for Joe Gibbs Racing last week at Pocono Raceway, was the No. 2 seed before being knocked out in a crash and losing to Noah Gragson in the tournament.

A \$1 million prize awaits the winner as part of a new media rights deal that includes TNT.

Elliott and Keselowski were on the front row when a caution with 33 laps to go forced a decision on whether to pit for fresh tires. Both stayed on the track and Elliott faded following the restart until making his decisive charge at the very end.

## Bracket busters

Ryan Blaney, the race favorite according to BetMGM Sportsbook, was knocked out on a

wreck late in the first stage. Christopher Bell hit the wall, triggering the crash that ended the stage with Cindric in the lead.

Cindric was involved in the bigger crash in Stage 2. That crash also claimed Kyle Busch, Denny Hamlin and Bubba Wallace.

## Photo finish

Tyler Reddick beat Elliott to the finish line by .001 seconds to win Stage 2 in a battle between drivers looking for both their first stage win and overall win of the season.

## Weather woes

Lightning and rain delayed qualifying Friday and the Xfinity race won by Nick Sanchez late Friday night. More lightning and rain threatened Saturday night's race. Fans were encouraged to leave the stands about 90 minutes before the race due to severe weather in the area but were allowed to return as pre-race were conducted as planned.

# Topuria makes pound-for-pound case with 1st-round KO

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Ilia Topuria continued his ascension up the pound-for-pound ladder with a major statement via a vicious first-round knockout of Charles Oliveira to win the vacant lightweight championship Saturday night at UFC 317.

Topuria used a devastating right hand before finishing with a left hook to drop Oliveira and end the bout at the 2:27 mark of the opening round, fulfilling his prediction of a first-round KO while sending the announced crowd of 19,800 into a frenzy.

Topuria (17-0), who now has 10 first-round finishes to his credit, moved up to the 155-pound weight class following a successful campaign in the featherweight division last year.

He claimed that belt with a sec-

ond-round knockout of Alexander Volkanovski and defended his title by finishing Max Holloway in the third round of an October bout in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Topuria, who came in ranked fourth on UFC's pound-for-pound list, joined nine others who have held a UFC belt in two weight classes. He is the first undefeated fighter to become champion in two UFC divisions.

Oliveira (35-11), who has the most finishes in UFC history, was hoping to become the first fighter to win the lightweight belt on separate occasions.

Fellow lightweight Paddy Pimblett was in the audience and summoned to the ring, where a heated exchange led to Topuria shoving the eighth-ranked contender and igniting a rivalry

from years ago.

White wasn't happy with Pimblett getting in the ring, knowing the history of bad blood between the two.

The pair have been at odds for some time, after they came to blows when Pimblett threw a bottle of hand sanitizer at Topuria's head in 2022.

In the co-main event, flyweight champion Alexandre Pantoja (30-5) successfully defended his belt by applying a rear-naked chokehold to defeat Kai Kara-France (25-12) at 1:55 of the third round.

It marked the second time the fighters met, nine years after their quarterfinal clash on the reality show "The Ultimate Fighter," also won by Pantoja, but by unanimous decision.

Pantoja closed a -250 favorite

and extended his win streak to eight fights. The 35-year-old Brazilian was joined in the ring after his victory by No. 12 Joshua Van, who put on a show of his own.

Van (15-2-0) defeated No. 1 contender Brandon Royval (17-8-0) in a slugfest in which both fighters displayed incredible boxing skills. Van, who closed a -120 favorite, used an overhand right to drop Royval before closing out the bout with a severe ground-and-pound to secure the unanimous decision.

The 419 combined significant strikes landed were the third most in a UFC fight, and the most in both a three-round bout and a featherweight clash.

Moments after Pantoja's win, Van challenged Pantoja with both standing nose to nose before exiting the octagon.

# Royals come back after Ohtani's solid start

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Vinnie Pasquantino homered, doubled and drove in a career high-tying five runs, and the Kansas City Royals beat Shohei Ohtani and the Los Angeles Dodgers 9-5 on Saturday to snap an 11-game home losing streak.

Ohtani made his third start of the season and threw the fastest pitch of his career, a 101.7 mph fastball that induced an inning-ending double-play grounder by Pasquantino in the first.

"I'm happy that I was able to attack the zone," Ohtani said through an interpreter. "There's some little things that I still need to work on, but overall I'm pretty happy."

The Dodgers' two-way superstar threw 27 pitches in two scoreless innings. He is working as an opener as he eases back into pitching following Tommy John surgery in 2023. Ohtani went 0-for-4 with three strikeouts as Los Angeles' leadoff batter.

"Getting Shohei through two innings throwing the ball the way he did is certainly a positive," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. "I didn't know it was 102 (mph). I just saw 100, so, no, I didn't expect that. Now I'm going to keep my fingers crossed that he feels good coming out of today."

Pasquantino's 430-foot, three-run blast to right-center off Ben Casparius (6-2) capped a four-run fifth inning for the Royals, who won at Kauffman Stadium for the first time since May 31. They ended a six-game skid overall.

Freddie Freeman went 3-for-3 with a homer for LA, which saw its five-game winning streak end. Infielder Miguel Rojas pitched the eighth.

Seth Lugo (5-5) threw 5½ scoreless innings, allowing four hits and five walks while striking out eight.

**Tigers 10, Twins 5:** Zach McKinstry had three hits, including one of host Detroit's four

home runs, and the Tigers went on to beat Minnesota.

Casey Mize (8-2) gave up two runs on five hits and one walk in 6⅔ innings.

Detroit took a 1-0 lead in the second when Spencer Torkelson doubled and scored on a sacrifice fly.

**Cubs 12, Astros 3:** Kyle Tucker launched a three-run homer and matched a season high with four hits against the team that traded him in December, and visiting Chicago routed Houston to stop the Astros' five-game winning streak.

Tucker also scored four times to pace a Cubs lineup that pounded out 15 hits, including three by Dansby Swanson.

The offensive outburst came in support of Colin Rea (5-3), who allowed two runs and five hits over five innings.

**Rays 11, Orioles 3:** Jonathan Aranda and Yandy Díaz each homered, Zack Littell pitched seven strong innings and visiting Tampa Bay beat Baltimore.

Littell (7-7) gave up one run and three hits with two walks. It was the fifth time Littell has gone at least seven innings this season.

The Rays grabbed the lead two batters into the game against Zach Eflin (6-6) when Josh Lowe doubled and scored on Brandon Lowe's single that extended his hitting streak to 15 games.

**White Sox 1, Giants 0:** Adrian Houser pitched seven sharp innings and Andrew Benintendi homered in the sixth as host Chicago beat San Francisco.

Houser (3-2) allowed four hits and a walk while striking out five before giving way to Grant Taylor.

Benintendi hit his 10th home run — a two-out shot to right-center field on a 2-0 pitch from Robbie Ray (8-3).

**Athletics 7, Yankees 0:** Brent Rooker ended Clarke Schmidt's scoreless streak at 28⅓ innings with a solo homer in the fourth inning, Nick Kurtz added a three-run drive in the sixth and

the visiting Athletics beat New York.

Schmidt (4-4) had an extra day of rest after he threw a career-high 103 pitches over seven no-hit innings against Baltimore on June 21. He gave up four runs and four hits in six innings.

**Brewers 5, Rockies 0:** Quinn Priester struck out a career-high 11 batters in seven innings of one-hit ball, Joey Ortiz homered for the third time in four games and Milwaukee extended its winning streak to four with a home victory over major league-worst Colorado.

Priester (6-2) allowed a one-out single to Michael Toglia in the fifth and walked a pair while throwing 95 pitches in the longest and best start of his three major league seasons.

**Marlins 8, Diamondbacks 7 (10):** Agustín Ramírez hit a run-scoring single in the 10th inning, Heriberto Hernández had a tying sacrifice fly in the ninth and visiting Miami stretched its winning streak to six games with a victory over Arizona.

The Diamondbacks led 7-3 entering the eighth inning, but the Marlins' Otto Lopez hit a two-run homer off Jalen Beeks and Liam Hicks followed with a run-scoring single to pull Miami to 7-6.

**Red Sox 15, Blue Jays 1:** Wilyer Abreu hit a three-run homer in the first inning to jump start Boston's offense, Ceddanne Rafaela added a two-run shot in the sixth, and the host Red Sox snapped a season-high six-game losing streak with a victory over Toronto.

Chris Bassitt (7-4) lasted two-plus innings, getting tagged for nine runs, eight earned, with eight hits and four walks.

**Cardinals 9, Guardians 6:** Victor Scott II had two hits and two RBIs as visiting St. Louis rallied for a 9-6 victory over Cleveland.

Masyn Winn added three hits for the Cardinals, and Brendan Donovan and Willson Contreras both homered. Donovan and Alec Burleson each drove in two runs.

**Padres 6, Reds 4:** Gavin Sheets hit a go-ahead three-run homer in the seventh inning, and visiting San Diego rallied past Cincinnati.

Jake Cronenworth took Scott Barlow deep in the sixth for a two-run shot that got the Padres within 4-3.

**Rangers 3, Mariners 2 (10):** Marcus Semien had an RBI single with the bases loaded in the 10th inning and host Texas beat Seattle.

Mariners reliever Andrés Muñoz (3-1) hit Josh Smith with his first pitch after striking out Sam Haggerty to begin the 10th. Corey Seager — who homered in the third to give the Rangers a 2-1 lead — fell behind in the count 1-2 before working a walk to load the bases with one out for Semien.

**Pirates 9, Mets 2:** Andrew McCutchen and Bryan Reynolds hit consecutive two-run doubles during a six-run eighth inning as host Pittsburgh pulled away for a victory over New York.

The Pirates led 3-2 when Ke'Bryan Hayes singled in a run before McCutchen and Reynolds broke open the game. Hayes also had an RBI single in a three-run second that put Pittsburgh ahead 3-1.

**Braves 6, Phillies 1:** Spencer Schwellenbach struck out a career-high 12 and Sean Murphy hit a grand slam as host Atlanta bounced back from an embarrassing loss to beat Philadelphia.

Schwellenbach (7-4) gave up one run, three hits and one walk in seven innings.

**Angels 8, Nationals 2:** Mike Trout hit a tying homer that sparked a six-run seventh inning, Kevin Newman added a three-run shot and host Los Angeles rolled to a victory over Washington.

Kyle Hendricks gave up one run in five innings and rookie Christian Moore delivered the go-ahead single with two outs in the seventh. Gustavo Campero also homered for the Angels.