

US, S. Korea scale back annual drills

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — The South Korean and U.S. militaries are scaling back their annual exercises this month due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to support diplomacy focusing on North Korea's nuclear program, officials said Sunday.

Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement that the allies decided to start the nine-day drills on Monday after reviewing factors like the status of the pandemic and diplomatic efforts to achieve denuclearization and peace on the Korean Peninsula.

It said the drills are defensive in nature and are mostly tabletop exercises and simulations that won't involve field training.

Last year, the allies canceled their springtime drills after some of their troops were infected with the coronavirus. In recent years, the countries have also suspended or downsized many of their regular training to

create more space for the now-stalled U.S.-led diplomatic drive to convince North Korea to denuclearize in return for economic and political incentives.

U.S.-South Korea drills have been a major source of animosities on the peninsula, with North Korea viewing them as invasion rehearsals and responding with its own weapons tests. In January, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un urged the U.S. to withdraw its hostile policy and South Korea to end drills with the U.S., warning the fate of their relations with North Korea depends on how they behave.

Some experts have said Kim may resume high-profile missile tests and raise tensions if he feels provoked by the upcoming drills, one of the two major military exercises between Seoul and Washington along with their summertime training.

The nuclear negotiations have been

stalled for about two years since a February 2019 summit between Kim and then President Donald Trump collapsed due to wrangling over U.S.-led sanctions on North Korea. The government of South Korean President Moon Jae-in, which facilitated the early part of the U.S.-North Korea talks, has been calling for the diplomacy's restart and greater inter-Korean ties.

A South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff officer said that Seoul and Washington decided to "minimize" the number of troops participating in this month's drills because of the pandemic.

The officer, who requested anonymity citing a department rule, said the allies have been staging field exercises throughout the year to maintain their readiness, rather than holding them intensively in certain periods, in an apparent reference to the spring and summer drills.

INDOPACOM: Guam defense is priority in deterring China

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

The head of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command sees one overriding and essential first step in deterring China's military expansion in the Pacific.

"Funding for the air and missile defense of Guam is my No. 1 priority," Adm. Philip Davidson said Thursday during a virtual talk hosted by the American Enterprise Institute, a Washington D.C.-based think tank.

"Guam is absolutely critical in maintaining deterrence and stability in the region," he said. "It's our most critical operating location west of the International Date Line."

The U.S. territory is "a critical nexus for command and control, for logistics and sustainment and for our power projection," Davidson said. The small island is home to a deep-water port, Naval Base Guam

and Andersen Air Force Base.

The best means of protecting the island is the "highly capable, adaptable and proven" Aegis Ashore missile defense system, which defends against short- to intermediate-range ballistic missiles, he said.

The \$1.6 billion Aegis Ashore system tops the list Davidson submitted to Congress last week in his assessment of warfighting resources needed under the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, which was created a year ago and aimed toward China.

The assessment, which looks out five years, was required by the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act that passed in January. It requests \$4.68 billion for fiscal year 2022 and another nearly \$23 billion for the five years through fiscal year 2027.

"We took an approach that concentrated on the invest-

ments that were absolutely needed out here from a joint-integration perspective," Davidson told the virtual audience from his headquarters in Honolulu, where he has commanded since 2018. He will step down from the position later this year.

Aegis Ashore would bring the same defensive capabilities to Guam as are now being provided by three Navy guided-missile destroyers, Davidson said.

"We need to free up those guided-missile destroyers who have multi-mission capability to detect threats and finish threats under the sea, on the sea and above the sea," he said.

Untethered from Guam, those destroyers will move with the Navy forces they were designed to protect from ballistic missile attacks in the first place, Davidson said.

A Guam-based Aegis would become part of the joint-force

network being developed in the Pacific whose goal is to give commanders flexibility in using fire power by any of the services whether on land, sea or air.

Davidson dismissed fears over how China would respond to Aegis Ashore on Guam.

"Placing a fixed defense system on Guam does not make Guam a target — it is already one," he said. "China is making no secret of this fact, as evidenced in last fall's widely circulated [People's Liberation Army] air force propaganda video which explicitly depicted an attack on a mock-up of Andersen Air Force Base on Guam."

Ultimately, Guam should not be regarded as an island "we only need to be able to fight from," he said.

"We're going to have to be able to fight for it, and missile defense in the region is critical," he said.

B-1 bombers on 1st Norway deployment

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

The first-ever deployment of B-1 Lancer bombers to Norway is allowing U.S. airmen to train in Arctic conditions and NATO ally Norway to test its defenses, particularly against its eastern neighbor, Russia, military officials from both countries said Friday.

"This is the first time we are generating flights in partnership with our close ally Norway, as well as operating from Norwegian soil," Lt. Gen. Steven Basham, deputy commander of U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Air Forces Africa, said during a telephone press briefing held with the chief of

Norwegian Joint Headquarters, Lt. Gen. Yngve Odlo.

Working with the Americans helps Norway, which shares a 122-mile northeastern border with Russia and is a founding member of NATO, to "ensure our defense plans work," Odlo said.

The U.S. bombers' presence in Norway is not intended as a threat to Russia, but as a demonstration that "the alliance is working," he said.

More than 200 Air Force personnel from Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, and four B-1B bombers deployed last month to Orland, a Norwegian air base some 300 miles south of the Arctic Circle out of which Norway oper-

ates F-35A Lightning II fighters.

The Americans are getting to know the "unique terrain and environment" of the High North region, Basham said, noting the bombers would remain in the region for several more weeks.

The bombers are training with the Norwegian navy, the country's special forces and joint terminal air controllers, and flying with Norway's F-35s.

They've dropped inert weapons on a training range in Norway, Basham said. They've also flown over the North and Baltic seas alongside combat aircraft from Denmark, Poland, Germany and Italy, the Air Force has said.

Air Force delays mandatory fitness appraisals to July due to pandemic

By ERICA EARL
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force is delaying its physical fitness assessments until July 1 because of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, according to a news release Friday from the Air Force secretary.

Testing had been delayed until April. This is the fourth time the service has rescheduled its fitness testing since the pandemic began approximately one year ago.

"This is the right decision for our airmen," Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force JoAnne Bass said in a Facebook post Friday. "We are getting after controlling the spread of COVID and ensuring we take the right steps to build a fitness lifestyle in our Air Force, rather than Airmen who can just pass a fitness test."

In December, the Air Force did away with waist circumference measurements as part of the grading matrix for the physical fitness test, and changes to age groupings could be coming once testing resumes in July, the news release said.

The Air Force may change the age brackets used for assessment and grading from 10-year age categories to five-year age groups. For example, a grading category for ages 25-30 may replace ages 25-35, the according to the release.

The service also plans to redistribute

fitness points now that waist circumference is no longer a factor, and plans to have a final decision by June, the news release said.

"We are conducting a holistic review of policies associated with the physical fitness assessment program to determine if they are still a good fit for today's Air Force," said Lt. Gen. Brian Kelly, Air Force deputy chief of staff for manpower, personnel and services in the release.

While recorded tests have been delayed, airmen can still take a diagnostic test if their command permits.

The Space Force will follow the Air Force policies until its leadership develops a service-specific plan.

In January, the Navy postponed physical fitness assessments to July, to be complete by December.

The Army Combat Fitness Test permanently replaced the Army Physical Fitness Test last October, and all current physical fitness scores remain valid until March 31, 2022, U.S. Army Japan spokesman Maj. Elias Chelala told Stars and Stripes in an email Friday.

"Soldiers are currently training on the ACFT and taking diagnostic exams in accordance with COVID-19 mitigation measures, but the Army has suspended using the ACFT score until further notice," he said.

DOD: Remains of Korean War hero priest ID'd

The Washington Post

The remains of Father Emil Kapaun, the Catholic priest and Korean War POW who was given the Medal of Honor posthumously in 2013, have been identified, the Pentagon said Friday.

The almost complete set of Kapaun's remains had been exhumed from a cemetery in Hawaii where they had been buried as unknown after the 1950-53 war, his nephew, Ray Kapaun, said Friday.

The identification was made using dental records and DNA, he said.

In 2019 the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency began disinterring 652 sets of unknown Korean War remains at Honolulu's National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific to attempt identifications.

Father Kapaun, who is also a candidate for sainthood in the Catholic Church, was beloved for ministering to American soldiers during the war's fierce fighting, rescuing them under fire, and caring for them when they became POWs.

He died of illness and maltreatment on May 23, 1951, and his place of burial was lost. He was 35.

"I never envisioned we would have this day," said Ray Kapaun, who accepted the Medal of Honor from President Barack Obama in 2013. "That's pretty incredible."

Bloody Sunday memorial honors civil rights giants

Associated Press

SELMA, Ala. — The commemoration of a pivotal moment in the fight for voting rights for African Americans will honor four giants of the civil rights movement who lost their lives in 2020, including the late U.S. Rep. John Lewis.

The Selma Bridge Crossing Jubilee was to mark the 56th anniversary of Bloody Sunday — the day on March 7, 1965, that civil rights marchers were brutally beaten by law enforcement officers on Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge. Lewis, the Rev. Joseph Lowery, the Rev. C.T. Vivian, and attorney Bruce Boynton are the late civil rights leaders who were to be honored Sunday.

Bloody Sunday became a turning point in the fight for voting rights. Footage of the beatings helped galvanize sup-

port for passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

This year's commemoration comes as some states seek to roll back expanded early and mail-in voting access and efforts have been unsuccessful to restore a key section of the Voting Rights Act that required states with a history of discrimination to get federal approval for any changes to voting procedures.

"Those of us who are still living, particularly the young, need to take up the challenge and go forward because there is still so much to be done," said former state Sen. Hank Sanders, one of the founders of the annual celebration.

The event typically brings thousands of people to Selma. Most of the events were being held virtually this year, however, because of the COVID-19

pandemic.

The annual Martin & Coretta King Unity Breakfast was held as a drive-in event. The Rev. Bernard LaFayette, Martin Luther King III and the founders of the group Black Voters Matter spoke at the breakfast.

President Joe Biden will appear via a pre-recorded message in which he announces an executive order aimed at promoting voting access. The White House released details about the order and a transcript of Biden's remarks.

"Every eligible voter should be able to vote and have that vote counted," Biden says in the message. "If you have the best ideas, you have nothing to hide. Let the people vote."

U.S. Sen Raphael Warnock of Georgia and U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn of South Carolina were also delivering remarks by video.

Europe reels as variants power new virus surge

Associated Press

MILAN — The virus swept through a nursery school and an adjacent elementary school in the Milan suburb of Bollate with amazing speed. In a matter of just days, 45 children and 14 staff members had tested positive.

Genetic analysis confirmed what officials already suspected: The highly contagious coronavirus variant first identified in England was racing through the community, a densely packed city of nearly 40,000 with a chemical plant and a Pirelli bicycle tire factory a 15-minute drive from the heart of Milan.

"This demonstrates that the virus has a sort of intelligence ... We can put up all the barriers in the world and imagine that they work, but in the end, it adapts and penetrates them," lamented Bollate Mayor Francesco Vassallo.

Bollate was the first city in Lombardy, the northern region that has been the epicenter in each of Italy's three surges, to be sealed off from neighbors because of virus variants that the World Health Organization says are powering another uptick in infections across Europe. The variants also include versions first identified in South Africa and Brazil.

Europe recorded 1 million new COVID-19 cases last week, an increase of 9% from the previous week and a reversal that ended a six-week decline in new infections, WHO said Thursday.

The variant first found in the United Kingdom is spreading significantly in 27 European countries monitored by WHO and is dominant in at least 10 countries: Britain, Denmark, Italy, Ireland, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Israel, Spain and Portugal.

Pope calls on Christians in Iraq to forgive

Associated Press

Qaraqosh, Iraq — Pope Francis called on Iraq's Christians to forgive the injustices committed against them by Muslim extremists and to rebuild as he visited the wrecked shells of churches and met ecstatic crowds in the community's historic heartland, which was nearly erased by the Islamic State group's horrific reign.

At each stop in northern Iraq, the remnants of its Christian population turned out, jubilant, ululating and decked out in colorful dress, though heavy security prevented Francis from plunging into the crowd as he would normally do. Nonetheless, they seemed simply overjoyed that they had not been forgotten.

It was a sign of the desperation for support among an ancient community uncertain whether it can hold on. Traditionally, Christian towns dotting the Nineveh Plains of the north were emptied as Christians — as well as many Muslims — fled Islamic State's onslaught in 2014. Only a few have returned to their homes since the defeat of ISIS in Iraq declared four years ago, and the rest remain scattered elsewhere in Iraq or abroad.

Bells rang out in the town of Qaraqosh as the pope arrived. Speaking to a packed Church of the Immaculate Conception, Francis said "forgiveness" is a key word for Christians.

"The road to a full recovery may still be long, but I ask you, please, not to grow discouraged," Francis said. "What is needed is the ability to forgive, but also the courage not to give up."

The Qaraqosh church has been extensively renovated after being vandalized by ISIS militants during their takeover of the town, making it a symbol of recovery efforts.

For the Vatican, the continued presence of Christians in Iraq is vital to keeping alive faith communities that have existed there since the time of Christ. The population has dwindled from around 1.5 million before the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that plunged the country into chaos to just a few hundred thousand today.

Francis's visit to Iraq, on its last day Sunday, aimed to encourage them to stay and help rebuild the country and restore what he called its "intricately designed carpet" of faith and ethnic groups.

Data focus helps wane racial vaccine gap

From wire reports

North Carolina is among the best-performing states when it comes to distributing vaccines evenly among Black and white residents. That's partly because the state is by far the best at collecting demographic data.

About 11% of North Carolina's Black population has received at least one shot, compared with 17% of the state's white residents, the Bloomberg Vaccine Tracker shows. That puts North Carolina in fourth place for the smallest spread between the two groups among states with the most comprehensive data sets. Other states might be doing as well or better than North Carolina in terms of equality, though huge numbers of incomplete records obscure the national picture.

North Carolina's success is no accident. The state made equity a priority early on, said Mandy Cohen, Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. To receive shipments, every provider must use the state's vaccine management system, which requires demographic data to finish registering someone for a shot. That has helped the state track its progress and target certain populations more effectively, Cohen said.

California

LOS ANGELES — Counties across California are increasingly asking to opt-out of the state's centralized vaccination program run by Blue Shield, further complicating Gov. Gavin Newsom's plan to smooth out what has been a confusing and disjointed rollout of coronavirus vaccines.

None of the state's 58 counties have signed contracts with the insurance giant even as the state moved ahead with plans to bring 10 counties in the inland sections of central and Southern California under Blue Shield oversight beginning this week, the Los Angeles Times reported Saturday.

The state is in the process of

switching over to a vaccine appointment and delivery system administered by Blue Shield that is expected to be completed by March 31. The decision announced in February to outsource functions to Blue Shield that had previously been managed by public officials at the state and local levels was intended to ensure vaccines are distributed equitably and reach low-income communities disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

Florida

DAYTONA BEACH — Despite the coronavirus pandemic, Daytona Beach's annual Bike Week brought tens of thousands of motorcyclists to the city and its neighbors this weekend — and few of them were wearing masks.

The city made a bargain with its bars — 60% capacity indoors in return for the permits necessary for temporary outdoor sales and entertainment. The city is trying to avoid what happened at the Sturgis, S.D., motorcycle rally in August — that event led to a disputed number of infections around the country, ranging from several hundred to tens or hundreds of thousands.

"I'm grateful to be open for Bike Week, grateful that the city allowed the vendors and the full Bike Week thing," said Bobby Honeycutt, owner of Froggy's Saloon, told The Daytona Beach News-Journal as the 10-day event began Friday. The bar is limited to 102 customers inside, but is serving from tubs and bars outside.

The Daytona Regional Chamber of Commerce, which organizes the event, estimated that 300,000 to 400,000 motorcyclists will attend. It typically draws 500,000.

Kentucky

FRANKFORT — Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear on Saturday announced the creation of a fund to develop a permanent monu-

ment for the state's COVID-19 victims.

Beshear made the announcements during a memorial service commemorating the 1-year anniversary of Kentucky's first COVID-19 case. It was held in front of the Capitol, where the lawn was covered in small American flags, one for each of the 4,754 Kentuckians who have died from the virus.

Several family members of victims spoke about those they have lost, often tearing up as they recounted the lives of firefighters, pastors and school workers killed by the virus.

Beshear said this anniversary is also one of hope, with the state now vaccinating tens of thousands of people each day. All qualified adults who want to be vaccinated should be able to get a vaccine by the end of May, he said.

Idaho

BOISE — At least a hundred people gathered at the front of the Idaho Capitol on Saturday to burn masks in a protest against measures taken to limit infections and deaths caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Some groups say mask mandates are a restriction of their freedoms. Health experts say they help slow the spread of the disease.

Videos posted on social media showed adults encouraging children to toss masks into a fire.

Republican Gov. Brad Little has never issued a statewide mask mandate, but seven counties and 11 cities have such mandates in place.

Minnesota

ST. PAUL — Data from the state Department of Health show nearly 91% of Minnesotans who have received the COVID-19 vaccine are white. That's compared to U.S. Census data that shows whites make up about 82% of the state's population.

The latest vaccine data released Friday shows about 3.5%

of those vaccinated in Minnesota are Black, 3% are Asian and 1.7% are Hispanic. The St. Paul Pioneer Press reported that the figures only account for about 83% of those who have received the vaccine.

Minnesota has been trying to distribute COVID-19 vaccines equitably, but efforts have been hard to track because state laws restrict demographic information that can be collected and how that information can be distributed.

Gov. Tim Walz announced Friday the state will partner with Minnesota Electronic Health Record Consortium to track vaccinations by race and ethnicity. The data will be collected from summary reports from health care providers, pharmacies, public health agencies and others conducting vaccinations.

Nevada

LAS VEGAS — Democratic Gov. Steve Sisolak has signed an emergency order adjusting the minimum distance between performers and audience members that previously challenged the return of productions in Las Vegas.

The tourist destination built for excess and known for bright lights, big crowds, indulgent meals and headline shows has slowly begun to reopen after the pandemic halted business in March. Businesses, especially on the Strip were struggling because of limited air travel, lack of mid-week convention business and an absence of arena events and entertainment options.

Previously, performers were required to maintain 25 feet of space between the audience as a precaution against the coronavirus. But some smaller venues could not accommodate that restriction.

Sisolak signed the new emergency directive on Friday, updating the minimum distance to 6 feet if performers are wearing masks and 12 feet when performers are unmasked.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Teen selling live bait in vending machine

GA ADEL — A South Georgia teenager said business is booming since he set up a vending machine to sell live fishing bait.

Christopher Keshawn Horne, 17, sells live minnows and worms from a machine plugged in outside a gym in Adel. Horne launched the business Feb. 25 and had to restock his vending machine the next day, the Valdosta Daily Times reported.

His father, Christopher Horne Sr., is an avid outdoorsman who was already raising his own live bait. He's been supplying his son.

Eagle euthanized after airport tree rescue

AK JUNEAU — A bald eagle rescued after it was found dangling from a tree near the Juneau International Airport has been euthanized after a veterinary exam found the bird in poor physical condition, according to the city.

The city said the eagle was rescued after the airport was notified of a possible dead eagle in a tree on airport property.

A subsequent veterinary exam showed the eagle had previously suffered a broken leg that affected its ability to forage, and the "very thin" bird was considered to have a low likelihood of surviving, the city said.

Crews remove mobile home stuck on highway

OH CANTON — Workers finally removed a mobile home that got stuck on Interstate 77 near Canton.

The home sat there when the driver who was towing it came upon a construction zone and realized the home was too wide to squeeze through, the Ohio Department of Transportation said. It remained between the southbound and northbound lanes.

Highway department workers closed the northbound lanes so the mobile home could be towed south to an exit.

FBI: Man suspected of robbing 6 banks arrested

AZ PHOENIX — A man suspected of robbing six banks in Arizona was arrested, according to the FBI.

FBI Phoenix Field Office officials said Jeffrey Patterson, 40, was arrested after allegedly robbing a Chase Bank in Cave Creek.

Patterson then was connected to five previous robberies over a 15-day span last month, according to authorities.

The FBI didn't disclose how much money was taken.

Man rescued after 3 days lost inside storm drain

IN CONNERSVILLE — An eastern Indiana man who became lost after entering a storm drain to avoid his probation officer was rescued after spending at least three days in the chilly drainage system, police said.

A Connersville police officer heard the 35-year-old man crying for help and followed his cries to where the man was below ground in the drain, police said.

Firefighters and emergency medical personnel later pulled

the man through a manhole in the middle of a street.

The probation officer told officers he had reached out to the man "only to verify his address."

Ex-zoo worker sentenced for tortoise trafficking

OK OKLAHOMA CITY — A former Oklahoma City Zoo employee was sentenced to probation and community service after pleading guilty to trafficking stolen Galapagos tortoise hatchlings, federal prosecutors announced.

Joshua Taylor Lucas of Austin, Texas, pleaded guilty in federal court in Oklahoma City to a felony wildlife trafficking count.

The former assistant curator of herpetology at the Oklahoma City Zoo admitted that he stole several hatchlings while working at the zoo and shipped them to a Nevada man.

Federal wildlife officials said hatchlings carry a black-market value starting at \$5,000 each.

2 men rescued from ice patch that broke free

IL ROCKFORD — Rockford firefighters rescued two men who became stranded on a patch of ice after it broke free from a bank and began floating down a river.

The two men were fishing while sitting on a mattress atop a roughly 20-by-20 feet patch of ice when the ice broke free and floated about 500 yards down the Rock River.

Firefighters deployed an inflatable boat to rescue the men, the Rockford Register-Star reported.

State trooper charged for police dog attack

MI LANSING — A Michigan State Police trooper was charged with felonious assault in connection with a traffic stop in which he let his police dog attack a motorist despite no resistance, the agency said.

Parker Surbrook was charged following a traffic stop in Lansing where a passenger was believed to be armed, state police said.

The driver fled and crashed into a tree and had exited his vehicle when Surbrook and a local police officer arrived at the scene. Surbrook let his dog attack the driver "for an extended period of time," police said.

Surbrook's actions violated "the standards of professional conduct expected by members of the MSP," police said.

Firefighters save bride's wedding from flames

PA BLUE BELL — Firefighters in Pennsylvania saved a bride's wedding, already postponed by COVID-19, from going up in flames.

The fire broke out in the ceiling of a building at the historic Normandy Farm Hotel. Inside the building was Caitlin Kerezsi's wedding dress.

She was eating at a restaurant across the street when she saw the smoke, she told WPVI-TV.

"The dresses were in there and the firefighters did an incredible job. They got everything out. Got the dresses out, my brother-in-law's suit, luggage, money," Kerezsi said.

—From The Associated Press



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Torkelson, Mize key to Tigers' rebuild

Associated Press

DETROIT — Spencer Torkelson's spring training began with an early setback when he cut his finger.

A rookie mistake by a player who hasn't even made his major league debut yet.

"I was in charge of dinner that night, and I was making this little corn salsa, and there was a can of beans to put in it," the Detroit infield prospect said. "The Airbnb didn't have a can opener, and we tried to improvise, and we learned our lesson."

Torkelson reacted with good humor to that mishap, and it hasn't changed his outlook for the season. He started at third base in Friday's 1-1 tie with the New York Yankees — and anything he does in these next few weeks will take on added significance.

The Tigers are now well into their rebuilding process, and they have a handful of promising prospects. That includes two of the last three players selected No. 1 overall in the draft — Torkelson and right-hander Casey Mize. If everything goes as planned, those two may be at the center of the next successful era of Detroit baseball.

It's easy to compare Torkelson and Mize to previous No. 1 picks like Carlos Correa, Stephen Strasburg and Gerrit Cole. Tigers fans would love if they panned out that well, but it's important to remember that a player's development isn't necessarily linear.

There can be progress and setbacks — plus injuries that hold a prospect back.

The top pick in the 2018 draft, Mize was called up to the majors during last year's abbreviated season. That was an exciting moment for the franchise, but he looked like a work in progress, going 0-3 with a 6.99 ERA in seven starts. He said he's rewatched games he pitched in an effort to improve at reading hitters.

"Just kind of replayed through my head what I could have done differently," Mize said. "Just reading swings — easy example, if they're late on things, what are you going to come back with after that, or if they're early, what are you going to come back with after that pitch?"

Mize also said he's worked on elevating four-seam fastballs.

"I think pushing yourself out of your comfort zone allows for some perspective, just in different areas of life," Mize said. "I'm definitely trying some new things on the mound for sure, so I think that's a little bit out of my comfort zone, but I think it's going to lead to success."

Mize says this spring training is different, since he knows he has a better chance to break camp with the team. That's less likely for Torkelson, the top pick in the 2020 draft. He spent time at the team's alternate training location during that unusual year.

"My mindset is, you're trying to make the team," Torkelson said. "I know that the chances are very unlikely, but if my mindset's that, I'll put in the work, and everything will fall into place, and I'll become a better baseball player at every aspect of the game."

Torkelson described this spring as a bit more laid-back than his summer camp experience last year, and manager AJ Hinch said the former Arizona State slugger should be able to handle what comes his way as he pursues his pro career amid high expectations.

"He's been under the spotlight for a long time," Hinch said. "I think the attention, the media, the fans, the opposing players — he's hit in the middle of every order he's ever been in. That to me has kind of built his foundation for handling this type of stuff."

Of course, there are moments when patience is in order — like when he hurt his finger. And there are moments when Torkelson sounds, well, exactly like you might expect a 21-year-old to sound at spring training.

It's all part of a young player's journey.

"There's cool moments every day," he said. "One of the craziest moments was showing up to the field for the away game, and my bag was already packed. I'm not used to that. That was pretty sweet."

Blachowicz, Nunes keep belts; Yan loses on DQ

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Israel Adesanya learned that holding two UFC title belts simultaneously is not nearly as easy as Amanda Nunes makes it look.

And Petr Yan learned that even a momentary lapse in discipline can dearly cost a champion.

Jan Blachowicz defended his UFC light heavyweight title with a unanimous decision over the previously unbeaten Adesanya at UFC 259 on Saturday night, thwarting the reigning middleweight champ's bid to claim a second belt.

Two-division champion Nunes defended her featherweight belt with ease, beating Megan Anderson by submission 2:03 into the first round at the Apex gym on the UFC's corporate campus. Aljamain Sterling also won the UFC's bantam-

weight title when Yan was disqualified for an illegal knee strike in the fourth round.

The 38-year-old Blachowicz (28-8) made his first title defense in impressive style by outworking Adesanya (20-1), the fearsome 185-pound champion moving up for a shot at history. The Polish champion used his size advantage and veteran savvy, taking control of their fight with two huge takedowns and subsequent ground control in the fourth and fifth rounds.

Blachowicz won 49-46 on two judges' scorecards and 49-45 on the third. The Associated Press scored it 48-47 for Blachowicz.

Blachowicz ended the fight in full mount while raining down punches on Adesanya, who had never lost in a mixed martial arts career that began in 2012. The charismatic Nigerian-born New Zealander failed to

join Nunes, Conor McGregor, Daniel Cormier and Henry Cejudo as the UFC's only simultaneous two-belt champions.

Nunes (21-4) handled her second featherweight title defense with her usual flair, making short work of her Australian challenger while extending her winning streak to 12 fights since 2014. After peppering Anderson (11-5) with strikes, Nunes jumped on her off-balance challenger and worked her way into a triangle armbar, forcing Anderson to tap out quickly.

Nunes has been the UFC's bantamweight champion since 2016, and she added the featherweight strap in late 2018.

The much-anticipated slate of three championship fights at UFC 259 got off to a bizarre start when Yan's inexplicable rules violation handed the 135-pound title to Ster-

ling, the first fighter to become a UFC champion on a disqualification.

The fight was stopped with 31 seconds left in the fourth when Yan drove his knee into the face of Sterling, who was kneeling on the canvas in front of him.

MMA rules strictly prohibit such blows to a downed opponent, and the knee clearly hurt Sterling, who struggled and failed to get up for several minutes. The bout was called off by referee Mark Smith, who had verbally warned Yan not to throw such a strike a few seconds earlier.

Sterling (20-3), a Long Island native, appeared disoriented and disappointed when the belt was wrapped around his waist after a fight he appeared to be losing to Yan (15-2). Sterling threw the belt onto the canvas before he left the octagon.

No. 17 Cowboys stun No. 6 Mountaineers

Associated Press

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. — Avery Anderson III scored a career-high 31 points and No. 17 Oklahoma State beat No. 6 West Virginia 85-80 on Saturday in a Big 12 regular-season finale.

The Cowboys (18-7, 11-7 Big 12) made up for the loss of two starters by finding holes in the defense for easy layups and shooting 58% from the floor.

Oklahoma State was without star freshman Cade Cunningham, who injured his left ankle late in a loss to No. 3 Baylor on Thursday. Isaac Likekele also sat out for the sixth time in seven games with a hand injury.

Matthew-Alexander Moncrieffe added 18 points for the Cowboys.

Taz Sherman led the Mountaineers (18-8, 11-6 Big 12) with 20 points.

No. 21 Virginia 68, Louisville 58: Sam Hauser scored 24 points, Trey Murphy III added 17 and the visiting Cavaliers won the Atlantic Coast Conference regular-season championship.

Assured of at least a No. 2 seed entering the regular-season finale, Virginia (17-6, 13-4) received a huge opening for bigger things when first-place Florida State lost at Notre Dame.

Notre Dame 83, No. 11 Florida State 73: Prentiss Hubb scored 22 points and Dane Goodwin had 15 to help the host Fighting Irish cost the the Seminoles the Atlantic Coast Conference regular-season title

Notre Dame (10-14, 7-11) beat a ranked team for the first time since since November 2017.

No. 4 Illinois 73, No. 7 Ohio State 68: Ayo Dosunmu returned after missing three games with a concussion and facial injuries to score 19 points, and the visiting Fighting Illini downed the Buckeyes.

Andre Curbelo also had 19 points to help Illinois (20-6, 16-4 Big Ten) win for the 11th time in 12 games.

No. 8 Alabama 89, Georgia 79: Herbert Jones had two baskets in a 9-0 run to open the second half and the Crimson Tide

won on the road for a school-record 17th Southeastern Conference victory.

Jahvon Quinerly added 18 points for Alabama (21-6, 16-2).

Providence 54, No. 10 Villanova 52: David Duke made a tiebreaking tip-in with 2.8 seconds left to help the host Friars hold on after blowing a 20-point lead.

Jeremiah Robinson-Earl shot a three-pointer after a long inbounds pass, but the shot hit the front of the rim and the buzzer sounded before Jermaine Samuels tipped it in.

No. 12 Arkansas 87, Texas A&M 80: Moses Moody scored 28 points, Jalen Tate added 22 and the host Razorbacks beat the Aggies to match the program's longest Southeastern Conference winning streak at 11 games.

Arkansas (21-5, 13-4) also won 11 straight SEC games in 1993-94 en route to a national championship.

No. 14 Creighton 93, Butler 73: Marcus Zegarowski matched his career high with 32

points and the host Bluejays closed a difficult week off the court with a victory over the Bulldogs.

Creighton (18-7, 14-6 Big East) won for the first time in three games, doing it without head coach Greg McDermott. He is suspended indefinitely for making racially insensitive remarks to his team following a Feb. 27 loss.

No. 23 Purdue 67, Indiana 58: Zach Edey scored 20 points, and Jaden Ivey added 17 and the host Boilermakers won their ninth straight game.

Loyola (MD) 76, Navy 68: Jaylin Andrews scored 17 points, Santi Aldama added 15 with 12 rebounds and two blocked shots and the visiting Greyhounds knocked off the top-seeded Midshipmen in the opening round of the Patriot League tournament.

Army 89, American 66: Alex King had 20 points as the host Black Knights rolled past the Eagles in the quarterfinals of the Patriot League Conference tournament.

Bacot, Love lead Tar Heels' rout of Blue Devils

Associated Press

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — Armando Bacot, Kerwin Walton and Caleb Love scored 18 points apiece and North Carolina never trailed in its 91-73 win over Duke on Saturday in the regular-season finale for both teams.

Walton hit 4-for-7 from three-point range and Love had seven assists. Garrison Brooks added 14 points on 6-for-9 shooting for the Tar Heels (16-9, 10-6 ACC).

They will be the No. 6 seed and earned a first-round bye in next week's conference tournament. The Blue Devils (11-11, 9-9), the tenth seed in the ACC, plays No. 15 seed Boston College in Tuesday's first round.

Bacot scored seven consecutive points to start a 22-4 run that made it 26-6 when he capped the spurt with a dunk midway through the first half.

Mark Williams led Duke with 18 points, DJ Steward added 16 and Matthew Hurt 14.

The Blue Devils finished the regular sea-

son without a winning record for the first time since 1994-95. Duke has made 24 consecutive NCAA tournament appearances, the second-longest active streak of its kind, but will likely have to win five games in as many days at the ACC tourney to earn a berth this year. The Blue Devils' longest win streak this season is four.

North Carolina made 31 of 56 (55%) from the field, shot 44% (8 -for-18) from three-point range, and outscored Duke 21-12 from the free-throw line.

Wichita State 80, South Florida 63: Tyson Etienne had 21 points as the host Shockers extended their winning streak to seven games.

Dexter Dennis had 14 points for Wichita State (15-4, 11-2 American Athletic Conference). Morris Udeze added 12 points and seven rebounds. Alterique Gilbert had six assists.

Connecticut 98, Georgetown 82: The host Huskies (14-6 overall, 11-6 Big East)

scored the first 12 points of the game and never looked back, piling up a lead as wide as 29 points before settling for the 16-point triumph. The Hoyas fall to 9-12 and 7-9. UConn has clinched the No. 3 seed at next week's Big East Tournament at Madison Square Garden.

Rutgers 77, Minnesota 70 (OT): Jacob Young had 23 points, seven assists and five rebounds to help the visiting Scarlet Knights hold off the Gophers to finish the regular season with a fourth Big Ten road win — the most for the Scarlet Knights in seven years in the league.

St. Bonaventure 71, Saint Louis 53: Kyle Lofton had 12 points and 10 rebounds to carry the Bonnies to a semifinal win in the semifinals of the Atlantic 10 Conference tournament in Richmond, Va. Jalen Adaway had 17 points and seven rebounds for St. Bonaventure (15-4).

Barzai leads Isles to 4th straight win

Associated Press

UNIONDALE, N.Y. — Mathew Barzai and Scott Mayfield each had a goal and an assist and the New York Islanders beat the Buffalo Sabres 5-2 on Saturday for their fourth straight victory.

Semyon Varlamov made 20 saves as the Islanders improved to 9-0-2 at Nassau Coliseum this season and 14-6-4 overall. Cal Clutterbuck, Brock Nelson and Anders Lee also scored.

New York beat the Sabres for the fifth straight time this season, outscoring them 19-7 in those five meetings. The teams meet again Sunday for their third game in four days in the same venue.

Buffalo dropped its sixth straight game. Sam Reinhart and Jacob Bryson scored for the Sabres, and Carter Hutton made 24 saves.

Bryson put Buffalo in front when he scored his first career goal 33 seconds into his sixth game. The 23-year-old defense-

man was selected by the Sabres in the fourth round of the 2017 draft.

But the Islanders responded with four goals in the second, including a memorable play by the speedy Barzai.

The 23-year-old Barzai tied it at 3:51 with his ninth of the season. After outracing and outmuscling Buffalo defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen for the puck, Barzai hesitated in front of the net and then backhanded the puck between his legs to himself before flicking it past Hutton on his forehead.

"Once I knew I had body position, I took it to the net," Barzai said. "I felt like Hutton was down. It was a lot of instinct, just being in the moment and reacting. I'd probably put it in my top two or three."

Barzai has three goals and four assists in the last six games. He leads New York with 22 points.

"Barzy scoring that goal the way he did, that lit a little bit of a fire for us," Lee said. "We had a flurry after that and kept it going."

Brock Nelson made it 2-1 at 5:16, taking a cross-ice pass from Anthony Beauvillier and firing a high shot past Hutton for his seventh goal.

Cal Clutterbuck extended the lead at 8:45, sending a wrist shot past Hutton for his second goal this season.

Mayfield made it 4-1 with his second goal of the season at 15:29, firing another high shot past Hutton.

"Buffalo can create a lot and they came with a purpose today, Islanders coach Barry Trotz said. "You have to be ready for the battle. That goal that Mat scored gave us a real good boost. That was huge for us."

Reinhart scored his team-best ninth goal 52 seconds into the third on the power play before Lee added his team-leading 11th goal at 2:15.

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger tried to find answers after yet another disappointing finish for his team, which hasn't won since a 4-1 road victory over the New Jersey Devils on Feb. 23.

Canucks rally, complete a sweep of Maple Leafs

Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — Bo Horvat and J.T. Miller scored in a 42-second span in the third period and the Vancouver Canucks beat the NHL-leading Toronto Maple Leafs 4-2 Saturday to sweep the two-game series.

Horvat tied it on a power play at 8:49, and Miller gave the Canucks the lead at 9:31. Nils Hoglander completed the scoring with 3:07 left.

"It means a lot to us. We take a lot of pride in beating a team like that at home twice when we really need wins," Miller said. "We've talked a lot over the last three weeks or so that we're playing well but not getting the results, and I think this is a perfect way, a couple bounces here and there, the power play was good, the penalty kill was good and you win the game against a good team."

Brock Boeser had a goal and two assists, and Thatcher Dem-

ko made 37 saves to help Vancouver improve to 11-15-2.

John Tavares and Jimmy Vesey scored for the Leafs, who dropped to 18-6-2 after losing two straight in regulation for the first time this season.

Ducks 5, Avalanche 4 (OT): Ryan Getzlaf scored on a power play 1:59 into overtime and Anaheim won at Colorado to snap a nine-game winless streak.

Troy Terry had two goals, Rickard Rakell had a goal and two assists and Kevin Shattenkirk added a goal and an assist to help the Ducks win for the first time since Feb. 11.

Penguins 4, Flyers 3: Jared McCann pounced on a rebound and knocked it past Bryan Elliott with less than 10 minutes left to lead host Pittsburgh.

The Penguins took two of three from the Flyers during Philadelphia's extended stay in Pittsburgh, with McCann providing the difference in the finale when Brandon Tanev's shot smacked off Elliott's pad and

ended up on McCann's stick. McCann fired it into the net, then went skates over skull after tripping over Elliott immediately after scoring his fifth of the season.

Panthers 6, Predators 2: Noel Acciari scored three goals for his third career hat trick, and Florida won at Nashville for its second straight victory.

Acciari, who began the day with no points in 14 games this season, scored twice in a three-goal second period as the Panthers took the lead for good. He finished off the hat trick with an unassisted goal with 3:02 left.

Rangers 6, Devils 3: Ryan Strome scored twice and streaking New York sent host New Jersey to its fifth straight loss and eighth in nine games.

Canadiens 7, Jets 1: Brendan Gallagher scored twice in host Montreal's four-goal second period.

Coyotes 5, Wild 2: Tyler Pitlick scored twice, Conor Garland had a goal and an assist, and Arizona rallied to beat visiting Min-

nesota.

Stars 5, Blue Jackets 0: Joe Pavelski scored his NHL-leading ninth power-play goal and host Dallas tallied twice in the opening period for the first time this season, winning for only the second time in the past 12 games.

Kings 4, Blues 3 (OT): Adrian Kempe scored 1:45 into overtime, Anze Kopitar had two goals and an assist and host Los Angeles rallied for the win after trailing by three goals in the first period.

Golden Knights 4, Sharks 0: Alex Tuch scored twice and Marc-Andre Fleury earned his NHL-leading fourth shutout in his return from a rare night off to help Vegas win on the road.

Oilers 3, Flames 2: Connor McDavid scored the tiebreaking goal with 3:45 left and added two assists to lead host Edmonton. The star forward was held without a point in his previous three games, all losses to the Toronto Maple Leafs.