

Ford finishing up post-delivery tasks

The Daily Press

From the fantail of USS Gerald R. Ford, as F/A-18s roar past a few yards overhead, Chief Warrant Officer Todd Williamson was testing the carrier's last line of defense.

Making sure the Close-in Weapons System Mount 23 — a combination multiple-barrel cannon, capable of firing 4500 rounds a minute, tied to radar and computers — can do its job of knocking down missiles or aircraft is just one part of one of the last big tasks in the carrier's year-and-half long post-delivery test and trial period.

Williamson and his team are in the midst of combat systems qualifications — making sure Ford's guns, radar, communications and command and control systems can do what the Navy promised 13 years ago, when it persuaded Congress to fund the first of a new generation of carriers.

At the same time, pilots are using the carrier for flights to earn certification in taking off and landing at sea — which explains those fighters screaming past Williamson's

station every couple of minutes.

The Ford has qualified 184 fleet replacement pilots and 139 student aviators so far in its testing and trial period, including just recently the first students to use the new precision landing modes, a technology that automates a lot of the fancy stick and throttle work.

To do that, the Ford has launched and recovered planes 7,150 times, using two controversial new systems.

One is the electromagnet-based catapult system that drew presidential ire with Donald J. Trump suggesting going back to the steam catapults the Navy used for decades.

One reason the Navy likes the new catapult, despite the longer- and costlier- than expected development of the system, can be seen on the flight deck, when a green-shirted aviation boatswain's mate dashes over to an F/A-18 waiting to be launched, holding a two-foot black box over his head.

That box shows the pilot and the shooter in the "bubble," the control station just

peeking up over the deck, a precise readout on the plane's weight. With that information, the shooter can program the catapult to precisely match the force used to the actual weight of the plane.

The certification flights also amass the data that Capt. Paul Lanzilotta says is showing the new systems are reliable — something that Government Accountability Office has wondered about.

Combat systems qualification is a multi-step process that starts with maintenance and moves on to running computerized simulations to tracking real targets — generally, Lear jets — to eventually live fire on drones and other targets, Williamson said.

The test and trial period is slated to end this spring.

Then, sailors will finish stringing the sensors that will track how the ship responds to the shock trials — basically big explosions close to the ship — that will be last major step before a trip back to Newport News Shipbuilding for a final checkup.

GAO: F-35 upgrade program costs up by \$2B

Bloomberg

A Pentagon project to upgrade the F-35 jet with new capabilities every six months has seen about \$2 billion in recent cost growth and continued delays as the result of an unrealistic schedule, according to congressional auditors.

The Pentagon and Lockheed Martin Corp. haven't been able to follow their plan for "Block 4" upgrade work on the next-generation fighter, the Government Accountability Office said Thursday in a new annual report on the almost two-decade, \$398 billion program.

In addition to not meeting time frames they established for the upgrades, Lockheed and the Defense Department haven't updated their estimates for future deliveries of the stealthy jet to reflect earlier delays in completing work.

"The F-35 program is more than three years into Block 4 development, but it has not delivered new capabilities as planned,"

the agency said in its report. The current schedule, "as planned, is not based on the most recent data available and is not achievable."

According to the report, GAO auditors found software defects weren't being caught before they were installed on aircraft and that it was taking longer than planned to develop each new capability. The agency recommended that the Pentagon revise the schedule to reflect Bethesda, Md.-based Lockheed's actual progress.

"The program routinely underestimated the amount of work needed to develop capabilities, which has resulted in delays, and has not reflected historical performance into its remaining work schedule," GAO said.

The Block 4 program has largely escaped public scrutiny while the F-35 continues to grapple with other issues. Those include a major delay in completing combat testing designed to evaluate whether it meets the original requirements developed in the

early 2000s, uncertainty over when a decision authorizing full-rate production will take place and growing concerns about the jet's roughly \$1.72 trillion "life-cycle" costs, which include acquisition and maintenance and operations over decades.

The Block 4 upgrade program's now \$14 billion estimated cost is more expensive than many Army, Navy and Air Force acquisition programs. As a result, it represents another costly example of the defense challenges that President Joe Biden's Pentagon will have to confront amid expectations of largely flat defense budgets in the year ahead.

In the report, Dyke Weatherington, an acting defense acquisition official, said the F-35 program office at the Pentagon "is currently assessing and updating" the Block 4 schedule "based on historical execution, budget and resourcing realities and insights derived from a recent independent review" and will issue a new schedule by June.

India, US set to expand military engagement

Associated Press

NEW DELHI — Top defense officials from India and the United States pledged Saturday to expand their military engagement, underscoring the strengthening defense ties between two countries concerned over China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh met in New Delhi and agreed to deepen defense cooperation, intelligence sharing and logistics.

"India is an increasingly important partner in rapidly shifting international dynamics. I reaffirm our commitment to a comprehensive forward-looking defense partnership with India as a central pillar of our approach to the Indo-Pacific region," Austin said.

Austin is making the first visit to India by a top member of President Joe Biden's administration. His visit follows a meeting earlier this month between leaders of Australia, India, Japan and the United States, which together make up the four Indo-Pacific nations known as the Quad.

The Quad is seen as a counterweight to China, who critics say is flexing its military muscle in the South China Sea, East China Sea, Taiwan Strait and along its northern border with India.

China has called the Quad an attempt to contain its ambitions.

Austin's Indian counterpart, Singh, said the talks were focused on "expanding military-to-military engagement."

"We are determined to realize

the full potential of comprehensive global strategic partnership," Singh said.

Austin arrived in New Delhi on Friday and met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval.

According to a statement from the Prime Minister's Office, Modi "outlined his vision for the strategic partnership between the two countries and emphasized the important role of bilateral defense cooperation in India-U.S. ties."

Before the talks on Saturday, Austin visited the National War Memorial and was accorded a ceremonial guard of honor.

The timing of Austin's visit, which follows talks between high-ranking U.S. and Chinese officials in Alaska amid a bitter exchange of words, signals the importance Biden places on New Delhi as a security ally.

The U.S. and India have steadily ramped up their military relationship in recent years and signed a string of defense deals and deepened military cooperation. In 2019, the two sides concluded defense deals worth over \$3 billion. Bilateral defense trade increased from near zero in 2008 to \$15 billion in 2019.

More recently, India drew closer to the U.S. following its monthslong military standoff with China along their disputed border in eastern Ladakh, where deadly clashes erupted last year. Tensions between the nuclear-armed Asian giants have eased after the two countries pulled back troops from one area of contention.

Talks show US ready for dust-up diplomacy

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — In his first standoff with China, Secretary of State Antony Blinken took a calculated risk.

Staring at his Chinese counterpart across a hotel conference room in Alaska's largest city, he called Beijing a threat to "global stability" and denounced its record on human rights, trade, Hong Kong, Taiwan and a range of other issues in front of throngs of reporters and video cameras.

The remarks were intended to demonstrate the Biden administration's confidence in the face of Chinese aggression and set the tone for what Blinken has called the "biggest geopolitical test of the 21st century."

The two-day meeting, which ended Friday, followed a separate diplomatic dust-up after President Joe Biden affirmed his view that Russian President Vladimir Putin is a "killer," generating a furious response from Moscow.

In just two months, the Biden administration has shown a surprisingly strong appetite for rhetorical fisticuffs with America's top adversaries. The dramatic standoffs help clarify Washington's new outlook in a post-Trump era, but also create unpredictable and sometimes chaotic outcomes on the diplomatic stage.

After four years of President Donald Trump's erratic style of diplomacy, many expected Biden to return to a traditional approach. But the new administration has not shied away from impugning heads of governments and ruling parties, and ripping up the playbook on standard diplomatic choreography.

In Alaska, Biden officials anticipated that China would respond angrily to Blinken's shot

across the bow, but the retort would be limited to a two-minute statement from each Chinese official, per the ground rules Washington and Beijing agreed upon.

That didn't happen.

Instead of issuing a modest rejoinder, China's top diplomat, Yang Jiechi, seized on Blinken's remarks and delivered a 17-minute diatribe against U.S. imperialism and failed military interventions over the last 20 years — flipping the accusation back at the United States regarding which country is responsible for sowing instability.

Whatever setbacks may have occurred, Blinken immediately won praise from his boss back in Washington.

"I'm very proud of the secretary of state," Biden told reporters on the South Lawn when asked for his reaction to the first day of talks.

Biden has similarly brushed off criticisms from Moscow, which temporarily recalled its ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Antonov, in what's believed to be the first such instance in more than 20 years. On Thursday, Putin said that by calling him a killer, the U.S. president was projecting to compensate for America's killing of Native Americans and slavery.

The twin spats with Russia and China raise questions about whether Biden will seek to forge productive relationships with them, or whether confrontation and conflagration will be the new normal.

The Biden administration has imposed sanctions on both countries in response to Moscow's alleged poisoning of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny and Beijing's ongoing crackdown on political freedoms in Hong Kong.

Biden, Harris decry racism on Atlanta visit

Associated Press

ATLANTA — President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris offered solace to Asian Americans and denounced the scourge of racism at times hidden “in plain sight” as they visited Atlanta, just days after a white gunman killed eight people, most of them Asian American women.

Addressing the nation after a roughly 80-minute meeting with Asian American state legislators and other leaders Friday, Biden said it was “heart-wrenching” to listen to their stories of the fear among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders amid what he called a “skyrocketing spike” of harassment and violence against them.

“We have to change our hearts,” he said. “Hate can have no safe harbor in America.”

Biden called on all Americans to stand up

to bigotry when they see it, adding: “Our silence is complicity. We cannot be complicit.”

“They’ve been attacked, blamed, scapegoated and harassed; they’ve been verbally assaulted, physically assaulted, killed,” Biden said of Asian Americans during the coronavirus pandemic.

The president also called the shootings an example of a “public health crisis of gun violence in this country,” as his administration has come under scrutiny from some in his own party for not moving as swiftly as promised on reforming the nation’s gun laws.

Harris, the first person of South Asian descent to hold national office, said that while the motive of the shooter remains under investigation, these facts are clear: Six

of the eight killed were of Asian descent and seven of them were women.

“Racism is real in America. And it has always been. Xenophobia is real in America, and always has been. Sexism, too,” she said. “The president and I will not be silent. We will not stand by. We will always speak out against violence, hate crimes and discrimination, wherever and whenever it occurs.”

She added that everyone has “the right to be recognized as an American. Not as the other, not as them. But as us.”

Before leaving Washington, Biden declared his support for the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act, a bill that would strengthen the government’s reporting and response to hate crimes and provide resources to Asian American communities.

Sources: Feds have no evidence yet for Georgia hate crime charge

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Federal investigators have so far not found evidence that clears the high bar for federal hate crime charges against a man who has been accused of killing eight people at three Atlanta-area massage businesses, two law enforcement officials told The Associated Press.

Seven of the eight people killed were women; six were of Asian descent. The crime has stitched together stigmas about race, gender, migrant work and sex work.

Though investigators have not ruled out ultimately filing hate crime charges, they face legal constraints in doing so. Federal statutes require prosecutors to prove that the victims were targeted because of specific factors, like race, gender identity, religion, national origin or sexual orientation, or the suspect infringed on a federally or constitutionally protected activity. To successfully prosecute a hate crimes case, prosecutors typically seek tangible evidence, such as the suspect expressing racism in text messages, in internet posts or to witnesses.

No such evidence has yet surfaced in the Georgia probe, according to the officials, who have direct knowledge of the investigation into the suspect, 21-year-old Robert Aaron Long. They were not authorized to speak publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity on Friday.

Advocates have said even if the shooter

didn’t specifically target the victims and because some were Asian, he still could have been acting with bias against them. Three of the women died at the Gold Spa in Atlanta, while the fourth woman died across the street at Aromatherapy Spa. Four other people were killed and one was wounded at Youngs Asian Massage near Woodstock, in Atlanta’s northwestern suburbs. Their deaths come as crimes against Asian Americans are spiking.

Officials have identified those killed as: Soon Chung Park, 74; Hyun Jung Grant, 51, whom family members identified by her maiden name, Hyun Jung Kim; Suncha Kim, 69; Yong Ae Yue, 63; Delaina Ashley Yaun, 33; Paul Andre Michels, 54; Daoyou Feng, 44; and Xiaojie Tan, 49, who owned Youngs.

Both federal and local investigators are still looking into the possible motive behind Tuesday’s killings.

After his arrest, Long told police he had a “sex addiction” and carried out the shootings because he was trying to snuff out the sources of temptation, according to authorities.

Police said the gunman previously visited two of the spas where four of the women were killed and said the suspect equated the businesses to sex, and that drove him to kill. Authorities have said he may have been headed to Florida to carry out a similar attack on “some type of porn industry.”

Spas had been focus of probes on prostitution

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Two Atlanta area massage businesses where a gunman waged a deadly assault this week had been repeatedly targeted in police prostitution investigations over the years, raising questions about the mayor’s earlier comments that the spas operated legally.

Police records show officers went to the businesses at least 21 times in the past 10 years, which appears to contradict Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms’ statement that officers in her city had not been to the businesses beyond a minor potential theft and that they were not “on the radar” of police. Bottoms added that she did not want to blame the victims.

According to a 2019 report written by a group of academics, public health experts and community organizers, employees in massage businesses that illicitly offer sex often ended up working there because they had few options to pay off the tens of thousands of dollars they owed smugglers or to support parents or children back home.

The authors stressed not all massage businesses are involved in the sex trade. The majority of women they interviewed who did sex work didn’t see themselves as being trafficked, instead feeling they were helping their families or themselves.

Turkey annuls treaty protecting women

Associated Press

ISTANBUL — Turkey has withdrawn from a landmark European treaty protecting women from violence that it was the first to sign 10 years ago and that bears the name of its largest city.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's decree early Saturday annulling Turkey's ratification of the Istanbul Convention is a blow to women's rights advocates, who say the agreement is crucial to combating domestic violence.

The Council of Europe's Secretary General, Marija Pejcinovic Buri, called the decision "devastating."

"This move is a huge setback to these efforts and all the more deplorable because it

compromises the protection of women in Turkey, across Europe and beyond," she said.

The Istanbul Convention states that men and women have equal rights and obliges state authorities to take steps to prevent gender-based violence against women, protect victims and prosecute perpetrators.

Some officials from Erdogan's Islam-oriented party have advocated a review of the agreement, arguing it encourages divorce and undermines the traditional family, which they say are contrary to the country's conservative values. Critics also claim the treaty promotes homosexuality through the use of categories like gender, sexual orientation and gender identity. They see that as a

threat to Turkish families. Hate speech has been on the rise in Turkey, including the interior minister who described LGBT people as "perverts" in a tweet.

Women's groups and their allies who have been protesting to keep the convention intact immediately called for demonstrations across the country Saturday under the slogan "Withdraw the decision, apply the treaty."

Violence against and killing of women is on the rise in Turkey, according to rights groups.

A total of 77 women have been killed since the start of the year, according to the We Will Stop Femicide Platform. At least 409 women were killed in 2020, according to the group.

Ex-senator who flew in space picked to lead NASA

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — President Joe Biden has chosen a former senator from Florida who flew on the space shuttle right before the Challenger accident to lead NASA.

Biden on Friday announced his intent to nominate Bill Nelson as the space agency's administrator.

If confirmed by the Senate, Nelson will become NASA's 14th administrator, succeeding another former member of Congress, Jim Bridenstine, a Republican from Oklahoma. Nelson currently serves on the NASA Advisory Council.

Nelson promised, if confirmed, to "help

lead NASA into an exciting future of possibilities." The space agency is working to send astronauts back to the moon this decade and counting more than ever on private U.S. companies and even other countries to get that job — and others — done.

"Its workforce radiates optimism, ingenuity and a can-do spirit," Nelson said in a statement. "The NASA team continues to achieve the seemingly impossible as we venture into the cosmos."

Nelson, 78, grew up near Cape Canaveral and was serving as a Democratic congressman when he launched aboard a space shuttle Columbia on Jan. 12, 1986. His commander was Charles Bolden Jr., who later

served as NASA administrator under President Barack Obama — at Nelson's urging.

Nelson, who has a law degree and is a former captain in the U.S. Army Reserve, served six terms in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1979 to 1991. He was elected in 2000 to the Senate, where he served until his defeat in 2018 by former Florida Gov. Rick Scott.

In 2017, Nelson criticized Bridenstine's nomination by President Donald Trump, saying the leader of NASA shouldn't be political but rather nonpartisan.

Bridenstine instead offered kind praise Friday and urged Nelson's confirmation "without delay."

Trump's Mar-a-Lago partially closed due to COVID

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Fla., has been partially closed after staff members tested positive for the coronavirus.

That's according to several people, including one familiar with club operations, who said Mar-a-Lago had "partially closed" a section of the club and quarantined some of its workers "out of an abundance of caution." The person spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the situation by name.

An email sent to members said that service had been temporarily suspended in the club's dining room and at its beach club be-

cause some staff members had recently tested positive. It said the club had undertaken "all appropriate response measures," including sanitizing affected areas, and that banquet and event services remain open.

"The health and safety of our members and staff is our highest priority," it read.

The Florida Department of Health did not immediately respond to a phone call and email.

Trump moved to Mar-a-Lago after leaving Washington in January, and has spent the weeks since then laying low, golfing, dining with friends, meeting with Republican party leaders and plotting his political future as he considers running again in

2024.

Trump was hospitalized with COVID-19 last fall and has since been vaccinated against the virus.

Mar-a-Lago was the site of his first known exposure more than a year ago. A senior Brazilian official tested positive last year after spending time at Mar-a-Lago, where he posed for a photo next to Trump and attended a family birthday party.

The Trump White House was hit with several subsequent outbreaks.

The club in Palm Beach has been a flurry of activity in recent weeks, hosting events and fundraisers, including one to benefit rescue dogs. Trump unexpectedly dropped by the event last week.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Couple offers free beer as way to meet neighbors

FL CAPE CORAL — A Florida couple came up with a great way to meet their new neighbors after moving into their home during the coronavirus pandemic: They offered free beer.

Amanda and Thomas Evans moved from Fort Myers to nearby Cape Coral just before the pandemic started last year.

"Typically, you would bring people cookies or pie or invite them over for dinner, but we weren't sure about how people were feeling," Amanda told ABC7 television station.

Instead, they created a flyer: Her husband wasn't sure anyone would show up. But once the "Free Beer" sign was placed outside, the neighbors started venturing over.

Girl, 8, uses mattress to escape burning home

IL CHICAGO — A Chicago girl whose mother was at work somehow managed to toss a mattress from her family's third-story window during a fire and then jump onto it to safety, a fire official said.

Firefighters who arrived at the burning apartment on the city's South Side just before midnight found the girl, 8, safe outside. They were able to rescue two younger children who were inside, including the girl's brother, 5, who was at the window poised to follow his sister, and a boy, 2, the fire department said.

District Chief Frank Velez told the Chicago Tribune he was impressed by the girl's quick

thinking in a life-or-death situation, calling her idea "quite innovative."

Feds: Owners of juice bar scammed senior citizens

CT WATERBURY — The owners of a now-closed Waterbury juice bar are facing federal charges for allegedly being involved in a sweepstakes scam that preyed on senior citizens.

A federal criminal complaint unsealed last month in Arizona charged Zonia Wright and her husband, Obrian Wright, with conspiracy to commit money laundering.

Zonia Wright opened the Raw Deal Juice Bar in downtown Waterbury in 2017 but the business only saw a trickle of customers.

According to the criminal complaint, the scammers contacted senior citizens around the country and told them they'd won the Publishers Clearing House sweepstakes but that they would need to send money to cover state taxes. They were allegedly told they faced legal consequences if they didn't comply.

The couple allegedly took in more than \$600,000 between 2012 and 2017 from victims and other sources not related to business income or paychecks.

Newseum's stone tablet to move to new home

PA PHILADELPHIA — A four-story, 50-ton marble tablet engraved with the text of the First Amendment, previously displayed on the facade of the now-shuttered Newseum in Washington, will

find a new home in Philadelphia across from Independence Hall.

The National Constitution Center, which sits in an area of the city billed as America's most historic square mile, will erect the tablet in an atrium overlooking Independence Hall, the UNESCO World Heritage Site where both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were adopted.

General Patton Museum to reopen in April

KY FORT KNOX — The General George Patton Museum of Leadership at Fort Knox is set to reopen next month with new features, officials said.

The museum closed to the public in December due to the coronavirus pandemic, but fundraising director Mike Martin told The News-Enterprise that conditions are right to open back up on April 1.

The facility will continue to focus on Patton, but has added new exhibits about other military leaders at the Army post.

Rap impostor sentenced for scamming businesses

GA AUGUSTA — A Florida man who claimed to work in the rap industry and to have ties to the hip hop group Wu-Tang Clan in a scheme to scam hotel stays and luxury services was sentenced to serve seven years in federal prison.

Aaron Barnes-Burpo, 29, of Crestview, Fla., was also ordered to pay nearly \$300,000 in restitution to 19 businesses and to serve three years supervised release after his prison term, ac-

cording to online court records. He earlier pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud.

A second man who also pleaded guilty in the scheme, Walker Washington, 52, of Augusta, Ga., is awaiting sentencing.

\$1M winning lottery ticket goes unclaimed

RI PROVIDENCE — A \$1 million winning Mega Millions lottery ticket in Rhode Island has gone unclaimed and has expired, a lottery spokesperson said.

Rhode Island Lottery spokesperson Nicole Mineau said it is not uncommon for a ticket to go unclaimed and that when a ticket expires the money is added to the state general fund.

The winning ticket was purchased from Season's Corner Market in North Smithfield on March 14 of last year, the Providence Journal reported.

Cleanup underway at site of fireworks explosion

CA ONTARIO — Authorities are destroying a massive cache of fireworks in a Southern California neighborhood rocked by explosions that left two people dead.

The blasts rained debris down over a wide area in the city of Ontario and dozens of residents were evacuated. Fireworks are illegal in Ontario, as in many California cities, and investigators are trying to figure out why the explosives were there.

Officials said experts have burned about 80 bins — each holding about 27 gallons — full of fireworks to safely destroy them.

— From The Associated Press

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Oral Roberts upsets No. 2 seed Ohio St.

Associated Press

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Ohio State's players were dancing around in the moments before tipoff against Oral Roberts, relaxed and full of swagger.

The Buckeyes aren't dancing anymore. The 15th-seeded Golden Eagles pulled off the first major upset of the first NCAA Tournament in two years, holding off second-seeded Ohio State 75-72 in overtime on Friday.

"When they rank them, it was only just a number at the end of the day," said Kevin Obanor, who led Oral Roberts with 30 points and 11 rebounds. "We put our shoes on just as the other team puts their shoes on. We just had the mindset of, 'Show us that you deserve to be No. 2,' and we came out with a lot of confidence."

Oral Roberts got poised, impeccable performances from its two stars, Obanor and guard Max Abmas, to become the ninth 15 seed to win a first-round game and the first since

Middle Tennessee shocked Michigan State in 2016. Last year's tournament was called off because of the pandemic.

Obanor scored seven of Oral Roberts' 11 points in overtime, including two free throws with 13 seconds left. Abmas, the nation's leading scorer, had 29 points.

"Their two players that obviously concerned us were terrific, so give them, their coaches, their players, their program, their university a lot of credit for this win," Ohio State coach Chris Holtmann said. "We had no illusions that this was going to be by any stretch anything other than a really challenging game, and it obviously was that from the very jump."

Ohio State could have tied it in the closing seconds of overtime, but Duane Washington Jr.'s open three-pointer from straight away bounced off the side of the rim, and Oral Roberts celebrated its first tournament win since 1974.

The Golden Eagles' roster is

full of lightly recruited players who found their way to the small, private Christian school in Tulsa, Okla. The Summit League champions bowed their heads in a prayer circle after their victory over the Big Ten power.

"I know growing up, all my life, I was always like the underdog," Obanor said. "The school is not a big school. Just to prove people wrong, it's a blessing just to have people that are really committed and believe that we're the better team."

The Golden Eagles (17-10) will play seventh-seeded Florida in the South Region on Sunday.

E.J. Liddell had 23 points and 14 rebounds to lead the Buckeyes (21-10). Washington had 18 points and 10 rebounds but made just 7 of 21 shots.

Oral Roberts scored the game's first seven points, including a three-pointer by Abmas from the logo that drew a collective "Ooooh!" from the socially distanced crowd.

The Buckeyes led by eight before the Golden Eagles rallied. Abmas hit a three-pointer with about five minutes left in the first half to give Oral Roberts a 26-25 lead, prompting a chant of "O-R-U!" He hit another three moments later to force an Ohio State timeout. He made 5 of 7 three-pointers in the first half and had 18 points at the break as the Golden Eagles led 36-33.

The Summit League champions led by seven in the second half before Ohio State rallied to take a 60-58 lead on a pull-up jumper by CJ Walker with just under five minutes to play.

Obanor was fouled with 14 seconds to play, and he made both free throws to tie the game at 64. Washington missed a step-back jumper in the closing seconds, and the Buckeyes had no answer for Obanor in the extra session.

"This is obviously a really, really bitter end to a terrific season," Holtmann said. "We'll own that and accept it and we'll move forward."

Mean Green surprise fourth-seeded Boilermakers

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — To be, or not to be? For an underdog named Javion Hamlet and his group of scrapping North Texas teammates, that was an easy question.

Hamlet scored 24 points and Thomas Bell had 16, along with some game-changing defense in overtime, to lift the 13th-seeded Mean Green to a 78-69 win over No. 4 Purdue on Friday in the NCAA Tournament.

"I've been waiting for this opportunity my whole life, just to show the world who Javion Hamlet is," he said.

He showed everyone, and sparked the second teen-powered upset of the Big Ten on the opening day of the NCAA Tournament. This one came only hours after No. 15 Oral Roberts

knocked out Ohio State. No. 12 Oregon State also beat fifth-seeded Tennessee of the SEC on Friday.

What a great prize for Hamlet, and for Bell, each seniors who led the Mean Green (18-9) to a regular-season Conference USA title last year but missed a chance at the tournament when the season was canceled by COVID-19.

They made sure things kept going this time.

Bell opened overtime with a three-pointer, then altered two Purdue shots underneath to help the Mean Green turn the extra session into a laugh. North Texas scored the first 11 points. Mardrez McBride also had 16 for North Texas, which advances to the second round of the tournament for the first time in history.

"They were very stingy, very,

very good on the defensive end," Purdue coach Matt Painter said. "Just overall, I was very impressed with North Texas."

Though Purdue kept things close all night, the Boilermakers (18-10) didn't lead once after 3-2 in the opening minutes. They twice had chances to take a one-point lead late, but missed free throws both times. North Texas' pesky defense held them to 36% from the field.

"You never know what happens when you get out there and scrap," North Texas coach Grant McCasland said.

Hamlet was at his scrappiest during a pair of sublime 8-0 personal runs, each of which stopped the Purdue momentum in its tracks. The second was a twisting, spinning, dribbling display of big-man play in the paint—the

6-foot-4 guard carving out space against players half a foot (Trevion Williams) and even a foot (Zach Edey) taller than him. It gave North Texas a nine-point lead with 7:45 left.

The Boilermakers scratched back and forced overtime on Williams' putback with 21 seconds left. Williams finished with 14 points and 13 rebounds.

But it's the team once known as the Eagles, that officially adopted "Mean Green" as its nickname in 2000, that is moving on. The moniker first became a thing when a fired-up cheerleader got creative at a football game in the late-'60s. It was made more popular when Hayden Fry, the folksy ballcoach who went on to greater fame at Iowa, came to the campus in Denton a few years later.

North Carolina bounced in opening round

Associated Press

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — North Carolina coach Roy Williams lost his first opening-round NCAA Tournament game in 30 tries as ninth-seeded Wisconsin blew out his eighth-seeded Tar Heels 85-62.

Brad Davison scored 29 points for the Badgers, who negated North Carolina's size advantage by draining 13 of 27 three-pointers. The Badgers (18-12) had lost four of five entering the tournament.

Although Williams had won all 14 of his first-round games with Kansas and his first 15 with UNC, the loss by this uneven Tar Heels team was hardly a shock. North Carolina came in on a three-game winning streak but did not win four in a row all season.

Armando Bacot scored 15 points for UNC (18-11).

Florida 75, Virginia Tech 70: Colin Castleton scored 19 points and grabbed 14 rebounds, Tre Mann hit a step-back three-pointer with 23 seconds left in overtime and the seventh-seeded Gators held off the 10th-seeded Hokies in Indianapolis.

Baylor 79, Hartford 55: MaCio Teague scored 22 points and the top-seeded Bears shook off a slow-as-molasses start to roll past the 16th-seeded Hawks.

Villanova 73, Winthrop 63: Jeremiah Robinson-Earl had 22 points and 12 rebounds, and the fifth-seeded Wildcats pulled away in the second half for a 73-63 victory over the 12th-seeded Eagles.

Arkansas 85, Colgate 68: Justin Smith had 29 points and 13 rebounds, and the Razorbacks shut down the high-scoring Raiders.

Texas Tech 65, Utah State 53: At Bloomington, Ind., Mac McClung scored 16 points in his first NCAA Tournament game and Kyler Edwards added 12 to help the sixth-seeded Red Raiders pull away from the 11th-seeded Aggies.

Midwest

Illinois 78, Drexel 49: At Indianapolis, Kofi Cockburn muscled his way to 18 points and the Illini cruised past the 16th-seeded Dragons in their first game as a No. 1 seed in 16 years.

Loyola Chicago 71, Georgia Tech 60: Lucas Williamson scored 21 points in a dynamic performance by the defensive whiz, All-America forward Cameron Krutwig added 10, and the eighth-seeded Ramblers beat the ninth-seeded Yellow Jack-ets.

Oregon State 70, Tennessee 56: Ro-

man Silva scored 16 points and the 12th-seeded Beavers took advantage of the Volunteers' icy perimeter shooting.

Oklahoma State 69, Liberty 60: Cade Cunningham didn't have an explosive debut, but did just enough to lead the Cowboys past the Flames.

Syracuse 78, San Diego State 62: The 11th-seeded Orange held the sixth-seeded Aztecs without a field goal for nearly a quarter of the game, and sweet-shooting Buddy Boeheim hit seven three-pointers and finished with 30 points to help his team cruise into the second round.

West Virginia 84, Morehead State 67: Miles McBride scored 18 of his 30 points after halftime to help the Mountaineers pull away from the Eagles, giving coach Bob Huggins his 900th career victory.

Rutgers 60, Clemson 56: Geo Baker scored 13 points, including the decisive layup with 10 seconds left, and the 10th-seeded Scarlet Knights beat seventh-seeded Clemson for its first NCAA Tournament victory in 38 years.

Houston 87, Cleveland State 56: At Bloomington, Ind., Quentin Grimes scored 18 points and coach Kelvin Sampson tied John Wooden on the career victories list as the Cougars beat the 15th-seeded Vikings.

Simmons gets \$61 million, four-year deal from Broncos

Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — Justin Simmons' unflinching leadership was evident Friday even though he wasn't anywhere in sight at the Denver Broncos headquarters on the day he became the NFL's highest-paid safety.

"I was just talking about it with Court (WR Courtland Sutton) in the locker room. This is big for him, big for (OLB Bradley) Chubb and all the young guys," defensive end Shelby Harris said at a news conference celebrating his own big contract. "It shows that if you go out there and ball, the Broncos will take care of you."

"That's the culture change that we're talking about. This is family," Harris said. "Justin is the highest-paid safety, and that's what he deserves. You go

out there and play, and they will give you what you deserve. That's the right message you want to send to your players."

The deal that agent Todd France negotiated with general manager George Paton includes \$35 million in guarantees and is worth \$61 million over four years.

The \$15.25 million-per-year average also makes Simmons the first safety to break the \$15 million mark. Last fall, Arizona signed Budda Baker to a four-year deal that averaged \$14.75 million per season.

Paton hinted Thursday that the deal was coming together when he said, "I think we're making progress. I don't know when it will happen, but I believe we are making progress and that's been a priority since I've gotten here."

Sources: Seattle, re-signs Carson

The Seattle Seahawks are bringing back their top running back after reaching an agreement with Chris Carson on a two-year contract, according to two people with knowledge of the deal.

The people spoke to The Associated Press on Friday night on the condition of anonymity because the team had not announced the signing.

Bringing back Carson is a major victory for the Seahawks, keeping the top remaining free agent running back on the market from leaving the only NFL team he has played for. Carson has been a workhorse in Seattle's backfield when he's been healthy, fitting the style of run-

ning back Pete Carroll wants for his offense.

Carson was a seventh-round pick of the Seahawks in 2017 and quickly earned himself the starting nod. Carson rushed for 1,151 yards and a career-high nine touchdowns in 2018 and in 2019 rushed for a career-best 1,230 yards and seven TDs.

This past season, Carson was limited to 12 games and rushed for 651 yards and five scores. He also added four receiving touchdowns.

Carson's new deal with Seattle will reportedly include a voidable third year to help with the salary cap.

The return of Carson may finally allow Seattle to have the two-headed running back tandem it has wanted since taking Carson and Rashaad Penny in consecutive drafts.

Ovechkin lifts Capitals over Rangers

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Alex Ovechkin shook off the kind of big hit he's used to delivering and scored the kind of timely, clutch goals he has built his career on.

Ovechkin scored two rebound goals in the final seven minutes to give the Washington Capitals their seventh consecutive victory by coming back to beat the New York Rangers 2-1 on Friday night.

A hit from big Rangers defenseman Ryan Lindgren that leveled Ovechkin and broke his stick maybe only woke up one of hockey's greatest goal-scorers, who again showed he can put the puck in the net every which way.

"Sometimes you have to get those really gritty ones," Ovechkin said. "It's still the same whether it's goal from my spot or whatever. It's most important goal, and it'll take it."

Ovechkin tied it with 6:42 left by poking a loose puck past goaltender Alexandar Georgiev and put the Capitals ahead on a nearly identical play with 3:33 remaining. He has scored in five in a row and has seven goals in the past seven games.

Washington's longtime captain now leads the team with 14 goals. After moving into sole possession of sixth place on the NHL career goals list earlier in the week, Ovechkin's goals against the Rangers were Nos. 719 and 720, moving him closer to Marcel

Dionne in fifth.

Ovechkin's late-game heroics kept the Capitals winning streak alive after a lackluster first 50 minutes. They had only 12 shots on net before the play that led to his tying goal, and New York was cruising toward a second consecutive shutout victory.

Flames 4, Maple Leafs 3: Mark Giordano broke a tie on a power play midway through the second period, Jacob Markstrom made 24 saves and visiting Calgary beat slumping Toronto.

Matthew Tkachuk, Derek Ryan and Christopher Tanev also scored, and Rasmus Andersson had two assists. The Flames improved to 15-13-3, winning for the fourth time in five games since Darryl Sutter returned as coach after Geoff Ward was fired.

Mitch Marner, Jason Spezza and Alexander Kerfoot scored for Toronto, and Frederik Andersen stopped 14 shots. The Maple Leafs, coming off a four-day break after dropping a pair last weekend, have lost six of seven to drop into a tie for the North Division lead with Edmonton. They had a nine-point division lead March 3.

Blues 2, Sharks 1 (SO): Vladimir Tarasenko scored the decisive goal in a shootout and visiting St. Louis beat San Jose to snap a five-game losing streak.

Tyler Bozak scored a short-handed goal on his 35th birthday to tie it in the third period. Jordan Binnington made 30 saves and

helped the Blues kill a penalty in overtime.

St. Louis won it in the shootout when Brayden Schenn and Tarasenko scored against Martin Jones. Binnington sealed it with a save against Kevin Labanc.

Ryan Donato scored his first goal in 21 games, and Jones made 33 saves for the Sharks.

Canucks 3, Canadiens 2 (OT): J.T. Miller scored at 2:01 of overtime to lift visiting Vancouver past Montreal for its fourth straight victory.

Miller scored his ninth of the season moments after Montreal's Josh Anderson failed to convert a breakaway attempt.

Nick Suzuki forced overtime with a power-play goal with 57 seconds left in overtime with Montreal on a two-man advantage with goalie Jake Allen off for an extra attacker.

Adam Gaudette and Nils Hoglander scored in regulation for Vancouver, and Thatcher Demko stopped 29 shots for his eighth victory in nine starts.

Corey Perry also scored for Montreal. The Canadiens are 0-6 in overtime this season.

Golden Knights 4, Kings 2: William Karlsson had the winning goal, Max Pacioretty scored twice and visiting Vegas beat Los Angeles for its fifth straight victory.

William Carrier also scored, and Robin Lehner made 23 saves.

Alex Iafallo and Trevor Moore scored for the Kings.

Gordon, Fournier help Magic edge Irving, Nets

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Aaron Gordon scored a season-best 38 points, Evan Fournier added 31 and the Orlando Magic held off Brooklyn's furious fourth-quarter rally to beat the Nets 121-113 on Friday night.

The Magic overcame Kyrie Irving's season-best 43 points to end a nine-game losing streak and stop Brooklyn's winning streak at six games. The Nets also had their franchise-record, eight-game road winning streak halted.

Pistons 113, Rockets 100: Frank Jackson had a season-high 23 points and visiting Detroit handed Houston its franchise-record 19th straight loss.

Winless since Feb. 4, Hous-

ton struggled to find answers for Detroit's ball movement and Jackson's shooting. Jackson was 5-for-5 from three-point range and 7-for-10 overall.

John Wall had 21 points and seven assists for Houston.

Jazz 115, Raptors 112: At Tampa, Fla., Donovan Mitchell scored eight of his 31 points in the final minute and a half to lead Utah past Toronto.

Joe Ingles added 19 points to help Utah avoid losing on consecutive nights for the first time since Jan. 5-6. Rudy Gobert had 15 points and 16 rebounds.

Suns 113, Timberwolves 101: Chris Paul scored 20 points, Mikal Bridges had 17 and host Phoenix bounced back from a loss to Minnesota the

night before to split the series.

Devin Booker had 16 points, and Langston Galloway added 14 to help the Suns improve to 27-13. They have won 16 of their last 20 games.

Kings 107, Celtics 96: Richaun Holmes had 25 points, 11 rebounds, three blocked shots and two steals and visiting Sacramento swept the season series with Boston for the first time since 2007.

Spurs 116, Cavaliers 110: Keldon Johnson had 23 points and career-high 21 rebounds, Dejounte Murray added 22 points and San Antonio beat host Cleveland.

Warriors 116, Grizzlies 103: Andrew Wiggins scored a season-high 40 points, Jordan

Poole added 25 starting in place of injured Stephen Curry, and visiting Golden State beat Memphis to open a two-game set.

Nuggets 131, Bulls 127 (OT): Jamal Murray scored 34 points, including a tying three-pointer in the final second of regulation and a crucial jumper in the final seconds of overtime, lifting host Denver past Chicago.

Trail Blazers 125, Mavericks 119: CJ McCollum scored 32 points, Damian Lillard had 31 and Portland beat visiting Dallas.

Pacers 137, Heat 110: Malcolm Brogdon scored 27 points on 10-for-12 shooting to help Indiana beat host Miami.