

Fort Hood leader under investigation

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — A Fort Hood brigade commander is under investigation after allegations of toxic leadership and violating coronavirus quarantine rules, even as hundreds of his troops contracted the illness soon after his unit's arrival in Germany for a nine-month mission.

Col. Michael Schoenfeldt led the 1st Armored Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, until he departed Germany for Texas in February because of unspecified health reasons, division officials said. He now faces numerous allegations by subordinate officers related to what they described as a bullying leadership style.

"Our command takes these allegations very seriously. We have ongoing investigations into

the alleged incidents," Lt. Col. Chris Brautigam, spokesman for the 1st Cavalry Division, said in a recent statement.

The allegations are the latest leveled at a unit from the Texas base, where the killing of Spc. Vanessa Guillen last year sparked an independent investigation that found a pervasive climate of abuse and sexual harassment, leading to the firings of at least 14 Army senior leaders by December.

Soldiers in the 1st Armored Brigade, which began arriving in Germany in November, said the toxic climate in their unit continued well after the findings of widespread dysfunction were reported to Congress.

"This is the worst I've been treated. That's the bottom line," said one brigade officer under condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation. "I've dealt with

some hard leaders before, but this was toxic through and through."

The Army's independent review of command culture failures at Fort Hood found that the 1st Armored Brigade "merits special mention" for high numbers of enlisted personnel who reported they would fear retaliation if they were to report a sexual assault. The report also faulted the brigade for "dismal" knowledge about sexual assault reporting protocols.

Despite problems outlined in the Fort Hood report and other investigations underway, Schoenfeldt has not been suspended or relieved, the Army said.

But the officers who reported to Schoenfeldt said there needs to be accountability for a commander they said routinely subjected his staff to profanity-

laced outbursts in meetings where leaders were singled out in front of peers and junior officers.

The division's probe is also examining accusations that Schoenfeldt flouted rules intended to stem the spread of the virus, which spread rampantly in the brigade after it came to Grafenwoehr, Germany.

Upon arrival, soldiers were required to quarantine and restrict their movements to a designated camp at the Army's largest training ground in Europe to prevent the spread of the virus, per U.S. Army Europe and Africa rules.

But three brigade officers said Schoenfeldt didn't join the rest of the unit at the camp, opting to stay in a garrison hotel instead, while making trips in and out of the restriction-of-movement area.

Container ship that blocked Suez Canal set free

Associated Press

SUEZ, Egypt — Salvage teams on Monday set free a colossal container ship that has halted global trade through the Suez Canal, bringing an end to a crisis that for nearly a week had clogged one of the world's most vital maritime arteries.

Helped by the peak of high tide, a flotilla of tugboats managed to wrench the bulbous bow of the skyscraper-sized Ever Given from the canal's sandy bank, where it had been firmly lodged since last Tuesday.

After hauling the fully laden 220,000-ton vessel over the canal bank, the salvage team was pulling the vessel toward the Great Bitter Lake, a wide stretch of water halfway between the north and south end of the canal, where the ship will undergo technical inspection, canal authorities said.

Satellite data from MarineTraffic.com

confirmed that the ship was moving away from the shoreline toward the center of the artery.

Video released by the Suez Canal Authority showed the Ever Given being escorted by the tugboats that helped free it, each sounding off their horns in jubilation after nearly a week of chaos.

"We pulled it off!" said Peter Berdowski, CEO of Boskalis, the salvage firm hired to extract the Ever Given, in a statement. "I am excited to announce that our team of experts, working in close collaboration with the Suez Canal Authority, successfully refloated the Ever Given ... thereby making free passage through the Suez Canal possible again."

The obstruction has created a massive traffic jam in the vital passage, holding up \$9 billion each day in global trade and straining supply chains already burdened

by the coronavirus pandemic.

It remained unclear when traffic through the canal would return to normal. At least 367 vessels, carrying everything from crude oil to cattle, have piled up on either end of the canal, waiting to pass.

Data firm Refinitiv estimated it could take more than 10 days to clear the backlog of ships. Meanwhile, dozens of vessels have opted for the alternate route around the Cape of Good Hope at Africa's southern tip — a 3,100-mile detour that adds some two weeks to journeys and costs ships hundreds of thousands of dollars in fuel and other costs.

It wasn't clear whether the Ever Given, a Panama-flagged, Japanese-owned ship hauling goods from Asia to Europe, would continue to its original destination of Rotterdam, Netherlands, or if it would need to enter another port for repairs.

Report: Animals likely source of COVID-19

Associated Press

BEIJING — A joint World Health Organization-China study on the origins of COVID-19 says that transmission of the virus from bats to humans through another animal is the most likely scenario and that a lab leak is “extremely unlikely,” according to a draft copy obtained by The Associated Press.

The findings offer little new insight into how the virus first emerged and leave many questions unanswered, though that was as expected. But the report does provide more detail on the reasoning behind the researchers’ conclusions. The team proposed further research in every area except the lab leak hypothesis.

The report, which is expected to be made public Tuesday, is being closely watched since discovering the origins of the virus could help scientists prevent future pandemics — but it’s also extremely sensitive since China bristles at any suggestion that it is to blame for the current one. Repeated delays in the report’s release have raised questions about whether the Chinese side was trying to skew its conclusions.

Last year, an AP investigation found the Chinese government was strictly controlling all research into its origins.

“We’ve got real concerns about the methodology and the process that went into that

report, including the fact that the government in Beijing apparently helped to write it,” U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a recent CNN interview.

China rejected that criticism Monday.

“The U.S. has been speaking out on the report. By doing this, isn’t the U.S. trying to exert political pressure on the members of the WHO expert group?” asked Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian.

The report is based largely on a visit by a WHO team of international experts to Wuhan, the Chinese city where COVID-19 was first detected. The mission was never meant to identify the exact natural source of the virus, an endeavor that typically takes years. For instance, more than 40 years of study has still failed to pinpoint the exact species of bat that are the natural reservoir of Ebola.

In the draft obtained by the AP, the researchers listed four scenarios in order of likelihood for the emergence of the new coronavirus. Topping the list was transmission from bats through another animal, which they said was likely to very likely. They evaluated direct spread from bats to humans as likely, and said that spread to humans from the packaging of “cold-chain” food products was possible but not likely.

That last possibility was previously dismissed by the WHO and the U.S. Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention, but researchers on this mission have taken it up again, further raising questions about the politicization of the study since China has long pushed the theory.

Bats are known to carry coronaviruses and, in fact, the closest relative of the virus that causes COVID-19 has been found in bats. The report says, however, that “the evolutionary distance between these bat viruses and (COVID-19) is estimated to be several decades, suggesting a missing link.”

It said highly similar viruses have been found in pangolins, which are another kind of mammal, but scientists have yet to identify the same coronavirus in animals that has been infecting humans.

The AP received the draft copy on Monday from a Geneva-based diplomat from a WHO-member country. It wasn’t clear whether the report might still be changed prior to release, though the diplomat said it was the final version. A second diplomat confirmed getting the report, too. Both refused to be identified because they were not authorized to release it ahead of publication.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus acknowledged that he had received the report over the weekend and said it would be formally presented Tuesday.

Video of Floyd arrest appears early at trial

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — The former Minneapolis police officer charged with killing George Floyd went on trial Monday, with prosecutors promptly showing the jury the video of Derek Chauvin pressing his knee on the Black man’s neck for several minutes as onlookers yelled at Chauvin to get off and Floyd gasped that he couldn’t breathe.

In opening statements, prosecutor Jerry Blackwell told the jury that the number to remember was 9 minutes, 29 seconds — the amount of time Chauvin had Floyd pinned to the pavement with his knee last May in the case that triggered scattered violence and a national reckoning over racial injustice.

The white officer “didn’t let up, he didn’t get up,” even after a handcuffed Floyd said 27 times that he couldn’t breathe and went

motionless, Blackwell said.

“He put his knees upon his neck and his back, grinding and crushing him, until the very breath — no, ladies and gentlemen — until the very life was squeezed out of him,” the prosecutor said.

Chauvin attorney Eric Nelson countered by arguing: “Derek Chauvin did exactly what he had been trained to do over his 19-year career.”

Floyd was resisting arrest, and Chauvin arrived to assist other officers who were struggling to get Floyd into a squad car as the crowd around them grew larger and more hostile, Nelson said.

The defense attorney also disputed that Chauvin was to blame for Floyd’s death.

Chauvin, 45, is charged with unintentional second-degree murder, third-degree murder and manslaughter.

The widely seen video sparked outrage across the U.S. and led to widespread protests and unrest, along with demands that the country confront racism and police brutality. Confederate statues and other symbols were pulled down around the U.S., and activists demanded that police department budgets be cut or overhauled.

Playing the footage during opening statements underscored the central role video will play in the case. It was posted to Facebook by a bystander who witnessed Floyd’s arrest after he was accused of trying to pass a counterfeit \$20 bill at a convenience store.

Fourteen people in the jury box will hear the case — eight of them white, six of them Black or multiracial, according to the court. Two of the 14 will be alternates. The judge has not said which ones will be alternates and which ones will deliberate the case.

Biden plan will expand offshore wind power

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The White House announced Monday an ambitious plan to expand wind farms along the East Coast and jumpstart the country's nascent offshore wind industry, saying that it would trigger a massive clean energy effort in the fight against climate change.

The plan would generate 30 gigawatts of offshore wind power by the end of the decade — enough to power more than 10 million American homes and cut 78 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions. The Biden administration said it would speed permitting for projects off the East Coast, invest in research and development, provide low-interest loans to industry and fund changes to U.S. ports.

"We are ready to rock and roll," National Climate Adviser Gina McCarthy told reporters in a phone call Monday. Offshore wind power will generate "thousands of good paying union jobs. This is all about creating great jobs in the ocean and in our port cities and in our heartland," she said.

The new initiative represents a major stretch for the United States. The country has only one offshore wind project online right now, generating 30 megawatts off Rhode Island. It is currently on track to generate 15 gigawatts by 2030, according to Rystad Energy vice president for renewable energy Vegard Wiik Vollset.

"A drastic acceleration of this is going to be needed if we're going to hit those targets," Wiik Vollset said in a phone interview.

Biden officials outlined a plan for speeding up offshore wind development, by setting concrete deadlines for reviewing and approving permit applications; establishing a new wind energy area in the waters between Long Island and the New Jersey coast; investing \$230 million to upgrade U.S. ports; and providing \$3 billion in potential loans for the offshore wind industry through the Energy Department.

The program also instructs the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to share physical and biological data with Ørsted, a Danish offshore wind development firm, about the U.S. waters where it holds leases. NOAA will grant \$1 million to help study the impact of offshore wind operations on fishing operators as well as coastal communities.

Unlike other renewable energy sectors, offshore wind represents one of the most labor-friendly opportunities for U.S. workers because these projects require regular operations and maintenance support. In November Ørsted signed an agreement in November with the North America's Building Trades Unions to transition some of its workers into offshore wind, and the company has also provided support to train members of the Masters, Mates and Pilots union.

While offshore wind represents the fastest-growing sector in renewable power, the U.S. remains far behind Europe. Wiik Vollset noted that Europe already has 24 gigawatts of operational capacity, and the U.K. alone aims to have 40 gigawatts online by 2030.

Russia's SolarWinds hack got into emails of top Trump DHS officials

Associated Press

Suspected Russian hackers gained access to email accounts belonging to the Trump administration's head of the Department of Homeland Security and members of the department's cybersecurity staff whose jobs included hunting threats from foreign countries, The Associated Press has learned.

The intelligence value of the hacking of then-acting Secretary Chad Wolf and his staff is not publicly known, but the symbolism is stark. Their accounts were accessed as part of what's known as the SolarWinds intrusion and it throws into question how the U.S. government can protect individuals, companies and institutions across the country if it can't protect itself.

The short answer for many security experts and federal officials is that it can't — at least not without some significant changes.

"The SolarWinds hack was a victory for our foreign adversaries, and a failure for DHS," said

Sen. Rob Portman, of Ohio, top Republican on the Senate's Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. "We are talking about DHS's crown jewels."

The Biden administration has tried to keep a tight lid on the scope of the SolarWinds attack as it weighs retaliatory measures against Russia. But an inquiry by the AP found new details about the breach at DHS and other agencies, including the Energy Department, where hackers accessed top officials' private schedules.

The AP interviewed more than a dozen current and former U.S. government officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the confidential nature of the ongoing investigation into the hack.

Gen. Paul Nakasone, who leads the Pentagon's cyber force, said last week the Biden administration is considering a "range of options" in response. Russia has denied any role in the hack.

Graham rebukes assault weapon ban, says he has AR-15 for home defense

The Washington Post

As Democrats push again to ban assault weapons after mass shootings in Boulder, Colo., and Atlanta this month, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., on Sunday reiterated his opposition — and said he has a personal reason for doing so.

He needs his own AR-15, he said, in case disaster strikes and he needs to defend his home against a roving "gang."

"I own an AR-15," Graham told Fox News host Chris Wallace. "If there's a natural disaster in South Carolina where the cops can't protect my neighborhood, my house will be the last one that the gang will come to because I can defend myself."

The comment went viral on Sunday, with more than 4.6 million watching one clip on Twitter as gun control advocates rebuked the Republican senator. But his interview also underscored the steep challenge that President Joe Biden and his allies will face

in seeking to enact new restrictions on gun ownership.

On Tuesday, the day after a gunman killed 10 people, including a police officer, inside a Boulder grocery store, Biden called for a renewed ban on assault weapons and high capacity magazines, as well as expanded federal background checks for gun sales. Later in the week, Biden also said he would consider executive orders limiting access to foreign-made guns and 3-D-printed weapons.

Graham has supported expanding red flag laws, which are in place in 19 states and can temporarily restrict gun sales to people flagged by family members or authorities as a danger to themselves or others. Last year, he co-sponsored legislation to encourage red flag laws, and on Sunday said he still supports that move.

"Most of these problems have a lot to do with mental health. Count me in for addressing that issue," he told Wallace.

Biden extends federal halt on evictions

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration is extending a federal moratorium on evictions of tenants who have fallen behind on rent during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention moved to continue the pandemic-related protection, which had been scheduled to expire on Wednesday. The moratorium is now extended through the end of June.

The moratorium, initially put in place last year, provides protection for renters out of concern that having families lose their homes and move into shelters or share crowded conditions with relatives or friends during a pandemic would further spread the highly contagious coronavirus.

To be eligible for protection, renters must earn \$198,000 or less for couples filing jointly or \$99,000 for single filers, demonstrate that they've sought government help to pay the rent, declare that they can't pay because of COVID-19 hardships and affirm they are likely to become homeless if evicted.

Arkansas

LITTLE ROCK — As Arkansas works to boost its low COVID-19 vaccination rates, Gov. Asa Hutchinson continued to ask his state's residents to help blunt the spread of the coronavirus by getting inoculated.

Arkansas has one of the nation's slowest vaccination rates. About 12% of the state's population had been fully vaccinated as of Saturday, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About 25% of Arkansas' population has received at least one shot of the COVID-19 vaccine.

"Last year, the urgent COVID message was 'wear a mask,'" Hutchinson said Saturday in a tweet. "Masks remain important, but today's urgent message is 'get vaccinated' ... but if we are going to win, we must increase

the count. Roll up your sleeve for Arkansas!"

Over the past two weeks, the rolling average of daily new cases has lessened by 121, a decrease of 39.2%, according to data on Sunday from Johns Hopkins University.

Florida

FORT LAUDERDALE — A Florida sheriff's deputy has become the seventh person in the agency to die of complications from the coronavirus.

The Broward Sheriff's Office said on its Facebook page that 48-year-old Sgt. Shane Owens died on Saturday. He worked for about 30 years with the agency's detention department.

He had been hospitalized and on a ventilator prior to his death, the sheriff's office said.

The Sun-Sentinel reported that Owens' father, David Owens, also worked for the Broward Sheriff's Office, serving for 34 years in the Department of Detention and retiring in 2019.

Indiana

INDIANAPOLIS — State health officials opened up COVID-19 vaccination eligibility on Monday to all Indiana residents 30 and older.

The state's latest vaccine expansion makes the vaccine available to more than 840,000 additional Hoosiers, the Indiana Department of Health said.

Gov. Eric Holcomb had announced last week that the state would also open up vaccine eligibility for all residents 16 and older, starting Wednesday.

Eligible Indiana residents can schedule an appointment to receive a vaccine by visiting ourshot.in.gov or calling 211 if they do not have access to a computer, or require assistance.

New Mexico

SANTA FE — Health officials in New Mexico on Sunday reported 167 confirmed COVID-19 cases but no new deaths amid

continued slowing of the coronavirus outbreak.

The state's pandemic totals rose to 191,048 cases and 3,925 known deaths as seven-day rolling averages of daily new cases and daily deaths declined over the past two weeks.

In the latest numbers, Bernalillo County had 50 of the new cases.

The state's largest county that includes metro Albuquerque has had 54,495 of the state's total coronavirus cases with Dona Ana County having 23,735 total cases since the pandemic started.

Oklahoma

OKLAHOMA CITY — Several universities in Oklahoma said that for now, they will not require their students to get a COVID-19 vaccine before coming back to campus in the fall.

Rutgers University in New Jersey was one of the first universities in the nation to put in place a vaccination mandate for its students when it made the announcement last week.

But officials at the University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma State University and the University of Central Oklahoma say they have no current plans for a vaccine mandate for their students, according to KOKH-TV in Oklahoma City.

Oklahoma State University said while it's not requiring the vaccine at this time for students, "The situation could change as we get closer to the start of the fall semester."

Rhode Island

PROVIDENCE — Eight community health centers across Rhode Island are sharing more than \$33 million in federal funding to boost coronavirus vaccination efforts, authorities said Monday.

The funding is Rhode Island's portion of \$6 billion in federal allocations to community health centers nationwide meant to expand vaccine access to under-

served communities and to support essential workers, according to a statement from the office Sen. Jack Reed.

While more doses of vaccine are coming to Rhode Island, more needs to be done to increase vaccination rates and this new funding will help immunize in communities that have been hit hardest, the statement said.

Texas

HOUSTON — Texas was set on Monday to begin making COVID-19 vaccines available to anyone who wants one.

Texas will become the most populous U.S. state to expand COVID-19 vaccine eligibility to all adults. The state has nearly 30 million residents.

This will come more than a month before President Joe Biden's goal of opening vaccine eligibility to everyone by May 1.

In Texas, individuals who are 16 and 17 years old will also be able to get a vaccine starting Monday. But the Texas Department of State Health Services said only the Pfizer vaccine is authorized for individuals in that age group.

Vermont

MONTPELIER — Vermonters aged 50 and over are now eligible for making appointments to be vaccinated against the virus that causes COVID-19.

The 50-and-up age band opens on Monday. The Vermont Health Department website will begin accepting appointments at 8:15 a.m.

Over the next three weeks, the age will drop for people to be eligible to make appointments to receive the vaccine.

On April 19, all adult Vermonters will be eligible to be vaccinated.

Gov. Phil Scott said he believes that if the vaccine supply remains adequate, by July 4, once all adults have had the opportunity to be fully vaccinated, life in Vermont will largely return to pre-pandemic normal.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Citizen Honor Award for teen who died in rescue

MN MINNEAPOLIS — A Minnesota teenager who died last year after rescuing her younger relatives from drowning near a dam will receive one of the nation's highest honors for heroism.

Raina Lynn Neeland, who was 18 years old, will receive the Citizen Honor Award from the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, the Star Tribune reported. The teenager from near Bagley, Minn., got caught, along with seven children, in the turbulent waters at the bottom of Clearwater Dam in Sinclair Township on Aug. 17. She pulled the younger children to safety, but went under the water herself.

Large amounts of rain had caused higher than normal water levels at the dam. Clearwater County Sheriff Darin Halverson said the dam is off-limits to the public, but authorities have struggled to keep people from accessing it.

The Congressional Medal of Honor Society, which bestows the nation's highest military decoration for bravery, selects people and individuals each year for its Citizen Honors Awards.

Police car Dillinger stole in jailbreak returning

IN CROWN POINT — A police car that notorious 1930s gangster John Dillinger stole after his daring escape from a northwest Indiana jail will get a police motorcade and a parade next month when it returns to the scene of his jailbreak.

After Dillinger escaped from jail in Crown Point, Ind., in March 1934 by fooling jailers with a gun carved out of wood, he

stole Lake County Sheriff Lillian Holley's 1933 Ford V8 police car and drove it to Chicago, where he abandoned it.

Chicago police impounded the car and later sold it at auction. But Arizona resident Mark Love and the Old Sheriff's House Foundation in Crown Point tracked down the car and restored it.

The police car's April 3 return will include a parade and a procession of Lake County Sheriff's Department police vehicles that will accompany it to the Old Sheriff's House and Jail in Crown Point roughly following the reverse route Dillinger took while fleeing to Chicago.

Mysterious disease killing bears in Sierra Nevada

CA TAHOE CITY — A mysterious disease has stricken several young black bears captured in the Sierra Nevada, and one telltale sign is their fearlessness at being around humans.

California veterinarians said in the past 12 months, officials have captured four bears with encephalitis, which can be caused by a body's immune system attacking itself, the Sacramento Bee reported Saturday. The bears with dangerously inflamed brains have been found on the Nevada side of Lake Tahoe and as far away as Humboldt County.

Bears normally shy away from humans, but a sickly, confused female bear captured last fall in Pollock Pines showed no fear of the people who took pity on it and began feeding it. At one point, it hopped into an open car trunk, state wildlife officials said. Like almost all of the bears captured with the same symptoms, which include head tremors and a subtle head tilt, the bear was so sick-

ly, veterinarians had to put it down.

The new viruses don't appear to pose a risk to people, said Jamie Sherman, a veterinarian at UC Davis' One Health Institute who has studied bear diseases.

Scammer posing as an investigator to get cash

AL DOTHAN — An Alabama sheriff said a scammer making calls in his jurisdiction is posing as an investigator and demanding money.

The Houston County Sheriff's Office said in a statement that several residents had reported phone calls from a person claiming to be a sheriff's investigator and "demanding money in lieu of an arrest."

Residents said the caller claimed to have arrest warrants in their names and wanted payment in the form of gift cards or money vouchers, the Dothan Eagle reported.

The sheriff's office said it doesn't call people to warn them of arrest warrants and any fines are imposed and collected by the court system, not the sheriff.

Town rallies to restore beheaded Mother Goose

KY HAZARD — A community in Kentucky is rallying to help restore an 80-year-old landmark — an oval shaped building that has a domed roof with the neck and head of a goose sticking out the front. Until last week, that is, when the goose was beheaded by strong winds.

The owners had put up a GoFundMe page March 20, saying the head had moved off its foundation and couldn't be stabilized. They were raising funds to reconstruct it. Then on Wednesday, they posted an update. The head

had fallen.

The building has served as a home, a service station, a market and an inn over the years, WYMT-TV reported. Now, community support in Hazard is pouring in. As of Saturday afternoon, the GoFundMe page had raised more than \$7,000. The Kentucky Heritage Council in Frankfort has also pledged to help out.

Costco shoppers: Ravens stealing groceries

AK ANCHORAGE — Some Alaska Costco shoppers said they've had their groceries stolen by ravens in the store parking lot.

Matt Lewallen said he was packing his groceries into his car in the parking lot of an Anchorage Costco when ravens swooped in to steal a short rib from his cart, the Anchorage Daily News reported Friday. Additional raven thief sightings have also emerged on social media.

"My parents were minding their business after a shop and made it home with one less steak!" Kimberly Waller wrote on Facebook. "The bird snatched it right out of the pack in the parking lot."

Anchorage resident Tamara Josey replied to Waller's post and referred to the ravens as "calculating." She said ravens hovered her in trying to steal her groceries.

Rick Sinnott, a former wildlife biologist with the state Department of Fish and Game, said hundreds of ravens fly to Anchorage in the winter for food. After winter turns to spring, most of the ravens leave, Sinnott said. But before they do, the ravens stick around to pluck assorted meats, fruits and vegetables.

— From wire reports

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No. 1 'Zags still team to beat

Associated Press

The Elite Eight marks the halfway point of the NCAA Tournament, but don't blink. It has the shelf life of chicken nuggets.

By the end of tonight, we'll be down to the Final Four, and find out whether the selection committee was any better at seeding schools than the cooks at your local McDonalds.

Three of the four teams handed No. 1s — Gonzaga, Baylor and Michigan — are still in the field, which is average. But so are three Pac-12 Conference teams — No. 6 USC, No. 11 UCLA and No. 12 Oregon State — which definitely is not. Needless to say, the road would have been a lot smoother for the Pac-12 entries if their league got anywhere near the respect the Big Ten and Big 12 carried inside the room where it (seeding) happens.

USC and UCLA were the last two teams to claim their seats Sunday. The Trojans handily beat fellow Pac-12 member and seventh-seeded Oregon, while the Bruins needed overtime — after a last-second hiccup — to put away No. 2 Alabama 88-78.

"I'll never live that one down," UCLA coach Mick Cronin said afterward. "The kids bailed me out."

In the two other games, Gonzaga looked unbeatable one more time while steamrolling No. 5 Creighton 83-65, while Michigan

had surprisingly little trouble shaking No. 4 Florida State 76-58, once again displaying the kind of balance and depth to upend the Zags' (29-0) quest for a title and the first perfect season since the 1975-76 Indiana Hoosiers.

"They just play so fast, so efficient with everything they do," said Marcus Zegarowski, who led Creighton with 19 points. "There are no lapses. You just can't take, not even a play, you can't take a second off or they're going to make you pay."

UCLA essentially took the last four seconds off, and the Tide made them pay. Leading by three with Alabama in-bounding the ball, Cronin chose not to have his players commit a quick foul and give up two free throws. Two passes later, Alex Reese canned a long three-pointer — the tournament's first buzzer-beater — and you could have fried an egg on the top of Cronin's pate.

Fortunately, his players saw it otherwise. That nonchalance has paid dividends for these Bruins, who had to beat Michigan State in the First Four just to get into the big-boy bracket. UCLA is the first play-in team to get this far since VCU in 2011, the year the brackets were expanded to 68 teams.

"We knew we had nothing to worry about," UCLA guard Jaime Jaquez Jr. said. "This is March. It happens all the time."

UCLA beats Alabama in OT to reach Elite Eight

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Jaime Jaquez Jr. remembers the moment Mick Cronin introduced himself at UCLA, the new coach promising to restore the shine to the storied program by instilling a mental and physical toughness the team had never experienced.

It came in handy Sunday night.

After watching second-seeded Alabama's Alex Reese take advantage of the Bruins' soft defense to drain a buzzer-beating three-pointer and force overtime, Jaquez and the rest of his boys in blue were completely nonplussed by the moment.

Instead, they scored the first five points of the extra session, then cruised to an 88-78 victory that gave the No. 11 seed Bruins their first trip to the Elite Eight since 2008 — and Cronin the first of his 18-year coaching career.

"When he came to UCLA," Jaquez said, "he basically preached the entire time, no matter what was going to happen, we were going to be a tough team, and we were going to be a defensive team. That was his whole

attitude. No matter what happens, we're going to be the toughest team to go out and play."

Now, after beating Michigan State in overtime just to escape the First Four, the unheralded Bruins are marching forward in the NCAA Tournament. Next up is top-seeded Michigan on Tuesday night for a spot in the Final Four.

"There's many times we could have packed it in," Cronin said, "but I told them they've put up with me for two years trying to pound into them toughness and competitive spirit. They allowed me to do it and you're seeing the results right now."

Jules Bernard also scored 17 points, Singleton had 15 and Juzang and Tyger Campbell added 13 apiece for UCLA, while Jahvon Quinerly scored 20 points and John Petty Jr. had 16 for the Crimson Tide.

Alabama (26-7) was just 11-for-25 from the foul line, missing both of its attempts in overtime, while losing for the eighth time in nine Sweet 16 games. Its only Elite Eight trip was in 2004.

Michigan pounds paint to rout FSU

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — What was touted as the marquee matchup in the Sweet 16 turned into a dud.

For everyone but Michigan, that is.

Seven-foot-1 freshman Hunter Dickinson had 14 points and eight rebounds and the top-seeded Wolverines took the inside route to the Elite Eight, pounding away in the paint Sunday for a 76-58 takedown of surprisingly helpless Florida State.

Franz Wagner had 13 points and 10 rebounds for Michigan. The Wolverines scored their first 30 points of the second half from close range to turn this game into a blowout and lead coach Juwan Howard and Co. to a victory in the only "chalk" meeting between a 1 and 4 seed of the second weekend.

Michigan (23-4) moved to a regional final for the first time since 2018 under John Beilein, whose departure a year later led to Howard's hiring. On Tuesday, the Wolverines will play 11th-seeded UCLA for a trip to the Final Four.

On Sunday, they decimated the Seminoles' inside defense. The evening's most telling stat was points in the paint: Michigan 50, Florida State 28.

"We basically knew how they were going to play us all game with fronting the post and switching everything," Wagner said. "We knew what to expect and did that in practice. And I think we did a really good job of not allowing them to speed us up."

The Wolverines created havoc on the other end, too.

They forced the Seminoles so off the mark that FSU didn't score its 20th point until M.J. Walker (10 points) hit a jumper with 27 seconds left in the first half.

The Seminoles were held under 60 points for the first time this season, and flashed about as much fluidity as coach Leonard Hamilton, who limped around on the sideline in a walking boot; he ruptured his Achilles tendon while stepping off the bus last week.

"I think they were the best version of Michigan tonight," Hamilton said. "Even though I thought we could have played a little better, I'm not sure Michigan didn't have a lot to do with our inability to play as well as we have sometimes."

The Wolverines have big men in Dickinson and 6-9 Wagner, the likes of whom FSU hasn't faced much, even as its long, athletic bunch took the program to its third straight Sweet 16.

Capital gains: 10 wins in 11 games

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Capitals players and coach Peter Laviolette sounded as if they'd lost after holding on to beat the New York Rangers 5-4 Sunday.

That's a good sign for the first-place team in the East Division after tying the Tampa Bay Lightning for the top spot in the NHL.

Washington has won 10 of 11 games to move two points up on the second-place New York Islanders and looks primed for another deep playoff run. Instead of celebrating two goals by Tom Wilson, the 724th of Alex Ovechkin's career or three points from T.J. Oshie, the Capitals lamented a sloppy third period that turned a blowout into a nail-biter.

This veteran team has grown to appreciate the value of piling up points and learning lessons along the way, and this game serves as another teachable moment after almost letting what should have been an easy victory slip away.

"If there's a trend, we want to address it," said Wilson, who has five points in four games since returning from a seven-game suspension. "The whole season is definitely

just to get ready for the meaningful hockey. You want to win games, you want to get there and you want to build your game and feel good about it going into the playoffs."

Washington has been outscored 40-34 in third periods this season. It led 4-0 on Evgeny Kuznetsov's goal 5:15 into the third before a Rangers scoring flurry made things interesting.

Oshie's deflection goal with 8:14 left proved crucial, standing up as the game-winner. Colin Blackwell scored twice on his 28th birthday, No. 1 pick Alexis Lafrenière scored the fifth goal of his rookie season and Chris Kreider scored on the power play, cutting New York's deficit to one with 3:52 left.

Panthers 4, Stars 1: Jonathan Huberdeau scored twice in the first period and Florida won at Dallas after losing standout defenseman Aaron Ekblad to a serious leg injury.

Ekblad was taken off on a stretcher midway through the second period after getting tangled up in the corner with Stars defenseman Esa Lindell following a hit from Lindell.

Devils 1, Bruins 0: Mackenzie Blackwood stopped 40 shots for his first shutout of the season, Kyle Palmieri scored and visiting New Jersey held off Boston.

The Devils improved to 4-0-1 against the Bruins this season, with each game decided by a goal.

Predators 3, Blackhawks 2: Roman Josi scored with 6:33 left in the third period and surging Nashville won at Chicago for its fifth straight victory.

Viktor Arvidsson also scored and Pekka Rinne stopped 27 shots. The Predators won for the seventh time in eight games.

Ducks 3, Blues 2 (OT): Josh Manson scored at 1:42 of overtime and Anaheim overcame a two-goal deficit to win at St. Louis for a two-game sweep.

Adam Henrique and Can Fowler scored in regulation for the Ducks, and Anthony Stolarz made 37 saves in his first start of the season.

Red Wings 4, Blue Jackets 1: Michael Rasmussen broke a tie early in the third period with his first goal of the season and host Detroit beat Columbus for the second time in two days.

U.S. men's soccer will miss third straight Olympics

Associated Press

The U.S. broke out a 3-4-3 formation with wingbacks, a new weapon in the team's arsenal under coach Gregg Berhalter that opened space for Christian Pulisic.

The result was the Americans' first win at a European opponent in six years.

Gio Reyna scored on a deflected shot off a pass from Pulisic in the 30th minute, Pulisic doubled the lead with a penalty kick in the 59th and the United States beat Northern Ireland 2-1 Sunday in an exhibition at Belfast.

"That's where I want to be. I want to help lead this team in whatever way that is, whether that's with the captain's band or not," Pulisic said.

"I hope I can always lead by example and be one of the hardest workers out there. And that's always going to be my

aim. And if I do that, I think the guys will see that and do the same, I hope."

Pulisic captained the U.S. for the fourth time, the first since Oct. 11, 2019, against Cuba.

Berhalter's formation morphed into a 5-4-1 at times that resulted in better defensive pressure on a bumpy field with soft patches.

"I think it gives the team a lot of stability in the back, especially it allows you to swing the ball around just having that extra man in the back," Pulisic said. "And it just allows me to come inside a bit more and for me to find that space in the pocket."

Berhalter made four changes, inserting Tim Ream and Matt Miazga as part of a three-man central defense with Aaron Long. Antonee Robinson started at left wing and Sergiño Dest shifted from left back to right wing. Jordan Siebatcheu got his

first start after making his debut in Thursday's 4-1 win over Jamaica at Wiener Neustadt, Austria.

"Christian, their team plays a similar way, right? Sergiño at Barcelona plays a similar way," Berhalter said. "Antonee Robinson at Fulham plays as a wingback. Gio played the similar position for Dortmund. So we thought that they would be comfortable playing that way."

Reyna received a pass from Ream and took four touches with no pressure. His right-footed shot from 24 yards deflected off a leg of Ciaran Brown and over goalkeeper Conor Hazard for his second international goal.

"Whenever you beat a European team, it's always good for your confidence," Reyna said.

Pulisic, who often plays on a wing for Chelsea, earned the

penalty when he took a pass from Reyna and was tripped by Daniel Ballard. He slid the ball to the left of Hazard for his 15th international goal and a 2-0 lead.

"When he's in that type of mode, he is just an unbelievable player," Berhalter said. "And that's what I was most happy with today. He was relentless pressing. He just kept going and going and going. And then he's so good on the ball, he can balance the team."

Meanwhile, the U.S. men will miss a third straight Olympics.

Juan Carlos Obregón scored in the fourth minute of first-half stoppage time, goalkeeper David Ochoa committed a blunder that gifted Luis Palma a goal two minutes into the second half and Honduras beat the United States 2-1 on Sunday in an Olympic qualification game at Guadalajara, Mexico.

Booker, Suns top Hornets in overtime

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Devin Booker scored 35 points, Chris Paul had 16 and the Phoenix Suns outlasted the Charlotte Hornets 101-97 in overtime Sunday.

Deandre Ayton added 14 points, and Mikal Bridges had 13 points, eight rebounds and a career-high six steals. The Suns, second in the Western Conference at 31-14, have won three of four on their Southeast swing.

Devonte Graham led the Hornets with 30 points, and Terry Rozier had 22 points and 10 rebounds. Miles Bridges added 18 points, 12 rebounds, and Gordon Hayward scored 15 points.

A crowd of 3,850 saw Charlotte force overtime, with Rozier's three-pointer tying it at 90 with 33.5 seconds left.

Lakers 96, Magic 93 (OT): Andre Drummond posted a photo of himself in Los Angeles Lakers gold, the signal that he was on his way to a team that needs the help in the worst way.

Later Sunday, the Lakers made the move official, the first team announcement in months that didn't include bad news about an injury.

"Andre Drummond gives us powerful, anchor-point skills on both ends of the court," Los Angeles general manager Rob Pelinka said in a statement. "We feel extremely fortunate to add a player of his caliber and magnitude to our core group at this stage of our journey to defend the NBA title."

This stage of the Lakers' journey is about to get interesting if not just flat-out dangerous. The team defeated Orlando in overtime. On Wednesday, they face the Milwaukee Bucks. From there, they get into the teeth of their second-half schedule, with games against the Clippers, the Heat, the Nets and the Knicks all on the road coming in the next two weeks.

Dennis Schroder scored 24 points and Kyle Kuzma added 21 to lead Los Angeles on Sunday.

Montrezl Harrell added 18 points to help

the Lakers win two in a row without LeBron James and Anthony Davis.

Orlando's Otto Porter Jr. had a clean look at a three-pointer to send it to overtime, but the shot hit the rim and stayed out.

Nuggets 126, Hawks 102: Aaron Gordon scored 13 points in his Denver debut to help the host Nuggets beat Atlanta.

Acquired from Orlando at the trade deadline, Gordon started and played 21 minutes. Nikola Jokic added with 16 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists, and Michael Porter Jr. had 15 points and 10 rebounds.

Trae Young scored 21 points for the Hawks, who lost for the third time in 12 games.

Trail Blazers 122, Raptors 117: CJ McCollum scored seven of his 23 points in the final two minutes, Damian Lillard had 22 points and 11 assists, and visiting Portland beat Toronto.

Pascal Siakam had 26 points and eight rebounds, and Fred VanVleet added 20 points and eight assists for the Raptors, who lost for the 11th time in 12 games.

Horschel grinds out Match Play win in Austin

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Billy Horschel is back among the top 20 in the world for the first time since the summer of 2015, and all it took was low expectations and the longest week of his career.

Horschel demands a lot from himself, and that starts with preparation. That's why it was so unusual for him to spend a week on the water at the Florida beaches of Melbourne with his family, not touching a club for seven days before arriving at the Dell Technologies Match Play.

All he wanted was to see what kind of shape his game was in so he could figure out what needed work going into the Masters. Five days, seven matches and 122 holes later, he had his first World Golf Championship.

"You just never know when you're going to win," he said. "You just never know when it's going to be your time."

And in this case, he couldn't have imagined how he would win

Sunday at Austin Country Club.

Horschel made only one birdie in the championship match against Scottie Scheffler, and that was on the fifth hole when he chipped in from below the green. Even with nothing but pars and one bogey the rest of the way, he never lost a hole.

On two par 5s, Horschel was in the fairway and Scheffler had to take a penalty drop, and both times they halved the hole with a par (No. 6) and a bogey (No. 12).

On another par 5 with a chance to close out the match, Horschel again was in the fairway and Scheffler was in the trees with barely a shot out to the fairway. Horschel had to get up and down from a bunker behind the green to halve the 16th.

It wasn't pretty. It wasn't easy. But he won on the 17th hole when Scheffler couldn't make a 10-foot birdie to send the match down the final hole.

"It wasn't pretty at all," Horschel said. "It was just one of those days where you knew you

just had to keep grinding out, trying to give yourself the best opportunity to make easy pars and hopefully that was going to get the job done."

And there was some luck involved, because there usually is in this most fickle format.

Max Homa had a putt to send him home on Friday. Horschel had to make a 20-foot birdie putt on the 17th hole against Tommy Fleetwood in the quarterfinals, and then won that match when Fleetwood hit out-of-bounds on the first extra hole. Even then, Horschel had to make a 5-foot putt.

And it helped that at the end of the five-day tournament, neither Victor Perez in the semifinals nor Scheffler in the championship match had their best stuff. By the end of the week, it seems no one did.

Perez lost three holes on the back nine with bogeys.

Scheffler, who had made 15 birdies in 31 holes to beat Ian Poulter and Jon Rahm on Satur-

day, and who made a 10-foot birdie on the 17th hole that led to a tough win over Matt Kuchar in the semifinals, didn't make anything in the last match. His only birdie was conceded from 35 feet because Horschel had hit into a hazard.

"I couldn't really get that spark that I needed," Scheffler said. "And I gave myself some opportunities, just wasn't able to make the putts."

Horschel can only wonder if lowering his expectations only helped. He sounded more worn out from his time at the beach than over the five days on the golf course. But he needed it. Striving for perfection can take a toll.

"I needed a mental reboot," he said, "and that's what I got."

Now he has bigger goals, starting with his next opportunity at match play. He has never played in the Ryder Cup, and while he remains outside the top qualifying spots, he still has four majors and a World Golf Championship on his schedule.