

Russians seek to control key Ukrainian cities

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian forces battled for control of a crucial energy-producing city in Ukraine's south on Thursday and gained ground in their bid to cut off the country from the sea, as Ukrainian leaders called on citizens to rise up and wage guerrilla war against the invaders.

The fighting at Enerhodar, a city on the Dnieper River that accounts for about one-quarter of the country's power generation, came as another round of talks between the two sides yielded what Ukraine said was a tentative agreement with Russia to set up safe corridors inside the country for evacuating citizens and delivering humanitarian aid.

The mayor of Enerhodar, the site of the biggest nuclear plant in Europe, said Ukrainian forces were battling Russian troops on the city's outskirts. Video showed flames and clouds of black smoke

rising above the city of over 50,000, with people streaming away from the inferno, past wrecked cars, as sirens wailed.

Moscow's ground advance on Ukraine's capital in the north has apparently stalled, with a huge armored column outside Kyiv at a standstill. And stiffer than expected resistance from the outmanned, outgunned Ukrainians has staved off the swift victory that Russia may have expected.

Russian Maj. Gen. Andrei Sukhovetsky, commander of an airborne division, was killed in fighting earlier this week, an officers organization in Russia reported.

But the Russians have brought their superior firepower to bear in the past few days, launching missile and artillery attacks on civilian areas and making significant gains on the ground in the south as part of an effort to sever the country's connection to the Black and Azov seas.

Cutting Ukraine's access to the coastline would deal a crippling blow to the country's economy and allow Russia to build a land corridor stretching from its border, across Crimea, which has been occupied by Russia since 2014, and all the way west to Romania.

The Russians announced the capture of Kherson, and local Ukrainian officials confirmed that forces have taken over local government headquarters in the vital Black Sea port of 280,000, making it the first major city to fall since the invasion began a week ago.

Heavy fighting continued on the outskirts of another strategic port, Mariupol, on the Azov Sea, plunging it into darkness, isolation and fear.

The second round of talks between Ukrainian and Russian delegations was held in neighboring Belarus. But the two sides ap-

peared to have little common ground going into the meeting, and Russian President Vladimir Putin warned Ukraine that it must quickly accept the Kremlin's demand for its "demilitarization" and declare itself neutral, formally renouncing its bid to join NATO.

After the latest talks ended, a member of Ukraine's delegation, Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, reported the tentative agreement to allow cease-fires in areas designated safe corridors.

Despite a profusion of evidence of civilian casualties and destruction of civilian infrastructure by the Russian military, some of it documented by The Associated Press, Putin decried what he called an "anti-Russian disinformation campaign" and insisted that Moscow uses "only precision weapons to exclusively destroy military infrastructure."

Navy jets back NATO, check Russia in southern Europe

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — U.S. Navy fighter planes from a carrier strike group in the Mediterranean Sea are patrolling southern Europe's skies as part of NATO's effort to check Russian aggression and support alliance members, Navy officials said Thursday.

Over the past month, U.S. and allied pilots have flown air policing and training missions originating from the USS Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group, the Navy said in a statement.

The Navy did not say how many flights are involved, but the level of support is "consistent with what carrier air wings have provided during similar missions,"

said Lt. Cmdr. Shawn P. Eklund, a spokesman for the Harry S. Truman/Carrier Strike Group 8.

"Bottom line, the entire air wing of more than 60 aircraft are supporting the NATO (enhanced air patrol) mission," Eklund said.

It's also unclear over which southern European locations the flights occurred or whether any planes had encountered Russian jets. The air wing, however, hadn't experienced any "unsafe or unprofessional interactions with Russian jets since they have been in theater," said Lt. Tyler Barker, a spokesman for U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet.

Last month, U.S. officials acknowledged three dangerous encounters between Russian jets

and Navy P-8A Poseidon patrol planes over international waters in the Mediterranean Sea during the Feb. 12-13 weekend.

The Truman policing and training flights have been carried out by fighter attack squadrons 11, 211, 81 and 34, and Electronic Attack Squadron 137, the Navy said.

The Air Force's 48th, 55th and 32nd fighter wings as well as the 435th Air Ground Operations Wing out of Ramstein Air Base in Germany and the 606th Air Control Squadron from Aviano Air Base in Italy supported the flights, according to the statement.

The air policing flights began Feb. 24, Eklund said.

Training flights with the Romanian air force occurred Feb. 8-15

and included four U.S. F/A-18 Hornet jets based at Borcea Fetesti Airfield in Romania.

The training missions were a critical jump-off point for NATO's enhanced air policing and show the work of the air wing and the Truman with allies to defend territorial integrity, Capt. Patrick Hourigan, the carrier wing's commander, said in the statement. Enhanced, or augmented, air policing is part of a multi-pronged approach developed by NATO after Russia invaded and annexed Crimea in 2014.

In early February, the Truman sailed alongside the French Charles de Gaulle and Italian Cavour carrier strike groups in a show of NATO strength prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Officials mull permanent US bases in Baltics

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON—Russia's invasion of Ukraine is prompting lawmakers to reconsider the U.S. security structure in the Baltics, where leaders have long sought permanent American bases.

"Having a U.S. flag there — a permanent one — is a deterrence," Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., a member of the House Armed Services Committee and co-chairman of the Baltic Caucus, said Tuesday during a committee hearing. "Russia will know they're not just going into the Baltics... but they are attacking U.S. forces when they do so. I think it will have a reassuring effect for the Baltics, who are very small."

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the only former Soviet republics to join NATO and the European Union, are considered by military experts to be the alliance's most

vulnerable flank. The Baltic states are connected to the alliance's main territory through a 40-mile sliver of land called the Suwalki Gap and fear they could easily be cut off from Europe by Russian forces, according to retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, who led the U.S. Army in Europe from 2014 to 2017.

In a news conference last month with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Lithuania's Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabrielius Landsbergis reiterated his country's request for long-term American forces to boost security there. Lithuania and Latvia border Belarus, where Russian President Vladimir Putin stationed 30,000 troops before launching a full-scale attack on Ukraine last week from Russian and Belarusian territory.

"We need to make sure that [Putin] sees that his actions are

creating a response in the Baltic region ... and we are reinforced, we are strengthened, and we do not allow him to even think about looking [in our direction]," Landsbergis said.

The United States has maintained a 500-troop battalion on rotation in Lithuania since 2019, but Congress appears ready to deepen engagement in the region.

Along with Bacon, Rep. Mike Rogers, of Alabama, the top Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, said establishing permanent American basing in the Baltics, as well as Romania and Poland, would show serious U.S. commitment to safeguarding NATO's eastern flank.

"I think it would send a great message to our NATO allies that ... we are going to do everything in our power to protect our NATO allies and their borders," Rogers

said. "I think the best way to do this is to enhance our position there... The Baltics are very vulnerable."

Last week, NATO activated its response force for the first time as Russian troops advanced on three fronts into Ukraine, including an intensifying move on the capital city of Kyiv.

Rep. Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich., said Russia's "unbelievable" decision to strike its neighbor despite years of U.S. efforts to ease tension with the Kremlin has changed how the U.S. should think about its military presence in Europe.

"I couldn't agree more with my colleagues who have talked about putting more force in," she said. "We need to be doing more, and obviously China is watching everything that we do. We have to completely reevaluate deterrence and how we reestablish it."

Russians start feeling heat of Ukraine war sanctions

Associated Press

MOSCOW — In the days since the West imposed sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, ordinary Russians are feeling the painful effects — from payment systems that won't operate and problems withdrawing cash to not being able to purchase certain items.

"Apple Pay hasn't been working since yesterday. It was impossible to pay with it anywhere — in a bus, in a cafe," Moscow resident Tatyana Usmanova said. "Plus, in one supermarket they limited the amount of essential goods one person could buy."

Apple announced that it would stop selling its iPhone and other popular products in Russia along with limiting services like Apple Pay as part of a larger corporate backlash to protest the invasion.

Dozens of international companies have pulled their business out of Russia. Major car brands halted exports of their vehicles; Boeing and Airbus suspended supply of aircraft parts and service to Russian airlines; and the list will likely keep growing. That's on top of the United States and other Western nations hitting Russia with sanctions of unprecedented breadth and severity.

Some Russians say that it's not so much the sanctions that worry them, but the attack Russia waged on a neighboring country.

"You know, sanctions bother me the least. I'm worried about Russia killing people in Ukraine," said Moscow resident Ivan Kozlov. "I wish it stopped the war no sane person with a conscience and capable of mercy and compassion in Russia wants."

US nuclear missile tests postponed amid tensions

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The United States has postponed nuclear missile tests initially set for this weekend in a move meant to avoid escalating tensions with Russia, chief Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Wednesday.

The Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile test launch would have been one of several that the U.S. conducts each year, Kirby said.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin made the decision "in an effort to demonstrate that we have no intention in engaging in any actions that can be misunderstood or misconstrued" as Russia continues to wage war on Ukraine, Kirby said.

"We did not take this decision lightly, but instead to demonstrate that we are a responsible

nuclear power," he said. "It is not a step backwards in our readiness, nor does it imply that we will necessarily cancel other routine activities to ensure credible nuclear capability."

The decision comes after Russian President Vladimir Putin during the weekend said he placed his nuclear forces on high alert, claiming he deployed extra military personnel to staff the country's nuclear arsenal.

"[T]he United States and other members of the international community rightly saw this as a dangerous and irresponsible and, as I've said before, an unnecessary step," Kirby said. "Such provocative rhetoric and possible changes to nuclear posture involving the most consequential weapons and our respective arsenals is unacceptable."

Navy bribery trial could expose pervasive problem

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Dozens of U.S. Navy officials have admitted to being bought off by the gregarious, rotund Malaysian defense contractor known as “Fat Leonard” who plied them with prostitutes, Cuban cigars and free stays at the Philippines’ Shangri-La hotel, among other things.

Now as the last five of 34 defendants stand trial in federal court in San Diego, what’s more shocking is how little the case has changed the Navy’s way of doing business, according to former military officers and government watchdog advocates.

“You would expect that one of the largest corruption scandals in the history of the United States Navy would provoke pretty dramatic changes to prevent something like this from happening again in the future. But sadly, that’s not really the case,” said Dan Grazier, a former Marine who now works as a military analyst at the Project on Government Oversight in Washington.

The case has centered on Leonard Glenn Francis, who admitted in 2015 to offering \$500,000 in bribes to Navy officers. In exchange, the officers passed him classified information and even went so far as redirecting military vessels to ports that were lucrative for his Singapore-based ship servicing company, Glenn Defense Marine

Asia.

Twenty-nine people, mostly Navy officials, have pleaded guilty to helping Francis including providing classified ship schedules in exchange for extravagant outings in South Asia with prostitutes and meals with tabs totaling more than \$20,000.

Navy officials vowed to clean up their contracting processes in response to the scandal and implemented more oversight.

Sailors received more ethics training. Supply officers have less independence. Goods and services must now be priced at current market rates as determined by the Navy’s Fleet Logistics Centers.

But that’s not enough for Grazier, who said the military needs to move away from contracting out so much of its work.

As bases have closed worldwide, the Navy has increasingly turned to contractors to do what it once did in-house.

Grazier fears the case’s biggest impact has been on young people like his son who is an enlisted sailor.

“They think they’re signing up for something really noble, and then they see all these people that they’re supposed to look up to behaving in such an unethical and often times illegal fashion,” Grazier said. “That’s hugely crushing for these young idealists. I think that’s one of the biggest tragedies of all this.”

Congressman ends campaign, admits affair with ISIS widow

Associated Press

DALLAS — U.S. Rep. Van Taylor of Texas said Wednesday that he was ending his reelection campaign and admitted having an affair following reports that he had been in a relationship with the widow of an American-born recruiter for the Islamic State.

The North Texas congressman’s announcement came the day after former Collin County Judge Keith Self forced Taylor into a runoff for the Republican nomination.

Several days before Tuesday’s primary election, some right-wing websites reported on an interview with Tania Joya, who said she had an affair with Taylor that lasted from October 2020 to June 2021. Joya, of the Dallas suburb of Plano, told The Dallas Morning News on Monday night that she had met the congressman through her work as an ex-jihadist helping to reprogram extremists.

Taylor apologized for the affair in a statement shared with supporters Wednesday. It didn’t mention Joya by name or reference her late husband, the Islamic State recruiter.

“About a year ago, I made a horrible mistake that has caused deep hurt and pain among those I love most in this world,” he wrote. “I had an affair, it was wrong, and it was the greatest failure of my life.”

The Dallas Morning News reported Wednesday that Joya contacted Suzanne Harp, another candidate opposing Taylor in the primary, hoping Harp would confront Taylor privately and persuade him to drop out and resign from Congress.

“All I wanted was for Suzanne Harp to just say, ‘Hey, I know your little scandal with Tania Joya. Would you like to resign before we embarrass you?’ But it didn’t happen like that,” Joya told the newspaper.

Instead, the newspaper reported, Harp sent a supporter to interview the woman, then shared the interview with a pair of right-wing websites.

In a statement, Harp said the revelations were “deeply concerning.”

“Politics should build up our families, our communities, and our political parties. This story breaks my heart, both as a wife and as an American,” she said.

UFC champion charged after shooting at molestation suspect

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Former two-time UFC heavyweight champion Cain Velasquez was charged Wednesday with attempted murder and multiple gun assault charges after authorities said he fired at a pickup truck carrying a man accused of sexually abusing a 4-year-old family member.

Velasquez was arrested Monday after he chased a pickup carrying Harry Goularte through busy streets in three Silicon Valley cities, ramming the vehicle with his own pickup truck during an 11-mile high-speed chase, prosecutors said.

Velasquez fired a .40-caliber pistol at the vehicle several times, wounding Goularte’s stepfather, who was driving, in his arm and

torso, prosecutors said.

Velasquez, 39, appeared in court Wednesday but his arraignment was postponed until Monday. He is being held without bail at Santa Clara County Main Jail.

Celebrity attorney Mark Geragos is representing Velasquez.

Last week, deputies were called to a San Marin day care owned by Goularte’s mother regarding allegations of sexual assault involving a child, the Santa Clara County Sheriff’s Office said in a statement Wednesday.

After interviewing the child and others, investigators determined that a sexual assault had taken place and Goularte, 43, was arrested soon after, the office said.

Biden seeks \$10B for Ukraine, \$22.5B for virus

Associated Press

The Biden administration is seeking another \$10 billion to help protect Ukraine against the Russian invasion and an additional \$22.5 billion to cover coronavirus pandemic-related expenses, two major additions to budget talks already underway.

The acting director of the White House Office of Management and Budget, Shalanda Young, laid out the need for the supplemental funding in a Thursday blog post. The requests would be additions to a planned budget agreement that Congress is trying to finish before a March 11 deadline.

Young said in the blog post that the money was urgently needed. The \$10 billion to Ukraine would be a rapid escalation of the \$1.4 billion provided by the United States since 2021, a reflection of the crisis caused by the Russian offensive that began last month. Young said the money would cover “additional humanitarian, security and economic assistance in Ukraine and the neighboring region in the coming days and weeks.”

Last week, Biden administration officials told congressional aides that their requests would include \$3.5 billion for the Pentagon and \$2.9 billion for hu-

manitarian aid, as Russia’s invasion has caused more than a million Ukrainian refugees to flee their country.

The \$22.5 billion tied to the coronavirus would pay for testing, treatments and vaccines as well as investments in research and efforts to increase vaccinations worldwide. There had been expectations that the request was going to be for as much as \$30 billion, which comes after lawmakers and the Biden and Trump administrations committed a combined \$5.8 trillion over multiple years on the pandemic, according to the nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients said on a call with reporters on Wednesday that the plan to address the pandemic is “robust and comprehensive,” which is why it requires additional funding for immediate and longer-term priorities.

The federal government spent \$6.8 trillion last fiscal year, due in large part to the emergency measures tied to the coronavirus that included President Joe Biden’s \$1.9 trillion relief package. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal budget was about \$4.4 trillion, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Amazon closing physical bookstores, 4-star shops

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Amazon is closing all of its brick-and-mortar bookstores, as well as its 4-star shops and pop up locations, as the online retail behemoth reworks its physical footprint.

The Seattle-based company said Wednesday that the move, which affects 66 stores in the United States and two in the United Kingdom, will enable it to concentrate its efforts on Amazon Fresh, Whole Foods Market, its convenience concept called Amazon Go and its upcoming Amazon Style stores. Amazon Style, which will sell fashion and accessories, is set to open in a Southern California mall later this year.

“We remain committed to building great, long-term physical retail experiences and technologies, and we’re working closely with our affected employees to help them find new roles within Amazon,” the company said in a statement.

It couldn’t be learned immediately how many Amazon workers are being affected.

Amazon opened its first brick-

and-mortar bookstore in 2015, two decades after it began selling books online and helped drive a number of shops out of business. Amazon’s 4-star shops, which first made their debut in 2018, carry a limited selection of best-selling products from top categories that Amazon.com sells, including devices, consumer electronics, toys and games.

The move comes as Amazon.com Inc.’s overall revenue growth is slowing, and it’s looking for new ways to reignite sales.

Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData Retail, said the strategy comes as a surprise. He said he believes it’s an acknowledgement that the bookstores weren’t delivering the returns Amazon was looking for.

“They were designed for people to pop in and browse rather than as destinations where people would head on a mission to buy something,” he wrote in a note on Wednesday. He noted that ultimately that wasn’t good for driving customer traffic, especially in an era where people are visiting shops less.

Jan. 6 panel sees evidence of Trump ‘criminal conspiracy’

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House panel investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol said Wednesday for the first time that its evidence suggests crimes may have been committed by former President Donald Trump and his associates in a failed effort to overturn the 2020 presidential election outcome.

Trump and his associates engaged in a “criminal conspiracy” to prevent Congress from certifying Democrat Joe Biden’s victory in the Electoral College, the House committee said in a court filing. Trump and those working with him spread false information about the outcome of the presidential election and pressured state officials to overturn the results, potentially violating multiple federal laws, the panel said.

“The Select Committee also has a good-faith basis for concluding that the President and members of his Campaign engaged in a criminal conspiracy to defraud the United States,” the committee wrote in a filing submitted in U.S. District Court

in the Central District of California.

The 221-page filing marks the committee’s most formal effort to link the former president to a federal crime, though the actual import of the filing is not clear. Lawmakers do not have the power to bring criminal charges on their own and can only make a referral to the Justice Department. The department has been investigating last year’s riot, but it has not given any indication that it is considering seeking charges against Trump.

The committee made the claims in response to a lawsuit by Trump adviser John Eastman, a lawyer and law professor who was consulting with Trump as he attempted to overturn the election. Eastman is trying to withhold documents from the committee.

The brief filed Wednesday was an effort to knock down Eastman’s attorney-client privilege claims. In doing so, the committee argued there is a legal exception allowing the disclosure of communications regarding ongoing or future crimes.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

School leader charged for confining students

WI SURING — The lead administrator of a Wisconsin public school system was charged Monday with false imprisonment after six female students said she asked them to take off some of their clothes in a search for vaping devices.

Suring Schools superintendent Kelly Casper, 51, is accused of holding the girls in a high school bathroom while she and the school nurse asked them to strip to their underwear in most cases, according to court documents.

The state originally declined to issue charges in the Jan. 18 incident.

“Upon their review, the state found that Casper lacked legal authority to confine the students in a small restroom in the school complex,” Oconto County District Attorney Edward Burke Jr. said in a statement. “The state also found that the students did not consent to being confined, nor were they given the opportunity to leave or contact their parents.”

Rare copy of 1800s novel donated to organization

NH PORTSMOUTH — A rare version of a book considered the first novel published in the U.S. by a Black woman has returned to her home state of New Hampshire.

An original first edition of Harriet Wilson’s “Our Nig; or Sketches From the Life of a Free Black” was recently donated to Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire, WMUR-TV reported. The book was hand-delivered by a retired librarian in California who found the novel in a fam-

ily safe, according to the station.

The organization plans to display the book at its headquarters in Portsmouth.

Executive Director JerriAnne Boggis said the largely autobiographical work tells the story of Frado, a Black girl who is abused and overworked as the indentured servant to a New England family.

Wilson was born in Milford, N.H., in 1825 and a statue in the town’s Bicentennial Park honors her. She died in 1900.

Probe: Eatery owners shortchanged employees

OR SALEM — An investigation by the U.S. Department of Labor, the Wage and Hour division has found that KKOKI Korean BBQ restaurant owners in Salem, Portland and Eugene shortchanged 118 employees nearly \$170,000.

The investigation report said managers took part of workers’ tips, paid overtime only after workers worked 86 hours rather than 40 hours per week and that the employer failed to keep accurate employee records, The Statesman Journal reported.

A total of \$169,728 was recovered. Additionally, the report says the division issued \$30,199 in penalties.

Restaurant owners were not available for comment.

Armed man who entered home is killed by resident

MO KANSAS CITY — A man who broke in to a Kansas City home was shot and killed by someone inside the home.

Kansas City police said the shooting was reported around 9:30 a.m. Sunday at a home in the

3800 block of Northwest 85th Terrace, according to the Kansas City Star. A resident of the home told officers that he shot the armed man after he had broken into the house. The man died at the scene.

Police said the person who shot the intruder is cooperating with investigators.

Feds: Woman stole late sister’s veterans benefits

MA BOSTON — A Massachusetts woman has been sentenced to a month in prison and three years of probation for stealing more than \$100,000 in veterans benefits that were intended for her late sister, federal prosecutors said.

Robin Calef, 62, of Brockton, was also ordered by a federal judge in Boston on Tuesday to pay back the money to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, according to a statement from the U.S. attorney’s office in Boston.

Calef’s sister died in December 2006 but Calef failed to inform the VA of the death, prosecutors said. The VA from December 2006 until September 2017 continued to deposit benefits into a joint bank account held by Calef and her sister, authorities said.

Woman arrested in alleged toddler abduction

CA SUNNYVALE — A woman was arrested in Northern California on suspicion of abducting a 2-year-old boy who was inside a car that was stolen over the weekend, police said Monday.

An officer found the child and the missing car Sunday about 13 hours after the child was taken

and an Amber Alert was issued by the California Highway Patrol.

Surveillance video implicated Luong Tammy Huynh, 29, in the boy’s abduction. She was arrested Sunday night at her home in San Jose, the Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety said in a statement.

After the boy was found, he was taken to a hospital to be checked, police said.

The car with the boy inside was stolen while his mother unloaded groceries at a motel in the city of Sunnyvale, south of San Francisco. It was found about 4 miles from where it was stolen, police said.

US wins annual across the pond pancake race

KS LIBERAL — A woman from Liberal, Kan., is this year’s champion of the traditional Pancake Day Race against women in Olney, England.

Whitney Hay won the U.S. leg of the race in Liberal on Tuesday with a time of 1:07, KSNW-TV reported. That beat Katie Godof, of Olney, who ran her race in 1:10.

The race returned after a hiatus in 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic. Hay, 21, also won the Liberal race in 2020 but lost to Olney that year.

Contestants must carry a pancake in a frying pan and flip it at the beginning and end of the 415-yard race. The event began in Olney in the 15th century. In 1950, Liberal challenged Olney to an international competition.

The crepe-like pancakes are traditionally eaten in the U.K. on Shrove Tuesday, the start of Lent.

— From wire reports

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Special K: Coach's impact will last generations

Associated Press

Mike Krzyzewski's unparalleled coaching career is down to a few basketball games, with no more than a month left before the retiring Duke Hall of Famer walks off the sideline for the last time.

His influence on the sport will remain long past that final farewell. The fingerprints of the man known simply as "Coach K" are all over the highest levels of the game as he winds down his nearly five-decade head-coaching career.

Nearly two dozen of his former players are on NBA rosters. Another dozen or so are coaching or working for NBA teams. There are others who lead their own Division I college programs. And some of the NBA's biggest stars of the past two decades have won Olympic gold medals under his direction.

"He's got a small army of people that are working in basketball that believe in his values and things that he felt were important," said Arizona State coach Bobby Hurley, the point guard on Krzyzewski's first two NCAA championship teams in 1991 and 1992. "That's regardless of whether you coached with him or if you were a player, because they'll have such incredible experiences and memories of things that he did that you still use in your own situations."

"His legacy is going to continue to grow through others that he's had an impact on in their lives, and I'm definitely one of those people."

The 75-year-old Krzyzewski coaches his fi-

nal home game at Cameron Indoor Stadium on Saturday, fittingly against rival North Carolina. At most, he has 10 games left in a career that began with five seasons at Army followed by 42 at Duke, assuming the Blue Devils reach both next week's Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament final in New York and the NCAA championship game in New Orleans on April 4.

Regardless of when or how the end comes, Krzyzewski's place is unquestioned among the greatest coaches in the history of American sports.

He has 1,196 career victories, more than any coach in men's or women's college history. His five NCAA titles rank second to late UCLA great John Wooden on the men's side, while his resume includes a record-tying 12 Final Fours and a record 127 weeks with teams ranked at No. 1 in The Associated Press men's college basketball poll.

"He's the best that's ever done that in the modern basketball world," Syracuse coach Jim Boeheim said. "John Wooden won 10 championships, you can never say anything but that. But it's a different world today. There have been a lot of great coaches — there's nobody close to what Mike has done."

"He has given everything to the game and helped make the game what it is today without any question."

The numbers back up Boeheim's conviction.

Krzyzewski had 21 players as of February on NBA rosters—including current or former

All-Stars Jayson Tatum, Kyrie Irving, Zion Williamson and Brandon Ingram — and an ACC-record 27 players last season.

Go back further, and NBA teams have drafted 68 of Krzyzewski's Blue Devils, with 42 as first-round picks and three — Elton Brand in 1999, Irving in 2011 and Williamson in 2019 — going No. 1 overall.

Duke notes that Krzyzewski has coached 113 NBA players between the school and USA Basketball, where Krzyzewski partnered with former managing director Jerry Colangelo to restructure the men's national team program. The result: he managed egos and meshed star talent like LeBron James and the late Kobe Bryant to thrice produce Olympic gold.

Some former Krzyzewski players are now in NBA leadership positions, such as Quin Snyder as head coach of the Utah Jazz, Brand as the general manager of the Philadelphia 76ers, Trajan Langdon as GM of the New Orleans Pelicans, and Grant Hill as co-owner of the Atlanta Hawks.

The same is true in college, with Krzyzewski's tree spawning 10 former players or staffers as head coaches—a number that will grow next season when Jon Scheyer moves over one seat on Duke's bench as Krzyzewski's designated successor.

For all, Krzyzewski's lessons linger.

Longtime Notre Dame coach Mike Brey studied Krzyzewski's competitiveness during eight years as his assistant.

"He still wakes up wanting to fight somebody and beat somebody," Brey said.

No. 5 Auburn wins in OT, earns a share of SEC title

Associated Press

STARKVILLE, Miss. — K.D. Johnson scored 12 of his 14 points in overtime, Jabari Smith had 27 points overall and No. 5 Auburn held off Mississippi State 81-68 in overtime Wednesday night.

With the win, the Tigers (26-4, 14-3 Southeastern Conference) clinched at least a share of the SEC regular-season championship. It marks the fourth SEC title for Auburn and the program's first since the 2017-18 season.

Smith tied the game at 61 in the final minute of regulation, but missed a three-pointer at the buzzer. But Johnson scored the

first 10 points of overtime to help the Tigers pull away.

No. 14 Arkansas 77, LSU 76: Razorbacks guard JD Notae made two free throws with 8.6 points left, the Tigers' Xavier Pinson missed a final attempt at the rim as the clock expired and host Arkansas held on.

Stanley Umude led the Razorbacks (24-6, 13-4 Southeastern Conference) with 23 points. They have won 14 of their last 15 games overall and nine in a row at home.

LSU (20-10, 8-9) had the lead on the possession before Notae's chance at the free-throw line, but Pinson missed a 3-pointer and Eric Gaines missed a follow,

giving the Razorbacks the ball. Mwani Wilkinson fouled Notae while going for a steal on the wing and Arkansas' scoring leader made two at the line.

Creighton 64, No. 18 UConn 62: Ryan Kalkbrenner scored 20 of his 22 points in the second half and the Bluejays held off the visiting Huskies after squandering a 16-point lead.

Creighton (20-9, 12-6 Big East) won for the seventh time in eight games and clinched a top-five seed and first-round bye in the conference tournament next week.

Texas A&M 87, No. 25 Alabama 71: Quenton Jackson scored 28 points and Tyrece

Radford had 22 to lead the visiting Aggies to the win.

Jackson had 15 points in the first 10 minutes of the second half to lead the Texas A&M (19-11, 8-9 Southeastern Conference) to their first straight win.

Rutgers 66, Indiana 63: Ron Harper Jr. scored 19 points and hit a three-pointer with 2.1 seconds left to give the Scarlet Knights a win over the host Hoosiers.

Miami 81, Boston College 70: Isaiah Wong hit 5 of 9 three-point attempts and the visiting Hurricanes guaranteed themselves a bye into the quarterfinal round of the Atlantic Coast Conference tournament.

Suns rout Blazers for their 50th win

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Even without their All-Star backcourt, the Phoenix Suns are a heavy load to handle.

Cam Johnson scored 20 points, Deandre Ayton added 18 and the Suns became the first NBA team to 50 wins this season by easily beating the Portland Trail Blazers 120-90 on Wednesday night.

"It feels good," Johnson said. "Fifty is a big benchmark in this league, but now we want to get to 60."

That's certainly a good possibility. Phoenix just needs to play .500 ball the rest of the regular season to reach 60 wins.

The Suns won this one without starting guards Chris Paul and Devin Booker. Paul's been out since Feb. 16 because of a broken thumb and could miss the rest of the regular season. Booker was placed in the league's COVID-19 health and safety protocols Wednesday, but the team didn't flinch.

"We know how to adjust," Ayton said.

Johnson was 6-for-8 from the field, and Ayton 9-for-12 to help Phoenix end a two-game skid and break a tie with Golden State for the NBA's best home record at 27-7. Mikal Bridges and Jae Crowder each added 15 points, with Bridges shooting 6-for-9.

Brandon Williams had a career-high 14 points for the Trail Blazers. Depleted Portland has lost three straight since the All-Star break — all by at least 30 points — and fell to 25-37. It shot just 38.5% from the field and was hurt by 19 turnovers.

76ers 123, Knicks 108: James Harden scored had 26 points, nine assists and nine rebounds in his Philadelphia home debut to help the 76ers beat New York.

Joel Embiid had 27 points and 12 rebounds, and Tyrese Maxey scored 25 points.

But the night belonged to the Beard.

Philadelphia moved to 3-0 with Harden in the lineup and his dynamic duo hookup with Embiid has suddenly stamped the 76ers as legitimate contenders in the Eastern Conference.

RJ Barrett had 30 points for the Knicks. They've lost 13 of 15.

Bucks 120, Heat 119: Jrue Holiday banked in a driving layup with 1.9 seconds left and host Milwaukee overcame a 14-point deficit in the final six minutes to beat Miami.

The Bucks outscored the Heat 21-6 down the stretch to snap the Heat's four-game winning streak.

Giannis Antetokounmpo Antetokounmpo had 28 points, 17 rebounds and five assists for Milwaukee. Khristian Middleton scored 26, and Holiday had 25.

Gabe Vincent had 21 points for the Heat.

Thunder 119, Nuggets 107: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 29 points, Isaiah Roby added a career-high 26 and injury-depleted Oklahoma City won at Denver.

The Thunder entered the game last in the league from three-point range at 31.2%. But they hit 16 of 29 and Gilgeous-Alexander's step-back deep shot with 1:27 left sent the fans to the exits.

Nikola Jokic led the Nuggets with 22 points and 16 rebounds.

Pelicans 125, Kings 95: Brandon Ingram scored 33 points on 15-of-19 shooting and host New Orleans beat Sacramento for its third straight victory.

Ingram scored 28 of his points before being briefly forced out of the game by an elbow to the face from Damian Jones. But he returned in the fourth quarter to make a tough turnaround, a transition three-pointer and a couple of heady assists that helped the Pelicans snuff out any hope the Kings had of coming back.

Jonas Valanciunas had 17 points and 14 rebounds, and CJ McCollum had 17 points and a season-high nine assists for New Orleans.

De'Aaron Fox scored 25 points for Sacramento.

Jazz 132, Rockets 127 (OT): Donovan Mitchell had 37 points and Mike Conley scored nine points in overtime to help Utah win at Houston.

Rudy Gobert added 27 points and 17 rebounds to help the Jazz win their third straight and ninth in 10 games.

Hornets 119, Cavaliers 98: Terry Rozier scored 29 points and carried Charlotte's backcourt with LaMelo Ball in foul trouble, leading the Hornets to a win at Cleveland.

The Cavaliers got back All-Star Darius Garland from a bone bruise in his back, but lost for the fifth time in six games. Garland had 33 points in 33 minutes.

Pacers 122, Magic 114 (OT): Malcolm Brogdon had 31 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists, and Indiana overcame a 15-point deficit in the fourth quarter to win at Orlando in overtime.

Tyrese Haliburton had 21 points and six assists. He scored five of the Pacers' 12 points in overtime.

Franz Wagner led the Magic with 28 points.

Rangers rally with 3-goal third period to beat Blues

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Chris Kreider scored a tiebreaking power-play goal in New York's three-goal third period as the Rangers rallied to beat the St. Louis Blues 5-3 on Wednesday night.

Artemi Panarin had a goal and two assists, and Alexis Lafrenière, Ryan Strome and Patrik Nemeth also scored for New York, which recovered after giving up a two-goal lead and snapped its two-game skid. Adam Fox had three assists and

Igor Shesterkin finished with 28 saves to help the Rangers improve to 5-1-1 in their past seven at home.

Ryan O'Reilly and David Peron each had a goal and an assist, and Ivan Barbashev also scored for St. Louis, which had won four straight. Ville Husso stopped 24 shots in the Blues' first regulation loss in eight games (6-1-1).

Kraken 4, Predators 3: Colin Blackwell scored the go-ahead, short-handed goal in the third period and host Seattle snapped

a seven-game losing streak.

Blackwell's goal came a little more than three minutes into the third, and was the first short-handed tally of his career. He also had an assist during a second-period scoring binge for the Kraken as Alex Wennberg, Calle Jarnkrok and Yanni Gourde had goals in a span of 2 minutes, 39 seconds. It was the fastest three-goal span for the first-year franchise.

Sabres 5, Maple Leafs 1: Craig Anderson made 29 saves,

Victor Olofsson and Tage Thompson scored in the second period and Buffalo won at Toronto to end a six-game losing streak.

The Maple Leafs played at home in front of a full crowd for the first time since Dec. 11 after Ontario eased COVID-19 capacity restrictions Tuesday.

Stars 4, Kings 3: Ryan Suter and Alexander Radulov scored in the final minute of Dallas' four-goal second period in a win over visiting Los Angeles.

Russians, Belarusians out in Paralympics

Associated Press

Faced with threats of withdrawals and growing animosity in the Athletes Village, organizers of the Winter Paralympics on Thursday reversed course and expelled athletes from Russia and Belarus.

The about-face came less than 24 hours after the International Paralympic Committee announced it would allow Russians and Belarusians to compete when the Games open on Friday, but only as neutral athletes with colors, flags and other national symbols removed because of the invasion of Ukraine.

The Paralympics in Beijing, which follow the Winter Olympics, close on March 13.

"The war has now come to these Games and behind the scenes, many governments are having an influence on our cherished event," IPC President Andrew Parsons said Thursday after announcing the ban. "We were trying to protect the Games from war."

Parsons said the IPC underestimated the negative reaction to letting Russians and Belarusians compete — even as neutral athletes. The Athletes Village, which Parsons hoped would be a place of harmony, he now depicted as a tinderbox. It was not only Ukrainians resenting the Russian and Belarusian participation, but across the board.

"We don't have reports of any specific incidents of aggression or anything like that," Parsons said. "But it was a very, very volatile environment in the (Athletes) Village.

"It was a very rapid escalation which we did not think was going to happen. We did not think that entire delegations, or even teams within delegations, will withdraw, will boycott, will not participate."

The first instance came when Latvia said its curlers would refuse to play against the Russians in a scheduled group game.

IPC spokesman Craig Spence described a stark change in just over 12 hours from athletes, administrators and politicians. He said the talk was "now we're thinking of going home. We're not playing.

"That threatens the viability of this event. So that's a huge change," Spence said. "The atmosphere in the Village is not pleasant."

Parsons said he expects legal action from the Russian and Belarusian Paralympic committees, which is what he said he feared on Wednesday when he ruled their athletes could compete. The likely place is the Switzerland-based Court of Arbitration for Sport.

"We do believe that the Russian Paralympic Committee and the Belarusian Paralympic Committee may take legal action," Parsons said. "But the facts that we express here led us to understand that this was the right decision to be taking."

The Russian Paralympic Committee called the decision to expel its athletes "baseless" and "illegal."

"(Russian athletes) have not done anything which could be interpreted as being involved in the current political complica-

tions," the RPC said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov also decried the decision, calling it a "disgrace."

"The situation is monstrous," Peskov said. "Yesterday one decision was taken, and today they took another."

Parsons said he understands the disappointment of the 71 Russians and 12 Belarusians who will be sent home. He said he did not know how quickly that would happen, particularly with China's severe COVID-19 restrictions.

"No one is happy with the decision, but certainly this is the best decision for the Paralympic Games to go ahead," Parsons said.

The IPC now joins sports like soccer, track, basketball, hockey and others that have imposed blanket bans on Russians and Belarusians.

The International Olympic Committee on Monday pushed sports organizations to exclude Russian and Belarusian athletes from international events, but it left the final decision to individual governing bodies.

The IOC has been slow to crack down on Russia, allowing its athletes to compete in the last four Olympics following a state-sponsored doping scandal and cover-up at the 2014 Sochi Games. The IOC also has not removed the membership or leadership positions from Russians in its own organization.

Parsons also addressed the Russian and Belarusian athletes directly, saying they are not at fault.

Anger, as much as money, led to broken labor talks

Associated Press

JUPITER, Fla. — Anger is at the center of Major League Baseball's broken labor negotiations as much as money.

Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred's cancellation of each team's first two series is a by-product of failed relationships in a fractured sport that can't get out of its own way.

Negotiators headed home Wednesday after the breakdown at Manfred's deadline to preserve opening day. It wasn't clear when the sides will meet next.

"Instead of bargaining in good faith — MLB locked us out," three-time MVP Mike

Trout wrote Wednesday on Twitter. "Instead of negotiating for a fair deal — Rob canceled games."

Meetings have been unproductive on many days, partly the nature of labor negotiations but exacerbated in baseball by mistrust rooted in negotiations past as they try to find a way forward.

"A core of this negotiation is to increase competition, and there's no way we're leaving the table without something that does that," said reliever Andrew Miller, one of the eight players supervising the union's bargaining. "We're not going to do anything to sacrifice this

competition of the season."

Players are seething over management actions in recent years. The union's grievances over Kris Bryant's demotion to the minor leagues in 2015, against Miami, Oakland, Pittsburgh and Tampa Bay for not properly spending revenue sharing money and against MLB alleging the 2020 season was shorter than it should have been hover over negotiations like an unending storm.

The players' association takes umbrage at management's slow pace of bargaining once the lockout began Dec. 2, yet both sides have been excruciatingly measured in unveiling ad-

vanced bargaining positions after concluding the other was hanging back.

The players' stated goal is to improve the bargaining agreement for those that follow.

"To the younger generation of baseball players, this is for you," free agent first baseman Anthony Rizzo tweeted.

Union head Tony Clark, in criticizing MLB for locking out players rather than risk a late-season strike, referred back to the shortened 60-game schedule of 2020.

"You only get so many opening days," he said. "If you're an average major leaguer, you might see four of them."