

300 died in Ukraine theater attack

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — About 300 people were killed in the Russian airstrike last week on a Mariupol theater that was being used as a shelter, Ukrainian authorities said Friday in what would make it the war's deadliest known attack on civilians yet.

Meanwhile, Russian forces appear to have halted, at least for now, their ground offensive aimed at capturing the capital, Kyiv, and are concentrating more on the fighting for control of the Donbas region in the country's southeast, a senior U.S. defense official said.

"They don't show any signs of being willing to move on Kyiv from the ground," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to describe an internal U.S. military assessment of the war.

Likewise, the deputy chief of the Russian general staff, Col.-Gen. Sergei Rudskoi, said that "the main objectives of the first stage of the operation have generally been accomplished," allowing Russian forces to focus on "the main goal, liberation of Donbas."

That could signal an important narrowing of Moscow's military objectives. The Don-

bas is the largely Russian-speaking eastern part of the country where Russian-backed separatists have been fighting Ukrainian forces since 2014 and where many residents have expressed support for Moscow.

In Mariupol, meanwhile, the bloodshed at the theater fueled allegations Moscow is committing war crimes by killing civilians, whether deliberately or by indiscriminate fire, with a NATO official saying Russian President Vladimir Putin's war is "unprovoked, illogical and also barbarian."

For days, the government in the besieged and ruined port city was unable to give a casualty count for the March 16 bombardment of the grand, columned Mariupol Drama Theater, where hundreds of people were said to be taking cover, the word "CHIL-DREN" printed in Russian in huge white letters on the ground outside to ward off aerial attack.

In announcing the death toll on its Telegram channel Friday, the city government cited eyewitnesses. But it was not immediately clear how witnesses arrived at the figure or whether emergency workers had finished excavating the ruins.

President Joe Biden's national security

adviser, Jake Sullivan, said Friday the theater bombing was an "absolute shock, particularly given the fact that it was so clearly a civilian target." He said it showed "a brazen disregard for the lives of innocent people."

The scale of devastation in Mariupol, where bodies have been left unburied amid bomb craters and hollowed-out buildings, has made information difficult to obtain.

But soon after the attack, the Ukrainian Parliament's human rights commissioner said more than 1,300 people had taken shelter in the theater, many of them because their homes had been destroyed. The building had a basement bomb shelter, and some survivors did emerge from the rubble after the attack.

"This is a barbaric war, and according to international conventions, deliberate attacks on civilians are war crimes," said Mircea Geoana, NATO's deputy-secretary general.

He said Putin's efforts to break Ukraine's will to resist are having the opposite effect: "What he's getting in response is an even more determined Ukrainian army and an ever more united West in supporting Ukraine."

Biden salutes US troops in Poland, visits refugees

Associated Press

RZESZOW, Poland — President Joe Biden visited U.S. troops stationed near Poland's border with Ukraine on Friday and was getting a firsthand look at the growing humanitarian response to the millions of Ukrainians who are fleeing to Poland to escape Russia's assault on their homeland.

Biden's first stop was with members of the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division, visiting a barber shop and dining facility set up for the troops, where he invited himself to sit down and share some pizza. The Americans are serving alongside Pol-

ish troops.

He arrived Friday afternoon at the airport in Rzeszow, the largest city in southeastern Poland, where some U.S. troops are based.

With the troops, he shared an anecdote about visiting his late son, Beau Biden, while he was deployed in Baghdad and going by his mother's maiden name so as not to draw attention to himself. The president jokingly razed one service member about his standard-issue short haircut and seriously praised the troops, too.

"You are the finest fighting force in the world and that's not

hyperbole," Biden said before sitting down on a folding chair to eat with the group.

He later addressed a group of soldiers in more formal remarks, telling them the nation "owes you big." Biden also borrowed the words of the late Secretary of State Madeline Albright to underscore their place in a fragile moment for the U.S. and its European allies.

"The secretary of state used to have an expression. She said, 'We are the essential nation,'" Biden told the troops. "I don't want to sound philosophical here, but you are in midst of a fight between democracy and

an oligarch."

He will be in Warsaw on Saturday for talks with Polish President Andrzej Duda and others. The Polish leader was to welcome Biden at the airport on Friday, but his plane was delayed by a technical problem.

The European Union says some 3.5 million Ukrainians — half of them children — have fled the country, with more than 2.2 million ending up in Poland.

Biden also announced that the United States would take in up to 100,000 of those refugees. The White House has said most Ukrainian refugees eventually want to return home.

N. Korea boasts 'new type' of intercontinental missile

BY DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea announced it successfully test-fired a new type of intercontinental ballistic missile Thursday and that the country was “fully ready to thoroughly curb and contain any dangerous military attempts” from the United States.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un personally guided the ICBM launch from Pyongyang International Airport, the state-run Korean Central News Agency said Friday.

The missile, purportedly a Hwasong-17 class, was touted by KCNA as a novel weapon “and a reliable nuclear war” deterrent.

KCNA said the missile reached an altitude of nearly 3,900 miles and traveled about 680 miles before coming down in the East Sea, which is more commonly known as the Sea of Japan.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff reported similar data after detecting the launch just after 2:34 p.m. Thursday. The ICBM test was North Korea's first in nearly five years.

“The new type weapon system to be operated by the strategic forces of [North Korea] under a plan for building up the state nuclear force will creditably perform its mission and duty as a powerful nuclear war deterrent,” KCNA said.

Analysts say North Korea's latest projectile is the longest-range missile the communist regime has tested, so far, outreaching 2017's Hwasong-15 ICBM, which was capable of reaching the continental U.S. on a standard trajectory.

“The size alone makes it one of, if not, the largest liquid-fuel ballistic missiles out there,” Dave Schmerler, a senior research associate at the U.S.-based James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, told Stars and Stripes by phone on Friday.

Schmerler said it's not clear whether North Korea had a simulated payload during the missile test, but in theory, it could have the largest payload capacity in the country's arsenal due to its size.

The U.S. and South Korean militaries are still investigating the launch and have yet to identify the projectile, according to statements from both countries.

Kim paused ICBM testing in 2017 as he, President Donald Trump and South Korean President Moon Jae-in expressed a desire to thaw tensions by holding summits. Those efforts now appear moot following Kim's resumption of long-range testing after 10 other rounds of missile tests so far this year.

Two hours after the North's launch, South Korea's military conducted its own military drill to display “our capabilities and will to react and punish immediately.”

Marines barred from traveling to Ukraine amid war

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Marines are barred from traveling to Ukraine and two neighboring countries, while those going on official or personal travel in Europe must now request prior clearance for their trips, the service said Thursday.

“Due to the ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine, Marines are prohibited from travel to Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova,” the Marine Corps said.

The directive said Marines and other military personnel attached to Marine units who are going anywhere in Europe on vacation or temporary duty must first submit travel clearance requests to the Aircraft and Personnel Clearance System, effective immediately.

The purpose of the message, known as a MARADMIN, was to echo a State Department “Do Not Travel” advisory and travel restrictions on all service members that the head of U.S. European Command imposed in February, said Maj. Jim Stenger, a Marine Corps spokesperson.

“I know I check MARADMINs more frequently than State Department travel advisories, so this was an attempt to communicate an important message to our Marines and sailors directly,” Stenger said.

It comes one month into the Russian invasion of Ukraine and follows reports of thousands of foreigners responding to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's call for volunteers to help repel the advance.

But some U.S. military veterans have been frustrated after arriving and being assigned to comparatively menial infantry tasks relative to their military specialties, Military.com reported this week.

Meanwhile, Russia has warned that foreigners will not be treated as legitimate combatants if captured.

Daniel Carde, a photojournalist in Ukraine, wrote on Twitter that he met a Marine reservist from Utah who'd traveled to the western city of Lviv to take part in the fight.

“He said his unit doesn't know he's here,” Carde said.

24 soldiers fired for refusing vaccine

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

The Army has now discharged 27 soldiers for refusing the order to receive the mandatory coronavirus vaccination, the service announced Thursday.

The Army announced last week that the first three soldiers were separated from the service for refusing the vaccine. In a weekly update about the vaccination status of the force, another 24 soldiers were listed as kicked out for refusing the vaccine.

The update also reported the vaccinated percentage of the roughly 486,000 active-duty soldiers rose from 96% to 97%.

The Army's deadline to receive the vaccine passed more than three months ago, and Army Secretary Christine Wormuth ordered commanders on Jan. 31 to begin the process of involuntarily separating those who refused the shots.

Troops do have the option of requesting a permanent exemption for religious or medical reasons, and 4,228 temporary exemptions are in place as the process plays out. As of Thursday, 694 soldiers have requested permanent medical exemptions with 664 denied and 20 approved. Army commanders have relieved six Army leaders, including two battalion commanders.

Jackson on track for confirmation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON—After more than 30 hours of hearings, the Senate is on track to confirm Ketanji Brown Jackson as the first Black woman on the Supreme Court. But Democrats seem unlikely to confirm her with a robust bipartisan vote, dashing President Joe Biden's hopes for a grand reset after partisan battles over other high court nominees.

On Thursday, just hours after the hearings came to a close, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell announced he will vote against Jackson's confirmation. He said in a Senate

floor speech that he "cannot and will not" support her for a lifetime appointment.

McConnell slammed the liberal groups that have supported Jackson and he criticized her for refusing to take a position on the size of the nine-member court, even though that decision is ultimately up to Congress. Some advocacy groups have pushed for enlarging the court after three justices nominated by former President Donald Trump cemented a 6-3 conservative majority.

McConnell also cited concerns about her sentencing of criminal defendants—a subject

that dominated much of the four days of hearings and was part of a coordinated GOP effort to portray her as soft on crime.

His position was expected, and does not affect Jackson's trajectory to be confirmed by mid-April. But the leader's quick declaration could prompt many of his fellow Republicans to follow suit, thwarting Biden's efforts to bring back the overwhelming bipartisan votes that were commonplace for Supreme Court nominees when he first came to the Senate five decades ago.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin, who has been privately lobbying GOP

colleagues to support Jackson, said after McConnell's announcement that it will be "sad for our country and sad as a commentary on where the parties are today" if her historic nomination is approved on a strictly partisan vote. "The Republicans are testing their messages for the November election," Durbin said.

Durbin said he is "still hoping that several Republicans—I hope many more" will vote for her.

If not, Democrats can confirm Jackson without any GOP support in the 50-50 Senate, with Vice President Kamala Harris breaking a tie.

Neb. lawmaker found guilty in campaign probe

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES—U.S. Rep. Jeff Fortenberry of Nebraska was convicted on charges that he lied to federal authorities about an illegal \$30,000 contribution to his campaign from a foreign billionaire at a 2016 Los Angeles fundraiser.

A federal jury in LA deliberated about two hours Thursday before finding the nine-term Republican guilty of concealing information and two counts of making false statements to authorities. Fortenberry was charged after denying to the FBI that he was aware he had received illicit funds from Gilbert Chagoury, a Nigerian billionaire of Lebanese descent.

Outside the courthouse, Fortenberry said the process had been unfair and he would appeal immediately. He would not say if he would suspend his campaign for reelection, saying he was going to spend time with his family.

The judge set sentencing for June 28. Each count carries a potential five-year prison sentence and fines. It was the first trial of a sitting congressman since Rep. Jim Traficant, D-Ohio, was convicted of bribery and other felony charges in 2002.

Fortenberry, 61, did not testify but his lawyers argued at trial that he wasn't aware of the contribution and that agents directed an informant to feed him the information in

a 10-minute call to set him up.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Mack Jenkins said there was ample recorded evidence in the case and the jury's swift verdict vindicated the prosecution's efforts.

"Our view is that it was a simple story," Jenkins said. "A politician caught up in the cycle of money and power. And like I said, he lost his way."

The trial could all but end the political career of a congressman seen as a reliable conservative who coasted to easy wins but isn't a familiar name outside of Nebraska. Felons are eligible to run for and serve in Congress, but the vast majority choose to resign under threat of expulsion.

2nd insider testifies on Gov. Whitmer kidnap plot

Associated Press

A second insider in a plot to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer told jurors that the group was prepared to use a grenade launcher and machine gun to fight security officers at her vacation home.

Kaleb Franks, who pleaded guilty in February, on Thursday backed up many points offered a day earlier by Ty Garbin, another man who admitted a role in a wild scheme to abduct Whitmer and

somehow take her by boat out to Lake Michigan. Franks was expected back on the witness stand Friday for cross-examination by defense lawyers.

Franks, 27, said an alleged leader, Adam Fox, believed Whitmer's COVID-19 restrictions were "tyrannical" and that the U.S. Constitution gave the men a right to strike back. He said no one was forced to stick with the plan and many people had dropped away by late summer 2020.

"I was going to be an operator," Franks replied when asked by a prosecutor to describe his role in a kidnapping. "I would be one of the people on the front line, so to speak, using my gun."

Fox, Barry Croft Jr., Daniel Harris and Brandon Caserta are on trial in federal court in Grand Rapids, Mich. Along with Franks and Garbin, the four were arrested in October 2020, a month before the national election.

Authorities said the men were

armed extremists who, after weeks of training, were trying to come up with \$4,000 for an explosive. They practiced that summer by dashing in and out of crude structures built to resemble a house or office.

Croft "discussed attacking her security detail," Franks told the jury. "He said he would use the grenade launcher that he had, and he was discussing mounting a machine gun on top of the truck."

Ariz. votes to restrict trans rights

Associated Press

PHOENIX — The Arizona Legislature passed bills Thursday to prohibit gender reassignment surgery for minors and ban transgender athletes from playing on girls sports teams, joining a growing list of Republican-controlled states attempting to restrict transgender rights as they gain more visibility in culture and society.

Republican Gov. Doug Ducey has not said whether he will sign either bill. Two GOP governors this week bucked conservatives in their party and vetoed bills in Indiana and Utah requiring trans girls to play on boys sports teams.

Republicans have said blocking transgender athletes from girls sports teams would protect the integrity of women's sports, claiming that trans athletes would have an advantage.

Many point to the transgender collegiate swimmer Lia Thomas, who won an individual title at the NCAA Women's Division I Swimming and Diving Championship last week.

But there are few trans athletes in Arizona schools. Since 2017, about 16 trans athletes have received waivers to play on teams that align with their gender identities out of about 170,000 high school athletes in the state, according to the Arizona Interscholastic Association.

"This bill to me is all about biology," said Republican Rep. Shawna Bolick, who said she played on a coed team in the 1980s but could not have made the high school boys team. "In my opinion, it's unfair to allow biological males to compete with biological girls sports."

Critics said the legislation dehumanizes trans youth to address an issue that hasn't been a problem.

"We're talking about legislating bullying against children who are already struggling just to get by," said Democratic Rep. Kelli Butler, fighting back tears.

"This bill is creating a pointless and harmful solution to a non-existent issue," Skyler Morrison, a 13-year-old transgender girl, told lawmakers during a committee

hearing earlier this month. "It's obvious this bill is just an excuse to discriminate against transgender girls."

Arizona is one of 20 states that have considered legislation to restrict gender-affirming health care. The bill originally would have banned all such care for minors but was scaled back to restrict only irreversible procedures, such as surgeries related to gender reassignment.

Supporters of the Arizona bill said it would prevent children from making permanent decisions that they might later come to regret. Republican Rep. John Kavanagh compared the vote to the Legislature's unanimous decision in 2014 to ban genital mutilation.

"We should stand the same way today because this is mutilation of children," Kavanagh said. "It is irreversible. It is horrific."

Critics said the decision should be left to parents, their children and the health care team caring for them. They said surgeries are only performed after extensive care and therapy.

Ariz. House approves 15-week abortion ban

Associated Press

PHOENIX — The Arizona Legislature on Thursday joined the growing list of Republican-led states to pass aggressive anti-abortion legislation as the conservative U.S. Supreme Court is considering ratcheting back abortion rights that have been in place for nearly 50 years.

The House voted on party lines to outlaw abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy, mirroring a Mississippi law now being considered by the nation's high court.

The bill explicitly says it does not overrule a state law in place for more than 100 years that would ban abortion outright if

the Supreme Court overrules *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 case that enshrined the right to abortion in law.

The bill now goes to Republican Gov. Doug Ducey, an abortion opponent who has signed every piece of anti-abortion legislation that has reached his desk since he took office in 2015.

The Arizona 15-week abortion ban bill contains no exceptions for rape or incest or for a medical emergency. It would also bar abortions for families that learn in pregnancy later on that a fetus is not viable.

The measure was pushed by the Cen-

ter for Arizona Policy, a prominent social conservative group that pushes religious freedom, anti-abortion and parental rights bills, that wields great power among Republican lawmakers.

Democrats criticized what they called GOP lawmakers' disconnect between opposing abortion and refusing to provide more funding for the poor and uninsured.

Rep. Lorenzo Sierra, a Catholic from Cashion, said he was strongly in favor of abortion rights and called the abortion ban politically motivated and "dangerous to the women in our lives."

Utah's trans sports ban veto likely to be quashed

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Utah's Republican lawmakers were preparing for a Friday push to override Gov. Spencer Cox's veto of legislation banning transgender youth athletes from playing on girls teams, a move that comes amid a brewing nationwide culture war over transgender issues.

Cox was the second GOP governor this week to overrule state lawmakers on a sports-participation ban, and his veto letter drew national attention with a poignant argument that such laws target vulnerable kids who already have high rates of suicide attempts. But 11 states have enacted similar bans, and they are a key topic for the party's vocal conserva-

tive base.

Leaders in the deeply conservative Legislature, though, say they need to pass the law to protect women's sports. As cultural shifts raise LGBTQ visibility, the lawmakers argue that transgender athletes can have a physical advantage and could eventually dominate the field and change the nature of women's sports.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Tiger mauls man at airboat attraction

FL OCHOPEE — A tiger mauled a worker Tuesday at Wooten's Everglades Airboat Tours in Ochoppee, according to the Collier County Sheriff's Office.

According to Wooten's website, the attraction includes an animal sanctuary that features two tigers, two lions, otters, turtles, crocodiles and alligators.

A caretaker was feeding a tiger in its enclosure when another worker who wasn't authorized to be with the tiger entered the enclosure, deputies said. The tiger attacked the 50-year-old man and caused injuries to both of his arms, officials said.

The man was transported to a hospital. Officials didn't immediately disclose his condition.

The tiger's caretaker was able to safely contain the big cat, officials said. It was not injured.

5 cops to be fired after man's stun gun death

PA PITTSBURGH — Five Pittsburgh police officers will be fired following an internal investigation into their interaction with a 54-year-old man, who died a day after police shocked him multiple times with a stun gun, officials said Wednesday.

The names of the officers or details of the investigation were not released by Lee Schmidt, the city's public safety director.

Schmidt said three other officers who were involved in the episode will keep their jobs.

All eight officers were suspended with pay and faced disciplinary hearings after the death of Jim Rogers in October.

Police shocked him with a stun gun multiple times in connection with a bicycle theft.

House wants age limit for tobacco, vaping

KS TOPEKA — The Kansas House approved a bill that would increase the age to purchase or possess cigarettes and tobacco products from 18 to 21.

The legislation also applies to electronic cigarettes and vaping products, and would prohibit them in school buildings. It would also make selling any tobacco or vaping products to someone younger than 21 or buying them for those under 21 a misdemeanor that can be punished with a \$200 fine.

Man charged with hiring hitman to kill ex-wife

DE WILMINGTON — A Delaware man has been arrested and charged in federal court with hiring a hitman to kill his ex-wife.

The U.S. attorney's office in Delaware announced the charges Wednesday against the 47-year-old Wilmington man.

According to court documents, the man offered a confidential source \$10,000 to kill his ex-wife at her workplace, a Maryland tire shop.

In recorded conversations, the Wilmington man tells the source how he wants the shooting to occur.

On March 18, the Wilmington man met the source in Newark and paid him \$5,000 to conduct the hit, with another \$5,000 to be paid after she was killed. The conversation and payment were recorded on audio and video.

Authorities arrested the man Wednesday. He faces up to 10 years in prison if convicted.

Police officer accused of taking pawning guns

NE GERING — A western Nebraska police officer has been arrested and accused of stealing and pawning guns from his department.

Bryan Martinez, 32, of Gering, was arrested at his home Tuesday by Nebraska State Patrol investigators, the Scottsbluff Star-Herald reported. He's charged in Scotts Bluff County with three counts of theft and one count of passing a bad check.

The investigation into Martinez began in January when a local store reported that he had written a bad check, the patrol said. Investigators then learned that several guns were missing from the Minatare Police Department.

Investigators believe that Martinez stole the guns and sold three of them to a local pawn shop.

The patrol said Martinez has served with other law enforcement agencies in the area and is also employed by the Sioux County Sheriff's Office.

Video shows teacher leading anti-Biden chant

CA NORCO — A private school apologized to parents after a teacher shared a video last month of her leading preschool students in a chant denouncing President Joe Biden.

The video obtained by ABC 7 News in Los Angeles shows the unnamed teacher at Turning

Point Christian School in Norco asking the 4- and 5-year-olds, "Who's our president?"

When they answer in unison, "Biden," the teacher then asks, "What do we want to do with him?"

The students shout back, "We want him out!"

Parent Christina McFadden told ABC 7 the video from the Presidents Day lesson was shared through the school's messaging app, before it was taken down.

Turning Point officials said in a statement to parents that the school was "sorry for any misunderstanding" caused by the video. It's unclear what, if any, disciplinary action was taken against the teacher.

New app to help visitors explore waterways

GA ATLANTA — A group that works to protect Georgia's waterways has released a free Georgia River Guide mobile app.

The Georgia River Guide app is aimed at helping people to experience the recreation on Georgia's network of more than 30 water trails, according to the Georgia River Network.

Paddlers, boaters, anglers and others who use the rivers can use the app to find trails and learn about river access points, mileage, water falls and other points of interest, the group said in a statement announcing the new app. Safety information such as river difficulty, potential hazards and rapids are also included.

The Georgia River Guide app is available in Apple and Google Play stores.

— From Associated Press

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Arkansas muscles out No. 1 Gonzaga

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — For 40 frenzied minutes, JD Notae, Jaylin Williams and Arkansas played a maddening, muscular style on both ends that took Gonzaga out of its game — and right out of the NCAA Tournament far earlier than these Zags expected.

Notae scored 21 points despite missing 20 shots and the determined, fourth-seeded Razorbacks dashed the No. 1 overall seed Bulldogs' title hopes with a 74-68 win in the Sweet 16 on Thursday night.

"We've been disrespected the whole year, so it's just another thing for us," Williams said. "We saw everything they were saying, we felt like they were dancing before the game. That was disrespect for us. We just came into the game playing hard and we had a chip on our shoulder. Every game we do."

When the final buzzer sounded, Notae tossed the game ball into the air in triumph, while Williams flexed and roared near mid-court. Coach Eric Musselman made his way into the stands to find his mother, Kris, for a celebratory embrace after she watched her son in person for the first time coaching the Razorbacks.

After a throwback performance from the program that once promised "40 Minutes of Hell," these Hogs relished in pure bliss.

Notae finished with six rebounds, six assists, three steals and even swatted a pair of shots for the Razorbacks (28-8), who reac-

hed the Elite Eight for a second consecutive year and will face second-seeded Duke on Saturday, hoping to deny retiring coach Mike Krzyzewski one last trip to the Final Four.

Drew Timme scored 25 points but couldn't rally the normally high-scoring Bulldogs (28-4), who for the second straight season were favored to win that elusive national title but couldn't keep up with Arkansas' athleticism and fight. Gonzaga had been undefeated last year before losing to Baylor in the national title game.

"We just wanted to be physical, plain and simple," Musselman said. "We wanted them to feel bodies. Obviously they played a really tough schedule early in the season, but it's been a long time in conference play since they faced a team like us."

An emotional Timme addressed his teammates afterward, then fought tears during a postgame news conference.

"It was a hell of a ride," Timme said. "It didn't end up the way we wanted but we came to play hard. It was their night."

Arkansas continually challenged 7-foot freshman Chet Holmgren in the paint, and the lanky NBA prospect fouled out with 3:29 remaining. Holmgren scored all 11 of his points after halftime and had 14 rebounds in what might have been his final college game.

Notae shot 9-for-29 overall and 2-for-12 from three-point range yet still did a little

bit of everything for Arkansas. The senior guard's three with 6:38 left made it 59-50, and the Razorbacks held on from there.

Au'Diese Toney's one-handed slam with 1 second left punctuated the victory.

Toney converted a three-point play with 8:36 left by going right at Holmgren to draw his fourth foul and send him to the bench. The big man returned at the 6:46 mark but Notae drove at him three minutes later and drew the freshman's fifth foul. Holmgren raised his arms in protest.

During one key sequence, Notae scored, then sneaked in from behind Timme for a steal as Williams held his ground on the block. Notae swatted an early shot and made a steal to get his team going. He hit the floor repeatedly to corral loose balls.

"He kept the momentum our way," Trey Wade said.

Gonzaga trailed at the break for just the fifth time this season and never found the shooting touch that made the Zags the top scoring team in the nation at 87.8 points per game. The Zags shot 37.5% and went 5-for-21 from three-point range. Andrew Nembhard was a non-factor with seven points on 2-for-11 shooting.

"It's always so tough when it finally ends, especially short of the goal we all had," coach Mark Few said. "First time we lost in this round in quite a while. All the credit goes to Arkansas. Their defense was tough to get any rhythm against."

Blue Devils lock down Red Raiders late to advance

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Mike Krzyzewski has spent more than four decades at Duke telling his players what to do, with championship-level results.

With his Hall of Fame career in danger of coming to an end, Krzyzewski let his players dictate the game-closing defensive strategy of switching from an uncharacteristic zone defense into Duke's famous man-to-man.

The key defensive stops and two late baskets by Jeremy Roach moved Krzyzewski within one win of his record-setting 13th trip to the Final Four in his farewell season with a 78-73 victory over Texas Tech on Thursday night.

Krzyzewski said the players came to him during a late timeout like a "Catholic boys' choir," asking in unison for the switch to man that led to three straight stops and turned the game in Duke's favor.

"With this team they're so young and they're still growing," Krzyzewski said. "Whenever they can own something, they're going to do it better than if we just run it. When they said that, I felt they're going to own it. They'll make it work, and that's probably more important than strategy during that time. So that's the way I looked at it."

Roach did the rest with two jumpers during a 7-0 run as the steady sophomore came through in the clutch for a second straight game to send second-seeded Duke (31-6) into an Elite Eight matchup against fourth-seeded Arkansas.

Paolo Banchero led Duke with 22 points, Mark Williams scored 16 and Roach added 15 as the Blue Devils made their final eight shots from the field to hold off third-seeded Texas Tech (27-10) and give Coach K his record 100th NCAA Tournament victory.

As compelling as the action on the court

was in this taut West Region semifinal, the story of this Blue Devils run has surrounded the farewell tour of their Hall of Fame coach.

Krzyzewski announced last June he would retire after this season. After missing the tournament last year, Duke was back with a roster filled with NBA prospects and capable of delivering Krzyzewski his sixth title.

But a Red Raiders team featuring four super seniors and five players with more than 120 career games didn't go away and the game stayed tight as Duke used the zone to negate Texas Tech's strength advantage.

"They have a Hall of Fame coach in Coach K over there and he was trying to find a way to slow us down because we were scoring," guard Adonis Arms said. "I just think if we would have just recognized it a little quicker, it would have been fine. But it was a great adjustment from Coach K."

Houston knocks off No. 1 seed Arizona

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Houston coach Kelvin Sampson gritted his teeth and raised his arms before emphatically pounding his right fist into his left hand 11 times while celebrating with ecstatic Cougars fans who were not too far from home.

Another No. 1 seed is out, and Houston is one win away from playing in its second straight Final Four after leading throughout in a 72-60 victory over Arizona in an NCAA South Regional semifinal game Thursday night.

"I knew we were going to make them uncomfortable, that's what we do," Sampson said. "Our team, we're a tough bunch. ... They're not afraid of anybody."

Jamal Shead, a 19-year-old second-year guard, scored a career-high 21 points and experienced guard Kyler Edwards had 19 points with five three-pointers. They both played 38 minutes after Taze Moore got in

early foul trouble.

"We always feel like we're the toughest team out there and we play like that we can't be scared of anybody," Shead said. "The energy was just electric. It was awesome to have that type of crowd here."

Consecutive layups by Dalen Terry got Arizona within 64-58 with just over two minutes left. But Edwards, the transfer from Texas Tech who played in the 2019 national championship game for the Red Raiders, settled things for Houston with a three from the right wing.

The No. 5 seed Cougars (32-5) play second-seeded Villanova in the South Region final on Saturday in San Antonio, about 200 miles from the Houston campus.

Terry had 17 points for Arizona (33-4), while Pac-12 player of the year Benedict Mathurin had 15 and Christian Koloko 10.

"It was a tough game. There's a lot of things we could have done better to win the game,"

Mathurin said. "I don't have a lot to say."

The American Athletic Conference champion Cougars became the second former Southwest Conference team to knock a No. 1 seed out of this NCAA Tournament in a matter of hours. Top overall seed Gonzaga lost 74-68 to Arkansas, which went to the SEC in 1991, five years before the SWC's final season.

These Cougars are much different than the ones Sampson took to the the Final Four last year — their first since going three times in a row during the Phi Slama Jama era from 1982-84.

Houston lost four starters from last season and then lost Marcus Sasser, the lone returner and leading scorer who broke his left foot before Christmas. Sophomore guard Tramon Mark had a season-ending shoulder injury before that.

Villanova 63, Michigan 55: At San Antonio, Texas, Jer-

maine Samuels scored 22 points and carried the Wildcats' offense as they finished off the Wolverines.

Samuels shot 8-for-13 from the field with much of his scoring coming on tough drives through Michigan defenders and around big man Hunter Dickinson. Villanova had long stretches of misfiring on three-pointers but did enough to move on to the Elite Eight, where it will face Houston.

It's the deepest run in the tournament for the second-seeded Wildcats (28-7) since coach Jay Wright won the second of his two national titles in 2018. The loss ends a turbulent season for Michigan (19-15), which squeaked into the tournament field only to shine in the first two rounds.

Dickinson led the Wolverines with 15 points and 15 rebounds, and Eli Brooks scored 14 points. Justin Moore scored 15 points and Collin Gillespie scored 12 for Villanova.

Americans close in on World Cup berth after draw

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — Christian Pulisic pounded the ground three times just past Mexico's goal line after his point-blank shot was blocked in the 35th minute.

The United States was frustrated yet pleased with a gritty 0-0 draw on Thursday night in the thin air of a half-full Estadio Azteca. The point earned pushed the Americans in place to all but clinch a World Cup berth with a victory against Panama on Sunday night at Orlando, Fla.

"We put ourselves in a position to play on Sunday and win and go to the World Cup," Pulisic said. "But of course I'm disappointed I missed a chance, and I would have loved to have won the game."

The U.S. maintained second

place in North and Central America and the Caribbean with 22 points, three behind Canada, and ahead of Mexico on goal difference. The top three nations reach the World Cup in Qatar, and the No. 4 team advances to a playoff, likely against New Zealand.

With a victory Sunday, the U.S. can ensure that fourth-place Costa Rica could only pull even by winning its final two games. The U.S. has a plus-nine goal difference, the first tiebreaker, and the Ticos are plus-two following a 1-0 win over Canada. If Costa Rica fails to win at El Salvador and the U.S. beats Panama, which has 18 points after being held to a 1-1 draw by visiting Honduras, the Americans will clinch outright.

The U.S. closes on March 30 at Costa Rica, where the Amer-

icans have never won in qualifying.

"We're getting close," U.S. coach Gregg Berhalter said. "Positive disappointment, that's how I would characterize it."

Berhalter played his "A" team — minus five injured regulars — after debating whether to rest top players ahead of Sunday. He will face Panama somewhat depleted.

Right back DeAndre Yedlin and winger Tim Weah both were given their second yellow cards of qualifying and must serve one-game suspensions, Yedlin in the 26th for an unnecessary sliding tackle in the midfield on Edson Álvarez and Weah in the 39th for knocking over Raúl Jiménez from behind on a throw-in.

Mexico, which has 40 wins, two losses and 10 draws in qual-

ifiers at Azteca, outshot the U.S. 11-9 and had 62.3% possession. But the Americans had the better chances, a 1.26 expected goals to Mexico's 0.40.

El Tri fans booed the home team at the final whistle.

Zack Steffen got the start and came away with his second shutout against Mexico in qualifying, helping the U.S. extend its unbeaten streak over El Tri to four games, including three wins.

After FIFA ordered Mexico to play a pair of home qualifiers without fans as punishment for homophobic chants during October qualifiers against Honduras and Canada, the Mexican Football Federation limited the crowd to about 47,000 in the 87,000-seat stadium and mandated a QR Code and identification for entry.

Paul back in lineup as Suns secure top seed

Associated Press

DENVER — Chris Paul returned from a broken right wrist to help the Phoenix Suns wrap up the top seed in the NBA playoffs with a 140-130 victory over the Denver Nuggets on Thursday night.

Devin Booker led Phoenix with a season-high 49 points and Paul had 17 points — 15 of them after halftime — and 13 assists in the Suns' seventh straight victory.

The Suns, who won 11 of the 15 games while their 12-time All-Star point guard was out, lead the NBA with a 60-14 record and are trying to make the NBA Finals for a second straight season after losing to Milwaukee last year.

Nikola Jokic led Denver with 28 points. The Nuggets shot 59.3% from the floor, but Phoenix was even hotter, hitting at a 60.5% clip.

Mikai Bridges added 22 points for the Suns on 8-for-9 shooting. Bridges and Deandre Ayton have played well in Paul's absence and Ayton had a career-high 35 points Wednesday night in a comeback victory at Minnesota. He had 16 against Denver.

Paul returned roughly five weeks after breaking his right thumb in a game against Houston on Feb. 16, just before the All-Star break.

With a nine-game lead over second-place Memphis with eight games left for both teams, the Suns wrapped up the best record in the NBA and home-court throughout the playoffs.

Grizzlies 133, Pacers 103: Desmond Bane scored 30 points, hitting 12 of 15 shots, and Memphis beat visiting Indiana to clinch a playoff spot.

Jaren Jackson Jr. finished with 20 points, going 7-for-13 from the field, and the Grizzlies shot 54%. De'Anthony Melton added 19 points, and John Konchar matched his career high

with 18. Bane was 5-for-7 from outside the arc as Memphis made a season-high 21 three-pointers.

Before the game, Grizzlies coach Taylor Jenkins announced that leading scorer Ja Morant would miss the next two weeks with right knee soreness.

Lance Stephenson led Indiana with 25 points.

Bucks 114, Wizards 102: Jrue Holiday had 24 points and 10 assists to help short-handed host Milwaukee beat Washington.

Grayson Allen added 21 points and the Bucks never trailed despite playing without either of their two All-Stars: Khris Middleton and two-time MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo.

Middleton missed a second straight game with a sore left wrist. Antetokounmpo was out for the second time in three games with a sore right knee.

Ish Smith scored 17 points for Washington.

Pelicans 126, Bulls 109: Devonte' Graham hit five three-pointers on his way to a season-high 30 points, CJ McCollum scored 25 points and New Orleans beat visiting Chicago.

Jonas Valanciunas added 16 points and 19 rebounds for the Pelicans won for the fourth time in six games as they try to solidify their hold on a Western Conference play-in spot.

Zach LaVine scored 39 points for Chicago, which played without leading scorer DeMar DeRozan (left groin) and lost for the fifth time in six games.

Raptors 118, Cavaliers 104: Pascal Siakam matched his season high with 35 points 17 and Toronto beat visiting Cleveland to tighten the Eastern Conference playoff race.

Siakam was 6-for-7 from three-point range to help Toronto snap a three-game home losing streak and tie Cleveland for the sixth-best record with nine games left.

Pastrnak leads Bruins by Bolts

Associated Press

BOSTON — David Pastrnak had his 12th career hat trick, scoring the tiebreaking goal with 4:10 left Thursday night to help the Boston Bruins beat the Tampa Bay Lightning 3-2 and move ahead of the two-time defending Stanley Cup champions in the Eastern Conference playoff race.

Entering the game one point behind the Lightning, Boston finished the night with 85 points — tied with Toronto for second in the Atlantic Division. Tampa Bay has 84 points, good for fourth.

Jeremy Swayman stopped 22 shots for the Bruins, who have won 12 of 15 and are 25-9-3 since New Year's Day.

Panthers 4, Canadiens 3: Claude Giroux had two assists in his first game with his new team, fellow newcomer Ben Chiarot set up a goal against his former teammates and visiting Florida beat Montreal.

The Panthers recently acquired Giroux from Philadelphia and Chiarot from the Canadiens.

Flyers 5, Blues 2: Travis Konecny scored twice and Hayden Hodgson had a goal and an assist in his NHL debut as visiting Philadelphia beat St. Louis.

The Flyers snapped a 13-game losing streak on the road, winning away from home for the first time since Dec. 29 at expansion Seattle.

Wild 3, Canucks 2 (OT): Joel Eriksson Ek scored 31 seconds into overtime, Cam Talbot made 26 saves and host Minnesota kept rolling with a win against Vancouver.

Kirill Kaprizov had a goal and an assist and Kevin Fiala also scored for Minnesota, which has won four in a row and is 6-1-1 in its last eight games. Talbot

has won his past seven starts.

The Wild (80 points) moved one point ahead of St. Louis for second place in the Central Division.

Islanders 5, Red Wings 2: Brock Nelson scored twice and Ilya Sorokin made 37 saves to lead New York over Detroit for its sixth straight home victory.

Anthony Beauvillier scored nine seconds in, the second-fastest goal to start a game in Islanders history. Oliver Wahlstrom and Josh Bailey also scored for New York, which improved to 7-1-1 in its last nine games. Anders Lee had three assists and Mathew Barzal added two.

Stars 4, Hurricanes 3 (SO): Tyler Seguin scored in the shootout after goalie Scott Wedgewood dazzled in his Dallas debut against host Carolina.

Blackhawks 4, Kings 3 (SO): Alex DeBrincat had a goal and an assist in regulation and then scored the only goal in a shootout to lift visiting Chicago over Los Angeles.

Golden Knights 6, Predators 1: Evgenii Dadonov had a goal and two assists, and host Vegas defeated Nashville in a game that included a frightening injury.

Golden Knights forward Brett Howden was wheeled off the ice on a stretcher after going headfirst into the boards near the Vegas bench. He was taken to a hospital and was in stable condition, the team said.

Senators 5, Jets 2: Brady Tkachuk had two goals and visiting Ottawa scored three times in a 3:15 span of the third period to beat Winnipeg.

Oilers 5, Sharks 2: Leon Draisaitl scored twice to lead host Edmonton over San Jose.

The Oilers, who had lost their previous two games, improved to 6-1-1 in their last eight. Mike Smith made 28 saves.