

N. Korea fires cruise missiles amid drills

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea launched cruise missiles toward the sea Wednesday, South Korea's military said, three days after the North carried out what it called a simulated nuclear attack on South Korea to protest its military drills with the United States.

North Korea has stepped up its weapons testing activities, saying they are in response to the ongoing South Korean-U.S. military training it has seen as an invasion rehearsal. Analysts have said North Korean leader Kim Jong Un likely intends to enlarge his arsenal to win greater outside concessions, while trying to boost an image of a strong leader amid domestic economic hardships.

The 11-day South Korean-U.S. drills are set to end Thursday. North Korea, however, is expected to continue its weapons tests as the U.S. reportedly plans to send an aircraft carrier in coming days for another round of joint drills with South Korea.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said it detected "several" cruise missile launches from the North's eastern coastal town of Hamhung. It said the missiles flew into the waters off the North's east coast and that South Korean and U.S. intelligence authorities were analyzing further details.

The launches are the North's sixth round of missile tests this month and the fourth since the U.S. and South Korean militaries

began large-scale military drills early last week, which include field exercises and computer simulations. The field training is the largest of its kind since 2018.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff said the South Korean military will maintain a firm readiness and successfully complete the rest of the drills with the U.S.

North Korea keeps a huge stockpile of ballistic missile systems whose tests are banned by multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions. Eleven rounds of U.N. sanctions imposed on North Korea since 2006 were approved because of North Korea's previous ballistic missile and nuclear test explosions.

Cruise missile tests by North Korea aren't prohibited by the U.N. council. But experts have said they still pose a serious threat to its neighbors because they are designed to fly at a lower altitude to avoid radar detection. Experts have said the main mission of North Korean cruise missiles include striking U.S. aircraft carriers or other big enemy ships.

North Korea has called some of its cruise and ballistic missiles "strategic" weapons, a suggestion that it wants to arm them with nuclear warheads. Foreign experts have debated whether the North has overcome the remaining technological hurdles to possess functioning nuclear missiles.

North Korea's state media didn't immediately confirm Wednesday's launches. It did, however, carry a statement by senior Foreign Ministry official Jo Chol Su, which pro-

tested what it called recent U.S. diplomatic attempts at the U.N. Security Council to push with the North's denuclearization.

Cho said North Korea will view any outside bid to force it to surrender its nuclear weapons as "a declaration of war." He said North Korea will sternly deal with such an attempt in line with its escalatory nuclear doctrine.

After more than 70 missile tests last year — the largest number for a year — North Korea has extended its provocative run in weapons demonstrations in 2023, launching around 20 missiles in 10 separate events. The weapons that were tested this year included short-range nuclear-capable ballistic missiles capable of striking South Korea and intercontinental ballistic missiles designed to attack the mainland U.S.

On March 12, the day before the South Korea-U.S. drills began, North Korea test-fired two cruise missiles from a submarine. Last month, North Korea launched what it called four long-range cruise missiles that demonstrated potential to strike targets 1,240 miles away.

On Sunday, Kim supervised a test-firing of a short-range ballistic missile launched from what was possibly a silo dug into the ground. State media called it a simulated nuclear attack on unspecified South Korean targets that was meant to send a "stronger warning" to the U.S. and South Korea over their drills.

NATO allies short of target for defense expenditures

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

Defense spending among NATO allies increased once again in 2022, but the number of countries hitting the alliance's benchmark for military expenditures fell short of expectations.

The findings, included in NATO's new annual report, showed that seven of 30 allies spent at least 2% of their gross domestic product on defense, down from eight in the previous year.

"We actually expected that (number) to be slightly more," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters Tuesday in

Brussels. "But because GDP has increased more than expected for a couple of allies, two allies that we expected to be at 2% are now slightly below 2%."

The seven countries that hit the mark are the United States, Greece, Poland, the United Kingdom, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Only three members were at 2% in 2014.

Overall defense spending, however, climbed for the eighth straight year, with collective expenditures increasing by 2.2% from the previous year.

Still, NATO countries are "not moving as fast as the dangerous world we live in demands," Stoltenberg said.

"While I welcome all the progress that has been made, it is obvious that we need to do more and we need to do it faster," he added.

The U.S. also still carries a disproportionate share of the burden, accounting for 54% of the allies' combined GDP but 70% of allied defense expenditure, the report said.

When NATO heads of state meet for a summit this summer in Vilnius, Lithuania, members are expected to set more ambitious spending goals, Stoltenberg said.

The agenda coincides with the Russia-Ukraine war, which has reinvigorated NATO and added urgency to efforts aimed at bolstering its eastern flank.

Russian missiles, drones kill Ukrainian civilians

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia stepped up its missile and drone attacks against Ukraine on Wednesday, killing students and other civilians, in a violent follow-up to dueling high-level diplomatic missions.

“Russia is shelling the city with bestial savagery,” President Volodymyr Zelenskyy wrote in a Telegram post accompanying video showing what he said was a Russian missile striking a nine-story apartment building on a busy road in the southeastern city of Zaporizhzhia. “Residential areas where ordinary people and children live are being fired at.”

At least one person was killed in the attack shown in the Zaporizhzhia video, apparently recorded by closed circuit TV cameras. Elsewhere, Moscow’s forces launched exploding drones before dawn, killing seven people in or near a student dormitory near Kyiv.

Ukrainian media showed charred apartments and flames billowing on several floors of the buildings. Two children were among the wounded, said Zaporizhzhia City Council Secretary Anatolii Kurtiev, adding that 25

people needed hospital treatment, with three in critical condition.

Earlier Wednesday, a drone attack damaged a high school and two dormitories in the city of Rzhyschiv, south of the Ukrainian capital, officials said. It wasn’t clear how many people were in the dormitories at the time.

The drone barrage and other Russian attacks on civilian infrastructure drew a scathing response from Zelenskyy.

“Over 20 Iranian murderous drones, plus missiles, numerous shelling occasions, and that’s just in one last night of Russian terror,” he tweeted in English. “Every time someone tries to hear the word ‘peace’ in Moscow, another order is given there for such criminal strikes.”

Zaporizhzhia’s regional administration said two missiles struck the apartment block, saying Russia’s goal is “to scare the civilian population of the city of thousands.”

“It’s hell in Zaporizhzhia,” Ukrainian lawmaker Oleksiy Goncharenko wrote on Telegram, adding: “There aren’t any military facilities nearby.”

Navy extends service of destroyer USS Arleigh Burke for 5 more years

BY ALEX WILSON
AND JENNESSA DAVEY
Stars and Stripes

The Navy last week approved plans to keep the guided-missile destroyer USS Arleigh Burke in service another five years, meaning the first-in-class ship will have sailed for four decades before its retirement.

The destroyer, homeported at Naval Station Rota, Spain, was slated for decommissioning in 2026 at the end of its anticipated 35-year service life. With the extension, the ship will operate until fiscal year 2031, according to a March 14 news release from Naval Surface Force Atlantic.

First commissioned in 1991, the Arleigh Burke would be 40 years old at the end of its extended service life.

The Navy approved the extended service “based on the lethality she delivers” and a “thorough assessment of her material condition and adherence to class maintenance plans,” Naval Surface Force Atlantic spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Jason Fischer said by email Wednesday.

Additional service extensions for other Arleigh Burke-class destroyers will be made with “similar criteria” on a “hull-by-hull basis,” he said.

The extension is a “testament to the success” of the Navy’s guided-missile destroyer program, which produced 71 Arleigh Burke-class destroyers over the past three decades, Rear Adm. Brendan McLane, commander of Naval Surface Force Atlantic, said in the release.

Triton drone to undergo advanced sensor testing

BY JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWA-KUNI, Japan — The Navy’s MQ-4C Triton, fresh from in-flight capability trials over the Indo-Pacific, is teed up for further testing with advanced capabilities this year.

The drone, developed by Northrop Grumman for the Navy, arrived at MCAS Iwakuni, near Hiroshima, in July to test its intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities before departing in October.

The Triton will return to the Indo-Pacific this year to start the next phase of its capability testing in the Integrated Functional Capability 4 configuration.

The sensor upgrade in that configuration dramatically improves the Triton’s signals intelligence, or listening, capabilities, according to Rob Zmarkzlak, chief engineer for Northrop Grumman, who is quoted on the company’s website. The Triton is the first high-altitude, long-endurance aircraft that can conduct persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions over the ocean expanse to complement the P-8 Poseidon crewed aircraft, 7th Fleet spokeswoman Lt. Kristina Wiedemann told Stars and Stripes by email Wednesday.

“The MQ-4C Triton provided 7th Fleet with around-the-clock [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] capability, as the aircraft has the capability to fly up to 24 hours during each mission,” she said.

Initial Triton testing in the Indo-Pacific began in 2020 at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, with the aircraft in the baseline configuration known as Integrated Functional Capability 3, according to a March 16 Navy news release.

“Triton helps bolster our Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance operations on a global stage,” Lt. Christopher Lee, a Triton naval flight officer, said in the release. “The communication and safety nets Triton brings to our friendly units is a game-changer.”

The Navy in 2021 deployed two Tritons at Misawa Air Base in the northeastern corner of the country. During the Triton’s deployment with 7th Fleet, the Navy applied and refined its tactics, techniques and procedures, Wiedemann said.

VA union: More staff, less private care

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Staffing shortages at the Department of Veterans Affairs and increased reliance on private health care threatens the agency's ability to provide quality service for veterans, according to a report released Tuesday by a union that represents federal employees at the VA.

The American Federation of Government Employees organized a group about a year ago to compile a report about health care at the VA out of concern for laws passed that allow more veterans to seek services outside the agency and because the VA has had tens of thousands of open jobs across its network nationwide for years, according to members of the union who held a news conference about the report's findings.

The report calls for the VA to

fill all vacancies at the agency, develop detailed, accurate comparisons between the VA's health care and private providers, change when a veteran can seek care outside the VA, and ensure pay offered within the VA system is competitive with the private sector.

The group's report — "Disadvantaging the VA: How VA Staff View Agency Privatization and Other Detrimental Policies" — is based on survey results from 2,000 of the VA's roughly 412,000 employees and was co-published by the National VA Council of the AFGE and the Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute, a nonprofit think tank focused on veterans' health. The AFGE advocates for workers across the federal government and has more than 283,000 members, according to its website. The VA makes up one of its

largest membership blocks.

Among survey respondents, 77% said the VA health care facility where they work has closed beds, units or programs because of staffing and budget shortages. More than half said they have less time to deliver direct patient care and support services than they did four years ago.

The VA now has more than 76,100 job vacancies, according to the report, and it calls on the agency to ease modernization efforts that began in 2018 and centralized hiring by pulling human resources staff away from local facilities.

The VA has made aggressive hiring and retention efforts to fill jobs across the agency, however, according to a VA spokesman who requested he not be identified.

The Veterans Health Admin-

istration has hired 22,759 new employees in fiscal 2023, which began Oct. 1, and is on pace to hire 52,000 by Sept. 30, the spokesman said. The Veterans Benefits Administration, which manages benefit claims, has increased its workforce by 1,369 employees, he said.

Veterans' trust in the VA to coordinate their care exceeds 90% nationwide, whether services are administered at a VA facility or by a private health care provider, the spokesman said.

The union's report also warned the VA's modernization efforts have increasingly cut into the VA's health care budget since the passage of the VA Choice Act of 2014 and the VA MISSION Act of 2018, which increased opportunities for veterans to seek private treatment outside of a VA facility.

Oklahoma court overturns part of state's abortion ban

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — A divided Oklahoma Supreme Court on Tuesday overturned a portion of the state's near total ban on abortion, ruling women have a right to abortion when pregnancy risks their health, not just in a medical emergency.

It was a narrow win for abortion rights advocates since the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the landmark *Roe v. Wade* last year. Since then, conservative states including Oklahoma have enforced restrictions on abortion.

Oklahoma's top court ruled that a woman has the right under the state Constitution to receive an abortion to preserve her life if her doctor determines that continuing the pregnancy would endanger it due to a condition she has or is likely to develop during the pregnancy. Previously, the right to an abortion only held in the case of medical emergency.

"Requiring one to wait until there is a medical emergency would further endanger the life of the pregnant woman and does not serve a compelling state interest," the ruling states.

In the 5-4 ruling, the court said the state law uses both the words "preserve" and "save" the mother's life as an exception to the abortion ban. "The language 'except to save the life of a pregnant woman in a medical emergency' is much different from 'preserve her life,'" according to the ruling.

"Absolute certainty," by the physician that the mother's life could be endangered, "is not required, however, mere possibility or speculation is insufficient" to determine that an abortion is needed to preserve the woman's life, according to the ruling.

The court declined to rule on whether the state Constitution grants the right to an abortion for other reasons.

Kansas could soon OK 'born alive' abortion bill

Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. — A Kansas proposal based on the disputed idea that providers leave newborns to die after unsuccessful abortions is nearing legislative approval, as Republicans pursue limited anti-abortion measures following a decisive statewide vote last year protecting abortion rights.

The Kansas House was set to take a final vote Wednesday on a bill declaring that when an abortion procedure inadvertently results in a live birth, medical personnel must take the same steps to preserve the newborn's life as "a reasonably diligent and conscientious" provider would with other live births. The measure is similar to a proposed Montana law that voters there rejected in November.

The U.S. Supreme Court declared in June that states can ban abortion, and the Republican-

controlled Kansas Legislature has long had strong anti-abortion majorities in both chambers. But a 2019 Kansas Supreme Court decision protected abortion rights and in August 2022, voters rejected a proposed change to the state constitution to overturn that decision and give lawmakers the power to greatly restrict or ban abortion.

Supporters of the "born-alive infants protection" bill argued during a House debate Tuesday that the measure will survive a court challenge because it doesn't limit abortion itself. State Rep. Clark Sanders, a Republican from central Kansas, said the bill deals only with cases when a newborn is "completely out of her or his mother," and has a heartbeat and is breathing.

House passage would send the measure to the Senate, where GOP leaders have also signaled they see it as a priority.

Spring brings more wind, rain and snow to soaked California

Associated Press

SANTA CRUZ, Calif. — A strong late-season Pacific storm that brought damaging winds and more rain and snow to saturated California was blamed for two deaths, and forecasters said additional flooding was possible Wednesday in parts of the state.

Tuesday's storm focused most of its energy on central and southern parts of the state, bringing threats of heavy runoff and mountain snowfall. In the north, intense hail was reported in Sacramento, the state capital.

Locally heavy rain and snowmelt may cause flooding Wednesday in southern California and central Arizona, the National Weather Service warned. On Tuesday, some residents of north-central Arizona were told to prepare to evacuate because of rising water levels in rivers and basins.

Trees and power lines were reported downed in the San Francisco Bay Area. An Amtrak commuter train carrying 55 passengers struck a downed tree and derailed near the East Bay village of Porta Costa. The train remained upright and nobody was injured, Amtrak and fire offi-

cials said.

In the Bay Area community of Portola Valley, a man driving a sewer truck was killed when a tree fell onto the vehicle, the California Highway Patrol said. And in the community of Rossmoor, a driver was injured and a passenger died after a large tree fell onto a car, the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District said.

In the Monterey Bay region, a severe wind-storm located over the ocean blasted Santa Cruz County with wind gusts up to 80 mph at midday. Along the coastline of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, ocean foam blew across the roadways like large snowflakes.

Wind gusts reached 76 mph in Santa Cruz mountain communities, including Boulder Creek.

Resident Frank Kuhr waited for hours Tuesday afternoon at a downtown supermarket for crews to remove large redwoods that were blocking a highway. "Trees are down everywhere," Kuhr said. "The wind has been unbelievable. Branches were flying through the air, and folks could hear trees just falling and cracking."

"This one's a doozy," Kuhr said.

Water levels forces Ariz. residents to leave homes

Associated Press

RIMROCK, Ariz. — Some residents of north-central Arizona were told to prepare to evacuate Tuesday afternoon because of rising water levels in rivers and basins.

Yavapai County Sheriff's officials told residents in the Rimrock and Lake Montezuma areas along Wet Beaver Creek to evacuate or move to higher ground.

Residents of Beaver Creek were advised to evacuate or move to higher ground. An evacuation center was set up in Camp Verde if needed.

The National Weather Service issued a flood advisory Tuesday afternoon for residents in the Oak Creek area south of Sedona.

Winter weather advisories were issued for parts of central, northwest and northeast Arizona with the Flagstaff area forecast to get up to 3 inches of snow.

Arizona Department of Transportation officials said State Route 89A was closed in both directions between Sedona and Flagstaff due to rock slides and adverse weather conditions, while State Route 260 was closed near Forest Lakes because of multiple disabled vehicles. State routes 87 in Payson and 64 near the Grand Canyon National Park are also closed.

Salt River Project said storms have compelled the utility to increase the number of water releases from its two reservoirs on the Verde River. The reservoirs are already more than 80% full, officials said in a news release.

SRP said it will begin Tuesday releasing 16,000 cubic feet of water per second, which translates into 120,000 gallons of water per second.

The number of cubic feet per second could go up more later in the week.

Law forces transgender people to use bathroom of birth gender at schools

Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders on Tuesday signed a law prohibiting transgender people at public schools from using the restroom that matches their gender identity, the first of several states expected to enact such bans this year amid a flood of bills nationwide targeting the trans community.

The bill signed by the Republican governor makes Arkansas the fourth state to place such restrictions at public schools, and it comes as bills in Idaho and Iowa also await their governor's signature. It may also be followed by an even stricter Arkansas bill criminalizing transgender adults using public restrooms that match their gender identity.

Arkansas' law, which won't take effect until later this summer, applies to multiperson restrooms and locker rooms at public schools and charter schools serving prekindergarten through 12th grade. The majority-Republican Legislature gave final approval to the bill last week.

"The Governor has said she will sign laws that

focus on protecting and educating our kids, not indoctrinating them and believes our schools are no place for the radical left's woke agenda," Alexa Henning, Sanders' spokesperson, said in a statement. "Arkansas isn't going to rewrite the rules of biology just to please a handful of far-left advocates."

Similar laws have been enacted in Alabama, Oklahoma and Tennessee, although lawsuits have been filed challenging the Oklahoma and Tennessee restrictions.

Proposals to restrict transgender people using the restroom of their choice have seen a resurgence this year, six years after North Carolina repealed its bathroom law in the wake of widespread protests and boycotts. More than two dozen bathroom bills have been filed in 17 states, according to the Human Rights Campaign.

"They're singling out transgender people for no other reason than dislike, disapproval and misunderstanding of who transgender youth are," said Paul Castillo, senior counsel and students' rights strategist for Lambda Legal.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Doctor avoids prison time for health care fraud

MS JACKSON — A Mississippi doctor will not spend time in jail after pleading guilty to federal misdemeanor charges for his role in a health care fraud scheme that prosecutors said cost insurers about \$515 million.

Dr. Gregory Auzenne, 51, of Meridian, entered a guilty plea Monday to charges related to his failure to disclose information involving expensive prescription pain cream. He was sentenced to five years of probation and ordered to pay a \$20,000 fine and \$116,623 in restitution, according to the Clarion Ledger.

Prosecutors said the fraud began in Mississippi and cost in-state insurers about \$515 million and \$1.5 billion nationwide. Auzenne was accused of causing about \$18 million in fraud, in part by signing preprinted prescription forms for medicines. He was one of more than two dozen charged in the case. In 2020, he was acquitted on seven of eight counts against him. Jurors were unable to agree on the eighth count of making false statements.

Official: Mountain lion claws man in hot tub

CO NATHROP — Wildlife officials said Monday they are searching for a mountain lion that clawed a man's head while he was sitting in a hot tub with his wife at a rental home in central Colorado.

The man was soaking in the in-ground hot tub in a wooded subdivision west of Nathrop on Saturday night when he felt something grab his head, according to Colorado Parks and

Wildlife. He screamed at the mountain lion and started splashing water while his wife shined a flashlight at the animal. Authorities said it retreated to the top of a hill and continued to watch the couple.

The man and his wife were able to get back into the home, where they cleaned his wounds and called the property owner, who happened to work for Colorado Parks and Wildlife. The man had four superficial scratches on top of his head and near his right ear, but he declined medical treatment.

Arrest made in theft of funeral van with body

WI GREEN BAY — Authorities in Wisconsin have arrested a man in connection with the theft last January of a funeral home van containing a body, saying he faces charges of abuse of a corpse and unlawful possession of a stolen vehicle.

The van belonging to Collins & Stone Funeral Home in Rockport, Ill., was stolen from that location on Jan. 21, and found behind a vacant Chicago home on Jan. 23 with the body inside, officials have said. The 23-year-old man was arrested Sunday in Green Bay. He had been charged in late January but had been at large. WLS-TV quotes Rockford police as saying police in Wisconsin took the man into custody after a traffic stop.

Man thrown off hood, run over during police chase

IL WAUKEGAN — An Illinois man who leaped onto the hood of a car suffered life-threatening injuries when he was thrown off and run over during a police chase early Mon-

day.

The Lake County Sheriff's Office said in a news release that a deputy spotted two vehicles leaving a Beach Park business about 1:30 a.m. A 19-year-old man from Waukegan was clinging to the hood of one of the vehicles and waved at the deputy for help.

The vehicle's driver decided to flee and, during the pursuit, the second vehicle pulled alongside, causing the driver to swerve and stop abruptly. The man on the hood fell off and the driver then ran him over before taking off again, according to the sheriff's office. The pursuing deputy stayed at the scene and helped the man, who was transported to Advocate Condell Medical Center in Libertyville with injuries the sheriff's office described as critical and life-threatening.

The second vehicle continued to chase the other car and called in updated locations to sheriff's dispatchers. Deputies and state troopers finally stopped the driver using spike strips on Interstate 94 near Rosemont. The driver, a 17-year-old girl from Winthrop Harbor, and two passengers were taken into custody, the sheriff's office said.

Cruise asks to test its self-driving cars in Calif.

MI DETROIT — General Motors' Cruise autonomous vehicle unit on Monday asked California for permission to test the cars across the entire state. The GM subsidiary is already running an autonomous ride-hailing service in its hometown of San Francisco after testing for more than two years. It doesn't have specific plans yet to expand testing in California, but

applying with the Department of Motor Vehicles is a step toward entering cities such as Los Angeles. If granted, the test permit won't allow Cruise to carry non-employee passengers outside of San Francisco. Testing could be done up to 55 mph statewide, Cruise said.

The GM subsidiary is under investigation by U.S. safety regulators for reports that its autonomous robotaxis can unexpectedly come to a halt, potentially stranding passengers. Cruise says it's cooperating in the probe and has driven 1 million autonomous miles without causing any life-threatening injuries or deaths.

Sierra Nevada snow earns place in history books

NV RENO — No one really knows how much snow fell on the infamous Donner Party when the pioneers were trapped atop the Sierra Nevada for months and dozens died near Lake Tahoe in the winter of 1846-47.

But this season has now etched its way into the history books as the second snowiest in the 77 years of record-keeping at the Central Sierra Snow Lab — more than 56.4 feet with no end in sight.

And there's still a chance it could surpass the record of 67.7 feet set in 1951-52 when more than 200 passengers on a San Francisco-bound luxury train from Chicago were stranded for three days near Donner Pass west of Truckee, California. Over the weekend, the "winter that just doesn't want to end" as the National Weather Service in Reno put it, topped the previous No. 2 record of 55.9 feet set in 1982-83.

— From wire reports



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Ohtani leads Japan to third WBC title

Associated Press

MIAMI — Shohei Ohtani and Mike Trout had dreamed of this moment, along with millions of fans throughout Japan and the United States: the two biggest stars on the planet, longtime teammates, facing each other at 60 feet, 6 inches, the world title at stake.

Of course, the count went full.

And then Ohtani got Trout to swing under a slider on the outside corner, sealing Japan's 3-2 win Tuesday night and its first World Baseball Classic title since 2009.

"This is the best moment in my life," Ohtani said through a translator.

Ohtani, the two-way star who has captivated fans across two continents, was voted MVP of the WBC after batting .435 with one homer, four doubles, eight RBIs and 10 walks while going 2-0 with a save and a 1.86 ERA on the mound, striking out 11 in 9 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings.

"I think every baseball fan

wanted to see that. I've been answering questions about it for the last month-and-a-half," said Trout, Ohtani's Los Angeles Angels teammate since 2018.

"Did you think it was going to end in any other way?"

Watching the eighth and ninth innings unfold, Japan first baseman Kazuma Okamoto was in disbelief.

"I thought it was like a Manga," he said through an interpreter, referring to a Japanese comic book.

U.S. manager Mark DeRosa savored the matchup — except for the ending.

"I just would have liked to have seen Mike hit a 500-foot homer," he said.

Ohtani had given a pregame pep talk in Japan's clubhouse.

"Let's stop admiring them," he said, according to a Los Angeles Times translation of the video posted on the website Samurai Japan. "If you admire them, you can't surpass them. We came here to surpass them,

to reach the top. For one day, let's throw away our admiration for them and just think about winning."

Japan then joined the Dominican Republic in 2013 as the only unbeaten champions of baseball's premier national team tournament. The Samurai Warriors went 7-0 and outscored opponents 56-18, reaching the final for the first time since winning the first two WBCs in 2006 and 2009. No other nation has won the title more than once.

Trea Turner put the U.S. ahead in the second against Shota Imanaga (1-0) with his fifth home run of the tournament, tying the WBC record set by South Korea's Seung Yuop Lee in 2006.

Munetaka Murakami tied the score on the first pitch of the bottom half off Merrill Kelly (0-1) driving a fastball 432 feet into the right-field upper deck, a 115.1 mph bullet. Japan loaded the bases and Lars Nootbaar, the first non-Japanese-born

player to appear for the Samurai Warriors, followed with a run-scoring groundout off Aaron Loup for a 2-1 lead.

Okamoto boosted the lead in the fourth when he sent a flat slider from Kyle Freeland over the wall in left-center for another solo homer. Kyle Schwarber pulled the Americans within a run when he went deep in the eighth off Yu Darvish.

Ohtani was Japan's designated hitter and first went to the bullpen ahead of the sixth inning. He returned to the dugout and beat out an infield single in the seventh before again walking down the left-field line to Japan's bullpen and warming up for his third mound appearance of the tournament.

He walked big league batting champion Jeff McNeil to begin the ninth, then got six-time All-Star Mookie Betts to ground into a double play.

That brought up Trout, the U.S. captain, a 10-time All-Star and a three-time MVP.

Super seniors lead the way into men's Sweet 16

Associated Press

Jerome Tang took his time finding the right players to fit into the program he wanted to build at Kansas State.

They meshed just right, taking Tang and the Wildcats to the Sweet 16 in a season that started with them being picked to finish last in the Big 12.

Four have been downright super.

Anchored by fifth-year seniors Markquis Nowell, Desi Sills, Tykei Greene and Abayomi Iyiola, Kansas State is heading from the Little Apple to the Big Apple to face Michigan State at Madison Square Garden on Thursday.

"To have guys who have 100 college games under their belt, there are just certain things that you pick up that it doesn't mat-

ter how talented you are that you can't gain it except through experience," Tang said.

Super seniors have had a huge impact on the teams that have made it this far in March Madness.

Nine of the 16 remaining teams have players in fifth seasons granted by the NCAA due to the pandemic. They bring experience, leadership and presence with them on these deep runs into the bracket.

"There is no substitute for experience," Texas interim coach Rodney Terry said. "They understand what type of urgency you have to play with this time of year. They will help the young guys with that."

Terry has leaned on his "old" players since former coach Chris Beard was fired in De-

cember. Texas has six players 22 or older, including super seniors Marcus Carr, Sir Jabari Rice, Timmy Allen and Christian Bishop.

Carr started his college career at Pittsburgh in 2017, had a three-year stint at Minnesota that included a redshirt year and is the Longhorns' leading scorer at 15.8 points per game. Rice, a New Mexico State transfer, chips in 12.8 points and hit seven three-pointers against Colgate. Allen adds 10.3 points after transferring from Utah two years ago and Bishop has been a valuable role player in two seasons since leaving Creighton.

"We've been battle tested time and time again," Allen said.

Souley Boum is Xavier's lead-

ing scorer at 16.5 points per game, helping the Musketeers reach the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2017 after stints at San Francisco and UTEP.

Jordan Miller is Miami's second-leading scorer at 15.1 points and is making his second trip to the Sweet 16 after starting his career at George Mason. Rasir Bolton has given Gonzaga another scoring option, three-point shooting and clutch shots in two seasons since playing at Penn State and Iowa State.

David Singleton has been UCLA's sharpshooter in his five seasons in Westwood, hitting 43% from the three-point arc. He suffered a sprained ankle against Northwestern in the second round, though the Bruins are hoping he can play Thursday against Gonzaga.

Tatum scores 36; Celtics beat Sabonis, Kings

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Jayson Tatum scored 36 points and the Boston Celtics ended a long road trip on a high note by beating the Sacramento Kings 132-109 on Tuesday night.

Boston bounced back from blowing a 19-point lead in Utah on Saturday night by knocking off one of the top teams in the Western Conference. It won four of six on the trip.

Jaylen Brown added 27 points and Derrick White scored 20 to help the Celtics take a one-game lead over Philadelphia in the Atlantic Division.

“He just did a great job coming out of the gate,” Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said of Tatum. “I thought him and Jaylen did a great job controlling the game with their decision-making.”

Domantas Sabonis had 16 points, 13 rebounds and 12 assists for the Kings, who lost consecutive games for the first time since Feb. 3-5. De’Aaron Fox scored 18 points.

“They kicked our behinds,” coach Mike Brown said. “It started with me. We all got our behinds kicked. There’s nothing tricky or hidden behind what I’m saying. They switched everything and turned us over.”

Sacramento fell 1½ games behind Memphis in the race for second place in the Western Conference. The Kings are trying to clinch their first playoff berth since 2006 — the longest postseason drought in NBA history.

Thunder 101, Clippers 100: Los Angeles star Paul George got hurt in the fourth quarter of

the team’s loss to Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and visiting Oklahoma City.

George went down hard under the Oklahoma City basket with 4:38 remaining. He lay on his back for several minutes before being helped to his feet. Supported by staff on either side, George headed to the locker room, appearing to barely be able to put any weight on his right leg.

Gilgeous-Alexander scored 31 points against his former team. Jalen Williams added 20 points for the Thunder.

Cavaliers 115, Nets 109: Donovan Mitchell had five three-pointers and one sensational slam dunk among his 31 points, and Cleveland held on for the road win.

Caris LeVert added 18 points for the Cavaliers in the opener

of a two-game series. Cleveland led by only six after a competitive first half, but quickly blew it open in the third en route to its seventh win in nine games.

Hawks 129, Pistons 107: Bogdan Bogdanovic sank three three-pointers in a 16-0 run early in the second half that allowed host Atlanta to extend its lead to double digits for the first time.

Trae Young had 30 points and 12 assists for the Hawks (36-36), who are eighth in the Eastern Conference standings.

Pelicans 119, Spurs 84: Brandon Ingram scored 32 points, leading host New Orleans to the runaway win.

Magic 122, Wizards 112: Rookie Pablo Bachero had 18 points, nine rebounds and eight assists, sending host Orlando to the victory.

Reed, leader on Knicks’ 2 title teams, dies at 80

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Willis Reed, who dramatically emerged from the locker room minutes before Game 7 of the 1970 NBA Finals to spark the New York Knicks to their first championship and create one of sports’ most enduring examples of playing through pain, died Tuesday. He was 80.

Reed’s death was announced by the National Basketball Retired Players Association, which confirmed it through his family. The cause was not released, but Reed had been in poor health recently and was unable to travel to New York when the Knicks honored the 50th anniversary of their 1973 NBA championship team during their game against New Orleans on Feb. 25.

The Knicks tweeted a photograph picturing Reed from behind walking onto the floor as his teammates were warming up for the 1970 finale, one of the most memorable moments in NBA and Madison Square Garden history.

“As we mourn, we will always strive to uphold the standards he left behind — the unmatched leadership, sacrifice and work ethic that personified him as a champion among champions,” the team said. “His is

a legacy that will live forever.”

Nicknamed “The Captain,” Reed was the undersized center and emotional leader on the Knicks’ two NBA championship teams, with a soft shooting touch from the outside and a toughness to tussle with the era’s superstar big men on the inside.

He was remembered Tuesday perhaps more for the manner he led the Knicks than how superbly he played for them.

“Willis Reed was the ultimate team player and consummate leader. My earliest and fondest memories of NBA basketball are of watching Willis, who embodied the winning spirit that defined the New York Knicks’ championship teams in the early 1970s,” NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said. “He played the game with remarkable passion and determination, and his inspiring comeback in Game 7 of the 1970 NBA Finals remains one of the most iconic moments in all of sports.”

Reed’s accomplishments — seven All-Star selections, two NBA Finals MVP awards among them — would have warranted Hall of Fame induction by themselves. During the 1969-70 season, he became the first player to sweep the MVP awards for the regular season, All-Star Game and NBA Finals.

But his spot in history was secured simply by walking onto the floor on the final night of that season.

Reed had injured a thigh muscle in Game 5 of the series between the Knicks and Los Angeles Lakers, tumbling to the court in pain. He sat out Game 6 as counterpart Wilt Chamberlain had 45 points and 27 rebounds in a Lakers romp that forced a deciding game at Madison Square Garden.

Reed’s status was unknown even to his Knicks teammates as he continued getting treatment until shortly before Game 7. Both teams were warming up when Reed came out of the tunnel, fans rising and roaring when they saw him emerge from the tunnel leading to the locker room.

“And here comes Willis and the crowd is going wild,” radio announcer Marv Albert said.

The Lakers stopped to watch Reed, who made two quick jump shots in the early minutes of the game, running back down the court after both with a noticeable limp. He wouldn’t score again but the Knicks didn’t need it, with their captain’s return and Walt Frazier’s 36 points and 19 assists energizing them to a 113-99 romp and their first NBA title.

Blue Jackets rally past Capitals in OT

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Boone Jenner tied it with 46.9 seconds left in the third period, Jack Roslovic scored his second goal of the game in overtime and the NHL-worst Columbus Blue Jackets rallied to beat the Washington Capitals 7-6 on Tuesday night.

The Blue Jackets ended a three-game losing streak and dealt Washington another blow in its longshot bid to make the playoffs. The Capitals sit five points back of Florida for the second and final Eastern Conference wild-card spot with 10 games left to play.

“Everybody realizes exactly where we’re at and what needs to be done,” coach Peter Laviolette said. “We didn’t get it done tonight.”

With Darcy Kuemper still out because of injury, Charlie Lindgren allowed seven goals on 39 shots in his second consecutive start. The Capitals blew a 3-0 lead, and the loss spoiled the celebration of captain Alex Ovechkin for reaching second on the career goals list.

Nick Jensen had two goals and T.J. Oshie and Sonny Milano also scored for the Capitals, who have lost three in a row and six of their past eight games.

“Any time you’re scoring six goals and losing, it’s going to be

a rough night,” Jensen said.

Bruins 2, Senators 1: Linus Ullmark made 40 saves, Jake DeBrusk had the go-ahead goal, and Boston continued its pursuit of the league’s record for regular-season victories.

David Krejci added a power-play goal for the host Bruins, who won their fourth straight. Boston has 54 wins — eight away from the record of 62 set by Detroit in 1995-96 and matched by Tampa Bay in 2018-19 — with 12 games remaining.

Wild 2, Devils 1 (OT): Matt Boldy scored with 1.3 seconds left in overtime and Filip Gustavsson made a career-high 47 saves to lift visiting Minnesota over New Jersey.

Hurricanes 3, Rangers 2: Teuvo Teravainen scored the tie-breaking goal late in the third period, Frederik Andersen stopped 29 shots and visiting Carolina rallied to beat New York.

Jalen Chatfield and Stefan Noesen also scored for the Hurricanes.

Tyler Motte and Kaapo Kakko scored for the Rangers, who were 6-0-1 in their last seven.

Red Wings 3, Blues 2 (SO): Lucas Raymond scored in the fourth round of the shootout to lift visiting Detroit.

Alex Chiasson and Filip Zadina scored in regulation for the Red Wings, who stopped a

three-game losing streak. Magnus Hellberg made 20 saves and denied all four attempts in the shootout.

Canadiens 3, Lightning 2: Kirby Dach and Jonathan Drouin scored in the first period and host Montreal beat Tampa Bay.

Brayden Point and Pat Maroon had goals for Tampa Bay.

Jets 2, Coyotes 1: Connor Hellebuick stopped 29 shots to lead host Winnipeg.

Nikolaj Ehlers and Adam Lowry scored for the Jets, who won for the second time in five games. Hellebuick recorded his 31st victory in his 55th start of the season.

Golden Knights 4, Canucks 3: Phil Kessel and Reilly Smith scored in the first period, and visiting Vegas got its fifth straight road win.

Teddy Blueger and Pavel Dorofeyev also scored, and William Karlsson had two assists to help Vegas win for the ninth time in 11 games.

Kraken 5, Stars 4 (OT): Adam Larsson scored on a breakaway backhander 1:52 into overtime and emergency call-up goaltender Joey Daccord made 25 saves in his first NHL appearance since Nov. 1 to lead visiting Seattle.

Brandon Tanev had two goals and an assist for the Kraken,

who bolstered their hold on the first wild card in the Western Conference.

Flyers 6, Panthers 3: Travis Sanheim scored twice, Carter Hart made 41 saves and host Philadelphia defeated Florida.

Joel Farabee added a goal and an assist for the Flyers, who won for just the fifth time in 16 games.

Flames 5, Ducks 1: Tyler Toffoli had three assists and visiting Calgary bounced back from a six-goal loss one night earlier with a victory over Anaheim.

Nick Ritchie, Troy Stecher, Rasmus Andersson, Elias Lindholm and Andrew Mangiapane scored Calgary’s goals.

Predators 7, Sabres 3: Luke Evangelista scored twice in a 39-second span during visiting Nashville’s four-goal second-period.

Matt Duchene also scored twice, including an empty-netter, to give him 21 goals on the season.

Islanders 7, Maple Leafs 2: Cal Clutterbuck had two goals and an assist as host New York got all its scoring in the last two periods.

Anders Lee and Noah Dobson each had a goal and an assist, and Zach Parise, Hudson Fasching and Simon Holmstrom also scored.

Former MVP Newton tests skills at Auburn pro day

Associated Press

AUBURN, Ala. — After not playing at all during the 2022 season, Cam Newton got to show what he can still do.

Newton threw in front of scouts at a pro day event on Tuesday at Auburn, where he won a Heisman Trophy and a national championship in the 2010 season.

The 2015 NFL Most Valuable Player was invited to throw at Auburn by his younger brother, Caylin — a former quarterback at Howard who finished his collegiate career as a wide receiver at Auburn and William & Mary.

“This was him showing love to me,” Caylin Newton said of his older brother. “He doesn’t owe anybody anything. He has had an amazing journey, an amazing career in the NFL. He has nothing to prove to anybody. ... He came to show his ability, show he still has it.

“I think, for him, this was a selfless act. But it was also to show and prove to everybody he’s not sitting around. He’s still got it. Whatever organization wants to get a winning quarterback, his number’s still open and available.”

Cam Newton declined to speak to report-

ers in Auburn on Tuesday. During the workout, Newton threw more than 30 passes to several NFL hopefuls from Auburn, including wide receiver Shedrick Jackson.

“That was fun,” Jackson said. “That was probably my most favorite part, just learning his lingo, seeing his cadence. He’s got good touch on the ball. ... I think he’s still got it.”

In perhaps the biggest highlight of the workout, Newton showcased his trademark scrambling ability in the pocket before throwing a 50-yard pass downfield to his younger brother.