

US retaliates after drone strike in Syria

Associated Press

BEIRUT — A strike Thursday by a suspected Iranian-made drone killed a U.S. contractor and wounded six other Americans in northeast Syria, and U.S. forces retaliated with airstrikes on sites in Syria used by groups affiliated with Iran's Revolutionary Guard, the Pentagon said. Activists said the U.S. bombing killed at least four people.

While it's not the first time the U.S. and Iran have traded strikes in Syria, the attack and the U.S. response threaten to upend recent efforts to deescalate tensions across the wider Middle East, whose rival powers have made steps toward détente in recent days after years of turmoil.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a statement that the American intelligence community had determined the drone was of Iranian origin, but

offered no other immediate evidence to support the claim. The drone hit a coalition base in the northeast Syrian city of Hasaka. The wounded included five American service members and a U.S. contractor.

Austin said the strikes were a response to the drone attack "as well as a series of recent attacks against coalition forces in Syria" by groups affiliated with the Revolutionary Guard.

Iran relies on a network of proxy forces through the Mideast to counter the U.S. and Israel, its arch regional enemy. The U.S. has had forces in northeast Syria since 2015, when they deployed as part of the fight against the Islamic State group, and maintains some 900 troops there, working with Kurdish-led forces that control around a third of Syria.

The U.S. airstrikes hit targets in three towns in eastern Syria, activists said. Overnight, videos

on social media purported to show explosions in Deir el-Zour, a strategic province that borders Iraq and contains oil fields. Iranian-backed militia groups and Syrian forces control the area, which also has seen suspected airstrikes by Israel in recent months allegedly targeting Iranian supply routes.

According to a defense official, the U.S. counter strikes were conducted by F-15 fighter jets flying out of al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military operations.

According to a U.S. official, the U.S. F-15s struck three locations, all in the vicinity of Deir el-Zour.

The activist group Deir Ezzor 24, which covers news in the province, said the American strikes killed four people and wounded a number of others, including Iraqis.

The Syrian Observatory for

Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, put the death toll from U.S. strikes at 11 Iranian-backed fighters — including six at an arms depot in the Harabesh neighborhood in the city of Deir el-Zour and five others at military posts near the towns of Mayadeen and Boukamal.

Rami Abdurrahman who heads the Observatory said three rockets were fired earlier Friday at al-Omar oil field in Deir el-Zour that houses U.S. troops, an apparent retaliation to the American strikes.

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, which answers only to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has been suspected of carrying out attacks with bomb-carrying drones across the wider Middle East.

The exchange of strikes came as Saudi Arabia and Iran have been working toward reopening embassies in each other's countries.

China threatens consequences over US ship's actions

Associated Press

BANGKOK — China threatened "serious consequences" Friday after the U.S. Navy sailed a destroyer around the disputed Paracel Islands in the South China Sea for the second day in a row, in a move Beijing claimed was a violation of its sovereignty and security.

The warning comes amid growing tensions between China and the United States in the region, as Washington pushes back at Beijing's growingly assertive posture in the South China Sea, a strategic waterway it claims virtually in its entirety.

On Thursday, after the U.S. sailed the USS Milius guided-missile destroyer near the Para-

cel Islands, China said its navy and air force had forced the American vessel away, a claim the U.S. military denied.

The U.S. on Friday sailed the ship again in the vicinity of the islands, which are occupied by China but also claimed by Taiwan and Vietnam, as part of what it called a "freedom of navigation operation" challenging requirements from all three nations requiring either advance notification or permission before a military vessel sails by.

"Unlawful and sweeping maritime claims in the South China Sea pose a serious threat to the freedom of the seas, including the freedoms of navigation and overflight, free trade

and unimpeded commerce, and freedom of economic opportunity for South China Sea littoral nations," U.S. 7th Fleet spokesperson Lt. j.g. Luka Bakic said in an emailed statement.

"The United States challenges excessive maritime claims around the world regardless of the identity of the claimant," Bakic said.

China's Ministry of National Defense responded by accusing the U.S. of "undermining the peace and stability of the South China Sea" with its actions.

"The act of the U.S. military seriously violated China's sovereignty and security, severely breached international laws, and is more ironclad evidence

of the U.S. pursuing navigation hegemony and militarizing the South China Sea," ministry spokesperson Tan Kefei said. "We solemnly request that the US. immediately stop such actions of provocation, otherwise it will bear the serious consequences of unexpected incidents caused by this."

He said China would take "all necessary measures" to ensure its security but did not elaborate.

Like its statement on the Thursday incident, China again said it drove the American ship away from the islands, which are in the South China Sea a few hundred miles off the coast of Vietnam and China.

N. Korea claims to test new underwater weapon

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea claimed Friday to have tested a nuclear-capable underwater drone designed to generate a gigantic “radioactive tsunami” that would destroy naval strike groups and ports. Analysts were skeptical that the device presents a major new threat, but the test underlines the North’s commitment to raising nuclear threats.

The test this week came as the United States reportedly planned to deploy aircraft carrier strike groups and other advanced assets to waters off the Korean Peninsula. Military tensions are at a high point as the pace of both North Korean weapons tests and U.S.-South Korea joint military exercises has accelerated in the past year in a cycle of tit-for-tat responses.

Pyeongyang’s official Korean Central News Agency said the new weapon, which can be deployed from the coast or towed by surface ships, is built to “stealthily infiltrate into operational waters and make a super-scale radioactive tsunami through an underwater explosion” to destroy enemy naval strike groups and ports.

The report came hours before South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol pledged to make North Korea pay for its “reckless provocations” as he attended a remem-

brance service honoring 55 South Korean troops killed during major clashes with the North near their western sea border in past years.

The testing of the purported “nuclear underwater attack drone” was part of a three-day exercise that simulated nuclear attacks on unspecified South Korean targets, which also included cruise missile launches Wednesday.

KCNA said the North’s latest tests were aimed at alerting the United States and South Korea of a brewing “nuclear crisis” as they continue with their “intentional, persistent and provocative war drills.” It said the tests were supervised by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, who vowed to make his rivals “plunge into despair.”

The U.S. and South Korea completed an 11-day exercise Thursday that included their biggest field training in years, and are preparing another round of joint naval drills that will reportedly involve a U.S. aircraft carrier.

Hours after the North Korean report, South Korea’s air force released details of a five-day joint aerial drill with the United States that began Monday and concluded Friday above waters off South Korea’s western coast, which included live-fire demonstrations of air-to-air and air-to-ground weapons.

Russian strikes in Ukraine kill, wound civilians

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian long-range strikes killed at least 10 civilians and wounded 20 others in several areas of Ukraine on Friday, Ukraine’s presidential office said, as a senior Moscow official warned that the Kremlin’s forces were prepared for an expected Ukrainian counteroffensive in the coming weeks.

Five people died in Kostiantynivka, a town in eastern Ukraine’s Donetsk province, when a Russian missile hit an aid station. Ukrainian authorities last year established hundreds of so-called “points of invincibility,” where residents hard-pressed by the war could warm up, charge their cellphones and get snacks.

Local prosecutors said the Russians attacked Kostiantynivka with S-300 anti-aircraft missiles. The civilians who died were refugees, according to Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrlyenko.

As the mostly artillery war of the recent winter months stretched into its second spring, Russian forces also used air-launched missiles, exploding drones and gliding bombs in their attacks on several regions early Friday, Ukrainian air force spokesman Yuri Ilnat said.

Two civilians were killed and nine were wounded in the Sumy province town of Bilopillia by a nighttime rocket and artillery barrage and air strikes, the administration of the northeast region said.

Philippines confronts China officials over sea disputes

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Filipino diplomats confronted Chinese officials in closed-door talks Friday with a slew of protests over China’s aggressive behavior in the South China Sea, including targeting a Philippine coast guard ship with a military-grade laser, but no resolution was reached on the issues, an official said.

Territorial disputes in the busy waterway have long loomed as a potential flashpoint in Asia and have become a sensitive front in the regional rivalry between China and the United States.

Washington lays no claims in the contest-

ed waters but has challenged Beijing’s extensive claims, including by deploying its warships and fighter jets and repeatedly warning that it would help defend the Philippines — a treaty ally — if Philippine forces, ships and aircraft are attacked. Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also have overlapping claims in the seaway, which sits atop vast deposits of oil and gas.

A Chinese delegation led by Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong held two days of talks starting Thursday with Philippine counterparts led by Foreign Undersecretary Theresa Lazaro and reviewed overall relations. The two sides focused on their ter-

ritorial disputes Friday, the Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila said.

The talks opened with both sides citing an agreement between Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who made a state visit to China in early January, to manage the territorial conflicts amicably while enhancing economic ties and other aspects of a nearly half-century of diplomatic relations.

A Philippine official involved in the talks told The Associated Press that Filipino diplomats outlined several incidents underscoring China’s assertiveness in the disputed waters in the closed-door talks.

Court blocks Biden's vaccine mandate

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — President Joe Biden's order that federal employees get vaccinated against COVID-19 has been blocked by a federal appeals court.

The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans, in a decision Thursday, rejected arguments that Biden, as the nation's chief executive, has the same authority as the CEO of a private corporation to require that employees be vaccinated.

The ruling from the full appeals court, 16 full-time judges at the time the case was argued, reversed an earlier ruling by a three-judge 5th Circuit panel that had upheld the vaccination requirement. Judge Andrew Oldham, nominated to the court by then-President Donald Trump, wrote the opinion

for a 10-member majority.

The ruling maintains the status quo for federal employee vaccines. It upholds a preliminary injunction blocking the mandate issued by a federal judge in January 2022. At that point, the administration said nearly 98% of covered employees had been vaccinated.

And, Oldham noted, with the preliminary injunction arguments done, the case will return to that court for further arguments, when "both sides will have to grapple with the White House's announcement that the COVID emergency will finally end on May 11, 2023."

The White House defended the order, citing the high compliance rate among the federal workforce and saying in a statement Friday that "vaccination remains one of the

most important tools to protect people from serious illness and hospitalizations" against COVID-19.

Opponents of the policy said it was an encroachment on federal workers' lives that neither the Constitution nor federal statutes authorize.

Biden issued an executive order in September 2021 requiring vaccinations for all executive branch agency employees, with exceptions for medical and religious reasons. The requirement kicked in the following November. U.S. District Judge Jeffrey Brown, who was appointed to the District Court for the Southern District of Texas by Trump, issued a nationwide injunction against the requirement the following January.

Large asteroid is set for close encounter with Earth

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — An asteroid big enough to wipe out a city will zip harmlessly between Earth and the moon's orbit this weekend, missing both celestial bodies.

Saturday's close encounter will offer astronomers the chance to study a space rock from just over 100,000 miles away. That's less than half the distance from here to the moon, making it visible through binoculars and small telescopes.

While asteroid flybys are common, NA-

SA said it's rare for one so big to come so close — about once a decade. Scientists estimate its size somewhere between 130 feet and 300 feet.

Discovered a month ago, the asteroid known as 2023 DZ2 will pass within 320,000 miles of the moon on Saturday and, several hours later, buzz the Indian Ocean at about 17,500 mph.

"There is no chance of this 'city killer' striking Earth, but its close approach offers a great opportunity for observations," the European Space Agency's planetary de-

fense chief Richard Moissl said in a statement.

Astronomers with the International Asteroid Warning Network see it as good practice for planetary defense if and when a dangerous asteroid heads our way, according to NASA.

The Virtual Telescope Project will provide a live webcast of the close approach.

The asteroid won't be back our way again until 2026. Although there initially seemed to be a slight chance it might strike Earth then, scientists have since ruled that out.

Pennsylvania's Fetterman expected to return 'soon'

Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Pennsylvania Sen. John Fetterman's office said Thursday that he is expected to return soon to the chamber, although Democratic leaders are giving no timeline five weeks after he sought inpatient treatment for clinical depression.

Fetterman, 53, was weeks into his service in Washington and still recovering from the aftereffects of the stroke he had last May during his campaign when he checked himself into Walter Reed National Military Medical Center on Feb. 15.

Aides said at the time that Fetterman had not been his usual self for weeks. He was withdrawn, showing a disinterest in talking, eating and the usual banter with aides. Post-stroke depression is common and treatable,

doctors say.

Asked about when Fetterman might return, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said only that Fetterman is recuperating.

"We want to give him the space to recuperate," Schumer said at a Wednesday news conference. "He needs it; it's fair, it's right. There are other people in the Senate who have taken their time to recuperate but I'm confident he's going to come back and be an outstanding and fine senator."

A spokesperson said Fetterman is getting better and that the recovery is going well.

"He'll be back soon, at least over a week, but soon," spokesperson Joe Calvello said Thursday.

Fetterman is receiving daily in-person

briefings by chief of staff Adam Jentleson, Calvello said. The senator is reading the news and getting briefings, he said, while issuing statements through his office and sponsoring legislation. Aides are opening new regional offices in Pennsylvania.

After Fetterman checked into Walter Reed, his office said he had experienced depression "off and on throughout his life," but it had only become severe in recent weeks. The Capitol physician, Dr. Brian P. Monahan, recommended Fetterman's hospitalization after conducting an evaluation, his office said then.

In the meantime, Fetterman's aides and his wife, Gisele, have released photos of the senator smiling, being briefed or visiting with her and their three school-age children.

3 people die in Arizona after being caught in floodwaters

Associated Press

PAYSON, Ariz. — At least three people were found dead this week after their vehicles were swept away by floodwaters in Arizona, authorities said.

Gila County Sheriff's officials said the bodies of a couple missing after their vehicle was stuck in floodwaters in the Payson area were located Thursday. They were identified as Phon Sutton, 85, and Dara Sutton, 72, both of Payson.

Separately, the Navajo County Sheriff's Office said the body of a 64-year-old woman was recovered after the vehicle she was traveling in with her husband was swept downstream at a river crossing.

Flooding caused by recent

rainfall and snowmelt has created issues across parts of central and northern Arizona with residents in several low-lying communities told to evacuate.

Gila County authorities said search and rescue crews were dispatched Wednesday morning after county authorities received a 911 call about a pickup truck found in Tonto Creek. The vehicle was about 18 miles east of Payson.

Sheriff's officials said search efforts were complicated and dangerous due to weather conditions and flooding. The Hell's Gate Fire Department, Tonto Rim Search and Rescue, Payson Police Department and Arizona Department of Public Safety took part in the search.

The Navajo County Sheriff's Office received a call at 10:48 a.m. Thursday from a man who reported his wife was missing. The man said that during the night they were traveling about 16 miles west of State Route 377 when their Jeep was swept downstream by swift-moving water at a wash known as Seymour's Crossing.

The vehicle came to rest and after an hour they were able to leave the vehicle and reach the riverbank, but they were separated in the dark while seeking assistance. The man was assisted by local residents.

The body of the woman, who was not immediately identified, was found about 200 feet from the water, the sheriff's office said.

Suspected tornado hits Texas

Associated Press

DECATUR, Texas — Authorities say a suspected tornado touched down early Friday in north Texas as a storm system threatens to spawn tornadoes in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee later in the day.

Cody Powell, the emergency management coordinator for Wise County, said the likely tornado struck about 5 a.m. in the southwest corner of the county near Parker County line, damaging homes and downing trees and power lines.

Powell said he had no reports of injuries.

The National Weather Service has not confirmed a tornado, but damage to homes was also reported in northern Parker County, said meteorologist Matt Stalley, and investigators likely will go to the area later Friday to make that determination.

The two areas are about 10 miles apart on the western edge of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, and Stalley said the storm system was expected to move east of the region by early Friday afternoon.

The weather service's Storm Prediction Center has forecast severe weather through Friday evening primarily from the lower Mississippi Valley to the lower Ohio Valley.

The greatest risk of tornadoes includes an area from eastern Arkansas, northern Louisiana, western Mississippi and western Tennessee.

Storms with damaging winds and hail are expected along a swath from eastern Texas and southeastern Oklahoma into much of western Kentucky, Tennessee and Alabama and including much of Louisiana and Mississippi and parts of southeast Missouri and southern Illinois.

French protests scuttle king's state visit

Associated Press

PARIS — French citizens angry at President Emmanuel Macron's pension reforms engaged in scattered protest actions Friday, as the ongoing unrest across the country persuaded officials to postpone a planned state visit by Britain's King Charles III.

Demonstrators had demanded that Charles cancel his trip, which was scheduled to start Sunday. The protests and labor strikes against Macron's decision to raise France's retirement age from 62 to 64 already had promised to impact his visit, with workers refusing to roll out the red carpet for the king's arrival.

French President Emmanuel Macron said "common sense and friendship" required delaying the king's visit, adding that it likely would have become a protest target and created a "deplorable situation."

"We would not be serious ... to make a state visit in the middle of protests," the French leader said.

Macron condemned the violent behavior that has taken place at some of the protests against his plan to raise France's retirement age from 62 to 64, saying "violence has no place in a democracy."

Although no major protests were planned for Friday, train traffic was slowed, rows of trucks blocked access to Marseille's port for several hours and debris still littered the streets of Paris following the previous day's mass demonstrations.

Over 450 protesters were arrested in Paris and beyond as some 300 demonstrations on Thursday drew more than a million people nationwide. Polls show that most French people oppose having to work two more years before retiring, which

Macron says is necessary to keep the pension system afloat.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said 441 police officers and gendarmes were injured as violence marred some marches. He added that 1,000 trash bins were set on fire in the capital; overflowing garbage cans have become a symbol of the protests during a weeklong strike by sanitation workers.

Charles and Queen Consort Camilla planned to visit both France and Germany during the king's first trip abroad as Britain's monarch. He still plans to go to Germany.

Fires in Paris, that were intentionally lit in narrow or inaccessible alleys on Thursday night, alarmed both city officials and residents.

Firefighters and residents worked together to tame the flames that rose to the second story of an apartment building in the chic Palais Royal area.

Gonzaga beats UCLA 79-76

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Gonzaga and UCLA played one NCAA Tournament game that left the Zags' star player bawling, and another that stunned the Bruins.

Add another to the list. Maybe the maddest one in March yet.

Julian Strawther hit a three-pointer with 7.2 seconds left to answer a three-pointer by UCLA's Amari Bailey, lifting Gonzaga to a wild 79-76 victory over UCLA Thursday night in the Sweet 16.

"It's moments like that you can't make up," said Strawther, a Las Vegas native. "Those are literally the moments you dream of. To even make a shot like that in March Madness and just to be back home in Vegas is like the cherry on top."

The Bruins (31-6), the West

Region's No. 2 seed, stormed back from an eight-point deficit in the final 1:05 and took a 76-75 lead on Bailey's three-pointer with 12.2 seconds left.

The Zags (31-5) brought the ball up the floor and Strawther stepped into a three-pointer after a drop pass from Hunter Sallis, sending Gonzaga fans to their feet.

"As soon as it came off, it looked like it was on line," Strawther said.

The Zags still had to sweat it out. Gonzaga's Malachi Smith stole the ball from UCLA's Tyger Campbell, but Strawther only hit one of two free throws at the other end.

Campbell's three at the buzzer hit the back of the rim, sending the Zags rushing off the bench and into the Elite Eight

against UConn on Saturday while leaving the Bruins disappointed again.

"Every game, try not to get too high, try not to get too low," said UCLA's Jaime Jaquez, who had 29 points and 11 rebounds. "He hit a big shot and we lost."

Strawther's shot was reminiscent of the one Villanova's Kris Jenkins made off a drop pass to clinch the 2016 national championship — a shot that came after North Carolina's Marcus Paige hit an off-balance three-pointer with 4.7 seconds left.

There's a reason it looked familiar.

"That's Jay Wright's play that he used in Villanova-Carolina, the championship," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said. "That's what we call it. He makes it all the time."

KSU downs MSU in OT

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Markquis Nowell walked the ball up the floor with the score tied in the final minute of overtime and exchanged animated hand signals with his coach, Jerome Tang.

Standing on the March Madness logo at Madison Square Garden, the 5-foot-8 Kansas State point guard who grew up in Harlem glanced at the basket for a split second and flicked a chest pass into the lane. Keyontae Johnson slipped behind the Michigan State defense, elevated with his back to the basket, grabbed the ball and slammed it down.

It was the signature play of a towering performance by the shortest player on the floor.

Nowell broke the NCAA Tournament record for assists in a game with 19, his last two on spectacular passes in the last minute of OT, and Kansas State beat Michigan State 98-93 on Thursday night in a Sweet 16 thriller.

"Today was a special one, man," said Nowell, who fought through a second-half ankle injury. "I've got to give a lot of credit to my teammates for battling, for fighting through adversity when we was down. I can't even explain how I'm feeling right now. I just know that I'm blessed and I'm grateful."

Nowell's alley-oop to Johnson with 52 seconds left in overtime gave the Wildcats (26-9) the lead for good in this back-and-forth East Region semifinal.

UNLV's Mark Wade had the previous NCAA tournament assists record with 18 during the Runnin' Rebels 1987 Final Four win over Indiana.

Florida Atlantic bounces Tennessee

Associated Press

NEW YORK — When the horn sounded on the greatest victory in the history of Florida Atlantic athletics, Nick Boyd and Bryan Greenlee hopped onto the press row table to celebrate.

Instead of going to the locker room, some of the Owls players made their way up into the stands to sing "New York, New York" with their fans.

The Boca Raton, Fla.-based school that has only been competing in Division I for the past 30 years, and had just one previous appearance in the NCAA Tournament, is now a victory away from the Final Four.

The Owls used a second-half

push led by Michael Forrest to upset fourth-seeded Tennessee 62-55 on Thursday night in the Sweet 16.

Ninth-seeded FAU (34-3) will play third-seeded Kansas State in the East Region final at Madison Square Garden on Saturday.

"Yeah, our guys definitely feel like they belong on this stage," fifth-year coach Dusty May said.

Even before the tournament started, this was the unquestionably the greatest season in FAU history. Now the Owls are one of the biggest stories in all of sports.

"We're just a scrappy group," Boyd said. "Unbreakable."

Johnell Davis led the Confe-

rence USA champions with 15 points and Forrest finished with 11, including eight straight when FAU took control in the final 10 minutes.

The Volunteers (25-11), who were looking for the second Elite Eight appearance in program history, shot just 33% — including 6 of 23 from three-point range. Josiah-Jordan James and Jonas Aidoo scored 10 points apiece.

"Certainly proud of the effort that these guys have given us all year, through tough times with injuries, but when it ends like this, it's always disappointing because we want it all and came up short," Tennessee coach Rick Barnes said.

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Track moves to ban transgender athletes

Associated Press

Track and field banned transgender athletes from international competition Thursday, while adopting new regulations that could keep Caster Semenya and other athletes with differences in sex development from competing.

In a pair of decisions expected to stoke outrage, the World Athletics Council adopted the same rules as swimming did last year in deciding to bar athletes who have transitioned from male to female and have gone through male puberty. No such athletes currently compete at the highest elite levels of track.

Another set of updates, for athletes with differences in sex development (DSD), could impact up to 13 current high-level runners, WA President Sebastian Coe said. They include Semenya, a two-time Olympic champion at 800 meters, who has been barred from that event since 2019.

Semenya and others had been able to compete without restrictions in events outside the range

of 400 meters through one mile but now will have to undergo hormone-suppressing treatment for six months before competing to be eligible.

Coe conceded there are no easy answers on this topic, which has turned into a societal lightning rod involving advocates concerned with keeping a level playing field in women's sports and others who don't want to discriminate against transgender and DSD athletes.

"All the decisions we've taken have their challenges," Coe said. "If that's the case, then we will do what we have done in the past, which is vigorously defend our position. And the overarching principle for me is we will always do what we think is in the best interest of our sport."

Athletes with sex development differences, such as Semenya and Olympic 200-meter silver medalist Christine Mboma of Namibia, are not transgender, although the two issues share similarities when it comes to sports.

Such athletes were legally

identified as female at birth but have a medical condition that leads to some male traits, including high levels of testosterone that World Athletics argues gives them the same kind of unfair advantage as transgender athletes.

Semenya has been running in longer events. She finished 13th in her qualifying heat at 5,000 meters at world championships last year. In a recent interview, she said she was aiming to run in the Olympics at a longer distance.

"I'm in the adaptation phase, and my body is starting to fit with it. I'm just enjoying myself at the moment, and things will fall into place at the right time," the South African runner said.

Now, in order to compete at next year's Olympics, she would have to undergo hormone-suppressing treatment for six months, something she has said she will never do again, having undergone the treatment a decade ago under previous rules.

Mboma, who won her silver in Tokyo two years ago but was

out of worlds last year because of an injury, has not publicly stated whether she would be willing to undergo hormone therapy.

Another athlete, Olympic 800-meter silver medalist Francine Niyonsaba of Burundi, also has said she would not undergo treatment. While Semenya struggled at longer distances, Niyonsaba had relative success, winning Diamond League titles at 3,000 and 5,000 meters and running in the 5,000 at the Tokyo Olympics.

Under the new regulations, athletes in the previously "unrestricted" events would have to suppress testosterone levels below 2.5 nanomoles per liter of blood for six months. Ultimately, they would have to stay below those levels for two years.

Previously, athletes with differences in sex development had to lower their testosterone to below 5 nanomoles per liter of blood for at least six months before competing, and the rules only applied to distances between 400 meters and one mile.

Blackhawks won't wear special Pride night jerseys

Associated Press

An NHL team with a Russian player has decided against wearing special warmup jerseys to commemorate Pride night, citing an anti-gay Kremlin law that could imperil Russian athletes when they return home.

The Chicago Blackhawks, who have at least two more players with connections to Russia, will not wear Pride-themed warmup jerseys before Sunday's game against Vancouver, a person with knowledge of the matter told The Associated Press, because of security concerns involving the law, which expands restrictions on supporting LGBTQ rights. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed it in December.

The decision was made by the Blackhawks following discussions with security officials within and outside the franchise, according to a person familiar with the situation who spoke Wednesday to the AP on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the move.

Chicago coach Luke Richardson said Thursday that he and his players were disappointed and called it "an unfortunate situation."

"I don't think we can control the world issues, so that takes it out of our hands," Richardson said. "We're just making decisions as best we can as an organization and for everybody."

The league declined to comment through a spokesperson.

The decision comes amid in-

creasing threats to freedom of expression in the U.S. and abroad. Conservative political forces have sought to ban LGBTQ-themed books from American school libraries and to forbid classroom lessons that mention sexuality and some aspects of race relations.

Similar pressures have forced Russian players to walk a careful line since the invasion of Ukraine, with some cautiously speaking out against the war even with family members still living in Russia. Last year, Minnesota Wild star Kirill Kaprizov ran into several roadblocks as he traveled to the U.S., raising concerns about his safety.

"There's such a sensitivity to the topic, and you have concerns for the Russians, especial-

ly," Buffalo Sabres captain Kyle Okposo said, emphasizing that he does not "understand what it's like to be in Russia and to grow up there. And I don't think we're able to speak about the psychology of those players because we don't understand."

Chicago defenseman Nikita Zaitsev is a Moscow native, and there are other players with family in Russia or other connections to the country.

The Florida Panthers — whose star goaltender, Sergei Bobrovsky, is Russian — went forward with plans to wear Pride-themed jerseys Thursday night before their home game against Toronto. Bobrovsky took part, while brothers Eric and Marc Staal did not, and cited religion as the reason.

Banchero lifts Magic to win over Knicks

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Paolo Banchero scored 21 points, including a three-pointer with 1:26 remaining and two free throws in the final seconds, to help the Orlando Magic beat the New York Knicks 111-106 on Thursday night.

Cole Anthony added 18 points for Orlando and Wendell Carter Jr. had 16 points and eight rebounds. Franz Wagner scored 16 before leaving in the fourth quarter with an ankle injury.

Quentin Grimes and Immanuel Quickley each scored 25 points for the Knicks, who lost their third straight. Julius Randle finished with 23 points and nine rebounds.

With Jalen Brunson out with an injury and Randle on the bench, the Knicks went almost 5½ minutes without scoring in

the second quarter and fell behind by 19 points.

Clippers 127, Thunder 105: Kawhi Leonard scored 32 points, making 13 of 15 field goals, and Los Angeles defeated visiting Oklahoma City in the Clippers' first game since losing Paul George to a knee injury.

George sprained his right knee in the closing minutes of a 101-100 loss to the Thunder two nights earlier. He'll be re-evaluated in two to three weeks.

Los Angeles shot 49% from three-point range, with Nicolas Batum and Bones Hyland making four each. Russell Westbrook added 24 points and seven assists for the Clippers.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led the Thunder with 30 points. Josh Giddey added 18 and Jalen Williams had 16.

Cavaliers 116, Nets 114:

Isaac Okoro hit a three-pointer from the corner with 0.7 seconds remaining and finished with 11 points as Cleveland sent host Brooklyn to its fifth straight loss.

Donovan Mitchell scored 31 points, Evan Mobley had 26 points and 16 rebounds and Jarrett Allen finished with 12 points and 10 rebounds against his former team. Cleveland won for the eighth time in 10 games.

Mikal Bridges scored 32 points, Spencer Dinwiddie had 25 points and 12 assists and Joe Harris hit five three-pointers and finished with 15 points for the Nets.

Cleveland trailed 112-104 with 2:13 left before closing the game on a 12-2 run. Trailing by one, Mitchell missed the a second free throw that would've tied the game. But the ball

bounced to Okoro in the corner, who drained the three-pointer to give Cleveland the lead. A heave from half court by Bridges at the buzzer fell short.

Pelicans 115, Hornets 96: Brandon Ingram had 30 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists for the first triple-double of his seven-year NBA career, leading host New Orleans over short-handed Charlotte.

Jonas Valanciunas scored 20 points and grabbed 19 rebounds for his 38th double-double of the season to help the Pelicans win their third in a row. C.J. McCollum added 20 points, Trey Murphy 19 and Naji Marshall had 16 off the bench.

P.J. Washington scored 18 points, including 16 in the first half for Charlotte. Svi Mykhailiuk had 15 points and Gordon Hayward 12 points.

McIlroy powers to Match Play win

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas—Rory McIlroy had every reason to love the long ball Thursday.

Taken to the 18th hole in the WGC-Dell Technologies Match Play, McIlroy unleashed the shot of the tournament. He smashed a drive on the 375-yard closing hole so magnificently that it pitched on the green and rolled to just inside 4 feet.

That all but clinched his 2-up victory over Denny McCarthy as McIlroy led a parade of top seeds into the final round of group play at Austin Country Club.

"It was good," McIlroy said with a smile, which was like saying Michelangelo did a good job on the Sistine Chapel.

He capped a rally from 3 down through six holes. McIlroy didn't take his first lead in the match until another power show — a big drive into the wind on the par-5 16th to set up a two-putt birdie from 18 feet.

Defending champion Scottie

Scheffler, who had to make a 12-footer on the last hole to win his first match, had seven birdies in a nine-hole stretch in the middle of his match against Alex Noren for a 5-and-4 victory.

Patrick Cantlay (4), Max Homa (5) and Xander Schauffele (6) also won their matches as four of the top six seeds took 2-0 records into Friday in a bid to win their group and advance to the knockout stage.

The exception was Jon Rahm, who recovered from his opening round loss by driving the green on the par-4 fifth on his way to a 4-and-3 victory over Keith Mitchell. That means Rahm winning his group is in his hands, as Rickie Fowler lost his match.

It capped another blustery day of momentum shifts and uncertain outcomes, typical of this format that is being played for the last time.

Matt Kuchar was on the cusp of tying Tiger Woods' tournament record of 36 wins, but then

he missed a 5-foot birdie putt on the last hole and had to settle for a halve with Chris Kirk.

Cameron Young never led in his match against Corey Conners — they halved 14 of the first 15 holes — until the rising American star made eagle on the par-5 16th, holed a 12-foot birdie on the 17th to take his first lead and then made a wild scramble for par to win.

"Obviously it's windy and difficult today but there's enough holes you should still make four, five or six birdies. It's just keeping myself patient knowing that those are probably coming," Young said. "I would have liked them to be a little bit earlier, but I'll take them right where they were."

The McIlroy drive was the topper, though.

"I was imagining the driver was going to land into the upslope and sort of stay 10, 20 yards short," McIlroy said. "I didn't imagine I could fly it on the green."

Phillies' 1B Hoskins tears ACL

Associated Press

CLEARWATER, Fla. — Philadelphia Phillies first baseman Rhys Hoskins needs surgery for a torn ACL after injuring his left knee Thursday fielding a grounder in a spring training game and is expected to miss a significant amount of time.

The Phillies did not say when Hoskins would have the surgery or exactly how long the slugging first baseman might be sidelined.

Hoskins hit 30 homers with 79 RBIs last season for the reigning National League champions.

He was backing up to play a chopper Thursday when the ball popped out of his glove. Soon after, he fell to the ground and began clutching his left knee. Teammates gathered around him before he was taken off the field.

Bruins win 5th straight, top Canadiens

Associated Press

BOSTON — David Pastrnak scored his 49th goal, Tyler Bertuzzi had a goal and an assist and the Boston Bruins overcame a sluggish performance to beat the Montreal Canadiens 4-2 on Thursday night for their fifth straight victory.

Jake DeBrusk scored on a breakaway, David Krejci put home on a rebound midway through the third period and Jeremy Swayman stopped 29 shots for the Bruins.

While they were denied a chance to clinch the Atlantic Division when Toronto beat Florida, the Bruins improved to 55-11-5 and remained on pace to break the league record of 62 wins in a season.

Nick Suzuki and Kirby Dach each scored power-play goals against Boston's No. 1 penalty kill, Suzuki added an assist and Jake Allen made 17 saves in Montreal's 10th loss in 12 games.

Maple Leafs 6, Panthers 2: Brothers Eric and Marc Staal of the Florida Panthers declined to wear special Pride-themed warmup jerseys ahead of the team's loss to Toronto.

The jerseys were part of Florida's Pride night game in support of the area's LGBTQ community, and the brothers cited their religion as the reason for their decision. While the Staal brothers declined to participate, Russian goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky was one of the Panthers who went ahead with the Pride-themed jerseys.

Auston Matthews had two goals for Toronto, and Matt Murray made 33 saves. Mitchell Marner and William Nylander each had a goal and an assist, and John Tavares finished with three assists.

Matthew Tkachuk and Nick Cousins scored for Florida. Bobrovsky made 21 saves in the team's second straight loss.

Flyers 5, Wild 4 (SO): James van Riemsdyk scored the only goal in a shootout and host Phi-

adelphia beat Minnesota for coach John Tortorella's 700th career victory.

Tortorella is 700-573-181 in 1,454 games as an NHL head coach. His 700 wins rank 12th in NHL history and his career games rank ninth.

Scott Laughton, Joel Farabee, Rasmus Ristolainen and Tyson Foerster scored for the Flyers.

Matt Boldy had two goals for the Wild, and Oskar Sundqvist and Marcus Foligno also scored.

Capitals 6, Blackhawks 1: John Carlson had a goal and an assist in his return from a fractured skull as Washington beat visiting Chicago.

Alex Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom also had a goal and an assist, helping Washington (34-31-8) move within four points of Pittsburgh for the second wild card in the Eastern Conference.

Nikita Zaitsev scored for Chicago in the third period, and Anton Khudobin made 22 saves in his first NHL game since Jan. 15, 2022, with Dallas.

Rangers 2, Hurricanes 1: Adam Fox ended a 24-game stretch without a goal and visiting New York edged Carolina.

Fox scored at 4:01 of the third period and the Rangers forged a split of a two-game set this week among Metropolitan Division contenders. Artemi Panarin also scored and assisted on the goal-ahead goal. Mika Zibanejad had two assists for the Rangers. Igor Shesterkin made 29 saves for New York, which has points in eight of its last nine games (7-1-1).

Sebastian Aho had Carolina's goal and Frederik Anderson stopped 14 shots. The Hurricanes could have clinched an Eastern Conference playoff spot with a victory.

Predators 2, Kraken 1 (SO): Matt Duchene and Philip Tomasino scored in the shootout to lead host Nashville past Seattle.

Kiefer Sherwood scored for Nashville in regulation, and Ju-

se Saros made 27 saves in regulation and overtime. Saros also denied both Kraken attempts in the shootout. Nashville earned its second straight win since a three-game slide. It hosts Seattle again on Saturday.

Daniel Sprong scored for Seattle, and Joey Daccord made 23 stops.

Senators 7, Lightning 2: Alex DeBrincat and Brady Tkachuk each scored two goals and Ottawa cruised past visiting Tampa Bay.

DeBrincat added an assist, and Derick Brassard, Erik Brannstrom and Austin Watson also scored for Ottawa, which earned its first 35-win season since 2015-16. Mads Sogaard made 27 saves.

Brayden Point and Mikhail Sergachev scored and Brian Elliott stopped 28 shots for the Lightning, who are on a three-game losing streak and have been outscored 15-6 during that stretch.

Blues 4, Red Wings 3: Sammy Blais scored the go-ahead goal, Joel Hofer made 27 saves and visiting St. Louis held off Detroit.

Alexey Toropchenko, Brayden Schenn and Jake Neighbours also scored for St. Louis, which avenged a loss to Detroit on Tuesday night.

Simon Edvinsson, the sixth pick of the 2021 draft, scored his first career goal in his third NHL game as Detroit took a 2-0 lead just 1:28 into the game. Jake Walman and Alex Chiasson also scored for Detroit. Magnus Hellberg and Alex Nedeljkovic combined for 18 saves.

Canucks 7, Sharks 2: Andrei Kuzmenko scored his 35th goal, a Canucks franchise record for a first-year player, to lead Vancouver to a rout of visiting San Jose. The Russian forward, who also had an assist, topped the 34 goals scored by Pavel Bure in 1991-92.

J.T. Miller, Dakota Joshua, Conor Garland and Phillip Di Giuseppe also each had a goal

and an assist, and Vasily Podkolzin and Sheldon Dries scored for Vancouver. Tyler Myers had two assists and Thatcher Demko made 17 saves.

Tomas Hertl and Andrew Agozzino scored for the struggling Sharks, who are winless in their last eight games (0-5-3).

Stars 3, Penguins 2: Joe Pavelski scored the tiebreaking goal on a third-period power play and the Stars overcame Sidney Crosby's first career goal in Dallas.

Roope Hintz and Jamie Benn also scored as Dallas moved a point ahead of Minnesota atop the Central Division with the Wild's 5-4 shootout loss in Philadelphia.

Crosby's 548th career goal was the 35-year-old's first in 10 games at the home of the Stars and gave him at least one in each of the other 31 NHL arenas.

Jets 3, Ducks 2: Adam Lowry scored the tiebreaking goal with 9:13 to play and Winnipeg topped Anaheim.

Kyle Connor scored his 28th goal and Connor Hellebuyck made 18 saves for the Jets, who opened a three-game California road trip with their third victory in four games.

After Frank Vatrano tied it for Anaheim early in the third with a power-play goal, Lowry put the Jets back ahead with a short redirection of a pass from Brenden Dillon for his third goal in four games.

Mason Appleton scored the first goal for Winnipeg.

Golden Knights 3, Flames 2: Logan Thompson made 37 saves and visiting Vegas beat Calgary.

Nicolas Roy scored for Vegas in his return from an 18-game absence. Jonathan Marchessault and Michael Amadio also scored.

Milan Lucic and Nazem Kadri scored for Calgary (32-26-15). Jacob Markstrom stopped 29 shots in his 11th start in the last 12 games.