

Army pulls recruiting ads after arrest

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The arrest of actor Jonathan Majors has upended the Army's newly launched advertising campaign that was aimed at reviving the service's struggling recruiting numbers.

Majors, who authorities said was arrested Saturday in New York on charges of strangulation, assault and harassment, was the narrator of two ads at the heart of a broader media campaign that kicked off at the start of the NCAA's March Madness college basketball tournament.

Army leaders were hopeful that the popularity of the star of the recently released "Creed III" and "Ant-Man and The Wasp: Quantumania," would help them reach the youth audience.

In a statement Sunday, the Army's Enterprise Marketing Office said that the Army was aware of Majors' arrest and was "deeply concerned by the allegations." It added that while Majors "is in-

nocent until proven guilty, prudence dictates that we pull our ads until the investigation into these allegations is complete."

New York City police said the actor was involved in a domestic dispute with a 30-year-old woman. "The victim informed police she was assaulted," a police spokesperson said in a statement.

A lawyer for Majors, Priya Chaudhry, said in a statement Sunday there was evidence clearing Majors and that the actor "is probably the victim of an altercation with a woman he knows."

The Army ads, titled "Overcoming Obstacles" and "Pushing Tomorrow," are part of the plan to revive the Army's "Be All You Can Be" motto.

They highlighted the history of the Army and some of the many professions that recruits can pursue.

The "Be All You Can Be" slogan dominated its recruiting ads for two decades

starting in 1981.

A nearly two-minute preview video, made available before the campaign rollout in early March, featured soldiers jumping out of airplanes, working on helicopters, climbing obstacle courses and diving underwater. A voiceover said: "We bring out the best in the people who serve, because America calls for nothing less."

In the Army's worst recruiting year in recent history, the service fell 25% short of its goal to enlist 60,000 recruits in 2022.

The new ads were a key element in the Army's drive to find creative new ways to attract recruits and ensure that the service has the troops it needs to help defend the nation.

Army Secretary Christine Wormuth said the Army has set a difficult goal for this year: aiming to bring in 65,000 recruits, which would be 20,000 more than in 2022.

N. Korea fires missiles as US, S. Korea hold exercise

BY DAVID CHOI

Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea on Monday fired two short-range ballistic missiles as the U.S. and South Korea conduct a large-scale naval exercise, according to the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The pair of ballistic missiles were launched at 7:47 a.m. and 8 a.m. from North Hwanghae province, the Joint Chiefs said in a message to news reporters Monday. The missiles traveled about 230 miles before splashing down in the Sea of Japan, or the East Sea, according to the message.

Both missiles flew 217 miles at a maximum altitude of 31 miles before falling into the sea outside of Japan's exclusive economic zone, according to a news release from Japan's Ministry of Defense.

The latest launches were "absolutely unacceptable," and Japan is "continuing to closely cooperate with the United

States and South Korea" in analyzing their flight, Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said at a Monday news conference.

South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a statement Monday said the North's launches were a "clear violation" of U.N. Security Council resolutions and that they reveal Pyongyang's "own vulnerability and insecurity."

Monday's launches mark the 10th and 11th ballistic missiles fired by North Korea in eight separate days of testing so far this year.

The communist regime last fired a single, short-range ballistic missile that flew eastward for roughly 500 miles on March 19.

"North Korea's successive ballistic missile launches are a serious provocation that harms peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, as well as the international community," the Joint Chiefs said in its message. The missiles posed no im-

mediate threat to the U.S. or its allies, according to a statement Monday from the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. However, they "highlight the destabilizing impact of [North Korea's] unlawful [weapons of mass destruction] and ballistic missile programs."

The launches come six days after U.S. and South Korean troops kicked off their Ssangyong exercise in and around the Korean Peninsula. The two-week exercise is the largest naval drill in five years and will include more than 30 ships and 70 aircraft from the two countries, as well as roughly 50 amphibious assault vessels.

Fighter jets roared off the USS Nimitz on Monday as the nuclear-powered U.S. aircraft carrier and its battle group — including a guided missile cruiser and two destroyers — took part in air defense exercises and other drills with South Korean warships in waters near Jeju island, The Associated Press reported.

Ashland sets out to homeport in San Diego

By JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

SASEBO NAVAL BASE, Japan — The amphibious dock landing ship USS Ashland, after nearly 10 years in Japan, departed Wednesday for Naval Base San Diego, its new homeport, according to a Navy news release.

The Ashland arrived in August 2013 at Sasebo, about 50 miles north of Nagasaki on Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands.

At Sasebo, the Ashland was part of the America Amphibious Ready Group along with the amphibious assault ship USS America and the amphibious transport dock USS

Green Bay.

The Navy made no announcement on a replacement for the Ashland as it steamed away.

"At this time, we have no information that we are prepared to release yet," Sasebo spokesman Aki Nichols told Stars and Stripes by phone on Friday.

The National Defense Authorization Act mandates that U.S. Navy ships may not deploy to Japan for more than 10 years, making this departure a permanent change of station for the crew and their family members.

The Ashland, commissioned in May 1999, is the eighth and last vessel of the Whidbey Island class. That class was designed specifically

to accommodate four air cushioned landing craft that can carry assaulting Marines and their equipment to amphibious landings, according to the Navy.

The Ashland carries a ship's company of 419 officers and crew and a complement of 402 Marines, with room for another 102.

The Ashland's skipper, Cmdr. Dirk Sonnenberg, had parting words for Sasebo.

"I can't thank the wonderful city of Sasebo enough for all their warm hospitality," he said in Wednesday's release. "I've done multiple tours in Japan, but Sasebo will always be special to me as the warmest and most welcoming city to be hosted at."

Exercise quickens move of Japanese from harm's way

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A tabletop, mass-evacuation exercise recently by Japanese emergency planners managed to halve the time required to move 120,000 people in the event of an attack on the nation's scattered southern islands. Planners with the Japanese government, including the Self-Defense Forces and coast guard, Okinawa prefecture and its cities and towns took part in the 3½-hour exercise March 17 in Naha, the prefectural capital, a spokesman for Okinawa's Disaster Prevention and Crisis Management Division told Stars and Stripes by phone Monday.

The group examined the logistics of moving most of the residents and visitors in the Sakishima island chain to its larger islands like Ishigaki and Miyako, and finally Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands. The Sakishima chain stretches southwest of Okinawa to within 75 miles of Taiwan and consists of 44 islands.

"Armed enemy attacks or terrorist attacks are emergencies that should not happen, but it is important to enhance readiness to protect people's lives," Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki said during a press conference March 17, according to a video clip on the prefectural website. Japan has announced plans to deploy missile batteries on Ishigaki, Miyako and Okinawa by 2026 to deter China's growing and increasingly assertive military.

Airman paralyzed in crash is part of sports clinic for disabled vets, troops

By GIANNA GRONOWSKI
Stars and Stripes

Airman 1st Class Lauren Arduser said her life changed in one night.

The newly minted Air Force recruit had just arrived in 2022 for training at Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas. She frequently went out with friends to explore the area and hike in nearby state parks.

One of those trips was halted abruptly when a car that she was riding in unexpectedly flipped several times, crushing her vertebrae, breaking her neck and collapsing her lung.

"I remember feeling really, really tired that day," said Arduser, 22. "I remember blinking, and on the next blink I woke up 11 days later from a coma."

She awoke to find she was paralyzed from the neck down. After surgeries and physical therapy, she moved to the St. Louis VA Medical Center — Jefferson Barracks, where she now rehabs three hours a day, five days a week.

Arduser, now a quadriplegic, plans to ski for the first time in her life down the slopes of Snowmass, Colo.

She is one of just two active-duty service members who will participate in the 2023 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic.

"Normally the active-duty who participate are in transition out of the service," said Jason Strickland, the communications director for the clinic.

Arduser and her fellow active-duty service

member will join more than 400 veterans with qualifying disabilities at the sports clinic through March 31. Hosted by the Department of Veterans Affairs and Disabled American Veterans, the clinic will offer disabled military members opportunities to participate in activities ranging from scuba diving and sled hockey to cross-country skiing and wheelchair self-defense.

Arduser said she grew up in her family with a sense of duty, with her great aunt and uncle each serving in the military.

"My aunt worked at the Pentagon," she said. "I kind of looked up to her, and when it was my turn to figure out what I was going to do with my life, it came back to that."

Confident she wanted a career in intelligence, Arduser sat down with a recruiter and produced a list of goals that she wanted to accomplish during her military career, including learning to speak Russian.

Though doctors originally thought she might not survive the car crash, Arduser said she was set on proving them wrong.

"I've always been one of those people who doesn't like being told you can't do something. Maybe it's stubbornness," she said.

Arduser said she approaches life now by allowing her emotions to help her, as opposed to bottling up her feelings.

"If I'm struggling to get up off the floor, I'm going to use that anger to push through, power through, because you're going to get stronger. A lot of it is mental resilience," she said. "No one ever felt good after giving up."

Mississippi faces tough tornado recovery

Associated Press

ROLLING FORK, Miss. — A massive tornado obliterated the modest one-story home that Kimberly Berry shared with her two daughters in the Mississippi Delta flatlands, leaving only a foundation and some random belongings — a toppled refrigerator, a dresser and matching nightstand, a bag of Christmas decorations, some clothing.

During the storm Friday, Berry and her 12-year-old daughter huddled and prayed at a nearby church that was barely damaged, while her 25-year-old daughter survived in the hard-hit town of Rolling Fork, some 15 miles away.

Berry shook her head as she looked at the remains of their material possessions. She said she's grateful she and her children are still alive.

"I can get all this back. It's nothing," said

Berry, 46, who works as a supervisor at a catfish growing and processing operation. "I'm not going to get depressed about it."

Like many people in this economically struggling area, she faces an uncertain future. Mississippi is one of the poorest states in the U.S., and the majority-Black Delta has long been one of the poorest parts of Mississippi — a place where many people work paycheck to paycheck in jobs tied to agriculture.

Two of the counties walloped by the tornado, Sharkey and Humphreys, are among the most sparsely populated in the state, with only a few thousand residents in communities scattered across wide expanses of cotton, corn and soybean fields.

Sharkey's poverty rate is 35%, and Humphreys' is 33%, compared to about 19% for Mississippi and under 12% for the entire

United States.

"It's going to be a long road to recovery, trying to rebuild and get over the devastation," Wayne Williams, who teaches construction skills at a vocational education center in Rolling Fork, said Sunday as people across town hammered blue tarps onto damaged roofs and used chainsaws to cut fallen trees.

The tornado killed 25 and injured dozens in Mississippi. It destroyed many homes and businesses in Rolling Fork and the nearby town of Silver City, leaving mounds of lumber, bricks and twisted metal.

The local housing stock was already tight, and some who lost their homes said they will live with friends or relatives. Mississippi opened more than a half-dozen shelters to temporarily house people displaced by the tornado.

All 7 Pa. factory explosion victims found

Associated Press

WEST READING, Pa. — The governor of Pennsylvania has ordered commonwealth flags flown at half-staff in honor of seven people whose bodies were recovered from the site of a powerful explosion at a chocolate factory.

"West Reading, we stand with you — and we'll continue to provide all of the support your community needs," Gov. Josh Shapiro said in a Twitter post Monday,

referring to the borough about 60 miles northwest of Philadelphia where the R.M. Palmer Co. plant blast occurred at about 5 p.m. Friday.

West Reading Mayor Samantha Kaag, in a statement Sunday night, called it "a devastating loss" but said "we are truly grateful to bring closure to the families involved in the upcoming days."

The Berks County coroner's office on Monday morning iden-

tified two of the victims as Amy Sandoe, 49, of Ephrata, and Domingo Cruz, 60, of Reading, and said "additional forensic medical examinations" would be needed to positively identify the other five victims. Autopsies are expected to be completed by the end of week, officials said.

West Reading Borough Chief of Police Wayne Holben said at a press briefing just after 9 p.m. that rescue workers had found the bodies earlier in the evening

and that they are believed to be the remaining two individuals who were listed as missing earlier in the day. Their identities will be confirmed by the Berks County Coroner's Office, he said.

One of the victims was found around 6:50 p.m. and the other around 8:20 p.m., Holben said. The deaths brought the total number killed to seven in the blast that occurred just before 5 p.m. Friday.

Senators share reflection, regret on Iraq War vote

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Michigan Sen. Debbie Stabenow was sitting in Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's conference room at the Pentagon, listening to him make the case that Saddam Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction.

At some point in the presentation — one of many lawmaker briefings by President George W. Bush's administration ahead of the October 2002 votes to authorize force in Iraq — military leaders showed an image of

trucks in the country that they believed could be carrying weapons materials. But the case sounded thin, and Stabenow, then just a freshman senator, noticed the date on the photo was months old.

"There was not enough information to persuade me that they in fact had any connection with what happened on Sept. 11, or that there was justification to attack," Stabenow said in a recent interview, referring to the 2001 attacks that were one part of the Bush administration's underly-

ing argument for the Iraq invasion. "I have a son and a daughter — would I vote to send them to war based on this evidence? In the end, the answer for me was no."

As with many of her colleagues, Stabenow's "nay" vote in the early morning hours of Oct. 11, 2002, didn't come without political risk.

The Bush administration and many of the Democrat's swing-state constituents strongly believed that the United States should go to war in Iraq, and

lawmakers knew that the House and Senate votes on whether to authorize force would be hugely consequential.

Now, 20 years after the Iraq invasion in March 2003, Congress is seriously considering walking it back, with a Senate vote expected this week to repeal the 2002 and 1991 authorizations of force against Iraq. Bipartisan supporters say the repeal is years overdue, with Saddam's regime long gone and Iraq now a strategic partner of the United States.

Zelenskyy warned of risks at nuclear plant

Associated Press

ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine — The United Nations' atomic energy chief warned Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in a meeting Monday that the perilous situation at Europe's largest nuclear plant "isn't getting any better" as relentless fighting in the area puts the facility at risk of a nuclear disaster.

The Zaporizhzhia plant, which continues to power war-torn Ukraine, has lost several of its power transmission cables during Russia's war, and on multiple occasions has had to switch to emergency diesel generators to power its essential cooling systems preventing a meltdown.

International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General Rafael Grossi plans to visit the Russian-held plant this week. The Vienna-based agency has staff permanently deployed at the plant following Russia's invasion 13 months ago.

In the meeting, covered exclusively by The Associated Press, Grossi said the situation at the plant remains tense because of the heavy military presence around it and a blackout that recently struck the facility, something that has occurred repeatedly since Russian forces took it over last year.

Earlier this month, fighting interrupted power supply to the

plant for half a day, forcing staff to activate backup generators.

Grossi expressed alarm at that development.

"Each time we are rolling a dice," he told his agency at the time. "And if we allow this to continue time after time, then one day our luck will run out."

Grossi and Zelenskyy met in the city of Zaporizhzhia, which is in Ukrainian-held territory, about 30 miles northeast of the nuclear plant with the same name.

The IAEA announced in January that it was placing teams of experts at all four of Ukraine's nuclear power plants to reduce the risk of accidents.

Grossi emphasized that his seventh trip to Ukraine underlined his commitment and support for "as long as it takes."

Also attending the meeting were other IAEA officials, the head of the presidential office Andriy Yermak and the head of nuclear state operator Energoatom, Petro Kotin.

While in Zaporizhzhia, Zelenskyy also inspected military positions in the partially occupied province and awarded soldiers with military honors. He also visited with wounded soldiers at city hospitals as well as an apartment building Kyiv has claimed was hit by Russian forces last Wednesday, killing at least one person.

Netanyahu delays judicial overhaul after protesting

Associated Press

JERUSALEM—Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced a delay in his judicial overhaul plan Monday, saying he wanted to give time to seek a compromise over the contentious package with his political opponents.

Netanyahu made the announcement after two days of large protests against the plan.

"When there's an opportunity to avoid civil war through dialogue, I, as prime minister, am taking a timeout for dialogue," Netanyahu said in a nationally televised address. Striking a more conciliatory tone than in previous speeches, he said he was determined to pass a judicial reform but called for "an attempt to achieve broad consensus."

Immediately after Netanyahu's statement, the head of the country's largest trade union said it would call off a general strike that threatened to grind Israel's economy to a halt.

Netanyahu spoke after tens of thousands of Israelis demonstrated outside parliament and workers launched a nationwide

strike Monday in a dramatic escalation of the mass protest movement aimed at halting his plan.

The chaos shut down much of the country and threatened to paralyze the economy. Departing flights from the main international airport were grounded. Large mall chains and universities closed their doors, and Israel's largest trade union called for its 800,000 members to stop work in health care, transit, banking and other fields.

Diplomats walked off the job at foreign missions, and local governments were expected to close preschools and cut other services. The main doctors union announced its members would also strike.

Tens of thousands of people burst into the streets around the country in a spontaneous show of anger at the prime minister's decision to fire his defense minister after he called for a pause to the overhaul. Chanting "the country is on fire," they lit bonfires on Tel Aviv's main highway, closing the thoroughfare and many others throughout the country for hours.

6 fatally shot, suspect dead at Nashville grade school

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — A female shooter wielding two "assault-style" rifles and a pistol killed three students and three adults at a private Christian school in Nashville on Monday in what marks the latest in a series of mass shootings in a country growing increasingly unnerved by bloodshed in schools.

The suspect also died after being shot by police following the violence at The Covenant School, a Presbyterian school for about 200 students from preschool through sixth grade. Police said the shooter was a 28-year-old woman from Nashville, after initially saying she appeared to be in her teens.

Authorities were working to identify her and whether she had a connection to the school.

The Nashville victims were pronounced dead upon arrival at the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital and Vanderbilt University Medical Center. One officer had a hand wound from cut glass.

Other students walked to

safety Monday, holding hands as they left their school surrounded by police cars, to a nearby church to be reunited with their parents.

"In a tragic morning, Nashville joined the dreaded, long list of communities to experience a school shooting," Mayor John Cooper wrote on Twitter. "My heart goes out to the families of the victims. Our entire city stands with you."

On WTVF TV, reporter Hannah McDonald said her mother-in-law works at the front desk at The Covenant School. The woman had stepped outside for a break Monday morning and was coming back when she heard gunshots, McDonald said during a live broadcast. The reporter said she has not been able to speak with her mother-in-law but said her husband had.

The shooter entered the school through a side entrance and went to the second story, police spokesperson Don Aaron said during a news briefing.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

West Coast facing salmon fishing ban

CA SANDIEGO — Ocean salmon fishing season is set to be prohibited this year off California and much of Oregon for the second time in 15 years after adult fall-run Chinook, often known as king salmon, returned to California's rivers in near record-low numbers in 2022.

The Pacific Fishery Management Council, the authority responsible for setting ocean salmon seasons off the Pacific coast, is expected in early April to formally approve its proposed closure of Chinook fishing along the coast from Cape Falcon in northern Oregon to the California-Mexico border. Salmon season is expected to open as usual north of Cape Falcon, including in the Columbia River and off Washington's coast.

Glen Spain, executive director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, said he believes the ban might need to be in place for two or three years to bring back sustainable stocks after many fish died in 2020, the start of a record-dry period.

Governor signs student discipline bill into law

KY FRANKFORT — A bill aimed at defusing classroom disruptions was signed into law Thursday by Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear, who said it would allow school administrators to intervene before situations escalate.

The Democratic governor told reporters the bill seeks to ensure that students posing "a significant and serious potential for harm to a school aren't immediately back in that school."

Under the bill, a student removed from the same classroom three times within 30 days may be suspended from school for being "chronically disruptive." Principals could require a review of classroom issues with the teacher and the student's parents to determine a "course of action" regarding the youngster's continued placement in the classroom.

The bill would allow principals to permanently remove a student from a classroom for the remainder of the school year if their presence would "chronically disrupt the education process for other students."

5 boys rescued after getting stuck in tunnel

NY NEW YORK — Five mischievous boys had to be rescued after they crawled through a storm drain tunnel in New York City and got lost, authorities said.

In audio released by the fire department, 911 dispatchers worked to pinpoint the boys' exact location and then told them to scream once rescuers are close enough to hear.

"Now you can scream as loud as you can," a dispatcher says. "They want you to scream and yell."

Firefighters said the boys were in the tunnel for about an hour. The boys and one firefighter were taken to a hospital for evaluation, but none had significant injuries, officials said.

Hackers hit computer network of court system

WI MADISON — Hackers attacked the Wisconsin court system's computer

network, court officials said Thursday.

A cyberattack began last week, according to a statement from court officials. Network users may have experienced intermittent service or slower than usual response times from online services, court officials said. Asked when exactly the attack began and if it's still ongoing, courts spokesman Tom Sheehan said in an email that he had no further information.

Director of State Courts Randy Koschnick said in the statement that the court system has taken effective counter measures, but did not elaborate.

The attack has not result in the breach of any data and court operations are continuing as usual statewide, state Supreme Court Chief Justice Annette Ziegler said in the statement.

Medicaid gets boost, shifting long opposition

NC RALEIGH — A Medicaid expansion deal in North Carolina received final legislative approval on Thursday, capping a decade of debate over whether the closely politically divided state should accept the federal government's coverage for hundreds of thousands of low-income adults.

North Carolina is among states with Republican leaders that are considering expanding Medicaid after years of steadfast opposition. Voters in South Dakota approved expansion in a referendum in November. And in Alabama, advocates are urging lawmakers to take advantage of federal incentives to expand Medicaid in order to provide health insurance to more working people.

When Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper, a longtime expansion advocate, signs the bill, it should leave 10 states in the United States that haven't adopted expansion. North Carolina has 2.9 million enrollees in traditional Medicaid coverage. Advocates have estimated that expansion could help 600,000 adults.

State OKs 1st wildlife bridges to limit crashes

NM SANTA FE — New Mexico will build its first wildlife highway overpasses for free-roaming cougars, black bears, bighorn sheep and other creatures large and small, and will also set aside \$100 million for conservation projects under two bills signed Thursday by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham.

Advocates for the initiatives have said the state stands to capture millions of dollars in federal matching funds for wildlife crossings and an array of established conservation programs. New Mexico hopes to expand efforts ranging from river stewardship to outdoor adventures for young people from low-income households.

The state's first wildlife bridge is likely to span a state highway that traverses remote desert oilfields and Native American lands of the Navajo Nation, Jicarilla Apache Nation and several pueblo communities, including a treacherous hot spot for wildlife-auto collisions north of Cuba, N.M.

Several hundred large animals — primarily deer and elk — are killed in the state each year by collisions that can also total cars and severely injure human passengers.

— From wire reports

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Miller, Wong rally Miami past Texas in Elite 8

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — On the eve of Miami playing for a place in its first Final Four, the quiet conversation floating through the team hotel did not revolve around all that the Hurricanes had accomplished this season. Instead, they talked about what had happened to bring last season to a close.

The sting of an Elite Eight defeat was fresh to those who were there. And they made everyone else feel it, too.

“That loss sat with me for a really long time,” the Hurricanes’ Jordan Miller said. “It doesn’t go away, and the fact that we had the opportunity to come back and make amends, make it right,

that’s what was pushing me.”

Miller responded with a perfect performance against second-seeded Texas in the Midwest Region final Sunday. Along with Atlantic Coast Conference player of the year Isaiah Wong and March dynamo Nijel Pack, Miller rallied the Hurricanes from a 13-point second-half deficit for an 88-81 victory that clinched that long-awaited trip to the national semifinals.

“How hard we fought to come back in this game, especially on a stage like this, it’s an amazing feeling,” said Pack, one of Miami’s newcomers. “I know how much these guys wanted to win this game, especially being here last year and losing the Elite

Eight, and now being able to take it to the Final Four is something special.”

Miller finished with 27 points, going 7-for-7 from the field and 13-for-13 from the foul line, while Wong scored 12 of his 14 points in the second half against the Longhorns, who had been the top remaining seed in a topsy-turvy NCAA Tournament.

Now, the No. 5 seed Hurricanes (29-7) have a date with No. 4 seed UConn on Saturday night in Houston. Two more Final Four newbies, fifth-seeded San Diego State and No. 9 seed Florida Atlantic, will play in the other national semifinal.

It’s the first time since seeding began in 1979 that no team seeded

better than No. 4 made the Final Four, so perhaps it is fitting that Miami coach Jim Larrañaga is involved. He took George Mason there as an 11 seed 17 years ago to the day.

Miami was a 10 seed last year when it lost 76-50 to eventual national champion Kansas in a regional final.

“No one wanted to go home,” said Miller, coincidentally a George Mason transfer, who joined Duke’s Christian Laettner as the only players since 1960 to go 20-for-20 combined from the field and foul line in an NCAA tourney game. “We came together. We stuck together. We showed really good perseverance and the will—the will to just want to get there.”

San Diego St. muscles past Creighton for 1st Final Four

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Darrion Trammell had shot enough free throws in practice to believe at least one would fall when it mattered.

San Diego State’s 5-foot-10 senior guard was fouled by Creighton’s Ryan Nembhard when he put up a floater near the free-throw line with 1.2 seconds left in a rugged NCAA Tournament East Region final that was tied at 56-all.

Trammell’s first free throw clanged off the rim, but he knocked down the second, and that was enough to push the defense-first Aztecs into their first Final Four with a 57-56 victory on Sunday.

Lamont Butler scored 18 points and Trammell had 12 for fifth-seeded San Diego State (31-6), which slowed down high-scoring, sixth-seeded Creighton (24-13) and became the first Mountain West Conference team to reach the national semifinals.

The experienced Aztecs, in their sixth season under coach Brian Dutcher, will play the surprising East Region champion, ninth-seeded Florida Atlantic, on Saturday in Houston for a spot in the national title game.

“Here we are,” said Dutcher, a longtime assistant to his predecessor, Steve Fisher. “We’re making the next step and it’s something we’ve always talked about. I’m sure there were people that doubted we could do it, but we never doubted for a minute.

“Not to say it’s easy to get there or that we would ever get there. But we’re there now, and we’re going to go and try to win the thing.”

In the final seconds, Trammell dribbled from the perimeter and elevated for the potential winning shot. A chasing Nembhard got his hand on Trammell’s hip and was whistled for the foul, sending Trammell to the line for the first time in the game.

“I feel like I’ve shot probably a thousand free throws in the last week,” said Trammell, who was named the region’s most outstanding player. “And then today, I feel like I put in the work to be able to step up and have confidence that I’m going to make ‘em.”

Make one, anyway.

Creighton couldn’t get a shot off on its final, desperation play. Baylor Scheierman threw the ensuing inbound pass the length of the floor. San Diego State’s Aguek Arop and Creighton’s Arthur Kaluma both jumped for it and the ball deflected out of bounds. Officials reviewed the play and determined that time had expired, and the celebration was on for the Aztecs.

“I wasn’t given an explanation other than there was no time on the clock,” Creighton coach Greg McDermott said. “They made no call on the floor, but officiating is part of the game and we’re not gonna go there.”

Scheierman had tied the game at 56-all when he stole an inbounds pass and convert-

ed a layup with 34 seconds remaining.

Ryan Kalkbrenner scored 17 points and Scheierman and Kaluma had 12 apiece for the Bluejays, who went 2-for-17 from three-point range.

The Aztecs, who got this far thanks to defense and physical play, held the Bluejays to 23 second-half points on 28% shooting as they won for the 14th time in 15 games. Creighton shot 40% overall.

San Diego State shot 38% but got clutch baskets from Nathan Mensah, whose jumper gave the Aztecs a 56-54 lead with 1:37 left, and Arop, who made two straight shots before that for a 54-50 advantage with 3:03 remaining.

“I’ve done that a thousand times throughout the season, so it was just another shot for me,” Arop, who had six points, said of his go-ahead jumper. “Obviously, there was a lot more weight to it, but I wasn’t thinking like that. I was just thinking, staying in rhythm, getting the shot up and putting my team up front.”

Creighton, which beat San Diego State in overtime in the first round of last year’s NCAA Tournament, fell just short of joining Big East rival UConn in the Final Four.

The teams didn’t appear to share any hard feelings from last year’s meeting. They shared a round-trip flight to Hawaii last fall for the Maui Invitational, and there were no dustups during a tight, physical game in which no team led by more than eight points.

Iowa women make 1st Final Four since '93

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Caitlin Clark put on quite a show, having one of the greatest performances in NCAA Tournament history to help Iowa end a 30-year Final Four drought.

She had 41 points, 12 assists and 10 rebounds to lead the No. 2 seed Hawkeyes to a 97-83 win over fifth-seeded Louisville on Sunday night and send the team to its first women's Final Four in since 1993.

"I dreamed of this moment as a little girl, to take a team to the Final Four and be in these moments and have confetti fall down on me," said Clark, who is an Iowa native.

The unanimous first-team All-American was as dominant as she's been all season in getting the Hawkeyes to Dallas for the women's NCAA Tournament national semifinals on Friday night. The Seattle 4 Region champion will face the winner of the Greenville 1 region that has South Carolina playing Maryland on Monday night.

"I thought our team played

really well. That's what it's all about. I was going to give it every single thing I had," said Clark, who was the region's most outstanding player. "When I came here I said I wanted to take this program to the Final Four, and all you've got to do is dream. And all you've got to do is believe and work your butt off to get there. That's what I did, and that's what our girls did and that's what our coaches did and we're going to Dallas, baby."

Iowa (30-6) hadn't been to the Final Four since Hall of Fame coach C. Vivian Stringer led the team to its lone appearance in 1993. Before Sunday, the team had only been to one other Elite Eight — in 2019 — since the Final Four team.

Clark had the 11th triple-double of her career and the 19th in NCAA Tournament history. She had the first 30- and 40-point triple-double in March Madness history.

"It's like a storybook, been like that all year long," Iowa coach Lisa Bluder said. "We

keep talking about destiny and how it's supposed to happen. ... She's spectacular. I don't know how else to describe what she does on the basketball court. A 40-point triple-double against Louisville to go to the Final Four. Are you kidding me? That's mind-boggling."

Trailing by five at the half, Louisville cut its deficit to 48-47 before Clark and the Hawkeyes scored the next 11 points as part of a 17-6 run to blow the game open. That brought most of the pro-Iowa crowd of nearly 12,000 fans to their feet.

Louisville was down 22 with just under 6 minutes left before going on a 13-1 run to get within 86-76 with 2:10 left. The Cardinals could get no closer.

Clark left the game with 22.7 seconds left to a loud ovation from the crowd as she hugged her coach. After the game, Clark paraded around the court holding the regional trophy high above her head, delighting the thousands of fans who stuck around to celebrate their Hawkeyes.

Hailey Van Lith scored 27 points and Olivia Cochran had 20 points and 14 rebounds to lead Louisville (26-12).

Greenville 2 Region

LSU 54, Miami 42: Angel Reese had 18 rebounds and LSU returned to the women's Final Four for the first time in 15 years by beating Miami.

Alexis Morris scored 21 points and Reese added 13 for the third-seeded Tigers (32-2), who shot 30.2% and went 1-for-12 from three-point range, including misses on its first nine attempts. But Miami was even worse from three, missing all 15 tries.

The Tigers head to Dallas to face Ohio State or Virginia Tech in Friday's national semifinals.

Jasmyne Roberts scored 22 points for ninth-seeded Miami (22-13), which had rallied from a huge deficit to beat Oklahoma State in the first round, stunned No. 1 seed Indiana on the road, then beat Villanova in Friday's Sweet 16 despite blowing a 21-point lead.

Reddick wins crashfest in triple OT for 23XI Racing

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Tyler Reddick had the lead and the fastest car on the track when calamity nearly struck.

Caution. Restart. Caution. Restart. Caution. Restart.

Enough slowdowns to make a driver lose his mind.

Or at least his cool.

Reddick handled it nearly to perfection Sunday, earning his first victory with new team 23XI Racing by holding on over multiple late restarts to win in triple overtime Sunday at Circuit of the Americas, the first road course race on this year's NASCAR schedule.

"Didn't quite get the restarts perfectly, but we got the one that mattered," Reddick said. "The last one."

Reddick's victory was the first of the year for Toyota and his first since joining the team co-owned by Denny Hamlin and Michael Jordan. It was Reddick's fourth career Cup Series win, third on a road course.

This one might have been the most nerve-wracking.

Reddick had to hold the front through the elevated, switch-back left hand turn that saw the field bunch up and smash each other time after time on the restarts. The race had eight cautions for 17 laps and went to three overtimes and seven laps past the scheduled distance.

Hamlin said Reddick showed poise to match talent that could lead to a whole lot of victories.

"You have to have that driver you feel can carry you to cham-

ionships. ... I feel like we have that guy," Hamlin said.

Kyle Busch, who pushed Reddick through the final three restarts, finished second in the Chevrolet for RCR that became available to the two-time Cup champion when Reddick jumped to 23XI.

"When we tested here, they were lights out," Busch said of 23XI. "Tyler obviously is a really good road racer. He proved it driving this car here last year. I've been trying to emulate the things he did in order to make this car fast last year, but not quite all the way there."

Alex Bowman, who had a chance to win on the final lap at COTA last season, was third in a Chevrolet from Hendrick Motorsports.

Ross Chastain, the defending race winner, finished fourth and was confronted post-race inside his car by Trackhouse Racing teammate Daniel Suarez over the aggressive nature of the race. Suarez also exchanged words with Bowman. NASCAR may take action against Suarez for using his car to bump both Bowman and Chastain on pit road.

"He just thought I drove in and tried to drive through him," Bowman said. "Daniel and I, we've been teammates in the past, raced together a long time. I respect the hell out of him. I'm sure he's still not super happy. Just tried to explain that I wouldn't race him like that, that I was shoved in there."

Bulls spoil LeBron's return to Lakers

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — LeBron James scored 19 points off the bench in his return from a month-long injury absence, but Zach LaVine scored 32 points to lead the Chicago Bulls to a 118-108 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers on Sunday.

DeMar DeRozan added 17 points for the Bulls, who easily overcame James' return for their seventh win in nine games. LaVine hit 11 of his first 14 shots to lead an offensive effort that snapped the Lakers' three-game winning streak despite the return of the NBA's career scoring leader.

James sat out 13 games with right foot soreness, missing four weeks during the Lakers' run at a playoff berth. The team provided few updates on his recovery, and his return came with little advance warning.

Cavaliers 108, Rockets 91: Jarrett Allen had 24 points and 14 rebounds, Donovan Mitchell scored 22 and host Cleveland beat Houston to clinch a playoff

spot for the first time since 2018.

It's also the first time Cleveland has made the playoffs without LeBron James on the roster since 1998.

The Cavaliers are closing in on locking up the No. 4 spot in the Eastern Conference — and home-court advantage in the first round. They've won 9 of 11.

Grizzlies 123, Hawks 119: Ja Morant scored 27 points in his return to the starting lineup and visiting Memphis held off Atlanta for its sixth consecutive win.

Memphis is second in the Western Conference despite a 15-22 road record. But the six-game winning streak, the NBA's longest active streak, includes two victories away from home.

Celtics 137, Spurs 93: Jaylen Brown scored 41 points and grabbed 13 rebounds to lead host Boston over San Antonio.

The Celtics were without star forward and leading scorer Jayson Tatum, who was sidelined with a bruised left hip. But they still moved within 1½ games of Milwaukee for the Eastern Con-

ference's best record with their seventh victory in nine games.

Timberwolves 99, Warriors 96: Karl-Anthony Towns hit a go-ahead three-pointer with 11 seconds to play after Kyle Anderson stole a pass by Draymond Green, and visiting Minnesota held off Golden State.

Jordan Poole gave Golden State the lead on a three with 1:28 left, moments after Towns had connected from deep. Poole had a game-high 27 points.

Hornets 110, Mavericks 104: Host Charlotte overcame a 40-point outing from Luka Dončić for its second win over the same team in three days, another costly blow to Dallas' playoff hopes.

Gordon Hayward scored 22 points and P.J. Washington added 21 points and 12 rebounds for the Hornets, who have been eliminated from playoff contention.

Raptors 114, Wizards 104: O.G. Anunoby scored 29 points, Fred VanVleet had 28 and host Toronto never trailed in a win

over Washington.

Pascal Siakam had 19 points and 11 rebounds, and Jakob Poeltl added 12 points and 12 rebounds.

Magic 119, Nets 106: Cole Anthony had 21 points to lead eight Orlando scorers in double figures, and host Orlando overcame Mikal Bridges' 44 points in a victory over Brooklyn.

Franz Wagner added 19 points and 10 rebounds for Orlando. Wendell Carter had 18 points and six rebounds, and Jalen Suggs returned from an injury with 16 points to help the Magic win their third straight. Paolo Banchero finished with 11 points and nine rebounds.

Thunder 118, Trail Blazers 112: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 31 points and visiting Oklahoma City beat depleted Portland.

Jalen Williams had 23 points and Isaiah Joe added 20 off the bench for the Thunder (37-38), who moved into a tie for ninth place in the Western Conference with the Los Angeles Lakers.

Pastrnak gets 50th goal as Bruins top Hurricanes in SO

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — David Pastrnak's milestone performance with the Boston Bruins came with additional responsibility.

Minus a couple of key players, Pastrnak moved to the forefront and eclipsed the 50-goal mark by scoring twice and the Bruins won their seventh game in a row by defeating the Carolina Hurricanes 4-3 in a shootout Sunday.

Forwards Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand didn't make the trip with the NHL-leading Bruins, so Pastrnak boosted his contributions.

"I've been learning from those guys," Pastrnak said. "You recognize when they're not here that you have to take a

step forward."

Pastrnak posted the 12th 50-goal season in Bruins history.

Charlie Coyle and Jake DeBrusk scored in the shootout in a matchup of Eastern Conference division leaders.

Jakub Lauko also scored for the Bruins, who earned their 57th victory and are five wins shy of matching the all-time NHL record with nine regular-season games to play. Charlie McAvoy had two assists and Jeremy Swayman made 34 saves.

Kings 7, Blues 6: Viktor Arvidsson had two goals for the second straight game, Adrian Kempe also scored twice and host Los Angeles beat St. Louis to extend its point streak to a franchise-record 12 games.

Jordan Kyrou had two goals, and Brandon Saad, Justin Faulk, Pavel Buchnevich and Kasper Kapanen also scored for St. Louis. But the Blues had their five-game point streak snapped.

Maple Leafs 3, Predators 2: John Tavares scored two goals and added an assist, Joseph Woll made 22 saves and visiting Toronto won its second of three games.

Tyson Barrie had a goal and an assist, Cody Glass also scored and Kevin Lankinen made 31 saves for Nashville, which lost back-to-back home games over the weekend. The Predators remain five points behind the Winnipeg Jets for the Western Conference's second wild-card berth.

Avalanche 4, Coyotes 3 (SO): Valeri Nichushkin scored a power-play goal in the third period and had the only goal in the shootout, and visiting Colorado moved into a tie for second place in the Central Division.

Clayton Keller scored his 36th goal for Arizona, which extended its points streak at home.

Canucks 4, Blackhawks 2: Elias Pettersson scored twice, Phillip Di Giuseppe scored, Brock Boeser got an empty-netter and visiting Vancouver won its third straight.

Defenseman Connor Murphy and rookie Lukas Reichel scored for Chicago, and Petr Mrazek made 27 saves in recording his 20th loss.