

NAVCENT: Red Sea mission ‘saving lives’

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — A U.S. Navy-led coalition is succeeding at protecting commercial shipping in the Red Sea from militant attacks, while sailors work at a pace unseen in the Middle East in decades, the commander of the service’s forces in the region said.

American personnel “have been asked to perform at a tempo and at a level that our Navy has not operated in since at least the Tanker War of the ‘80s,” Vice Adm. George Wikoff, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. 5th Fleet, said Thursday.

He was referring to a series of Iranian and Iraqi military attacks from about 1984 to 1988 on commercial shipping in the Persian Gulf. Nowadays, the attackers are Houthi militants in Ye-

men who are backed by Iran and say they are retaliating against Israel-linked ships, though many of the ships they’ve targeted have no apparent connection to Israel.

The Houthis on Monday also denied involvement in severed Red Sea underwater cables that provide internet and telecommunications around the world.

Combined U.S. and coalition forces destroyed at least 26 missiles and 26 drones preparing to launch or already launched into the Red Sea from Feb. 23 through March 1, according to U.S. Central Command statements over the same period.

At the same time, Navy ships also have fended off direct attacks and protected other vessels, Wikoff said.

One of the latest of those actions was on Feb. 24, when the destroyer USS Mason shot

down an anti-ship ballistic missile targeting a fuel tanker, according to CENTCOM.

U.S. and coalition strikes on Houthi military facilities in Yemen have destroyed or degraded more than 150 missiles and launchers since Jan. 11, a Pentagon spokesman said last week.

But despite those efforts, a handful of Houthi attacks have found their targets, notably a British-owned bulk carrier struck by a missile Feb. 18, which sank Saturday.

Still, about 4,700 ships have transited the waterway since Dec. 1. That’s about a 25% decline over the same period last year, when about 6,300 vessels moved through the waterway, according to figures from NAVCENT/U.S. 5th Fleet.

Most normal merchant traffic is continuing to transit the Red Sea, an indication that the ser-

vice’s defensive operations, specifically those through the U.S.-led Operation Prosperity Guardian, are working, Wikoff said.

“My reassurance is that shipping continues,” said Wikoff, who assumed command of the Navy’s forces in the Middle East last month. He also commands Combined Maritime Forces, a 41-nation maritime partnership focused on counterpiracy, counterterrorism and drug smuggling, among other operations.

Houthi militants say their attacks will continue until there is a cease-fire declared in Gaza.

“We continue to be committed to this mission,” said Wikoff, who praised U.S. sailors for their sacrifices and work in such a high-stakes environment. “We are preserving freedom of navigation, and we are focused on saving lives and livelihoods of people.”

Troops train for disaster prep in Cobra Gold drill

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

RAYONG, Thailand — Soldiers in protective gear breathed steadily through respirators outside a Thai airport hangar, where they prepared on Sunday to screen a group of volunteers for radiation during a simulated evacuation.

Despite their imposing appearance, the soldiers patiently processed a group of about 50 role players from Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and the United States.

The drill was one piece of Cobra Gold, the largest military exercise in mainland Southeast Asia, according to the Army.

The annual drills brought 4,500 U.S. service members

from the four branches together with troops from Thailand, the host nation, and 30 other countries, including Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea.

In the case of any large-scale disaster, the military will almost always play a significant role, said Col. Patrick Blankenship, assistant chief of staff of G9 civil affairs for the Army’s I Corps.

“Cobra Gold and this exercise is a premier time, location and opportunity to exercise these things,” he told Stars and Stripes on Sunday. “I think this reflects the professional character of our militaries being able to work together with other militaries to do this.”

Troops from the U.S., Thailand and Japan, specially trained in chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defense, or CBRN, led the decontamination drill.

No real radiation was involved, but the teams employed specialized equipment to check for it and after a search for contraband like weapons or drugs directed role players to gender-appropriate showers.

“We were just using soap for this operation, just due to it being a radiation threat, and soapy water can take a lot of radiation particles off of you,” said Marine Sgt. Jaden Graham, a CBRN specialist from Boise, Idaho.

The drill was meant to simu-

late as close as possible a real-world evacuation and prepare participants for any future disaster.

It also provided the troops a chance to learn about their counterparts’ CBRN defense capabilities, said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Nick Weidner, who led the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit’s CBRN team.

“When we do other partnerships, understanding what capabilities they bring to the table is a large one, and also seeing what they do for their training,” he said ahead of the drill. “It’s their capabilities, their training and figuring out how they communicate — that’s probably been the biggest barrier.”

Teixeira pleads guilty to leaking military secrets

Associated Press

BOSTON — Massachusetts Air National Guard member Jack Teixeira pleaded guilty on Monday in federal court to leaking highly classified military documents about Russia's war in Ukraine and other national security secrets.

Teixeira pleaded guilty to six counts of willful retention and transmission of national defense information under the Espionage Act nearly a year after he was arrested in the most consequential national security leak in years.

The stunning breach raised alarm over America's ability to protect its most closely guarded secrets and forced the Biden administration to scramble to try to contain diplomatic and military fallout. The leaks embarrassed the Pentagon, which tightened controls to safeguard classified information and disciplined members found to have

intentionally failed to take required action about Teixeira's suspicious behavior.

Teixeira, 22, admitted illegally collecting military secrets and sharing them with other users on Discord, a social media platform popular with people playing online games. Prosecutors plan to seek nearly 17 years in prison for him, according to the plea agreement.

Teixeira, who was part of the 102nd Intelligence Wing at Otis Air National Guard Base in Massachusetts, worked as a cyber transport systems specialist, essentially an information technology specialist responsible for military communications networks.

Authorities said he first typed out classified documents he accessed and then began sharing photographs of files that bore SECRET and TOP SECRET markings.

The leak exposed to the world

unvarnished secret assessments of Russia's war in Ukraine, the capabilities and geopolitical interests of other nations and other national security issues.

Teixeira remains in the Air National Guard in an unpaid status, an Air Force official said.

Teixeira has been behind bars since his April arrest.

The judge denied his request for release from jail last year after prosecutors revealed he had a history of violent rhetoric and warned that U.S. adversaries who might be interested in mining Teixeira for information could facilitate his escape.

Prosecutors have said little about a motive. But members of the Discord group described Teixeira as someone looking to show off, rather than being motivated by a desire to inform the public about U.S. military operations or to influence American policy.

Port cranes on Guam weak link in Pacific chain

By JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

Guam Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero emphasized the island's growing role in Indo-Pacific defense recently as she lobbied in Washington, D.C., for a share of federal money to replace aging cranes at Guam's port.

President Joe Biden under an executive order Feb. 21 announced plans to improve cybersecurity at U.S. ports, citing threats to systems that provide ship navigation and cargo tracking.

The administration had already apportioned \$20 billion alone to upgrade port infrastructure over five years.

The infrastructure initiative targets port cranes manufactured in China for replacement, also due to cybersecurity concerns. Among other measures, the initiative makes funds available to replace Chinese-made cranes in use at U.S. ports with U.S.-built cranes, according to a White House press release Feb. 21.

"Securing these cranes is imperative for our national security," Leon Guerrero said in a Feb. 23 news release from spokeswoman Krystal Paco-San Agustin. "With the Biden administration's heightened concerns, securing funding aligned with U.S. security policies to prevent reliance on China-manufactured equipment is crucial."

The Port of Guam employs three used gantry cranes more than 40 years old that must be replaced in a few years, Rory J. Respicio, Port Authority of Guam general manager, told Stars and Stripes by email Wednesday.

US, South Korea Buddy up for air drills

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — U.S. and South Korean airmen began a five-day combat drill to sharpen the allied defense against aerial attacks Monday amid a broader exercise that kicked off in South Korea that day.

More than 20 U.S. and South Korean fighters flew counter-air drills for Ssangmae Training, or Buddy Squadron, from Osan Air Base, roughly 30 miles south of Seoul, the Ministry of National Defense said in a news

release.

Aircraft used in Buddy Squadron include F-16 Fighting Falcons from Osan's 51st Fighter Wing and F-15K Slam Eagles from South Korea's 11th Fighter Wing, according to the release.

"We are conducting the training as 'one team' to immediately respond to enemy provocations," South Korean air force F-15K pilot Maj. Park Young-do said in the release.

The annual air drill began in 1998, according to the ministry.

Freedom Shield, a separate 11-day joint military exercise,

also kicked off Monday.

The semiannual Freedom Shield is aimed at countering North Korean threats, such as its cruise-missile launch sites, South Korean army Col. Lee Sung-jun told reporters at a news conference last week.

This year's iteration is composed of 48 drills, double the number conducted in 2023, Lee said. Neither U.S. Forces Korea nor the Ministry of National Defense disclosed how many troops are participating in the exercise, citing operational security concerns.

Supreme Court restores Trump to ballot

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Monday restored Donald Trump to 2024 presidential primary ballots, rejecting state attempts to hold the Republican former president accountable for the Capitol riot.

The justices ruled a day before the Super Tuesday primaries that states cannot invoke a post-Civil War constitutional provision to keep presidential candidates from appearing on ballots. That power resides with Congress, the court wrote in an unsigned opinion.

The outcome ends efforts in Colorado, Illinois, Maine and elsewhere to kick Trump, the front-runner for his party's nomination, off the ballot because of his attempts to undo his loss in the 2020 election to Democrat Joe Biden, culminating in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol.

Trump's case was the first at the Supreme Court dealing with a provision of the 14th Amendment that was adopted after the Civil War to prevent former officeholders who "engaged in in-

surrection" from holding office again.

Colorado's Supreme Court, in a first-of-its-kind ruling, had decided that the provision, Section 3, could be applied to Trump, who that court found incited the Capitol attack. No court before had applied Section 3 to a presidential candidate.

Some election observers have warned that a ruling requiring congressional action to implement Section 3 could leave the door open to a renewed fight over trying to use the provision to disqualify Trump in the event he wins the election. In one scenario, a Democratic-controlled Congress could try to reject certifying Trump's election on Jan. 6, 2025, under the clause.

The issue then could return to the court, possibly in the midst of a full-blown constitutional crisis.

Trump had been kicked off the ballots in Colorado, Maine and Illinois, but all three rulings were on hold awaiting the Supreme Court's decision.

The case is the court's most direct involvement in a presiden-

tial election since *Bush v. Gore*, a decision delivered a quarter-century ago that effectively handed the 2000 election to Republican George W. Bush. And it's just one of several cases involving Trump directly or that could affect his chances of becoming president again, including a case scheduled for arguments in late April about whether he can be criminally prosecuted on election interference charges, including his role in the Jan. 6 Capitol attack. The timing of the high court's intervention has raised questions about whether Trump will be tried before the November election.

The arguments in February were the first time the high court had heard a case involving Section 3. The two-sentence provision, intended to keep some Confederates from holding office again, says that those who violate oaths to support the Constitution are barred from various positions including congressional offices or serving as presidential electors. But it does not specifically mention the presidency.

The lawyers for Republican and independent voters who sued to remove Trump's name from the Colorado ballot had argued that there is ample evidence that the events of Jan. 6 constituted an insurrection and that it was incited by Trump, who had exhorted a crowd of his supporters at a rally outside the White House to "fight like hell." They said it would be absurd to apply Section 3 to everything but the presidency or that Trump is somehow exempt. And the provision needs no enabling legislation, they argued.

Trump's lawyers mounted several arguments for why the amendment can't be used to keep him off the ballot. They contended the Jan. 6 riot wasn't an insurrection and, even if it was, Trump did not go to the Capitol or join the rioters. The wording of the amendment also excludes the presidency and candidates running for president, they said. Even if all those arguments failed, they said, Congress must pass legislation to reinvigorate Section 3.

Lawmakers release bills to avoid partial shutdown

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Congressional leaders on Sunday came out with a package of six bills setting full-year spending levels for some federal agencies, a step forward in a long overdue funding process beset by sharp political divisions between the two parties as well as infighting among House Republicans.

The release of the text of legislation over the weekend was designed to meet the House's rule to give lawmakers at least 72 hours to study a bill before voting. And it's a promising sign that lawmakers will avoid a partial shutdown that would kick in at 12:01 a.m. Saturday for those agencies covered under the bill, such as Veter-

ans Affairs, Agriculture, Transportation, Justice and others.

Congressional leaders hope to complete votes on the package this week and continue negotiations on the remaining six annual spending bills to pass them before a March 22 deadline. The price tag for the package out Sunday comes to about \$460 billion, representing less than 30% of the discretionary spending Congress looks to approve for this year. The package still being negotiated includes defense spending.

House Speaker Mike Johnson highlighted some key policy and spending wins for conservatives, even as many of his GOP colleagues consider the changes inadequate.

Forecasters warn of more snow in California, Nevada

Associated Press

TRUCKEE, Calif. — A powerful blizzard that closed highways and ski resorts had moved through the Sierra Nevada by early Monday but forecasters warned that more snow was on the way for Northern California mountains.

Sections of Interstate 80 to the west and north of Lake Tahoe were still shut down late Sunday, with no estimate for reopening, the California Highway Patrol said.

The CHP office in South Lake Tahoe warned motorists that tire chains for improved traction are required on routes through the mountains, where more than 7 feet of snow fell over the weekend.

Blizzard warnings had mostly expired but scattered thunderstorms were likely and another 2 feet of snow was possible at higher elevations, the National Weather Service office in Sacramento said.

"Mountain travel is HIGHLY discouraged!" the office warned.

The multi-day storm caused traffic backups and closures on I-80 and many other roadways, and left thousands of homes and businesses without power. By Sunday night, Pacific Gas & Electric had restored electricity to all but about 4,400 Northern California customers, while NV Energy had reduced its outages to roughly 1,000 homes and businesses across the state line in Nevada.

Gaza cease-fire talks bogged down

Bloomberg News

Israel delayed sending a high-level delegation to Cairo for talks on a cease-fire in the war against Hamas for a second day, putting a damper on hopes for an imminent deal.

The U.S., Egypt and Qatar — the main mediators — are trying to get Israel to pause fighting in Gaza and release Palestinian prisoners in return for Hamas freeing hostages. The talks are also meant to ensure more aid gets into the devastated enclave.

Israel has said it won't send negotiators to Cairo until Hamas gives it a list of Israeli hostages it intends to release. Israeli media also says Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government wants to know about their well-being and how many are still alive.

The negotiations are taking

place as hunger grows acute in Gaza and with the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan less than a week away.

The war erupted on Oct. 7 when Hamas, an Iran-backed group designated a terrorist organization by the U.S., rampaged through southern Israeli communities, killing around 1,200 and capturing 250. More than 30,000 have been killed in Gaza by Israel's retaliatory air and ground assault, according to the Hamas-run health ministry.

The conflict's roiled the Middle East, leading to other Iran-supported militias attacking Western ships in the Red Sea and U.S. bases. In one deadly drone assault, an Iraqi group killed three American soldiers in Jordan.

On Sunday, a Hamas official said an agreement could be

reached in a day or two if Israel accepted his organization's demands. Some of those are unacceptable, according to Israeli officials, citing Hamas wanting its militants to return to northern Gaza and asking for too high a number of imprisoned Palestinians to be released.

U.S. officials say Israel has essentially agreed to a six-week cease-fire in exchange for some 35 hostages out of the roughly 100 still thought to be alive, a big increase in aid trucks entering the Gaza Strip and the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

Even if there's a truce, Israel insists the war won't be over. It says it still needs to destroy Hamas' military infrastructure or else face the risk of future massacres. It continues to say a ground offensive on Rafah, a city

in the south of Gaza with more than one million refugees, is necessary to root out the thousands of Hamas fighters encamped there.

Governments, including the U.S., are pushing Israel to accept a cease-fire to prevent the humanitarian crisis worsening. Last Thursday, more than 100 Gazans were killed when violence — including shooting by Israeli troops — broke out near aid trucks in northern Gaza. Israel says its forces didn't shoot at the civilians around the trucks; doctors and witnesses in Gaza say they did.

The U.S. and Jordan have taken to air-dropping meals but officials say it's too expensive a method to make much difference. Instead, hundreds of trucks need to get through every day, they say.

Haiti orders curfew after weekend of violent attacks

Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Authorities have ordered a nighttime curfew in an attempt to regain control of Haiti's streets after an explosion of violence during the weekend, including gunmen from gangs overrunning the coun-

try's two biggest prisons and freeing their inmates.

A 72-hour state of emergency began Sunday night, and the government said it would set out to find the killers, kidnappers and other violent criminals that it reported escaped from prison.

"The police were ordered to use all legal means at their disposal to enforce the curfew and apprehend all offenders," said a statement from Finance Minister Patrick Boivert, serving as acting prime minister.

The emergency decree was issued after a deadly week-

end. At least nine people had been killed since Thursday — four of them police officers — as gangs stepped up coordinated attacks on state institutions in Port-au-Prince, including the country's international airport and the national soccer stadium.

Albanian air base reopens after a \$58M renovation

BY JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — A former Soviet-era air base reopened Monday in Albania, where it will serve as a modernized center for future NATO air operations in the Balkans, the alliance said.

The Kucova base, about 50 miles south of Tirana, will support logistics missions, air operations, training and exercises, according to a NATO statement Monday.

"The makeover of Kucova air base is a strategic investment and shows that NATO continues to strengthen its presence in the western Balkans, an area of strategic importance to the alliance," acting NATO spokesman Dylan White said.

Begun in 2019, the roughly \$58 million base upgrade was the alliance's biggest initiative in Albania over the past decade. Improvements were made to the control tower, runways, hangars and storage facilities.

The Kucova site was built in the 1950s with Soviet help and used to be named in honor of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, reflecting the esteem in which he was held by Albania's longtime communist ruler Enver Hoxha.

While Albania is one of NATO's smallest member states, the country is strategically positioned on the Adriatic Sea and borders Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia.

For U.S. European Com-

mand, the Balkan Peninsula has been an area of concern for several years, with issues that range from tensions between Serbia and Kosovo to suspected Russian destabilization campaigns in Montenegro, a fellow NATO member.

In 2022, the Stuttgart-based U.S. Special Operations Command Europe established a forward operating headquarters in Albania to serve as a home base for missions in the broader Balkans.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Suspect arrested in
kidnap of girl found safe**

TX COLUMBUS — Police in Texas have arrested a man suspected in the disappearance of a girl who was missing for eight days before she was safely located.

The 27-year-old Houston man was charged with evading authorities after he attempted to flee from officers, the Columbus Police Department said in social media post.

The police learned that a 12-year-old girl who was the subject of an Amber Alert search was in Columbus, about 94 miles west of Houston.

The girl's identity was confirmed and she was transported to Texas Children's Hospital in Houston for evaluation, police said.

**Bins now required, only
rats sorry to see trash go**

NY NEW YORK — New York City's tradition of piling garbage bags on the sidewalk for pickup is going the way of the dinosaur.

All 200,000 businesses in the Big Apple are required to put out their bags of trash in garbage bins, as communities across the county and world have long done.

The requirement is the next phase in the city's efforts to curb what Mayor Eric Adams' administration has called a "24-hour rat buffet" of trash on sidewalks.

The city in August started requiring restaurants, convenience stores and bars to use a sturdy trash can with a secure lid and extended the requirement to chain stores the following month.

Then in the fall, residential buildings with nine or fewer units will fall under the mandate.

**Man sentenced for killing
woman in his driveway**

NY FORT EDWARD — A man who fatally shot a 20-year-old woman after the SUV she was riding in mistakenly drove into his rural driveway in upstate New York was sentenced to 25 years to life in prison.

Kevin Monahan, 66, was convicted of second-degree murder in the death last April of Kaylin Gillis. She was riding in a caravan of two cars and a motorcycle that was trying to leave after pulling into Monahan's long, winding driveway while looking for a party at another person's house in the town of Hebron.

The judge added up to 4 more years for tampering with the murder weapon, and scolded Monahan for showing no remorse.

**Woman convicted in
disappearance cover-up**

CT NEW CANAAN — A woman was convicted of conspiring to murder missing mother-of-five Jennifer Dulos, who vanished from a wealthy Connecticut enclave in 2019 and was never found.

Prosecutors said Michelle Troconis, 49, helped her then-boyfriend, Fotis Dulos, in his plot to kill his estranged wife and cover it up.

While the jurors were polled as to whether they agreed with the verdict, Troconis sat with her head down, crying, as one of her lawyers rubbed her back. She later rested her head on the table and could be heard sobbing.

Authorities believe Fotis Dulos killed Jennifer Dulos as they battled each other in divorce and child custody proceedings. Fotis Dulos killed himself in January 2020 shortly after being charged with murder. He had denied the allegations.

Jennifer Dulos, 50, vanished on May 24, 2019, after dropping off their five children at school.

**Panel advances armed
'guardians' in schools bill**

KY FRANKFORT — Kentucky school districts could hire retired law officers or military veterans to serve as armed guardians offering security at schools under a bill advanced by a state Senate committee.

The proposal cleared the Senate Education Committee and heads to the full Senate next. It would still need House approval if it gains Senate passage.

The measure is the latest attempt by Kentucky lawmakers to bolster school safety since a 2018 shooting at Marshall County High School in western Kentucky, where two students were killed and more than a dozen others were injured when another student opened fire.

The intent is to allow local school boards to hire and assign guardians to augment security at schools. Their hiring would be optional for school boards.

**Governor pushes back on
minimum wage criticism**

CA SACRAMENTO — California Gov. Gavin Newsom's administration has denied a news report that he pushed for an exception to the state's new fast-food minimum wage law that benefits a wealthy campaign donor.

California's minimum wage is \$16 per hour. But starting April 1, most fast-food restaurants in the state must pay their workers at least \$20 an hour under legislation Newsom signed last year to much fanfare. It doesn't apply to restaurants that have on-site bakeries and sell bread as a stand-alone menu item.

That exception puzzled some industry watchers and was never fully explained by Newsom or other supporters of the law.

But Bloomberg News reported it was connected to opposition from Panera Bread franchisee Greg Flynn, whose company owns 24 of the restaurants in California and has donated to Newsom's campaigns.

**IRS launches crackdown
on 125K rich 'non-filers'**

DC WASHINGTON — The IRS plans to go after 125,000 high-income earners who did not file tax returns going back to 2017 — and the agency expects to collect roughly \$100 billion in back taxes.

The IRS will start sending out noncompliance letters to more than 25,000 people who earn more than \$1 million per year and 100,000 people with incomes between \$400,000 and \$1 million who failed to pay their taxes between 2017 and 2021.

The campaign announced is part of the agency's ongoing effort to pursue high wealth tax cheats — mandated in part by funding provided through Democrats' Inflation Reduction Act passed into law in 2022 and a directive from Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen to IRS leadership not to increase audit rates on people making less than \$400,000 a year annually.

— From wire reports

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Clark passes NCAA career scoring mark

Associated Press

Caitlin Clark broke three major college basketball scoring records in less than three weeks.

Finally, the Iowa superstar can take a breath.

"I'm so focused on helping this team win and be so great, it's hard to wrap my head around everything going on," she said. "I'm trying to soak in the moment."

Clark's dizzying regular season ended Sunday with her passing Pete Maravich as the NCAA Division I overall scoring leader during the sixth-ranked Hawkeyes' 93-83 win over No. 2 Ohio State in Iowa City.

Four days earlier, she took down Lynette Woodard's major college women's scoring record, and two weeks before that she broke Kelsey Plum's Division I record.

Maravich's 54-year-old record was considered the holy grail, and many observers will want to put an asterisk on

Clark's accomplishment because Maravich amassed his 3,667 points in 83 games over three seasons at LSU (1967-70) and without having a 3-point line or shot clock.

Clark, who scored 35 points against the Buckeyes and built her reputation on the 3-point shot, will go into the Big Ten Tournament with 3,685 in 130 games.

"I hope it advances women's sports even more," Iowa coach Lisa Bluder said, "but to me, you don't have to break a man's record to be recognized. You don't have to do that. Breaking Lynette's record was significant. So to me, I admire 'Pistol Pete' but at the same time, I just don't want that to be the bar for women's athletics."

Clark, who announced last week that she would enter the 2024 WNBA Draft, said she hopes she's not just remembered for setting records at Iowa.

"I hope people remember me

for the way I played with a smile on my face, my competitive fire," she said. "Sure, they can remember the wins but also the fun me and my teammates had together."

Attention on Clark has increased each season since she arrived at Iowa in 2020, and the spotlight has been especially bright since she led the Hawkeyes to the NCAA championship game last year.

Her name, image and likeness deals with Nike, Gatorade and State Farm, among others, have made her one of the most visible athletes, college or pro, in the nation.

Her pursuit of scoring records, combined with her glitzy playing style, have brought media attention in an amount that would overwhelm most 22-year-olds.

"The biggest part of my maturity and growth has been being able to handle that and balance everything going on around me and the noise around me," she

said, "and obviously it can be hard at times. But I would never change that for the world."

The Hawkeyes are off until the Big Ten Tournament starts later this week. They're the No. 2 seed, meaning they don't play until Friday's quarterfinals in Minneapolis.

She'll go into the postseason chasing conference and national championships, not scoring records.

That she will go into her final games at Iowa atop the NCAA's all-time scoring chart is something she is yet to fully grasp.

"It's really crazy to think about," she said. "If you had told me that before my college career started, I would have laughed in your face and been like, 'No, you're insane,' " she said. "I've always been able to score the ball. People don't understand how many players came before me and were able to score the ball at such a high rate and do it for teams that were really, really good."

UConn claims first outright league title in 25 years

Associated Press

STORRS, Conn. — No. 3 UConn is the defending men's national champion. However, the Huskies had not won even a share of the Big East regular-season title in 18 years.

Donovan Clingan scored 19 points and pulled down 11 rebounds to lead a balanced attack and Connecticut clinched its first outright Big East championship in 25 years Sunday with a 91-61 rout of Seton Hall.

The team considered the achievement big enough to cut down the nets at Gampel Pavilion after the game.

"The hardest thing to do is to be excellent over the course of three, four months in a brutal, hard league," coach Dan Hurley said.

Freshman Stephon Castle tied a career high with 21 points

and Tristen Newton had 17 points and 10 assists for the Huskies (26-3, 16-2 Big East), who finished this season undefeated at home (16-0). Alex Karaban added 13 points.

Dre Davis had 20 points and Kadary Richmond scored 15 to lead Seton Hall (18-11, 11-7), which remains in fourth place in the Big East with the loss, a game ahead of Villanova.

UConn, which lost at Seton Hall by 15 points in December, shot 56% from the floor, outscored the Pirates 52-30 in the paint, outrebounded them 38-26 and scored 24 points off 11 Seton Hall turnovers.

"I feel like our defense really went to the next level," said Clingan, who missed five games after suffering a right foot injury during the loss in New Jersey.

"Coach has really emphasized just trying to work on our defense, just trying to really guard the ball at a high level, rebound the ball at a high level."

Davis had 12 points in the first 10 minutes and 16 points in the first half for Seton Hall. His 3-point play on a layup sparked a 7-0 run that gave the Pirates an 18-14 lead.

But UConn responded with a 15-2 run, highlighted by a steal and one of several highlight-reel dunks from Castle.

A floater in the lane from Karaban put the Huskies up by 15 points at intermission and the Huskies outscored Seton Hall 47-32 in the second half.

Big picture

Seton Hall: The Pirates were picked to finish ninth in the con-

ference's preseason poll and remain on the bubble for an NCAA Tournament berth. Coach Shaheen Holloway did not speak with reporters or make his players available after the game.

UConn: The Huskies previously won all of their regular-season home games back in 2005-06, when they finished 16-0 in the league. That was the same season the program won a share of its most recent Big East regular-season title.

"We feel it's harder to win the Big East than the national championship," Newton said.

Play of the game

A behind-the-back dribble, crossover move and dunk by Castle put the Huskies up 74-51.

"I'm just out there having fun," he said.

Brown, Tatum lead Celtics to historic rout

Associated Press

BOSTON — Jaylen Brown scored 29 points, Jayson Tatum had 27 on his 26th birthday, and the NBA-best Boston Celtics posted their third-largest winning margin in franchise history, drubbing the weary Golden State Warriors 140-88 on Sunday.

Payton Pritchard added 19 points for the Celtics, who set a league record with their third win this season by 50 points or more and extended their season-best winning streak to 11 games. Boston led by a franchise-record 44 points at half-time and pushed it to 51 early in the third quarter before coach Joe Mazzulla went to his reserves the rest of the way.

"It feels great, but, at the same time, it's always within humility," Brown said. "We don't take the game for granted. We didn't come and mess around and that's just how we show our respect to the game; we handle business and take care of it. ... It's a lot of respect for the Golden State Warriors, but we feel like it's our time now."

Stephen Curry didn't play the second half and finished with a

season-low four points for Golden State, his fewest since he had three points in 16 minutes on March 16, 2022 at Boston — a game he departed with a foot injury. Curry was 2 of 13 from the field Sunday and missed all nine of his 3-point attempts, including consecutive airballs in the opening quarter.

"The way that they've been playing, they seem very sure of themselves in their identity and who they are," Curry said. "Give them credit. They came out and whooped us tonight from the jump, and it was one of those perfect storms of a rough (day) on our end and them taking it to us."

Knicks 107, Cavaliers 98: Josh Hart had a triple-double, Donte DiVincenzo scored 28 points and visiting New York regrouped to beat Cleveland after losing All-Star guard Jalen Brunson in the first minute with a left knee injury.

Hart finished with 13 points, 19 rebounds and 10 assists in helping the Knicks cope for one night without Brunson, their latest starter to get hurt.

Thunder 118, Suns 110: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 35

points and visiting Oklahoma City beat Phoenix to take the Western Conference lead, rebounding after blowing a 24-point lead.

Jusuf Nurkic broke the Suns' franchise record with 31 rebounds, the most in an NBA game in 14 years. He also had 14 points — and five of Phoenix's 21 turnovers. The Suns played without star guard Devin Booker after he sprained his right ankle late in a loss to Houston on Saturday night.

Clippers 89, Timberwolves 88: Kawhi Leonard had 32 points and visiting Los Angeles beat Minnesota in a physical and defensive game between two of the top four teams in the Western Conference.

Norman Powell matched a season-high with 24 points, and Paul George added 15 points, but shot just 5 of 16 from the field and was 3 of 11 from 3-point range.

76ers 120, Mavericks 116: Tobias Harris scored 28 points, Tyrese Maxey added 24 and visiting Philadelphia beat Dallas.

Kelly Oubre Jr. had 19 of his 21 points after the four-minute mark of the third quarter to help

the 76ers win consecutive games for the second time in the 14 straight games Joel Embiid has missed. There is no timetable for the reigning MVP's return after surgery on his left knee.

Spurs 117, Pacers 105: Victor Wembanyama had 31 points and 12 rebounds to lead host San Antonio past Indiana.

Wembanyama added six blocks, six assists and a steal while going 3 for 4 on 3-pointers. Malaki Branham had 18 points, and Devin Vassell and Keldon Johnson each had 17.

Raptors 111, Hornets 106: Immanuel Quickley scored 22 points and matched his season high with 11 assists, RJ Barrett had 23 points and host Toronto beat Charlotte.

Gary Trent Jr. added 17 points and Ochai Agbaji had 13 points and a career-high nine rebounds as the Raptors overcame the absence of All-Star Scottie Barnes after he broke his left middle finger Friday night.

Magic 113, Pistons 91: Paolo Banchero scored 29 points for a second straight game and host Orlando beat Detroit for a four-game season sweep.

Larson wins 2nd straight NASCAR race in Las Vegas

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — There's a tradition at Hendrick Motorsports to ring the winning bell throughout the North Carolina shop after every NASCAR victory.

As motivation to have the best year of his career, Kyle Larson's team decided to bring a bell on the road to avoid having to wait to return to Charlotte to celebrate every achievement he plans for this season.

The bell got its first ring Sunday when Larson won his second consecutive race at Las Vegas Motor Speedway to keep Chevrolet undefeated and give Rick Hendrick his second victory in the first three NASCAR Cup Series races of the season.

Hendrick Motorsports is celebrating its 40th anniversary this season and opened the year with William Byron winning the Daytona 500.

"That bell will travel with us every week and we'll be ringing it loud and proud," Larson said.

Larson won for the third time in his career at Las Vegas, where in 2021 he got his first win driving for Hendrick following a nearly yearlong suspension in 2020. Larson also won in the No. 5 Chevy at Las Vegas last October in the playoffs.

Larson held off Tyler Reddick for his 24th career Cup victory. In a Toyota for 23XI Racing, Reddick chased Larson for the final few laps but could never find enough room to make a move for the pass. Larson's margin of victory was 0.441 seconds over Reddick.

"I knew Tyler was going to be the guy to beat from the first stage. He was really fast there," Larson said. "Cool to get a win here at Vegas again. Back-to-back, swept all the

stages again. Can't ask for more than that."

Reddick was extremely frustrated after finishing second and believed Larson as the leader controlled the race because of the rules of NASCAR's new car.

"Kyle did a really good job there taking away pretty much every option I had there to close the gap," Reddick said. "Second sucks, that is for sure. You have to run up front all day long, and when asked about what we need to do to get better, that's the very thing, and we didn't do it. We were pretty evenly matched, so I don't know if there was anything that I really could've done to get around him."

"He would have had to make a big mistake or had some traffic kind of knock his wind around. It's a solid effort for our team, that's how we need to run, but I don't like running second."

Wild win behind Kaprizov's hat trick

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Kirill Kaprizov posted his second hat trick in less than two weeks, scoring the go-ahead goal with 3:59 left to lift the Minnesota Wild past the San Jose Sharks 4-3 on Sunday.

Frederick Gaudreau also scored for the first time in 24 games for the Wild, who outshot the Sharks 32-15 and leaned on their star left wing Kaprizov to stop a three-game losing streak.

"He's got all the skills. He's fast. He's strong. But what makes him one of the best in the world is that he competes every single day," Gaudreau said.

All three Sharks goals against Filip Gustavsson, who finished with 12 saves, were unassisted after sloppy turnovers. Former Wild centers Mikael Granlund (power play) and Nico Sturm (short-handed) each scored to give the Sharks a 2-0 lead in the second period. Anthony Duclair made it 3-2 for San Jose off a breakaway just 23 seconds into the third period.

Kaprizov then showed why he was by far the best player on the ice all night, with the equalizer about two minutes later and the

winner after that on a wrist shot that eluded Sharks goalie Kaapo Kahkonen.

"They've got Kaprizov, and we don't. That really was the difference," Sharks coach David Quinn said. "He scores goals a lot of guys can't score in this league."

Canucks 2, Ducks 1: Conor Garland scored the go-ahead goal in the second period and visiting Vancouver snapped a two-game skid.

Nils Hoglander also scored for the Canucks, and Casey DeSmith had 18 saves to pick up his first win since Jan. 9. Vancouver went back on top of the Western Conference with 85 points with its second win in eight games.

Alex Killorn scored for Anaheim and Lukas Dostal stopped 29 shots, as the Ducks were looking for their first three-game winning streak since early November.

Jets 5, Sabres 2: Morgan Barron scored the tiebreaking goal on a partial breakaway with 6:05 remaining and visiting Winnipeg got its ninth win in 11 games.

Vladislav Namestnikov and

Sean Monahan sealed the win with empty-net goals over the final 81 seconds, and the Jets rallied from a third-period deficit for the second consecutive night.

Josh Morrissey had a goal and an assist, and Nino Niederreiter also scored in helping Winnipeg move into a tie with idle Dallas atop the Central Division standings. Laurent Brossoit stopped 17 shots to improve to 10-4-2.

Coyotes 5, Capitals 2: Dylan Guenther had a goal and two assists, Jason Zucker and Nick Schmaltz each had a goal and an assist, and visiting Arizona dealt Washington a significant defeat in the playoff race.

Logan Cooley scored on a breakaway, Michael Kesselring also had a goal, and Karel Vejmelka made 24 saves for the Coyotes, who have won two in a row since ending a 14-game losing streak.

After wasting a valuable opportunity against one of the NHL's bottom five teams, the Capitals sit six points back of the Flyers for third place in the Metropolitan Division, and seven behind Tampa Bay and Detroit for one of the two Eastern Con-

ference wild cards.

Kings 5, Devils 1: Phillip Danault scored three goals for his second career hat trick, Kevin Fiala had a goal and two assists, and host Los Angeles beat New Jersey.

Alex Laferriere also scored, Cam Talbot made 30 saves and the Kings won for the eighth time in 12 games under interim coach Jim Hiller.

Nico Daws was replaced in the second period after giving up four goals on 13 shots for the Devils, who have lost five of seven. Timo Meier scored and Aki-Kira Schmid made eight saves in relief.

Oilers 6, Penguins 1: Zach Hyman scored two goals and Leon Draisaitl had three assists as host Edmonton beat Pittsburgh for its fourth straight win.

Ryan McLeod and Connor McDavid each had a goal and an assist, and Corey Perry and Cody Ceci also scored for the Oilers, who are 31-8-1 in their last 40 games. Calvin Pickard stopped 22 shots.

Evgeni Malkin scored for the Penguins in their third straight loss. Alex Nedeljkovic finished with 31 saves.

Wheeler, Phillies reach \$126 million, 3-year extension

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Zack Wheeler and the Philadelphia Phillies agreed Monday on a \$126 million, three-year contract for 2025-27, the fourth-highest average salary in baseball history at \$42 million.

The Phillies' ace gets \$23.5 million this year in the final season of a \$118 million, five-year contract, one of the best free-agent contracts in Phillies history.

"I've really just enjoyed being here in Philly," the 33-year-old right-hander said. "The fans are the best. Playing in Citizens Bank (Park) in October, there's

nothing like it."

Wheeler's average salary trails only Los Angeles Dodgers two-way star Shohei Ohtani (\$70 million), Texas pitcher Max Scherzer (\$43.33 million) and Houston pitcher Justin Verlander (\$43.33 million), the latter two who signed their deals with the New York Mets.

"What it tells us is we think Zack is as good as anybody in baseball right now," team president Dave Dombrowski said. "For us right now, when we look over the last handful of years, we think Zack Wheeler is as fine a pitcher in the game of baseball."

Wheeler has led the NL in strikeouts and innings during his four seasons after missing time with injuries while with the Mets from 2013-19. He also leads all pitchers in wins above replacement (WAR) while with the Phillies at 19.3, per FanGraphs.

After he missed the 2015 and 2016 seasons following Tommy John surgery, Wheeler has made 90 starts the last three seasons.

An NL Cy Young Award runner-up in 2021, Wheeler also won a Gold Glove last season.

The new deal for Wheeler adds yearly salaries of \$42 mil-

lion.

Wheeler credited the training staff for keeping him healthy, making him a rarity among modern pitchers who is better in his 30s than his 20s. Wheeler said he never wanted a massive long-term deal and didn't look for the seven or eight-year deals most top free agents seek these days — and the righty didn't want lingering contract negotiations hanging over his head this season.

"I think it works out for me, I think it works out for the team," Wheeler said. "I'd rather have it now than go to free agency and see what happens."