

Houthi hit on ship kills 2 in first deaths

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A missile attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels on a commercial ship in the Gulf of Aden killed two of its crew members and forced survivors to abandon the vessel on Wednesday, authorities said, the first fatal strike in a campaign of assaults by the group over Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The attack on the Barbados-flagged bulk carrier True Confidence further escalates the conflict on a crucial maritime route linking Asia and the Middle East to Europe that has disrupted global shipping.

The Iranian-backed Houthis have launched attacks since November, and the United States began an airstrike campaign in

January that so far hasn't halted the rebels' attacks.

Meanwhile, Iran announced Wednesday that it would confiscate a \$50 million cargo of Kuwaiti crude oil for American energy firm Chevron Corp. aboard a tanker it seized nearly a year earlier.

It marks the latest twist in a yearslong shadow war playing out in the Middle East's waterways even before the Houthi attacks began.

The attack Wednesday on the True Confidence came after it had been hailed over radio by individuals claiming to be the Yemeni military, officials said. The Houthis have been hailing ships over the radio in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden since launching their attacks, with

analysts suspecting the rebels want to seize the vessels.

Two U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity as they didn't have authorization to speak publicly, said the anti-ship ballistic missile attack killed two of the crew members on board and wounded six others.

The full extent of the damage to the Liberian-owned ship remained unclear, but the crew abandoned the ship and deployed lifeboats.

A U.S. warship and the Indian navy were on the scene, trying to assist in rescue efforts.

Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree, a Houthi military spokesman, claimed the attack in a prerecorded message, saying its missile fire set the vessel ablaze. He

said the rebels' attacks would only stop when the "siege on the Palestinian people in Gaza is lifted."

The rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea and surrounding waters over the Israel-Hamas war, but up to Wednesday hadn't killed any crew members. The vessels have included at least one with cargo bound for Iran, the Houthis' main benefactor, and an aid ship later bound for Houthi-controlled territory.

It was unclear why the Houthis targeted the True Confidence. However, it had previously been owned by Oaktree Capital Management, a Los Angeles-based fund that finances vessels on installments. Oaktree declined to comment.

Marine unit, USS Bataan make way out of Mediterranean

By ALISON BATH

Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The Bataan Amphibious Ready Group left the Mediterranean Sea this week after a nearly eight-month deployment that began with Iranian seizures of commercial ships and continued amid the Middle East's expanding upheaval.

The amphibious assault ship USS Bataan, dock landing ship USS Carter Hall, amphibious transport dock ship USS Mesa Verde and embarked 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit transited the Strait of Gibraltar on Wednesday, Amphibious Squadron 8 announced in a statement the same day.

In the coming weeks, the ships will return to Norfolk, Va., according to the statement. The 26th MEU is based at Camp Le

jeune in North Carolina. The Bataan Amphibious Ready Group departed from Norfolk on July 10.

It was unclear whether the Navy intended to send another similar group or ship into the Mediterranean, which has had a nearly continuous presence of an aircraft carrier or amphibious ready group since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The Bataan ARG had been in the region since December, helping to maintain a Navy presence in the Eastern Mediterranean as part of the U.S. strategy to keep the Israel-Hamas war from broadening.

In January, the USS Gerald R. Ford returned to Norfolk after an eight-month deployment to the U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet area

of operations, leaving the Bataan ARG on duty.

"Our presence in the eastern Mediterranean was exactly what our nation needed: an integrated Navy and Marine Corps force ready to respond when called upon," Capt. Martin Robertson, commodore of Amphibious Squadron 8, said in the statement.

While in the Mediterranean, the Bataan ARG participated in several exercises and made multiple port calls, including at least four to Naval Support Activity Souda Bay on the Greek island of Crete.

In August, Bataan and Carter Hall, along with about 3,000 sailors and Marines, arrived in the Middle East as part of a Defense Department push to counter Iranian aggression in the Persian Gulf.

The assignment to the Middle East was prompted by Iran's continued harassment of commercial ships and attempted seizure of two oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman in July. In one of those instances, Iranian naval forces fired at the tanker.

Meanwhile, Mesa Verde, along with the embarked 26th MEU Bravo Command, operated in the NAVEUR-6th Fleet area of responsibility, taking part in exercises and other operations in the Baltic Sea.

That included a September port call in Riga, Latvia, and participation in a German-led naval exercise with other NATO nations and European Union countries the same month.

The three ships rejoined in December for duty in the Mediterranean.

Victim of Black Hawk crash sues for \$9.5M

Associated Press

BOSTON — Jeff Smith was whizzing along on a snowmobile one evening a few years back when something dark appeared in front of him. He hit his brakes but he couldn't avoid clipping the rear tail of a Black Hawk helicopter parked on the trail.

The March 2019 crash almost cost Smith his life and is now the subject of a federal lawsuit by the Massachusetts lawyer. He is demanding \$9.5 million in damages from the government, money he has said is needed to cover his medical expenses and lost wages, as well as hold the military responsible for the crash.

"The last five years, there's been surgery, recovery, surgery, recovery," said Smith, who lost the use of his left arm, suffered respiratory issues since the crash and hasn't been able to work full time. "Honestly, right now, it feels like I'm in a [worse] place than when I first had the surgeries in 2019."

A U.S. District Court judge in Springfield is expected to rule on the lawsuit later this year.

Smith's lawyers in the years-long court case have argued that the crew of the Black Hawk helicopter that flew down from New York's Fort Drum for night training was negligent for parking a camouflaged 64-foot aircraft on a rarely used airfield also used by snowmobilers. Smith also sued the owner of Albert Farms airfield in Worthington, Mass. — accusing them of both giving permission to snowmobilers to use the trail and the Black Hawk crew to land in the same area. He settled with the farm owner for an undisclosed sum.

Smith, 48, has argued that the crew didn't do enough to protect him, including failing to warn

snowmobilers of the helicopter's presence on the trail, leaving the 14,500-pound aircraft unattended for a brief time and failing to illuminate it. The helicopter landed on an air strip approved by the Federal Aviation Administration and the crew members testified that trainings are often conducted in similar locations. But Smith, who said he had snowmobiled on the trail more than 100 times, said the last time an aircraft used it was decades ago — and never a military aircraft.

"Our argument from the beginning has been that it's incompatible to have a helicopter land on an active snowmobile trail," Smith's attorney, Douglas Desjardins, said.

"The Army internal investigation showed pretty clearly that the crew knew that they were landing right before or right after on an active snowmobile trail," he said. "What bad could happen there? You know, helicopter on a snowmobile trailer where folks go fast."

The government has attempted to dismiss the case several times, arguing that it can't be sued under the Federal Tort Claims Act since this involves a policy decision.

They also argued that the court lacked jurisdiction and that the crew wasn't told they were landing on a snowmobile trail. They also pushed back on claims they could have prevented the accident, saying there was nothing in their policies that required illuminating the helicopter.

They also attempted to cast blame on Smith for the accident, claiming he was driving his sled more than 65 mph at the time the crash.

Marine Commandant Smith returns to full duty after heart attack

By MATTHEW ADAMS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Gen. Eric Smith, commandant of the Marine Corps, returned to full duty Tuesday after suffering a heart attack in October, the service announced.

"Gen. Smith and his family appreciate the full support of Congress, the leadership at the Department of Defense, Department of the Navy, the Joint Force and all who extended them their well wishes during his recovery," the Marine Corps said in a statement.

Smith suffered cardiac arrest Oct. 29 near his home at the Marine Barracks in Washington and was hospitalized for 17 days. He underwent successful surgery Jan. 8 to repair an aortic valve in his heart, which was the cause of his heart attack. The service said at the time of Smith's surgery that he was in

good condition and would return to full duty following rehabilitation.

The assistant commandant, Gen. Christopher Mahoney, has been serving as the acting commander of the Marine Corps since Smith's hospitalization.

At the time of his heart attack, Smith had been performing the duties of commandant and assistant commandant because Mahoney's nomination was held up by Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala.

Tuberville had blocked hundreds of military promotions and nominations for months due to his opposition to Pentagon policy paying for troops' travel for abortions and other reproductive care. Under pressure from lawmakers, Tuberville ended his holds in December, allowing the Senate to confirm more than 435 nominations.

Bases look to phase out single-use plastic bags

By KELLY AGEE

Stars and Stripes

U.S. military commissaries will begin phasing out plastic bags at checkout lanes starting March 15 with two stores in Guam, according to the Defense Commissary Agency.

DeCA intends to do away with single-use bags first in locations where state or local bans are already in place, including Hawaii and California, and then move to discontinue their use worldwide, agency spokesman Keith Desbois said Tuesday.

Andersen Air Force Base and Naval Base Guam will be the

first of the 236 commissaries to discontinue their use.

Removing plastic bags from Guam brings DeCA into compliance with a local law that came into effect Jan. 1, 2021. The Guam Environmental Protection Agency enforces the ban on single-use plastic bags with a \$500 fine for the first offense; subsequent violations can cost up to \$10,000.

"The Defense Commissary Agency is committed to complying with applicable local and territorial laws restricting the use of plastic and paper single-use bags," Desbois wrote.

Biden, Trump are poised for a rematch

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and his predecessor, Donald Trump, romped through more than a dozen states on Super Tuesday, all but cementing a November rematch and pushing the former president's last major rival, Nikki Haley, out of the Republican race.

Their victories from coast to coast, including the delegate-rich states of California and Texas, left little doubt about the trajectory of the race. Haley won Vermont, denying Trump a full sweep, but the former president carried other states that might have been favorable to her such as Virginia, Massachusetts and Maine, which have large swaths of moderate voters like those who have backed her in previous primaries.

Haley, who suspended her presidential campaign on Wednesday, didn't endorse the former president in a speech in Charleston, S.C. Instead, she challenged him to win the support of the moderate Republi-

cans and independent voters who supported her.

"It is now up to Donald Trump to earn the votes of those in our party and beyond it who did not support him. And I hope he does that," she said.

The only contest Biden lost Tuesday was the Democratic caucus in American Samoa, a tiny U.S. territory in the South Pacific Ocean. Biden was defeated by previously unknown candidate Jason Palmer, 51 votes to 40.

Not enough states will have voted until later this month for Trump or Biden to formally become their parties' presumptive nominees. But the primary's biggest day made their rematch a near-certainty. Both the 81-year-old Biden and the 77-year-old Trump continue to dominate their parties despite facing questions about age and neither having broad popularity across the general electorate.

Haley watched the election results in private. Her campaign said in a statement that the results reflected there were many

Republicans "who are expressing deep concerns about Donald Trump."

"Unity is not achieved by simply claiming 'We're united,'" spokesperson Olivia Perez-Cubas said.

Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate, meanwhile, was packed for a victory party. Among those attending were staff and supporters, including the rapper Forgiano Blow and former North Carolina Rep. Madison Cawthorn. The crowd erupted as Fox News, playing on screens around the ballroom, announced that the former president had won North Carolina's GOP primary.

"They call it Super Tuesday for a reason," Trump told a raucous crowd.

He went on to attack Biden over the U.S.-Mexico border and the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. After beginning the night with victories in Virginia and North Carolina, he wrapped Super Tuesday by winning contests in Alaska and Utah.

Biden didn't give a speech but

instead issued a statement warning that Tuesday's results had left Americans with a clear choice and touting his own accomplishments after beating Trump.

"If Donald Trump returns to the White House, all of this progress is at risk," Biden said. "He is driven by grievance and grift, focused on his own revenge and retribution, not the American people."

While much of the focus was on the presidential race, there were also important down-ballot contests.

The governor's race took shape in North Carolina, where Republican Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson and Democratic Attorney General Josh Stein will face off in a state that both parties are fiercely contesting ahead of November.

In California, Democratic Rep. Adam Schiff and Republican Steve Garvey, a former Los Angeles Dodgers baseball player, advanced to the general election race to fill the Senate seat long held by Dianne Feinstein.

Dark horse Dem beats Biden in American Samoa caucus

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden was sweeping every Democratic contest on Super Tuesday — except for American Samoa.

He fell short there to a previously unknown candidate named Jason Palmer. Out of 91 ballots cast in the territory's caucus, Palmer won 51 and Biden won 40, according to the local party.

"I found out that I had won because my phone started blowing up with friends and campaign staffers texting me," Palmer said in an interview late Tuesday.

Palmer, 52, said he never visited the territory before the caucus.

"I have been campaigning remotely, doing Zoom town halls, talking to people, listening to them about their concerns and

what matters to them," he said.

The outcome will hardly derail Biden's march toward his party's nomination. Only six delegates were at stake in the U.S. territory, a tiny collection of islands in the South Pacific with fewer than 50,000 residents. Palmer and Biden each earned three delegates from the race.

On the day before the caucus, Palmer posted on X that "Washington D.C. is long overdue for a president who will be an advocate for American Samoa."

Palmer is a Baltimore resident who has worked for various businesses and nonprofits, often on issues involving technology and education. He said voters want "someone who is more of the 21st century than Joe Biden" to serve as president.

Retired colonel pleads not guilty to sharing classified info online

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — A former Air Force employee and retired Army lieutenant colonel pleaded not guilty Tuesday to charges that he shared classified information about Russia's war with Ukraine on a foreign dating site.

David Franklin Slater was in court in Omaha on Tuesday afternoon — three days after the 63-year-old was arrested. Slater briefly answered Magistrate Judge Michael Nelson's questions during the initial hearing.

Nelson ordered Slater to hire his own attorney after reviewing financial information including details of several rental homes Slater owns in Nebraska along with a property in Germany.

The indictment against Slater gives examples of the messages

he was responding to in early 2022 from an unindicted co-conspirator who claimed to be a woman living in Ukraine.

Some of the inquiries investigators found in emails and on the online messaging platform of the dating site were: "Dear, what is shown on the screens in the special room?? It is very interesting." Another one was: "Dave, I hope tomorrow NATO will prepare a very unpleasant 'surprise' for Putin! Will you tell me?"

The indictment says that Slater shared classified information between February and April of 2022 while attending briefings about the war at the U.S. Strategic Command at Offutt Air Force Base. He worked there from August 2021 to April 2022 after retiring from the Army at the end of 2020.

Court seeks arrest of 2 Russian officers

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — The International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants Tuesday for two high-ranking Russian military officers on charges linked to attacks on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine that judges said happened “pursuant to a state policy.”

It's only the second time the global court has publicly announced arrest warrants linked to Russia's war in Ukraine. In March 2023, the court issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin for war crimes, accusing him of personal responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine.

On Tuesday, the court an-

nounced warrants for Russian Lt. Gen. Sergei Ivanovich Kobylash, who was commander of the Long-Range Aviation of the Aerospace Force at the times of the alleged crimes. Also wanted is Russian Navy Adm. Viktor Nikolayevich Sokolov, who was the commander of the Black Sea Fleet.

They are wanted for the war crime of directing attacks at civilian objects, causing excessive incidental harm to civilians or damage to civilian objects, and the crime against humanity of inhumane acts.

“I have repeatedly emphasized that those responsible for actions that impact innocent civilians or protected objects must know that this conduct is

bound by a set of rules reflected in international humanitarian law,” ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan said in a statement. “All wars have rules. Those rules bind all without exception.”

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the warrants should serve as a warning to other Russian top brass.

“Every Russian commander who orders strikes against Ukrainian civilians and critical infrastructure must know that justice will be served. Every perpetrator of such crimes must know that they will be held accountable,” Zelenskyy wrote on X.

Ukrainian Prosecutor General Andriy Kostin welcomed the warrants, saying they were supported by evidence provided by

Ukrainian agencies. He called them “another milestone in ensuring justice for all victims and survivors of this war.”

Kostin also applauded the crime against humanity charge, the first by the ICC in its Ukraine investigation. He said the crimes were “committed on a massive scale” far from the front lines and with no military justification.

■ The sound of a large explosion reverberated around the Ukrainian port of Odesa as Zelenskyy and Greece's prime minister ended a tour of the war-ravaged southern city Wednesday. The Greek prime minister said the delegations were getting into their vehicles when they heard the blast.

Asian leaders urge talks on South China Sea issues

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Australia's prime minister expressed concerns Wednesday over “unsafe and destabilizing behavior” in the South China Sea, citing the collision between Chinese and Philippine ships the previous day.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's remarks came as his country wrapped up a three-day summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations that failed to explicitly call China out over a series of incidents in the disputed waters.

Instead, ASEAN leaders urged for disputes to be resolved through dialogue rather than threats, a day after Chinese

and Philippine coast guard vessels collided near a disputed shoal in the South China Sea and four Filipino crew members were injured in the confrontations.

Chinese and Philippines officials traded blame for the incident.

The disputed area has been site of several tense skirmishes between Chinese and Philippine coast guard ships last year.

Albanese, who co-chaired the summit with Laos Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone, said Tuesday's clash was concerning for Australia.

“It is dangerous and it creates risks of miscalculation, which can then lead to escalation,” he

said.

Australia had backed the Philippines' push to have the ASEAN declaration adopted at the end of summit cite a 2016 arbitration ruling in The Hague, Netherlands, that invalidated Beijing's vast territorial claims in the South China Sea, which conflict with the claims of several ASEAN states. China did not accept the ruling.

The Melbourne Declaration, released late Wednesday, did not mention the 2016 ruling. The summit was held in the Australian city to mark 50 years since Australia became the first external ASEAN partner.

The declaration called for peaceful resolution of disputes

through legal and diplomatic processes “without resorting to the threat or use of force” in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

“We encourage all countries to avoid any unilateral actions that endanger peace, security and stability in the region,” it said.

Albanese said compromises had to be made to find words that ASEAN leaders at the summit could agree on.

“There is a general recognition that we need to make sure that activity in the South China Sea alleviates any tension and doesn't add to it,” Albanese said.

S. Korea president won't tolerate doctor's walkouts

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea's president vowed Wednesday not to tolerate the prolonged walkouts by thousands of junior doctors, calling them “an illegal collective action” that

threatens public health and shakes the country's governing systems.

President Yoon Suk Yeol's government was in the process of suspending the licenses of about 9,000 medical interns and resi-

dents over their joint walkouts that have impacted hospitals' capacity to provide care.

The doctors-in-training have been on strike for more than two weeks to protest a government push to admit thousands more

new students to medical schools in coming years.

Yoon's government had repeatedly urged the striking doctors to return to work but most of the strikers missed a government-set Feb. 29 deadline for their return.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Macy's takeover offer up to \$6.6B after rejection

NY NEW YORK — Arkhouse Management and Brigade Capital Management are upping their offer to acquire Macy's in a deal now valued at \$6.6 billion.

The investment firms announced Sunday that they had submitted an all-cash proposal of \$24 for each of the remaining shares in Macy's they don't already own — up from a earlier offer of \$21 per share.

Macy's rejected the previous deal, which was valued at \$5.8 billion, in January. At the time, the retailer said that its board reviewed the investment firms' proposal and not only had concerns about the financing plan, but also felt there was a "lack of compelling value."

In a joint-statement Sunday, Arkhouse managing partners Gavriel Kahane and Jonathon Blackwell said that they "remain frustrated by the delay tactics" from Macy's board and its "continued refusal to engage" — but were still committed to completing the transaction.

Ohio to dole out opioid settlement money

OH COLUMBUS — Ohio is ready to begin doling out millions of dollars in opioid settlement money to community and government organizations, an influx eagerly anticipated since the first sums were secured in 2021.

The OneOhio Recovery Foundation, who has been tasked with distributing over \$860 million of settlements reached with drugmakers and pharmaceutical companies for

their roles in the national opioid crisis, planned to release its formal request for proposals this week.

Drugmakers, wholesalers, pharmacies and other companies have agreed to settlements over the toll of opioids that are to pay state, local and Native American tribal governments more than \$50 billion. Under the agreements, most of the money is to be used to address the overdose epidemic.

Over-the-counter birth control pill heads to stores

DC WASHINGTON — The first over-the-counter birth control pill will be available in U.S. stores later this month, allowing American women and teens to purchase contraceptive medication as easily as they buy aspirin.

Manufacturer Perrigo said Monday it has begun shipping the medication, Opill, to major retailers and pharmacies. A one-month supply will cost about \$20 and a three-month supply will cost around \$50, according to the company's suggested retail price. It will also be sold online.

The launch has been closely watched since July, when the Food and Drug Administration said the once-a-day Opill could be sold without a prescription. Ireland-based Perrigo noted there will be no age restrictions on sales, similar to other over-the-counter medications.

Opill is an older class of contraceptive, sometimes called minipills, that contain a single synthetic hormone, progestin, and generally carry fewer side effects than more popular combination estrogen and progestin pills.

Jupiter's moon Europa may have little oxygen

FL CAPE CANAVERAL — New research suggests there's less oxygen on the icy surface of Jupiter's moon Europa than thought — and that could affect what if any life might be lurking in the moon's underground ocean.

Even with little or no oxygen, microbes might still be bustling around in the ocean believed to exist miles beneath Europa's frozen crust. As for what else, "who knows," said NASA scientist Kevin Hand, who was not involved in the study published Monday in *Nature Astronomy*.

More work is needed to confirm these findings, which are contrary to earlier telescope observations of condensed oxygen in Europa's ice, indicating a higher oxygen concentration, Hand said.

The new study is based on data collected by NASA's Juno spacecraft during a particularly close flyby of Europa in 2022 — a distance of just 219 miles.

Mayor calls LGBTQ+ leaders' arrest 'concerning'

PA PHILADELPHIA — The arrest of two of Philadelphia's LGBTQ+ leaders by a state trooper during a fraught highway traffic stop is "very concerning," the city's mayor said after a video showing some of what happened circulated on social media.

Celena Morrison leads the city's Office of LGBT Affairs and is a top aide to Mayor Chelle Parker. Morrison's husband, Darius McLean, runs a community center. Both are Black, while the Pennsylvania state trooper appears to be

white.

Both Morrison, 51, and McLean, 35, were detained on obstruction and resisting arrest charges after the 9 a.m. traffic stop.

However, District Attorney Larry Krasner did not immediately file the charges while he investigates.

In the cellphone video posted online, the trooper says he stopped Morrison for tailgating and not having lights on. McLean, chief operating officer of the William Way LGBT Community Center, apparently pulled over in a second vehicle and was arrested after allegedly arguing with the officer.

Small plane crashes on interstate median; 5 killed

TN NASHVILLE — A single-engine plane crashed near a highway in Nashville, Tenn., just a few miles short of the airport it had tried to reach for an emergency landing, killing five people aboard, authorities said.

The pilot made an emergency call to John C. Tune Airport at about 7:40 p.m. Monday, reported engine trouble and was given clearance to make an emergency landing, Metro Nashville Police Department spokesman Don Aaron said. A short time later the pilot radioed that the aircraft would not reach the airport, he said.

The plane burst into flames when it crashed in a grassy median just off Interstate 40 and behind a Costco on the city's westside. The crash scene was about 3 miles south of the general aviation airport.

"It appears that everyone on board perished," Aaron said.

— From wire reports

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Wade, Cavs rally to end Celtics' win streak

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — With every one of Dean Wade's shots that splashed through the net, the Cavaliers got closer to the Celtics and his confidence grew.

"The rim looked like a swimming pool," he said.

Wade made five 3-pointers and scored 20 points in the fourth quarter, outscoring the Celtics by himself, and Cleveland won a replay review in the final second to stun Boston 105-104 on Tuesday night, ending the NBA's longest winning streak this season at 11 games.

With NFL star Travis Kelce and his recently retired brother Jason urging on Cleveland's crowd from courtside seats, the Cavs overcame a 22-point deficit in the final period, the biggest fourth-quarter comeback in franchise history.

"Honestly, when the Kelce brothers started hyping up the crowd, we knew we could do it," Cavs center Jarrett Allen said.

Cleveland stormed back without All-Star Donovan Mitchell, who missed the game with a knee injury, as well as forward Evan Mobley, who went out with a sprained ankle in the third quarter.

Wade, who finished with a career-high 23 points, came to the rescue with his barrage of 3s in the fourth and a putback dunk with 19.1 seconds left that put the Cavs ahead 105-104.

Suns 117, Nuggets 107 (OT): Kevin Durant scored 35 points, including eight in overtime, and short-handed Phoenix rebounded to beat host Denver after blowing a 22-point lead in the second half.

After managing just 12 points in the fourth quarter, the Suns scored 15 in OT, led by Durant and Bradley Beal, who had five of his 16 in the extra period.

Grayson Allen hit eight 3-pointers and scored 28 points to help the Suns snap a two-game slide.

Pacers 137, Mavericks 120: Myles Turner scored 20 points, Tyrese Haliburton had 19 points and 11 assists, and visiting Indiana beat Dallas despite Luka Dončić's fourth consecutive game with a 30-point triple-double.

Dončić had 39 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds. Russell Westbrook is the lone player in NBA history with five straight 30-point triple-doubles, and Oscar Robertson is the only other

player with four.

Nine players scored in double figures for the Pacers, including five reserves as Indiana's bench outscored Dallas' 69-32.

Nets 112, 76ers 107: Dennis Schroder and Dorian Finney-Smith each scored 20 points and host Brooklyn beat Philadelphia.

Lonnie Walker IV added 19 points and Nic Claxton had 17 points and 10 rebounds for the Nets, who bounced back quickly after a poor performance Monday in a 106-102 home loss to Memphis. They took advantage of a short-handed Philadelphia team that was missing both its All-Stars in Tyrese Maxey and Joel Embiid. Maxey was scratched early Tuesday because of a concussion.

Pelicans 139, Raptors 98: Trey Murphy III scored a season-high 34 points, Jonas Valanciunas had 10 points and 10 rebounds against his former team, and visiting New Orleans beat short-handed Toronto.

Murphy matched a career best by making 10 of 14 3-point attempts as the Pelicans handed the Raptors their worst defeat of the season, eclipsing a 38-point drubbing they gave Toronto in

New Orleans last month.

Rockets 114, Spurs 101: Alperen Sengun had a career-high 45 points and a season-best 16 rebounds as host Houston beat San Antonio.

Sengun, who is in his third NBA season, also set a career mark with five steals and had three assists and a block. Jalen Green added 23 points and 10 assists for the Rockets, and Fred VanVleet had 21 points.

Heat 118, Pistons 110: Jimmy Butler scored 15 of his 26 points in the fourth quarter, Bam Adebayo and Duncan Robinson each scored 18 and host Miami beat Detroit.

Terry Rozier scored 17 points, Caleb Martin had 15 points and Jaime Jaquez Jr. scored 11 for the Heat, who improved to 11-3 in their last 14 games.

Hawks 116, Knicks 100: Jalen Johnson scored 26 points and visiting Atlanta beat New York, which played without the injured Jalen Brunson.

Magic 101, Hornets 89: Paolo Banchero had 22 points, Cole Anthony scored 12 of his 14 points in the second half and surging Orlando beat host Charlotte for its ninth win in 11 games.

Better defense under Rivers has had Bucks surging

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Doc Rivers left broadcasting behind when he took over as the Milwaukee Bucks' coach at midseason, but he remains as talkative as ever.

That chattiness has helped the Bucks dramatically improve their defense since his arrival in late January. Going into Wednesday, Milwaukee had won six straight games and owned the NBA's best defensive rating since the All-Star break.

"It's a lot of talking with Doc," All-Star guard Damian Lillard said Monday night after the Bucks rallied for a 113-106 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers without injured two-time MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo. "Sometimes we get on the court and we're supposed to be starting practice, and Doc will talk for 15 minutes straight."

Lillard detailed the way Rivers will tell players about their responsibilities in certain situations while explaining how their roles fit into the overall defensive scheme.

"Sometimes you need what we want to happen to make sense verbally," Lillard said. "Then we walk through it, and then you get an understanding of it. And that's how you build that faith and that belief, and you get on the same page. I think he's created an environment where everybody understands. Everything is clear. We walk through it 10, 15 times in practice, and then we're able to go out there and execute it because of how it's being delivered to us."

Milwaukee staggered into the All-Star break, going 3-7 in its first 10 games under Rivers, who left his job at ESPN to take over the Bucks after the firing of Adrian Griffin.

But the Bucks haven't lost since the break and have moved into second place in the Eastern Conference, behind the Boston Celtics.

Although the Bucks were 30-13 when Griffin was dismissed, their struggles on defense cast doubt on their viability as a title contender. Under Griffin, the Bucks ranked 21st in the league in defensive rating, which measures points allowed per 100 possessions.

They've come a long way over the last few weeks.

Their six-game winning streak included four straight games in which they allowed fewer than 100 points, the first such streak for the Bucks since February 2018. Milwaukee has allowed below 100 points in six of its last 10 games after doing that just once in its first 52 contests.

Edey helps rally No. 3 Purdue at Illinois

Associated Press

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — Zach Edey had 28 points and eight rebounds as No. 3 Purdue rallied in the second half to beat No. 12 Illinois 77-71 on Tuesday night, becoming the first team in 17 years to win consecutive outright Big Ten regular-season championships.

Fletcher Loyer added 16 points for the Boilermakers (27-3, 16-3), who had already clinched at least a share of their second straight conference title with Saturday night's victory over Michigan State.

The previous Big Ten team to win back-to-back outright regular-season crowns was Ohio State in 2006 and 2007.

Braden Smith had 13 points and six assists for Purdue, which improved to 7-0 against ranked opponents this season. Mason Gillis scored 10 off the bench.

Loyer hit a 3-pointer with 3:08 left that put Purdue ahead for good, 67-66. That started a personal seven-point run that gave the Boilermakers a 71-66 lead

with 1:27 to go.

Purdue outscored Illinois 43-31 in the second half and shot 8-for-10 on 3s.

No. 7 North Carolina 84, Notre Dame 51: Armando Bacot played in his record 162nd ACC game and the host Tar Heels claimed at least a share of the regular-season conference title.

Bacot, a fifth-year player who holds North Carolina's record for career rebounds and double-doubles, finished with 14 points and five rebounds.

RJ Davis added 22 points and six assists for the Tar Heels (24-6, 16-3).

No. 13 Auburn 101, Missouri 74: Johni Broome had 17 points and eight rebounds to lead five players in double figures in visiting Auburn's win over last-place Missouri.

Chad Baker-Mazara added 15 points and seven boards for Auburn (23-7, 12-5 Southeastern Conference). Jaylin Williams also scored 15 as Auburn matched its season high for points in an SEC game.

No. 14 Kansas 90, Kansas State 68: Kevin McCullar Jr. had 19 points in his Allen Fieldhouse farewell, Hunter Dickinson added 15 points and 20 rebounds, and the Jayhawks snapped a two-game skid.

Nick Timberlake added 18 points and KJ Adams Jr. had 16 for Kansas (22-8, 10-7 Big 12), which beat the Wildcats at home for the 18th straight time and won their 40th in a row on senior night, a run that stretches to the 1983-84 season.

Will McNair had 17 points and 10 rebounds for the Wildcats (17-13, 7-10), but leading scorers Tylor Perry (two points) and Cam Carter (three points) were shut down.

Florida 105, No. 16 Alabama 87: Will Richard scored 23 points, Walter Clayton Jr. added 22 and the host Gators beat the Crimson Tide to stay in contention for a top-four seed and double bye in the upcoming SEC Tournament.

Florida (21-9, 11-6 SEC) won for the 10th time in 13 games and finished 14-1 at home.

Mark Sears led Alabama (20-10, 12-5) with 33 points, including 29 in the second half.

UNLV 62, No. 21 San Diego State 58: Dedan Thomas scored 19 points and made a tie-breaking jumper with 18.6 seconds left to lift the host Runnin' Rebels over the Aztecs.

It was the fourth win against a ranked team for surging UNLV (19-10, 12-5 Mountain West), which has won 10 of 11 overall.

Elijah Saunders led San Diego State (22-8, 11-6) with 14 points.

No. 24 South Florida 85, Tulane 72: Chris Youngblood had 29 points and five assists as the host Bulls extended their winning streak to 15 games.

Kasean Pryor scored 13 points and Selton Miguel added 12 for South Florida (23-5, 16-1), the American Athletic Conference's regular-season champion.

No. 25 Dayton 100, Saint Louis 83: Daron Holmes II had 25 points and 13 rebounds, and Koby Brea and Kobe Elvis each hit five 3-pointers as the Flyers snapped a three-game road losing streak.

Dartmouth players get late milestone with union vote

Associated Press

For those who have led unsuccessful labor movements involving NCAA athletes, the vote by Dartmouth men's basketball players to unionize felt momentous — even if they are still a long way from forming the first union in college sports.

In a 13-2 vote in a building on the campus in Hanover, N.H., and under supervision of the National Labor Relations Board, players elected to join the Service Employees International Union Local 560 on Tuesday.

"This is definitely a milestone that has been reached. One that we believe should have been reached long ago," said Ramogi Huma, a longtime advocate for college athletes who helped organize a movement to unionize

Northwestern football players a decade ago.

As with Dartmouth basketball, a regional ruling by the NLRB cleared the way for a vote by the Northwestern football team to unionize. The votes were impounded, however, and never revealed after the full board in 2015 dismissed the argument that the players were employees of the private Big Ten school.

Rules have changed since, allowing the result of the Dartmouth players' vote to be made public while the school appeals.

"In issuing her decision, the Regional Director made an unprecedented, unwarranted and unsupported departure from every applicable Supreme Court, federal court and Board

precedent and created a new definition of 'employee' in a manner that not only exceeded her authority, but promises to have significant labor and public policy implications," the school wrote in its request for a ruling by the full NLRB board.

The case could also end up in federal court.

"I think this is years away from being settled, but it's going in the right direction," said Huma, a former UCLA football player and executive director of the National College Players Association.

Huma has had no involvement with the Dartmouth basketball players. His group has filed a separate complaint with the NLRB against Southern California, asking that the school's

football and basketball players be deemed employees.

"The case that we have at USC is stronger because the athletes there get full scholarships. So the fact that athletes at Dartmouth that don't get scholarships were deemed to be employees, I think it provides strength to our arguments at USC," Huma said.

The NLRB only has jurisdiction over private employers. Dartmouth and USC are private schools, like Northwestern.

The Dartmouth and USC cases could impact the many public schools in the NCAA, including those that compete at the highest levels of college sports such as Michigan, Alabama, Ohio State, Texas and North Carolina.

Stars rally from three down, win in OT

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Wyatt Johnston had his first career hat trick and the Dallas Stars rallied from three goals down in the third period to beat the San Jose Sharks 7-6 on Roope Hintz's overtime goal on Tuesday night.

Hintz came off the bench following a long stretch for Dallas in the offensive zone, took a pass from Logan Stankoven in the slot and beat Kaapo Kahkonen.

Johnston had a five-point night with two assists, Stankoven had two goals and two assists, and Jamie Benn had a goal and three assists to get Dallas off to a good start on a three-game California swing.

Anthony Duclair had his third two-goal game since the All-Star break and added two assists to lead the Sharks, who are winless in their last eight games.

Fabian Zetterlund, Ryan Carpenter, Filip Zadina and Mikael Granlund also scored for San Jose. Kahkonen made 33 saves.

Oilers 2, Bruins 1 (OT): Leon Draisaitl scored 2:18 into overtime for his second goal of the game, and visiting Edmonton beat Boston for its fifth consecutive victory.

Draisaitl also tied it at 1 with his 31st goal of the season with 1:20 left in the third. He ended the game with a one-timer off a crossing pass from Connor McDavid.

Pavel Zacha scored for Boston 4:26 into the third period.

Canucks 2, Kings 1 (OT): J.T. Miller scored on a power play 1:36 into overtime, and visiting Vancouver beat Los Angeles.

Miller scored from the right faceoff circle on a slap shot for his 31st of the season. Vancouver earned its second straight win and remained on top of the Western Conference.

Trevor Moore scored for Los Angeles.

Canadiens 4, Predators 3 (OT): Nick Suzuki scored at 17 seconds of overtime to lead visiting Montreal to the victory over Nashville.

Brendan Gallagher, David Savard and Joshua Roy also scored and Jake Allen made 25 saves for the Canadiens, who snapped a two-game losing streak.

Ryan O'Reilly scored a goal and assisted on two others, Filip Forsberg and Gustav Nyquist each had a goal and an assist and Juuse Saros made 26 saves

for Nashville. The Predators had their eight-game winning streak snapped.

Kraken 4, Jets 3: Andre Burakovsky scored a power-play goal with 2:39 remaining in the third period to lift visiting Seattle to a victory over Winnipeg.

Jared McCann had a goal and two assists and Justin Schultz and Tomas Tatar also scored for the Kraken.

Kyle Connor, Adam Lowry and Nino Niederreiter scored for the Jets.

Panthers 5, Devils 3: Nick Cousins had two goals and visiting Florida beat New Jersey for its sixth straight win, spoiling the debut of interim coach Travis Green.

Eetu Luostarinen, Evan Rodrigues and Sam Reinhart also scored as the Panthers won for the 12th time in 13 games. Florida leads the NHL with 43 wins and 90 points, and it is 25-4-2 since Dec. 23.

Jack Hughes, Timo Meier and Colin Miller scored for the Devils.

Penguins 5, Blue Jackets 3: Jeff Carter and Reilly Smith scored just over a minute apart midway through the third period and host Pittsburgh beat Co-

lumbus to snap a three-game losing streak.

Evgeni Malkin, Rickard Rakell and Jesse Puljujarvi also scored for Pittsburgh. Johnny Gaudreau and Andrew Peeke also had goals for the Blue Jack-

Islanders 4, Blues 2: Bo Horvat scored the go-ahead goal early in the third period and host New York won its fourth straight game, topping St. Louis.

Kyle Palmieri, Jean-Gabriel Pageau and Mathew Barzal also scored for the Islanders who moved within four points of the Philadelphia Flyers for the third spot in the Metropolitan Division, which would guarantee them a spot in the playoffs.

Alexey Toropchenko and Jordan Kyrou scored for the Blues.

Blackhawks 5, Coyotes 2: Nick Foligno scored one of his team's four power-play goals, and Chicago ended a 22-game road losing streak with a win over Arizona.

Chicago, the NHL's worst team on the power play, went 4-for-5 with the man advantage for its first road win since Nov. 9 at Tampa Bay.

Nick Bjugstad and Michael Carcone scored for Arizona.

Three big-name pitchers in question for opening day

Associated Press

The news hit one after the other on Tuesday: Three big-name starting pitchers all dealing with injuries that could cause them to miss the beginning of the regular season — and potentially more.

Houston's Justin Verlander, St. Louis' Sonny Gray and Boston's Lucas Giolito are all ailing at spring training.

Verlander will start the season on the injured list after being slowed by inflammation in his pitching shoulder during the offseason. Gray has a hamstring strain sustained Monday. And

Giolito reported discomfort in his pitching elbow following last week's start in which he was roughed up.

Verlander is the biggest name of the three, although his situation appears to be more of a delay than a long-term concern. Astros manager Joe Espada said Tuesday the 41-year-old Verlander hasn't suffered any setbacks or soreness following bullpen sessions but needs more time to become game ready.

The three-time Cy Young Award winner is expected to throw in the bullpen again on Friday but has yet to face hit-

ters. A delay to the start of the season could jeopardize his conditional \$35 million option for 2025.

Giolito will have additional exams to determine the severity of his injury, but there's worry it could be a long-term issue.

Giolito signed a \$38.5 million, two-year deal with the Red Sox this offseason. The 29-year-old right-hander is coming off a 2023 season in which he gave up 41 home runs and had a 4.88 ERA for the White Sox, Angels and Guardians.

Gray may be the one of the three that has a chance to make

it back for opening day, which he was slated to start against the Los Angeles Dodgers on March 28.

Gray left his start Monday against Washington after 20 pitches. The Cardinals initially said Gray had tightness in his hamstring, and an MRI revealed the strain.

Following their poorest season since 1995, the Cardinals gave Gray a \$75 million, three-year contract in November to anchor a revamped rotation. Because the strain is mild, all parties are holding out hope Gray can make it back by the opener.