

DOD told to address fatigue in ranks

By **MATTHEW M. BURKE**
Stars and Stripes

The military's approach to preventing fatigue is fragmented and requires greater oversight to prevent potentially fatal accidents and help sleep-deprived service members, a government watchdog agency said this week.

Dedicated leadership at the Pentagon and in each service is needed to oversee progress combatting the issue, the Government Accountability Office said in a report released Tuesday.

The GAO asked service members how sleep deprivation affected their work and several said that slower reaction times could have led to deaths, injuries and millions of dollars in property damage.

"Sometimes when I'm driv-

ing, I find myself falling asleep and I have to catch myself," said one respondent, who added that they feared they might kill someone due to lack of sleep. Rotary wing pilots, drone operators and aviation maintainers also reported fatigue interfering with their decision making.

U.S. service members have long complained of high operational tempos and sleep deprivation. Only about a third reported receiving seven or eight hours of sleep per night, according to periodic defense health surveys conducted between 2005 and 2018, the GAO report said. The majority reported sleeping six or fewer hours.

The Defense Department recommends at least seven hours per night for optimal

performance and readiness.

"DOD recognizes that impairment from fatigue can be equivalent to the effects of alcohol intoxication and significantly increases the risk of physical injury," the GAO report said.

Fatigue was identified as a factor in the June 2, 2016, crash of a Blue Angels F/A-18 Hornet that killed Marine Corps Capt. Jeff Kuss at an airfield in Tennessee.

It was likewise identified by the National Transportation Safety Board as a contributing factor in the crash of the Navy destroyer USS John S. McCain on Aug. 21, 2017, which killed 10 sailors.

In response, Congress in 2022 ordered the GAO to undertake a "comprehensive review" of DOD efforts.

The report found that while there are many research projects across the services, the Pentagon hasn't facilitated collaboration and lacks leadership in key areas.

The GAO recommended that the Pentagon create an office to act as a focal point for its fatigue-related efforts, and that the office should have the authority, staffing, resources and commitment to oversee service-level programs.

DOD also should set up time frames for follow-on actions, coordinate with stakeholders and identify those responsible for implementing the recommendations of past fatigue-related studies, the report said.

The GAO also recommended that service secretaries assign leadership to work with the newly formed DOD office.

Third of Russian fleet sunk or damaged, Ukraine says

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine has sunk or disabled a third of all Russian warships in the Black Sea in just over two years of war, the navy spokesman said Tuesday, a heavy blow to Moscow's military capability.

Ukraine's Navy spokesman Dmytro Pletenchuk told The Associated Press that the latest strike on Saturday night hit the Russian amphibious landing ship Kostiantyn Olshansky that was resting in dock in Sevastopol in Russia-occupied Crimea. The ship was part of the Ukrainian navy before Russia captured it while annexing the Black Sea peninsula in 2014.

Pletenchuk has previously announced that two other land-

ing ships of the same type, Azov and Yamal, also were damaged in Saturday's strike along with the Ivan Khurs intelligence ship.

He told the AP that the weekend attack, which was launched with Ukraine-built Neptune missiles, also hit Sevastopol port facilities and an oil depot.

Russian authorities reported a massive Ukrainian attack on Sevastopol over the weekend but didn't acknowledge any damage to the fleet.

Pletenchuk said that with the latest attack, a third of all warships that Russia had in the Black Sea before the war have been destroyed or disabled.

At the same time, he acknowledged that just two of about a

dozen of Russian missile-carrying warships have been sunk and pledged that Ukraine will continue the strikes.

"Our ultimate goal is complete absence of military ships of the so-called Russian Federation in the Azov and Black Sea regions," Pletenchuk told the AP.

Successful Ukrainian drone and missile strikes have provided a major morale boost for Kyiv at a time when its undermanned and under-gunned forces are facing Russian attacks along the more than 600-mile front line.

Challenging Russia's naval superiority also has helped create more favorable conditions for Ukrainian grain exports and other shipments from the coun-

try's Black Sea ports.

Moscow officials have kept mum on most of Ukrainian claims, but previous navy losses have been confirmed by Russian military bloggers and media who have harshly criticized the military brass for its slow and sloppy response to the threat.

Earlier this month, Russian media reported that the navy chief, Adm. Nikolai Yevmenov, had been fired and replaced with Adm. Alexander Moiseyev, the commander of Russia's Northern Fleet. The Kremlin hasn't yet announced the reshuffle, but last week Moiseyev was presented as the new acting navy chief during a ceremony at a Russian naval base.

DOD's reproductive care policy was used 12 times in 7 months

By MATTHEW ADAMS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon's policy to provide leave and travel expenses for troops who must travel to obtain an abortion or other reproductive care was used only 12 times during seven months of Sen. Tommy Tuberville's block of hundreds of military promotions in protest, a defense official said Tuesday.

Tuberville, R-Ala., initiated his blockade of military nominations in February 2023 when the Pentagon announced its new policy guidelines that took effect in March. The Defense Department's decision came after the U.S. Supreme Court reversed *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022 declaring the constitutional right to abortion no longer exists. Many states have since passed laws outlawing abortions in most cases.

Some of the most restrictive states, including Texas and Louisiana, are home to major

military installations, and there was concern over how the new laws would affect troops.

The senator's effort lasted until December when he lifted his remaining holds, allowing the Senate to confirm more than 400 military nominations.

Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh said Tuesday that the Defense Department's policy was used 12 times from June to December to cover reproductive services at a cost of \$40,791.20.

The travel conducted by service members does not mean it was specifically for an abortion. Troops could have used the policy for reproductive matters such as in vitro fertilization, ovarian stimulations and egg retrieval, Singh said.

"Basically, any type of non-covered reproductive health service that the department does not cover and is not available in [a service member's] state," she added.

Israeli attack in Lebanon brings retaliatory strike

Associated Press

HEBBARIYE, Lebanon — An Israeli airstrike on a paramedic center linked to a Lebanese Sunni Muslim group in south Lebanon killed seven of its members early Wednesday and triggered a rocket attack from Lebanon that killed one person in northern Israel, officials said.

The strike on the village of Hebbariye came after a day of airstrikes and rocket attacks between Israel's military and Lebanon's Hezbollah group along the Lebanon-Israel border, raising concerns of further escalation along the frontier that has been active for the past five months of the Israel-Hamas war.

The airstrike after midnight Tuesday hit an office of the Islamic Emergency and Relief Corps, according to the Lebanese Ambulance Association.

It was one of the deadliest single attacks since violence erupted along the border.

The paramedics association listed the names of seven volunteers who were killed in the strike. It said the strike was "a flagrant violation of humanitarian work."

Hebbariye resident Ali Nou-

reddine said that the seven dead were pulled out from the rubble before sunrise Wednesday.

Muheddine Qarhani, head of the Emergency and Relief Corps, told reporters at the scene that the center that was struck was set up late last year, after the latest round of violence broke out. He said they were surprised that a paramedic group was targeted.

"They were here waiting to respond to a rescue call and ended up getting hit by missiles that brought the building over their heads," he said.

The Israeli military said it struck a military building in Hebbariye and killed a member of Lebanon's Sunni Muslim al-Jamaa al-Islamiya, or Islamic Group, and several other militants. It said the man was involved in attacks against Israel.

Hours later, Hezbollah said it retaliated against the airstrike by firing dozens of rockets Wednesday morning on the northern Israeli city of Kiryat Shmona and a military base there.

Rescue services in Israel said that a 25 year-old man was killed when a direct hit sparked a fire in an industrial park in Kiryat Shmona.

Attack death toll rises as Russia blames the West

Associated Press

MOSCOW — The death toll from last week's Moscow concert hall attack rose to 140 on Wednesday after another victim died in a hospital, Russian officials said.

That person was one of five still hospitalized in "extremely grave condition," and the doctors "did everything they could" to save them, Russia's Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said.

A total of 80 people injured in the attack remain hospitalized, the official added, and 205 others have sought outpatient medical assistance.

The Friday night massacre in Crocus City Hall, a shopping and entertainment venue on the northwestern outskirts of Moscow, was the deadliest terrorist attack on Russian soil in nearly 20 years. At least four gunmen toting automatic rifles shot at thousands of concertgoers and

set the venue on fire.

An affiliate of Islamic State claimed responsibility for the violence, while U.S. intelligence said it had information confirming the group was responsible. French President Emmanuel Macron said France also has intelligence pointing to "an IS entity" as responsible for the attack.

Russia's Federal Security Service said it had arrested 11 people the day after the attack, including four suspected gun-

men. The four men, identified as Tajik nationals, appeared in a Moscow court on Sunday on terrorism charges and showed signs of severe beatings. One appeared to be barely conscious during the hearing.

Russian officials, however, have insisted Ukraine and the West had a role, claims Kyiv vehemently denies. FSB chief Alexander Bortnikov also alleged that Western spy agencies could have been involved.

Police had about 90 seconds before Baltimore bridge fell

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — It was the middle of the night when a dispatcher's warning crackled over the radio: A massive cargo ship had lost its steering capabilities and was heading toward the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

Within about 90 seconds, police officers who happened to be nearby responded that they managed to stop vehicle traffic over the Baltimore bridge in both directions.

One parked sideways across the lanes and planned to drive onto the bridge to alert a construction crew once another officer arrived. But he did not get the chance. Powerless and laden with huge containers, the vessel smashed into a support pillar.

"The whole bridge just fell down," a frantic officer said. "Start, start whoever, everybody ... the whole bridge just collapsed."

When the container ship Dali slammed into the pillar around 1:30 a.m. Tuesday, the bridge crumpled into the Patapsco River. The loss of the major transportation link is expected to snarl commuter traffic and disrupt a vital shipping port.

At least eight people went into

the water. Two were rescued, but the other six — part of a construction crew that had been filling potholes on the bridge — were missing and presumed dead. A search for their bodies was underway Wednesday.

The twisted metal and other debris in the water complicated the search, according to a Homeland Security memo described to The Associated Press by a law enforcement official. The official was not authorized to discuss details of the document or the investigation and spoke to AP on condition of anonymity.

Maryland Gov. Wes Moore said divers in the water faced dangerous conditions.

"They are down there in darkness where they can literally see about a foot in front of them. They are trying to navigate mangled metal, and they're also in a place it is now presumed that people have lost their lives," he said.

Among the missing were people from Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, according to diplomats from those countries. The Honduran man was identified as Maynor Yassir Suazo Sandoval.

Three Mexicans were on the

bridge. One was rescued, and two are missing, said Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

Federal and state officials have said the crash appeared to be an accident. Investigators planned to collect evidence on the ship, including electronics and paperwork, said National Transportation Safety Board Chair Jennifer Homendy.

The U.S. Coast Guard already boarded the vessel and downloaded the voyage data recorder and sent it to the National Transportation Safety Board, which is building a timeline of what led to the crash, Homendy said. A preliminary report could be done in two to four weeks, she said.

Capt. Michael Burns Jr. of the Maritime Center for Responsible Energy said bringing a ship into or out of ports in restricted waters with limited room to maneuver is "one of the most technically challenging and demanding things that we do."

There are "few things that are scarier than a loss of power in restricted waters," he said. And when a ship loses propulsion and steering, "then it's really at the mercy of the wind and the current."

Texas' migrant arrest law on hold

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — A Texas law that allows the state to arrest and deport migrants suspected of illegally entering the U.S. will remain on hold for now, a federal appeals court ruled.

The order late Tuesday from the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals followed a March 20 hearing by a three-judge panel of the court. It's just the latest move in a seesaw legal case that is not yet over.

The Justice Department has argued that Texas' law is a clear violation of federal authority and would create chaos at the border. Texas has argued that President Joe Biden's administration isn't doing enough to control the border and that the state has a right to take action.

The law was in effect for several hours on March 19 after the U.S. Supreme Court cleared the way. But the high court didn't rule on the merits of the case. It instead sent the case back to the 5th Circuit, which then suspended enforcement while it considered the latest appeal.

The latest ruling keeps the block in place.

The law signed by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott allows any Texas law enforcement officer to arrest people suspected of entering the country illegally. Once in custody, migrants could either agree to a Texas judge's order to leave the U.S. or be prosecuted on misdemeanor charges of illegal entry.

Migrants who don't leave could face arrest again under more serious felony charges.

Texas did not announce any arrests during the brief time the law was previously in effect. Authorities have offered various explanations for how they might enforce the law.

Settlement reached in lawsuit between Florida Gov. DeSantis allies and Disney

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Allies of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Disney reached a settlement agreement Wednesday in a lawsuit over who controls Walt Disney World's governing district.

In a meeting, the members of the board of the Central Florida Tourism Oversight District approved the settle-

ment agreement, ending almost two years of litigation that was sparked by DeSantis' takeover of the district from Disney supporters following the company's opposition to Florida's so-called "Don't Say Gay" law.

The 2022 law bans classroom lessons on sexual orientation and gender identity in early grades and was cham-

pioned by DeSantis, who used Disney as a punching bag in speeches until he suspended his presidential campaign this year.

As punishment for Disney's opposition, DeSantis took over the governing district through legislation passed by the Republican-controlled Florida Legislature and appointed a new board of supervisors.

Lawyer for ‘Diddy’: Home raids ‘excessive’

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Sean “Diddy” Combs’ lawyer said Tuesday that the searches of the rapper’s Los Angeles and Miami properties by federal authorities in a sex trafficking investigation were “a gross use of military-level force” and that Combs is “innocent and will continue to fight” to clear his name.

It’s the first public statement from the music mogul’s team since Monday’s raids of his homes by Homeland Security Investigations agents.

“Yesterday, there was a gross overuse of military-level force as search warrants were executed at Mr. Combs’ residences,” said the statement from attorney Aaron Dyer. “There is no excuse for the excessive show of force and hostility exhibited by authorities or the way his children and employees were treated.”

The searches were part of an ongoing sex trafficking investigation by federal authorities in New York, two law enforcement officials told The Associated Press. The officials were not authorized to publicly discuss details of the investigation and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

Combs was not detained and spoke to au-

thorities, and neither he nor any family members were arrested, nor has their travel been restricted, according to Dyer’s statement.

Dyer said the “unprecedented ambush” has led to a “premature rush to judgment of Mr. Combs and is nothing more than a witch hunt based on meritless accusations made in civil lawsuits.”

“There has been no finding of criminal or civil liability with any of these allegations,” Dyer said. “Mr. Combs is innocent and will continue to fight every single day to clear his name.”

Combs’ sons, Justin and Christian “King” Combs, were handcuffed during the raid at their father’s residence in Los Angeles. King, 25, is a music artist whose song “Can’t Stop Won’t Stop” with Kodak Black topped Billboard’s Mainstream R&B Hip-Hop charts in 2022.

Law enforcement conducted the raid Monday at Combs’ multimillion-dollar mansion in the affluent Holmby Hills neighborhood in Los Angeles and his Miami waterfront home. Along with a heavy presence of officers, command trucks were parked outside both properties.

The criminal investigation is a major esca-

lation in the scrutiny of Combs, who has been the defendant in several sexual abuse lawsuits in recent months.

In a lawsuit Combs settled the day after it was filed in November, his former protege and girlfriend, the R&B singer Cassie, sued him alleging years of sexual abuse, including rape. The lawsuit said he forced her to have sex with male prostitutes while he filmed them.

In February, a music producer filed a lawsuit alleging Combs coerced him to solicit prostitutes and pressured him to have sex with them.

Another of Combs’ accusers was a woman who said the rap producer raped her two decades ago when she was 17.

Combs and his attorneys have denied all of the lawsuits’ allegations.

The AP does not typically name people who say they have been sexually abused unless they come forward publicly as Cassie did.

Combs is among the most influential hip-hop producers and executives of the past three decades. Formerly known as Puff Daddy, he built one of hip-hop’s biggest empires, blazing a trail with several entities attached to his famous name. He is the founder of Bad Boy Records and a three-time Grammy winner.

Roller derby league sues official for restricting trans women in sports

Associated Press

SEAFORD, N.Y. — They zip around the rink, armed with helmets, pads and mouthguards. They push, bump and occasionally crash out as they jostle for position on the hardwood floor.

But for the women of the Long Island Roller Rebels, their biggest battle is taking place outside the suburban strip-mall roller rink where they’re girding for the upcoming roller derby season.

The nearly 20-year-old amateur league is suing a county leader over an executive order meant to prevent women’s and girl’s leagues and teams with transgender players from using county-run parks and fields. The league’s legal effort, backed by the New York Civil Liberties Union, has thrust it into the national discussion over the rights of transgender athletes.

Amanda Urena, the league’s vice president, said there was never any question the group would take a stand.

“The whole point of derby has been to be this thing where people feel welcome,” said the 32-

year-old Long Island native, who competes as “Curly Fry” and identifies as queer, at a recent practice at United Skates of America in Seaford. “We want trans women to know that we want you to come play with us, and we’ll do our very best to keep fighting and making sure that this is a safe space for you to play.”

The February edict from Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman affects more than 100 public facilities in the county of nearly 1.4 million just east of Queens.

Sports leagues and teams seeking permits to play or practice in county-run parks must disclose whether they have or allow transgender women or girls. Any organization that allows them to play will be denied a permit, though men’s leagues and teams aren’t affected.

The Roller Rebels sought a permit this month in hopes of hosting practices and games in county-owned rinks in the upcoming season, as they have in prior years. But they expect to be denied, since the organization is open to anyone who identifies as a woman and has a transgender player already on the roster.

Player in NJ wins \$1.13 billion Mega Millions jackpot

Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — Someone in New Jersey overcame the odds Tuesday night and won the \$1.13 billion Mega Millions jackpot, breaking a winless streak that dated to last December.

The numbers drawn were: 7, 11, 22, 29, 38 and the gold Mega Ball 4. The winning ticket was sold in New Jersey, according to the Mega Millions website.

Until the latest drawing, no one had matched all six numbers and won the Mega Millions jackpot since Dec. 8. That amounted to 30 straight drawings without a big winner. It’s tough to win the Mega Millions jackpot because the odds are so long, at 1 in 302.6 million.

The prize is the 8th largest in U.S. lottery histories.

The \$1.13 billion jackpot is for a winner who is paid through an annuity, with an initial payment and then 29 annual payments. Most winners choose a cash payout, which would be \$537.5 million.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Fishermen buck trends, catch more fish in 2023

ME PORTLAND — Maine fishermen bucked yearslong, industry-wide trends last year and caught more fish, a development that regulators and industry members said shows the impact of COVID-19 relief funds.

The New England ground-fishing industry has been in decline for decades due in part to past overfishing of key species and difficulty rebuilding those stocks.

But Maine's groundfishermen had a stronger year than most in 2023, according to state data released earlier this month. The catch of haddock more than doubled to more than 500,000 pounds, and the catches of Atlantic cod, witch flounder and Atlantic halibut were all up significantly.

The increase in catch, as well as a more stable price, reflects investments the state made in critical infrastructure such as the Portland Fish Exchange, an auction house, said Patrick Keliher, the commissioner of the Maine Department of Marine Resources. The state received COVID-19 relief funds via the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for that work and other improvements, he said.

Visa, Mastercard settle antitrust suit over fees

NY NEW YORK — Visa and MasterCard announced a settlement with U.S. merchants related to swipe fees that could potentially save American shoppers tens of billions of dollars.

Swipe fees are paid to Visa, Mastercard and other credit card companies in exchange for enabling transactions. Merchants ultimately pass on those fees to consumers who use credit or debit cards. The fees are calculated as a fixed fee plus a percentage of the sales total, typically about 1% to 3%.

According to the settlement announced Tuesday, Visa and Mastercard will cap the credit interchange fees into 2030, and the companies must negotiate the fees with merchant buying groups.

The law firm that announced the settlement put the value of the savings in swipe fees at close to \$30 billion.

Ex-state House speaker indicted on new charges

OH COLUMBUS — Imprisoned ex-Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder was indicted Monday on 10 new felony counts, including one that would ban him from ever holding public office in the state again.

The fresh indictments brought by the state extend action in what was already the largest corruption case in state history.

The 64-year-old Householder was convicted of racketeering in June for his role orchestrating a \$60 million bribery scheme funded by Akron-based FirstEnergy Corp. in exchange for passage of a \$1 billion bailout of two nuclear plants owned by one of its subsidiaries. He was sentenced to 20 years, which he's serving at Elkton Federal Correctional Institution near Youngstown, and has appealed.

On Monday, a Cuyahoga County grand jury indicted

Householder on the additional charges, which include alleged misuse of campaign funds, ethics violations and a theft in office charge that would block him from working for the government.

Hospitality workers ratify contract with 34 hotels

CA LOS ANGELES — Thousands of Southern California hospitality workers overwhelmingly ratified a new contract with 34 hotels after repeated strikes since the summer, their union announced Monday.

Workers won higher pay, increased employer contributions to pensions, and fair workload guarantees among other provisions of a contract that received 98% approval, Unite Here Local 11 said in a summary of highlights of the pact, which runs until Jan. 15, 2028. The union has yet to reach settlements with 30 other hotels.

Room attendants, cooks and other non-tipped workers will receive wage hikes of \$10 an hour over the term of the contract, representing a 40% to 50% increase, the union said. Half of the increase will come in the first year.

Room attendants at most hotels will earn \$35 an hour by July 2027 and top cooks will earn \$41 an hour, the union said.

Subway rider is pushed onto tracks and killed

NY NEW YORK — A subway rider was pushed onto the tracks and killed by a train, the latest in a string of violent episodes in New York City's transit system that have prompted officials to beef up policing in the subway sys-

tem.

The shoving victim, who has not been identified, was pushed onto the tracks inside an East Harlem subway station shortly before 7 p.m. Monday, police said. The operator of an oncoming No. 4 train was unable to stop and the person was killed, police said.

The suspected shover, Carlton McPherson, 24, was arrested on a murder charge, a police spokesperson said. No information about an attorney for McPherson was available Tuesday morning.

DeSantis signs social media bans for minors

FL TALLAHASSEE — Florida will have one of the country's most restrictive social media bans for minors — if it withstands expected legal challenges — under a bill signed by Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis on Monday.

The bill will ban social media accounts for children under 14 and require parental permission for 14- and 15-year-olds. It was slightly watered down from a proposal DeSantis vetoed earlier this month, a week before the annual legislative session ended.

The new law was Republican Speaker Paul Renner's top legislative priority. It takes effect Jan. 1.

The bill DeSantis vetoed would have banned minors under 16 from popular social media platforms regardless of parental consent. But before the veto, he worked out compromise language with Renner to alleviate the governor's concerns and the Legislature sent DeSantis a second bill.

— From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

**Reporting
World, National
and Military News**

Dodgers' big spending hardly ensures title

Associated Press

As the Los Angeles Dodgers made splashy signings with Shohei Ohtani and Yoshinobu Yamamoto this offseason, other teams focused on modern baseball's stark reality: pricey payrolls often don't translate into titles.

Baseball's biggest spender has won the World Series just three times in the last 23 seasons: the 2009 New York Yankees, 2018 Boston Red Sox and 2020 Los Angeles Dodgers. Going back to the start of the Wild Card Era in 1995, the highest roller has just six championships, with the Yankees also winning in 1996, 1999 and 2000.

"Clearly having a very high payroll is correlated with winning more games in the regular season," baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said Tuesday. "The saving grace for us has been that our playoffs are unpredictable enough that the 110-win team doesn't automatically march through the playoffs. That's why I reacted probably too negatively to the criticism that the playoffs were unpredictable and the best teams

weren't coming through. The fact of the matter is that's a good thing for us over the long haul."

Just 12 of the last 29 World Series winners had the top regular-season record in their league. Steve Cohen's New York Mets became the most expensive failure in baseball history last year, boosting payroll to a record \$355 million on opening day, then finishing fourth in the NL East at 75-87 and incurring a record luxury tax of nearly \$101 million.

"Some of the best teams in baseball that we've seen over the last 10 years have a hard time winning the World Series," Cohen said.

Since Texas won its first title after finishing second in the AL West at 90-72, the Dodgers made the most ostentatious additions by reaching a record \$700 million, 10-year contract with two-way star Shohei Ohtani and a \$325 million, 12-year deal with right-hander Yoshinobu Yamamoto. They also acquired right-hander Tyler Glasnow from Tampa Bay and gave him a \$136.5 million, five-year agreement.

Los Angeles attracted a rockstar following ahead of its opening series against San Diego in Seoul, South Korea.

"I think we're kind of starting to get used to it a little bit," All-Star first baseman Freddie Freeman said. "But I don't know if anybody is going to get used to this like this."

Other teams open March 28 in hopes of preventing the Rangers from becoming the first repeat champions since the 1998-2000 Yankees. Bruce Bochy, who turns 69 next month, will try to join Joe McCarthy, Casey Stengel and Connie Mack as the only managers with five Series titles.

Already injured

Several stars will start on the injured list, among them reigning AL Cy Young Award winner Gerrit Cole with the Yankees, Sonny Gray with the Cardinals and closer Jhoan Durán with the Minnesota Twins.

An All-Star pitching staff is recovering from Tommy John surgery, including Jacob deGrom, Sandy Alcántara, Félix Bautista, Shane Bieber and Liam Hendriks. Ohtani

won't pitch this year following elbow surgery in September.

New seats, hot seats

Among the winter's biggest acquisitions was the Chicago Cubs poaching manager Craig Counsell from rival Milwaukee. The Brewers replaced Counsell with bench coach Pat Murphy.

Ron Washington is getting another chance to manage at 71 years old with the Los Angeles Angels, and Bob Melvin left San Diego for San Francisco, returning to the Bay Area after previously leading Oakland. Mike Shildt got Melvin's previous job with the Padres, Joe Espada replaced retired Dusty Baker in Houston, Stephen Vogt got Terry Francona's old gig in Cleveland and Carlos Mendoza took over the New York Mets.

Boston's Alex Cora and the Yankees' Aaron Boone are lame-duck managers in the final seasons of contracts. The Yankees are coming off an 82-80 record, missing the playoffs for the first time since 2016.

"All you can kind of do is focus on what we have, and I'm excited about our group," Boone said.

Source: Arizona, Montgomery agree to 1-year deal

Associated Press

PHOENIX — The Arizona Diamondbacks and pitcher Jordan Montgomery have agreed on a \$25 million, one-year contract with a vesting option for 2025, according to a person familiar with the deal.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity Tuesday night because the agreement was subject to a successful physical. The option for next year can become guaranteed to Montgomery if he makes at least 10 starts this season.

Montgomery pitched for Texas against Arizona in the World Series last year, and his addition bulks up the defending National League champions' rotation just days before the regular season begins. Montgomery should slide into the No. 3 or No. 4 spot once he's ready for game

action, joining Zac Gallen, Merrill Kelly and Eduardo Rodriguez, who signed an \$80 million, four-year contract with the Diamondbacks earlier in the offseason.

ESPN first reported that Montgomery and the D-backs had agreed to a deal.

Montgomery, who turned 31 in December, went into free agency for the first time as a World Series champion. The 6-foot-6 left-hander played a significant role in Texas' first title after being traded at the deadline for the second year in a row.

While the Rangers surely would have liked to bring back Montgomery, they weren't in position to pay the increased cost to re-sign him. He made \$10 million last season.

Texas had a final payroll of \$242.1 million for its championship season, and paid a luxury tax penalty for the first

time, though it owed only \$1.8 million in tax.

Montgomery is 38-34 with a 3.68 ERA in 141 career games (140 starts) with the New York Yankees, St. Louis Cardinals and Rangers.

Texas got him and reliever Chris Stratton last year from St. Louis, which had acquired Montgomery from the Yankees in a 2022 trade for Gold Glove center fielder Harrison Bader.

After going 4-2 with a 2.79 ERA in 11 starts for the Rangers down the stretch, Montgomery was 3-1 with a 2.90 ERA in six postseason games.

He won their playoff opener with seven scoreless innings at Tampa Bay in the Wild Card Series, and allowed only two runs over 14 innings while pitching three times against the Houston Astros in the AL Championship Series.

Aztecs face UConn in title game rematch

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The UConn Huskies pretty much wrecked every team they faced in the NCAA Tournament on the way to last year's championship and the first two games this March Madness look awfully familiar.

Up next is a wrinkle: A rematch with a San Diego State team that was outclassed in the title game a year ago and remembers it.

The Aztecs (26-10) think this year's outcome can be different, but know how tough that will be, especially with Thursday night's East Region semifinal game being played in Boston, about an 85-mile drive for fans of the No. 1-seeded Huskies (34-3).

"We're excited to get off to Boston," coach Brian Dutcher said Tuesday morning before the Aztecs headed to the airport for their cross-country flight. "The good news is, we're not playing the Celtics. The bad news is, we're playing UConn."

"We're up for the challenge. It's like playing a road game.

I'm sure it's going to be packed with UConn fans. Our Aztec faithful will travel as best they can. But we're ready for the challenge and we're looking forward to it, and (we'll) try to come out of there with a couple of victories," Dutcher said.

A year ago, the Aztecs went from the ecstasy of Lamont Butler's buzzer-beating jumper against FAU in a national semifinal game — one of the most thrilling moments in San Diego sports history — to the pain of a 76-59 loss to UConn in the national championship game. The Huskies built a double-digit lead in the first half before the Aztecs cut the lead to five points with about five minutes to go, only to watch the Huskies pull away again.

"A lot of new pieces on both teams, which will make it interesting. Last year we had it to five points with about five minutes to go and then they spurted to the final margin," Dutcher said. "If we can keep it close and give ourselves an opportunity to win the game at the end, I like our

chances."

Now they're in the Sweet 16 in consecutive years for the first time, with an unenviable assignment.

"We know we've got to go through them again to get to where we want to be so we can't wait," Butler said.

Last year, the Aztecs were a No. 5 seed and beat 12th-seeded College of Charleston in the first round and 13th-seeded Furman in the second round before upsetting No. 1 seed Alabama.

This year they're on the same path, at least heading into the fourth Sweet 16 in program history. They beat 12th-seeded UAB in the first round and then routed 13th-seeded Yale in the second round in arguably their best game of the season.

It's just that UConn has won its first two tournament games by an average of 28 points.

"We know we can do it. We did it last year and I think we can do it again," Butler said about upsetting a No. 1 seed. "We've got the right pieces. We've just got to lock in and fol-

low the game plan and we can go out there and win."

UConn lost three players to the NBA from last year's team.

But this year's team is a balanced and focused group, and has looked even more dominant as it attempts to become the first repeat champion since Florida in 2007.

The Huskies are led by guard Tristen Newton and big man Donovan Clingan, who stands 7-foot-2 and weighs 280 pounds.

"I still feel like they're a little bit of a different team from last year," said SDSU big man Jaedon LeDee, a third-team All-American who's used to getting pounded on the inside. "We watched some film on them. They get in transition really well so we've got to get back in transition. They play physical. They're a good team, we're a good team, so we've got to go out there and play."

The Aztecs made 13 of 27 3-pointers in their 85-57 win against Yale and might have to be that good again against UConn.

Coach: Utes shaken by 'racial hate crimes' at regional

Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — Members of the Utah women's basketball team were subjected to racism near their hotel in Idaho last week when a pickup truck with a Confederate flag drove near them and the driver began using offensive language, including the N-word, authorities said Tuesday. The team was left shaken and wound up moving to a different hotel the next day.

Utah coach Lynne Roberts said her team experienced a series of hate crimes after arriving at its first NCAA Tournament hotel in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. She revealed what happened after Utah lost to Gonzaga in the second round of the tournament Monday night and authorities confirmed some of the details

the following day.

Roberts said the incidents happened last Thursday night after the team arrived, and they were disturbing to the traveling party to the point there were concerns about safety. The Utes played their games in Spokane, but were staying about 30 miles away in Coeur d'Alene before they were relocated to a different hotel Friday.

"We had several instances of some kind of racial hate crimes toward our program and (it was) incredibly upsetting for all of us," Roberts said. "In our world, in athletics and in university settings, it's shocking. There's so much diversity on a college campus and so you're just not exposed to that very often."

Tony Stewart, an official with

the Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations, said at a news conference the Utes were walking from the hotel to a restaurant when the truck drove up and the driver began using racist language. After the team left the restaurant, the same driver returned "reinforced by others," Stewart said, and they revved their engines and again yelled at the players.

"We all just were in shock, and we looked at each other like, did we just hear that? ... Everybody was in shock — our cheerleaders, our students that were in that area that heard it clearly were just frozen," Utah deputy athletic director Charmelle Green, who is Black, told KSL.com.

Utah said it filed a police re-

port the night of the incidents. Coeur d'Alene police chief Lee White said Tuesday about 100 people were around the area that night.

South Dakota State and UC Irvine also were staying at hotels in Idaho because of a lack of hotel space in the Spokane area.

South Dakota State stayed in Post Falls, just west of Coeur d'Alene and on the Idaho-Washington state line. UC Irvine stayed in Coeur d'Alene, but was not involved in the incident with Utah. Even so, the team requested to move "for the well-being and safety of our student-athletes and the entire travel party," Mike Uhlenkamp, assistant vice chancellor for communications and media relations, said in an email.

Bruins score late to frustrate Panthers

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Pavel Zacha scored the winning goal with 2:21 remaining in the game and the Boston Bruins defeated the Florida Panthers 4-3 on Tuesday night.

"It gives us confidence in three weeks when it starts for real," Boston coach Jim Montgomery said, referring to the playoffs. "We were down three times, we kept coming back. So we can believe in our process, believe in our identity and keep playing."

The Bruins also broke a tie with Florida atop the Atlantic Division and now hold a two-point lead although the Panthers have played one less game. Boston is also in second place in the Eastern Conference with 99 points, one point behind the New York Rangers, who beat the Philadelphia Flyers 6-5 in overtime on Tuesday night.

"I thought it was a good effort by our group," Bruins captain Brad Marchand said. "It was a playoff-type game there, the teams played hard, they didn't really have any holes, so it was a good character win."

Charlie McAvoy, David Pastrnak and Trent Frederic also scored for the Bruins. Jeremy Swayman made 18 saves, and also had an assist on Frederic's tying goal that came on the power play with less than five minutes to play.

Evan Rodrigues, Sam Reinhart and Carter Verhaeghe scored for the Panthers.

Rangers 6, Flyers 5 (OT): Adam Fox scored 36 seconds into overtime and host New York became the first NHL team to clinch a playoff spot this season, beating Philadelphia following a wild third period.

Alexis Lafreniere had two goals and Igor Shesterkin made 36 saves for the Rangers, who lead the league with 100 points after giving coach Peter Laviolette his 800th career win.

Penguins 4, Hurricanes 1: Sidney Crosby had a goal and two assists and his team scored two goals on five shots in the second period, spoiling Jake Guentzel's return to Pittsburgh with a victory over Carolina.

Capitals 4, Red Wings 3 (OT): Dylan Strome scored twice, Charlie Lindgren made 30 saves and host Washington beat Detroit in a pivotal matchup in the Eastern Conference playoff race.

The Capitals moved two points ahead of Detroit and still have an extra game left to play. They're also right on the heels of Philadelphia for third place in the Metropolitan Division.

Devils 6, Maple Leafs 3: Nico Hischier had a goal and two assists, Jake Allen made 42 saves and visiting New Jersey beat Toronto.

The Maple Leafs are third in the Atlantic Division with the postseason less than a month away. New Jersey entered Tuesday's

game five points out of the Eastern Conference's second wild-card berth.

Predators 5, Golden Knights 4 (OT): Roman Josi scored 40 seconds into overtime to lead host Nashville to a victory over Vegas and extended the team's stretch of consecutive games unbeaten in regulation to a franchise-record 18.

Oilers 4, Jets 3 (OT): Zach Hyman scored his 51st goal of the season 1:22 into overtime, helping visiting Edmonton hand Winnipeg its fourth straight loss.

Blackhawks 3, Flames 1: Jason Dickinson scored twice, Petr Mrazek made 40 saves and host Chicago beat Calgary.

Canadiens 2, Avalanche 1: Sam Montembeault made 27 saves and visiting Montreal beat Colorado in coach Martin St. Louis' return to the team.

Coyotes 6, Blue Jackets 2: Josh Doan had two goals, including the go-ahead score in his first NHL game, and host Arizona beat Columbus.

Kraken 4, Ducks 0: Eeli Tolvanen and Matty Beniers each had a goal and an assist, and host Seattle halted an eight-game losing streak by beating Anaheim.

Stars 6, Sharks 3: Wyatt Johnston and Jason Robertson each scored twice, Jamie Benn added a goal and two assists, and visiting Dallas beat San Jose for its fifth straight win.

Reaves' triple-double lifts Lakers over Bucks in 2OT

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Staring at a double-digit deficit midway through the fourth quarter without LeBron James available, Austin Reaves and the Los Angeles Lakers faced a clear choice.

"It was one of those moments that you could either flip the page to tomorrow, get ready for that game or you could go out and compete 110% and give yourself an opportunity or at least try to give yourself an opportunity to get back in the game," Reaves said.

The Lakers chose the latter option and delivered a comeback for the ages.

Reaves had his second career triple-double and made a tie-breaking 3-pointer with 38.6

seconds left in the second overtime as the Lakers overcame James' absence and rallied to beat the Milwaukee Bucks 128-124 on Tuesday night.

Reaves had 29 points, 14 rebounds and 10 assists in 47 minutes as the Lakers opened a six-game trip by winning their fourth straight.

Warriors 113, Heat 92: Klay Thompson scored 28 points, Jonathan Kuminga added 18 and visiting Golden State pulled away in the second half to beat still-shorthanded Miami.

Stephen Curry and Andrew Wiggins each scored 17 for Golden State, which led by two at the half and then led by as many as 22 points in the fourth.

Bam Adebayo scored 24 points for Miami, which played

without leading scorer Jimmy Butler — sidelined by an illness. The Heat also were without Tyler Herro (foot) for a 16th consecutive game, Kevin Love (heel) for a 14th consecutive game and Duncan Robinson (back) for a fourth game in a row.

Thunder 119, Pelicans 112: Jalen Williams scored 26 points and visiting Oklahoma City rallied with a 12-0 run during the final 2:31 to escape with a victory over New Orleans.

Josh Giddey scored 25 points and Shai Gilgeous-Alexander added 24, including a tying 3 with 1:29 left.

Zion Williamson had 29 points and 10 assists, and CJ McCollum scored 23 points for the Pelicans, who trailed 88-68

before using a 20-2 run to get themselves — and the crowd — back into the game.

Mavericks 132, Kings 96: Luka Doncic scored 26 of his 28 points in the first half and visiting Dallas beat the Kings for its fifth straight win.

Doncic added 11 rebounds, six assists and three steals as the Mavericks moved into sixth place in the Western Conference, a game ahead of the Kings, with both teams trying to avoid the play-in tournament.

Kyrie Irving had 24 points and eight assists, and Tim Hardaway Jr. scored 22 off the bench.

De'Aaron Fox led the Kings with 18 points but was held to 6-for-18 shooting. Keegan Murray added 17.