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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Trump orders strikes on Houthi rebels

Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — President Donald Trump said he ordered a series of airstrikes on the Houthi-held areas in Yemen on Saturday, promising to use “overwhelming lethal force” until the Iran-backed rebels cease their attacks on shipping along a vital maritime corridor. The Houthis said at least 31 people were killed, and Trump’s national security adviser said Sunday that the strikes had successfully targeted “multiple” Houthi leaders.

“Our brave Warfighters are right now carrying out aerial attacks on the terrorists’ bases, leaders, and missile defenses to protect American shipping, air, and naval assets, and to restore Navigational Freedom,” Trump said in a social media post. “No

terrorist force will stop American commercial and naval vessels from freely sailing the Waterways of the World.”

He also warned Iran to stop supporting the rebel group, promising to hold the country “fully accountable” for the actions of its proxy. It comes two weeks after the U.S. leader sent a letter to Iranian leaders offering a path to restarting bilateral talks between the countries on Iran’s advancing nuclear program. Trump has said he will not allow it to become operational.

“This was an overwhelming response that actually targeted multiple Houthi leaders and took them out,” Trump national security adviser Michael Waltz said on ABC’s “This Week.” that aired Sunday.

The United States and Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen are both vowing escalation after the U.S. launched airstrikes to deter the rebels from attacking military and commercial vessels on one of the world’s busiest shipping corridors.

“We’re not going to have these people controlling which ships can go through and which ones cannot. And so your question is, how long will this go on? It will go on until they no longer have the capability to do that,” Secretary of State Marco Rubio told CBS on Sunday.

The Houthis reported explosions in their territory Saturday evening, in the capital of Sanaa and the northern province of Saada, the rebels’ stronghold on the border with Saudi Arabia, with more airstrikes reported in

those areas early Sunday.

The Houthi-run Health Ministry said early Sunday that the death toll had climbed to 31, including women and children. Anees al-Asbahi, a spokesperson for the ministry, said Sunday that another 101 people were wounded.

Nasraddin Amer, deputy head of the Houthi media office, said the airstrikes won’t deter them and they would retaliate against the U.S. “Sanaa will remain Gaza’s shield and support and will not abandon it no matter the challenges,” he added on social media.

Another spokesman, Mohamed Abdulsalam, on X, called Trump’s claims that the Houthis threaten international shipping routes “false and misleading.”

Massive storm causes fatal destruction across US

Associated Press

PIEDMONT, Mo. — Residents pounded by unusually vicious weather across parts of the U.S. surveyed damage Sunday from violent tornadoes, high winds and blinding dust storms that decimated homes and other structures and left at least 35 people dead.

National Weather Service meteorologist Cody Snell said tornado watches remained in effect Sunday morning for portions of the Carolinas, east Georgia and northern Florida. He said the main threat would be damaging winds, but there is the possibility of more tornadoes.

“As we go through the day today, there still is the potential for severe weather from, say,

the upper Ohio Valley and western Pennsylvania down through the rest of the mid-Atlantic and Southeast as we have this cold front that’s still moving across the country, and it won’t clear the East Coast until later on tonight,” Snell said.

The dynamic storm from Friday through Sunday earned an unusual “high risk” designation from weather forecasters. Still, experts said it’s not unusual to see such weather extremes in March.

At least three people were killed in central Alabama when multiple tornadoes swept across the state. Among those killed was an 82-year-old woman who was in a manufactured home that was destroyed by a twister, Dallas County Sheriff

Michael L. Grantham said.

In Troy, Ala., parks officials said the recreation center where over 200 people had taken shelter would be closed due to damage it received from overnight storms. No one was injured.

Missouri resident Dakota Henderson said he and others rescuing trapped neighbors found five bodies scattered in the debris Friday outside what remained of his aunt’s house in hard-hit Wayne County. Scattered twisters killed at least a dozen people in the state, authorities said.

Authorities were still sifting through massive tornado damage.

On Saturday, Coroner Jim Akers of Butler County de-

scribed the “unrecognizable home” where one man was killed as “just a debris field.”

In Mississippi, Gov. Tate Reeves announced that six people died in three counties and three more were missing.

Dust storms spurred by the system’s early high winds claimed almost a dozen lives on Friday. Eight people died in a Kansas highway pileup involving at least 50 vehicles, according to the state highway patrol.

Authorities said three people also were killed in car crashes during a dust storm in Amarillo, in the Texas Panhandle.

More than 130 fires were reported across Oklahoma and nearly 300 homes were damaged or destroyed, Gov. Kevin Stitt said Saturday.

Navy offers voluntary exit to trans troops

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy is offering voluntary honorable discharges to transgender sailors and Marines who self-identify by March 28 or risk being involuntarily separated, according to a memo released Thursday.

"The Department of the Navy recognizes two sexes: male and female. An individual's sex is immutable, unchanging during a person's life," reads the memo signed by Terence Emmert, the acting Navy secretary.

Sailors and Marines who are no longer eligible for military

service, as well as potential new recruits, might be considered for a retention or recruitment waiver on a case-by-case basis provided there is a "compelling government interest" in that individual's ability to support "warfighting capabilities."

Only the Navy secretary has authority to grant a waiver, according to the memo.

Troops with a diagnosis or history of gender dysphoria were disqualified from military service, according to instructions issued Feb. 27 by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

Gender dysphoria is the distress that a person feels because

their assigned gender and gender identity don't match.

The medical condition has been linked to depression and suicidal thoughts.

The new policy stems from an executive order signed by President Donald Trump that claims the sexual identity of transgender service members "conflicts with a soldier's commitment to an honorable, truthful, and disciplined lifestyle, even in one's personal life."

Roughly 2,000 transgender people serve in the military, representing less than 1% of active-duty service members.

The Navy said it will take no

action to identify transgender sailors and Marines or those diagnosed with dysphoria.

Those who choose to separate will receive voluntary separation pay, depending on years of service.

The policies also apply to reservists. Those who request voluntary separation will be placed on administrative, non-deployable status.

Additional guidance is expected for those who do not request voluntary separation and have a diagnosis or symptoms of gender dysphoria.

The ban is being challenged in court.

Marines take tougher line on shaving waivers

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Marines with a medical exemption from shaving for painful skin disorders must have their condition reexamined within 90 days, according to a new administrative order that comes after the initiation of a broader Pentagon review on grooming standards.

The Marine directive, issued Thursday, also said troops diagnosed with the skin condition

known as pseudofolliculitis barbae could be separated from the service if grooming exceptions are needed beyond one year.

Under such a scenario, a Marine "may be considered for administrative separation due to incompatibility with Service," the order stated.

A Marine directive issued in 2012 allowed commanding officers to separate Marines with long-term conditions that did not respond to treatment if it af-

fected "good order and discipline."

The new order was described as interim guidance and comes after Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's announcement Wednesday of a rapid review across the military of standards for physical fitness, body composition and grooming.

The review also will examine policies regarding beards. All services grant shaving waivers to members diagnosed with

pseudofolliculitis barbae. The condition disproportionately affects Black men.

Marines already diagnosed with it need to be reevaluated to assess their treatment protocol and determine need for further treatment, guidance says.

Over the years, branches have carried out studies on bears to determine whether regulations could be loosened, but so far, none have taken steps beyond special exceptions.

Navy: Shipyards exempt from probationary purge

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — At least 10 workers were fired from Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Maine last week, a day after a top Navy admiral told lawmakers that the service's shipyard workforce is exempt from a Defense Department-wide probationary employee purge.

All 10 were entry-level probationary workers in administra-

tive positions. Of those, four were fired for performance issues. The other six were let go based solely on their probationary status, according to the chapter president of a union that represents more than 500 workers at the shipyard.

The firings occurred the same week that Adm. James Kilby, the Navy's vice chief of operations, told the Senate Armed Services Committee

that probationary shipyard workers would be exempt from the Pentagon's first wave of workforce cuts.

The Defense Department on March 10 began cutting its civilian workforce, with the goal of immediately purging 5,400 probationary workers. The Pentagon plans to slash its workforce by up to 8%, which could total more than 70,000 workers.

Lawmakers and unions have

urged the Navy to exempt its four public shipyards — Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Virginia, Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Washington and Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard in Hawaii — from the Pentagon's civilian workforce purge. The shipyards are responsible for maintaining the Navy's nuclear-powered fleet of submarines and aircraft carriers.

Stopgap signed with \$6B more for military

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON—The Senate on Friday passed a stopgap funding bill that averts a government shutdown and provides \$6 billion in new spending for defense and another \$6 billion for veterans' health care through Sept. 30.

The 54-46 vote came two days after the vice chiefs of all the military services warned lawmakers that a temporary funding extension of last year's funding levels, even with a \$6 billion increase, will hurt readiness and slow modernization efforts.

President Donald Trump signed the legislation into law Saturday. The bill largely keeps government funding at levels set during Joe Biden's presidency, though with changes.

Senators adopted the legislation, known as a continuing resolution, despite fierce resistance

from Democrats, who argued it would give the Trump administration wide latitude to dismantle the federal government.

Members of both parties said they were reluctant to vote for the spending measure due to the harm it would cause the military. This is the first time the Defense Department will operate under a full-year continuing resolution after lawmakers failed to agree on appropriations for fiscal 2025, which began Oct. 1.

"This is a shame on our process and it is not in keeping with what the founders intended," said Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, the Republican chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

He said the legislation does not provide adequate support for a military that is contending with multiple adversaries who are working together to "bring us ill." But he said he would nonetheless

support the bill because the alternative of a shutdown was "so unpalatable, so dangerous."

The government would have shut down at midnight Friday had the measure failed.

Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., on Thursday urged senators to pass a one-month continuing resolution to buy more time to hammer out a traditional appropriations bill, citing concerns in congressional testimony by senior service leaders earlier in the week.

Adm. James Kilby, vice chief of naval operations, said the Navy will need to "make hard choices" this year due to the stopgap measure and predicted slowed progress in shipbuilding, maintenance and fleet modernization. Gen. Michael Gutelein, vice chief of space operations, said the Space Force will face a "huge challenge" because it is the smallest force with the smallest budget.

"Ultimately, the Army can afford a large, ready or modern force, but with the current budget, it cannot afford all three," said Gen. James Mingus, vice chief of staff of the Army. "Either we provide soldiers the capabilities needed to win or accept greater risks in other areas."

The \$6 billion increase in military funding included in the continuing resolution will bring total defense spending for the current fiscal year to about \$847 billion, about \$3 billion less than what defense budget planners had hoped for. The additional money will fully cover a historic pay raise for junior enlisted troops, as well as weapons purchases and operations and maintenance. Another \$6 billion is being allocated to the Department of Veterans Affairs' Toxic Exposures Fund to cover a budget shortfall.

Judge stalls Trump's effort to speed some deportations

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal judge barred the Trump administration Saturday from carrying out deportations under a sweeping 18th century law that the president invoked hours earlier to speed removal of Venezuelan gang members from the U.S.

U.S. District Judge James E. Boasberg said he needed to issue his order immediately because the government was already flying migrants it claimed were newly deportable under President Donald Trump's proclamation to be incarcerated in El Salvador and Honduras. El Salvador had already agreed to take up to 300 migrants that the Trump administration designated as gang members.

"I do not believe I can wait any longer and am required to act," Boasberg said during a Saturday evening hearing in a lawsuit brought by the ACLU and De-

mocracy Forward. "A brief delay in their removal does not cause the government any harm," he added, noting they remain in government custody but ordering that any planes in the air be turned around.

The ruling came hours after Trump claimed the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua was invading the United States and invoked the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, a wartime authority that allows the president broader leeway on policy and executive action to speed up mass deportations. The act has been used three times before, all during wars. Its most recent application was during World War II, when it was used to incarcerate Germans and Italians as well as for the mass internment of Japanese American civilians.

In a proclamation released before Boasberg's hearing, Trump contended Tren de Aragua was effectively at war with the U.S.

NASA's stuck astronauts greet their replacements

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Just over a day after blasting off, a SpaceX crew capsule arrived at the International Space Station on Sunday, delivering the replacements for NASA's two stuck astronauts.

The four newcomers — representing the United States, Japan and Russia — will spend the next few days learning the station's ins and outs from Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams. Then the two will strap into their own SpaceX capsule later this week, one that has been up there since last year, to close out an unexpected extended mission that began in June.

Wilmore and Williams had expected to be gone just a week when they launched on Boeing's first astronaut flight. They hit the nine-month mark earlier this month.

The Boeing Starliner capsule encountered so many problems that NASA insisted it come back

empty, leaving its test pilots behind to wait for a SpaceX lift.

Wilmore swung open the space station's hatch, then rang the ship's bell as the arrivals floated in one by one and were greeted with hugs and handshakes.

"It was a wonderful day. Great to see our friends arrive," Williams told Mission Control.

Wilmore's and Williams' ride arrived in September with a downsized crew of two and two empty seats reserved for the leg back. But more delays resulted when their replacements' new capsule needed extensive battery repairs. An older capsule took its place, pushing up their return by a couple weeks to mid-March.

Weather permitting, the SpaceX capsule carrying Wilmore, Williams and two other astronauts will undock from the space station no earlier than Wednesday and splash down off Florida's coast.

Fire kills dozens in N. Macedonian club

Associated Press

KOCANI, North Macedonia — A massive fire tore through a nightclub in North Macedonia's eastern town of Kocani early Sunday, killing 59 people and injuring 155, authorities said.

The blaze broke out around 2:30 a.m. local time during a concert by a local pop group at Club Pulse, Interior Minister Panche Toshkovski told reporters. Officials said 39 of the dead had so far been identified, adding that 18 of those injured were in critical condition.

Toshkovski said following an

initial assessment that pyrotechnics likely caused the roof to catch fire. Videos showed sparkling pyrotechnics on the stage hitting the ceiling followed by scenes of chaos inside the club, with young people running through the smoke as the musicians urged people to escape as quickly as possible.

Throughout Sunday, relatives gathered in front of hospitals and city offices in Kocani, 72 miles east of the capital, Skopje, begging authorities for more information. Dragi Stojanov was informed that his 21-year-old son

Tomce had died in the fire.

"He was my only child. I don't need my life anymore ... 150 families have been devastated," he said. "Children burnt beyond recognition. There are corpses, just corpses inside (the club)."

Condolences poured in from leaders around Europe as well as from the office of Pope Francis, who has been in the hospital for the last month fighting double pneumonia. Health Minister Arben Taravarai said he had received offers of assistance from neighboring countries, including Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy also sent messages of support.

In Skopje, health officials said the injured have been taken to hospitals around the country, many being treated for severe burns and smoke inhalation.

The effort was being assisted by multiple volunteer organizations.

The fire is the worst tragedy in recent memory to befall the land-locked nation, whose population is less than 2 million.

Two South Korean pilots charged with negligence

By DAVID CHOI

Stars and Stripes

South Korea's military has charged two air force pilots with criminal negligence following an accidental bombing that injured 38 people outside a live-fire range.

The two unidentified KF-16 pilots were accused of mistakenly inputting incorrect bombing coordinates during a training flight on March 6, the Criminal Investigation Command of the Ministry of National Defense said in a news release Thursday.

Eight 500-pound MK-82 free-fall bombs struck a section of Pocheon city, beyond the intended practice range and about 20 miles south of the border.

The pilots' error was the "direct cause" of the bombs landing in a residential area, the release said. The investigation is ongoing.

The bombs were also dropped "without visually confirming the target" in the final stages, South Korean air force spokesman Jang Dong-ha told reporters at a news conference

in Seoul on Thursday.

Jang said the pilots face additional charges related to damage at an unspecified military facility.

The KF-16, South Korea's variant of the U.S. F-16 Fighting Falcon, is used by both the South Korean and U.S. militaries. The MK-82 bomb is also employed by U.S. forces.

South Korea's air force chief of staff, Gen. Lee Young-su, issued a televised apology Monday.

"As the chief of staff, I am responsible for this accident," he

said before bowing his head.

In the wake of the incident, U.S. Forces Korea announced that all live-fire training has been suspended for the "safety of the local community."

The training was part of the large-scale Freedom Shield drills that began Monday, according to the defense ministry and USFK. The 10-day exercise includes operations on land, air, sea and cyberspace and involves approximately 19,000 South Korean troops and an unspecified number of U.S. personnel.

Russia and Ukraine trade overnight aerial attacks

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia and Ukraine traded heavy aerial blows overnight, with both sides on Saturday reporting more than 100 enemy drones over their respective territories.

The attacks come less than 24 hours after Russian President Vladimir Putin met with U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff to discuss details of the American proposal for a 30-day ceasefire in the war with Ukraine.

Putin told a press conference on Thursday that he supported a

truce in principle but set out a host of details that need to be clarified before it is agreed. Kyiv has already endorsed the truce proposal, although Ukrainian officials have publicly raised doubts as to whether Moscow will commit to such a deal.

Speaking to reporters in Kyiv on Saturday, after virtual talks between Western allies hosted by U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy voiced his nation's support for the 30-day full ceasefire proposal to discuss a longer-

term peace plan, but said Russia would attempt to derail talks with conditions and "buts."

Starmer has told allies to "keep the pressure" on Putin to back a ceasefire in Ukraine, hailing Ukraine as the "party of peace." Starmer said Putin will "sooner or later" have to "come to the table."

In a statement earlier on Saturday, Zelenskyy had accused Moscow of building up forces along the border.

"The buildup of Russian forces indicates that Moscow intends to keep ignoring diplomacy. It is

clear that Russia is prolonging the war," he said.

However, Zelenskyy stressed that if Russia did not agree with the U.S. proposal there would be "specific, harsh and straightforward" response from the administration of President Donald Trump.

He also said that Kyiv's troops were maintaining their presence in Russia's Kursk region after Trump said Friday that "thousands" of Ukrainian troops had been surrounded by the Russian military.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Measles vaccine rates below immunity threshold

PA PHILADELPHIA — Measles vaccination rates among kindergarten students in the Philadelphia region have been declining since the COVID pandemic, and are now below the so-called herd or community immunity rate needed to keep the highly contagious virus from spreading.

Medical experts say that 95% of a community must be vaccinated against measles to keep the disease from circulating, even at low levels. Vaccination rates among kindergartners in Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester and Delaware counties had all dipped below that critical threshold by the beginning of the 2023-24 school year, according to the most recent data available from the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

The downward trend began during the pandemic, when families avoided nonurgent medical appointments and were advised to stay home. But vaccination rates have continued to decline.

American Airlines jet catches fire upon landing

CO DENVER — Twelve people were taken to hospitals after an American Airlines plane landed at Denver International Airport on Thursday and caught fire, prompting slides to be deployed so passengers could evacuate quickly.

All of the people transported to hospitals had minor injuries, according to a post on the social platform X by Denver International Airport.

Flight 1006, which was headed from the Colorado Springs

Airport to Dallas Fort Worth, diverted to Denver and landed safely around 5:15 p.m. after the crew reported engine vibrations, the Federal Aviation Administration said in a statement. While taxiing to the gate, an engine on the Boeing 737-800 caught fire, the FAA added.

Photos and videos posted by news outlets showed passengers standing on a plane's wing as smoke surrounded the aircraft.

Influencer who snatched baby wombat heads home

MT HELENA — An American influencer left Australia on Friday after the government announced it was reviewing her visa over a video she posted of her snatching a baby wombat from its mother.

Montana-based Sam Jones, who describes herself as an "outdoor enthusiast & hunter," made her Instagram account private Thursday after she was widely condemned for the video.

In the video, Jones lifts the wombat joey by its front legs in darkness from a roadside then runs away from its mother. "I caught a baby wombat," she said as a man filming her laughs. She returns the wombat to the roadside after several seconds.

A government official confirmed Jones had flown from the country voluntarily.

Cops: Stepmother held man captive for 20 years

CT WATERBURY — A Connecticut man who said he was held captive for 20 years was rescued after setting fire to his room and telling

first responders he did it to gain his freedom, police said.

The man's stepmother was charged with cruelty and kidnapping.

Waterbury first responders rescued the emaciated, 32-year-old man from an upstairs room after they were deployed to a house fire last month, police said in a statement. While being treated for smoke inhalation, he revealed that he intentionally set the blaze. The man said he had been held captive since he was about 11 years old.

An investigation revealed that the man, whose name was not released, "had been held in captivity for over 20 years, enduring prolonged abuse, starvation, severe neglect, and inhumane treatment," police said, adding that he had not received medical or dental care during that time.

Kimberly Sullivan, 56, identified as the man's stepmother, was charged with assault, kidnapping, unlawful restraint, cruelty and reckless endangerment. She was arraigned Wednesday and held in lieu of \$300,000 bond.

Prisons limit calls, visits, movement amid violence

CA SACRAMENTO — High-security prisons across California have tightly restricted movement, calls and visits while officials probe a surge in violence this year.

The restrictions started Saturday and affect the top-security sections of nearly a dozen lockups including the California Correctional Institution, California State Prison-Los Angeles County and California State Prison-Sacramento.

Under the protocols, meals

must be delivered directly to housing units and showers and any other movements must be done in a "controlled manner," the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation said in a statement.

Calls by telephone and Via-Path tablet are also restricted, as are visitations.

Prisoners still have access to medical care, legal proceedings and other "critical appointments," corrections officials said.

Shots fired a second time at same Tesla dealership

OR TIGARD — Gunshots were fired at a Tesla dealership in Oregon on Thursday for the second time in a week in ongoing vandalism and protests around the country since CEO Elon Musk became a key figure in the Trump administration.

Around 4:15 a.m., more than a dozen shots were fired around the electric vehicle dealership in the Portland suburb of Tigard, according to the Tigard Police Department. The shooting caused extensive damage to cars and showroom windows, police said. No one was hurt.

A similar shooting happened on March 6 at the same location. Police said they continue to work with federal partners at the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives to investigate.

Tesla has been a target for demonstrations and vandalism in the U.S. and elsewhere this year. People have protested Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, which has been moving to slash the size of the federal government.

— From wire reports

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St. John's wins 1st Big East title in 25 years

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Regular-season champs. A tournament title. Pride in the program fully restored.

The pied piper of college basketball rebuilds, Rick Pitino has St. John's back atop the Big East.

And this time, the nets were coming down.

RJ Luis Jr. scored all but two of his 29 points after halftime and the No. 6 Red Storm made 14 straight shots from the field in the second half to beat Creighton 82-66 on Saturday night for their first Big East Tournament title in 25 years.

"Wow, this is incredible just to come from last year to this year and to see the transformation," Luis said. "Coach P is the mastermind behind all of this. I mean, it's truly special."

Zuby Ejiofor added 20 points and Kadary Richmond had 12 points and 12 rebounds for top-seeded St. John's (30-4), which reached 30 wins for the third time in program history before a roaring hometown crowd at sold-out Madison Square Garden.

The Red Storm earned the conference's automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament for their

first trip since 2019, making the 72-year-old Pitino the first coach to take six schools to the Big Dance.

The others were Boston University, Providence, Kentucky, Louisville and Iona.

"Great win for the city. Great win for our university. You hear it all along that it's New York's team, and it truly is," the Hall of Fame coach said. "As a New Yorker myself, I'm very, very proud that St. John's has gotten to this level."

Pitino, in his second season with the Red Storm, also became the first coach to win the Big East Tournament at two schools. He's won three times in his last four seasons in the league, after guiding Louisville to championships in 2009, 2012 and 2013.

"I saved the best for last," Pitino announced to loud cheers from the crowd of 19,812, pausing to remove falling confetti from his lips during a postgame interview on the court.

Luis, the Big East Player of the Year, also grabbed 10 rebounds and was selected the tournament's Most Outstanding Player.

"Just still trying to soak it in, and it's just crazy how much you

can speak things into existence and just watch it all come together," Luis said. "This has by far been the most emotional, happiest week of my 22 years of existence."

Ejiofor and Richmond made the All-Tournament team.

"The three of them have been unstoppable," Pitino said.

Ryan Kalkbrenner scored 15 points for the second-seeded Bluejays (24-10), who fell to 0-5 in Big East championship games since joining the conference for the 2013-14 season.

"It's hard to get to this game, let's be honest," coach Greg McDermott said. "We've been fortunate to be here quite a few times. Unfortunately, we haven't been able to finish the job."

When resurgent St. John's clinched its first outright regular-season conference championship in 40 years with a victory over Seton Hall at The Garden on March 1, it had already decided not to cut down the nets to celebrate.

More work to do.

But on this night, players and staff climbed the ladder and snipped their souvenirs.

It was the fourth Big East

Tournament title for the Red Storm, who made the championship game for the first time since winning the 2000 trophy under Mike Jarvis. The previous two came in the 1980s under Hall of Fame coach Lou Carnesecca, who died Nov. 30 about five weeks shy of his 100th birthday.

"To finally get over the hump, it's really an unbelievable feeling," Ejiofor said. "I'm so happy to be a part of history."

And after St. John's cut down the nets, a message appeared on the giant video screen above center court: "For Looie."

"I'm thinking he would be so proud of this team," said Pitino, who has quickly revived the Red Storm into a national power again late in his illustrious but checkered career.

"Humility is a big part of my life right now. It wasn't always that way," he added. "I don't believe in redemption. I believe in humility."

The drought between Big East Tournament titles for St. John's was the longest for any team in league history.

"St. John's didn't get built by the NIL. St. John's got built with character of the players," Pitino said.

Uzan, Houston beat Arizona for Big 12 championship

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Houston had crowded onto the podium inside T-Mobile Center on Saturday night, and the second-ranked Cougars were beginning to celebrate their Big 12 Tournament title, when Emanuel Sharp was handed a championship belt as the tourney MVP.

He raised it high above his head — upside down.

It was just about the only obvious misstep that anyone from Houston made all week.

Milos Uzan poured in 25 points against Arizona in the finale, Sharp added 17 in another brilliant effort, and the Cougars turned up their trademark defense in the final minute to hold on for a 72-64 victory over the Big 12 newcomer.

Playing without injured big man J'Wan

Roberts, Houston (30-4) took a 64-62 lead on Uzan's 3-pointer with 5 minutes to go, then suffocated the Wildcats (22-12) down the stretch to avenge a loss to Iowa State in last year's title game.

"We did a great job of staying together," said Sharp, who was joined by Uzan and Big 12 player of the year LJ Cryer on the All-Tournament team. "That's what coach has been preaching. And that's why I love this team."

The Cougars romped to the regular-season Big 12 title, winning 19 of 20 games in the expanded league. And it was just as dominant in three games in Kansas City, easily beating Colorado and No. 17 BYU before turning back red-hot Arizona for the trophy.

"We never panic," Houston coach Kelvin Sampson said. "A lot of people around us do,

but thank God they're not coaches and players. We've been in these bunkers. We've been there when it's tough. We've learned to internalize and almost get independent of everything around us. We get in a bunker and believe in each other and get to work."

Caleb Love scored 19 points, Jaden Bradley added 14 and KJ Lewis finished with 11 for the Wildcats, who were trying to replicate what Arizona State did in football this past season: win a Big 12 title in its first year in its new league.

"It was a tough year. A tough conference. And for us to compete with the best of the best, you know, as far as conferences, I'm proud of my guys," Love said. "I'm just proud we made it this far, and we'll be ready for March Madness."

Proctor, Knueppel lift Duke to ACC title

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Tyrese Proctor entered Saturday night's ACC championship 0 for 10 from beyond the 3-point arc in his previous two tournament games.

That didn't keep him from letting it fly.

Proctor made six 3-pointers and scored 19 points, tournament MVP Kon Knueppel added 18 points and No. 1 Duke defeated 13th-ranked Louisville 73-62 to clinch its second Atlantic Coast Conference championship in three seasons under Jon Scheyer.

"He's been playing great defense," Scheyer said. "The shots

haven't been falling for him lately but we knew it was only a matter of time because he's a killer."

It was the Blue Devils' 23rd ACC title overall — the most of any team in conference history — and five more than rival North Carolina, which Duke knocked off 74-71 in a semifinal thriller. The Blue Devils also won the regular-season title.

"Two down and one to go," Knueppel said, referring to the upcoming NCAA Tournament in which Duke is a lock to be the No. 1 overall seed.

Sion James added 15 points for the Blue Devils (31-3), who played their final two games

without ACC player of the year Cooper Flagg and Maliq Brown due to injuries.

"Every game this season, everyone standing behind me stepped up and tonight was no different," Scheyer said. "So many guys made winning plays and that has been the story of this team."

Terrence Edwards Jr. scored 29 points on five 3s for the Cardinals (27-7), who were playing in their first ACC final since joining the league in 2014. Louisville went 18-2 in the conference play during the regular season under first-year head coach Pat Kelsey after going 5-37 vs. ACC foes in the previous two seasons.

Kelsey praised his team for "leaving everything on the floor" over the past three days.

"In the last three months this team has lost twice," Kelsey said. "So I feel strongly in my heart that the best is yet to come. ... We are excited to find out (during selection Sunday) where we are going and who are playing."

Added Edwards: "We are far from done."

There were nine lead changes and neither team led by more than five before Duke broke the game open with a 12-0 run midway through the second half behind a 3 from Proctor in transition to build a 57-47 lead.

SGA scores 48, helping Thunder hold off Pistons

Associated Press

DETROIT — Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 48 points and the Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Detroit Pistons 113-107 on Saturday night.

Gilgeous-Alexander shot 17-for-26 from the floor, including 4-for-6 from 3-point range, and added six assists and three steals for Oklahoma City, which won for the ninth time in 10 games.

Cason Wallace added 20 points for Thunder, and Isaiah Hartenstein had 12 points and 10 rebounds.

Detroit's Cade Cunningham matched a season low with 11 points on 5-of-18 shooting before being ejected for arguing calls late in the third quarter.

Tobias Harris led the Pistons with 18 points, while reserve Dennis Schroder had 17 points and 11 assists in place of Cunningham.

Detroit trailed 91-75 until Malik Beasley's buzzer-beating layup at the end of the third quarter. His 3-pointer pulled the Pistons within 98-97 with 4:16 left.

Gilgeous-Alexander answer-

ed with a 3, a runner in the lane and a layup to make it 106-100 with 2:07 left before setting up Wallace for a clinching 3-pointer.

Wizards 126, Nuggets 123: Jordan Poole hit a 3-pointer with 2.1 seconds left to give visiting Washington a victory over Denver.

Poole finished with 19 points. Alex Sarr led the Wizards with a career-high 34 points, six rebounds and five assists.

Nikola Jokic led the Nuggets with 40 points and 13 rebounds.

Poole's jumper with 44.1 seconds left gave Washington a 120-119 lead. After Russell Westbrook's layup for Denver, Kyshawn George made a 3-pointer to again put the Wizards in front.

Jamal Murray's jumper tied the game with 5.1 seconds left before Poole's 3-pointer for the win.

Celtics 115, Nets 113: Krisaps Porzingis scored 24 points in his return from an eight-game absence with an illness, getting 14 in the fourth quarter to help visiting Boston hold off Brooklyn.

Payton Pritchard added 22

points and Jayson Tatum had 20 points, eight rebounds and eight assists for the Celtics, who seemed headed for an easy night after a 25-7 run to open the second quarter gave them a 21-point lead. The Nets cut it to two in the fourth quarter before Porzingis made some clutch plays in his first game since Feb. 26.

Grizzlies 125, Heat 91: Jaren Jackson Jr. had 31 points, Desmond Bane added 22 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists as host Memphis led from start to finish in a victory over Miami.

Jackson shot 13-for-18 from the field as the Grizzlies won for the fifth time in last six games.

Bucks 126, Pacers 119: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 34 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists before fouling out and host Milwaukee defeated Indiana.

After trailing 105-84 with 11 minutes left, the Pacers made a frantic comeback and cut the Bucks' lead to 122-119 on Andrew Nembhard's 3-pointer with 12.5 seconds remaining.

Taurean Prince and Kevin Porter Jr. went 4-for-4 on free-

throws down the stretch to preserve Milwaukee's victory.

Rockets 117, Bulls 114: Jalen Green scored 28 points and host Houston extended its winning streak to six games with a victory over Chicago.

Green also added six rebounds for the Rockets. Alperen Sengun scored 24 points while adding 15 rebounds. Fred VanVleet shot 8-for-20 to finish with 23 points.

Warriors 97, Knicks 94: Stephen Curry had 28 points, seven rebounds and five assists two days after becoming the first player in NBA history with 4,000 3-pointers and a day after turning 37, leading host Golden State past New York.

The Warriors won their seventh straight overall — and at home — and 12th in 13.

Karl-Anthony Towns had 29 points and 12 rebounds for the Knicks.

Spurs 119, Pelicans 115: Devin Vassell scored 22 points and host San Antonio held on to beat New Orleans.

Keldon Johnson and Harrison Barnes each had 19 points for the Spurs.

Last-place Sabres beat first-place Knights in SO

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Alex Tuch scored the deciding goal in the shootout to lead the Buffalo Sabres to a 4-3 win against the Vegas Golden Knights on Saturday.

Rasmus Dahlin, Ryan McLeod and Jason Zucker scored in regulation for the Sabres. Uko-Pekka Luukkonen made 16 saves and stopped two out of three Golden Knights shooters in the tiebreaker.

Buffalo had dropped seven of eight.

Jack Eichel, Brett Howden and Pavel Dorofeyev scored for Vegas, which lost for the third time in four games. Adin Hill made 34 saves in regulation and overtime.

The Knights grabbed a 3-2 lead when Eichel scored with 2:33 left in the third. It was Eichel's 21st goal of the season.

Dahlin responded with his 12th goal for the Sabres with 13.6 seconds to play.

Buffalo forward Jiri Kulich was injured at 9:25 of the second period after a hit from Howden.

Capitals 5, Sharks 1: Alex Ovechkin scored his 887th career goal Saturday to move within eight of breaking Wayne Gretzky's NHL record as visiting Washington beat San Jose.

Ovechkin deflected a shot from Martin Fehervary past Georgi Romanov with 9:06 remaining in the third period. Romanov is the NHL-record 182nd goalie that Ovechkin has scored on.

Aliaksei Protas, Taylor Radysh and Trevor van Riemsdyk also scored for the Capitals. Logan Thompson made 19 saves.

Macklin Celebrini scored for San Jose.

Penguins 7, Devils 3: Erik Karlsson scored a power-play goal and host Pittsburgh beat New Jersey.

Rickard Rakell scored his team-leading 31st goal. Connor Dewar scored twice, and Philip Tomasino, Kevin Hayes and

Danton Heinen also scored.

With an assist, Sidney Crosby tied Wayne Gretzky for the fourth-most points with a single franchise. Crosby also recorded his 12th 50-assist season, equaling Adam Oates for 8th in NHL history. He has points in 10 straight home games.

Nico Hischier and Timo Meier scored power-play goals for the Devils. Cody Glass also had a goal. Nathan Bastian's short-handed goal was called back on a challenge because he was offside.

Rangers 4, Blue Jackets 0: Vincent Trocheck scored twice in the third period, Igor Shesterkin made 18 saves for his fifth shutout this season and visiting New York leapfrogged Columbus for the second Eastern Conference wild-card playoff spot with a victory.

Alexis Lafreniere and Artemi Panarin each had a goal and an assist for the Rangers, who won the last two games of their three-stop road trip. New York has won eight of its last 11 against the Blue Jackets, including three of four this season.

Of Shesterkin's 20 career shutouts, four have come against Columbus — including his last two games against the Blue Jackets.

Daniil Tarasov made 18 saves for Columbus, which lost its third straight, including shutouts in its last two at home. The Blue Jackets have failed to score in three of their last five games.

Hurricanes 5, Flyers 0: Mark Jankowski scored twice, Pyotr Kochetkov stopped 26 shots for his second shutout of the season, and visiting Carolina beat Philadelphia for its seventh straight win.

Sebastian Aho had a goal and an assist, Taylor Hall and Scott Morrow also scored, and Eric Robinson and Shayne Gostisbehre each had two assists for the Hurricanes.

Samuel Ersson finished with

26 saves for the Flyers, who have lost six of seven.

Jankowski got his second of the night as he beat Ersson for his eighth of the season and second two-goal effort in the last four games since he was acquired from Nashville. He had four in 41 games with the Predators.

Senators 4, Maple Leafs 2: Claude Giroux broke a second-period tie on a power play and visiting Ottawa beat Toronto for its sixth straight victory.

Jake Sanderson, David Perron and Michael Amadio, into the empty net, also scored. Linus Ullmark made 20 saves.

William Nylander and Auston Matthews scored for the Maple Leafs, and Anthony Stolarz stopped 21 shots. Toronto has dropped five of six.

The Senators trail their provincial rival by four points in the Atlantic Division standings. The Maple Leafs sit third after Tampa Bay beat Boston, while fourth-place Ottawa occupies the Eastern Conference's first wild-card spot.

Canadiens 3, Panthers 1: Cole Caufield scored his team-leading 33rd goal and added an assist to help host Montreal beat Florida.

Patrik Laine and Christian Dvorak — with his 100th career goal — also scored for the Canadiens. Sam Montembeault made 21 saves, including a windmill glove stop on Carter Verhaeghe late.

Mackie Samoskevich scored for the Panthers, who lost for the second time in nine games. Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 12 shots.

Montreal remained within a point of being in playoff position with 71 points.

Lightning 6, Bruins 2: Anthony Cirelli scored twice and visiting Tampa Bay held Boston without a shot in the second period in a victory.

Nick Paul, Victor Hedman and Darren Raddysh added goals to help the Lightning snap

a three-game skid. Cirelli and Ben Hagel had empty-netters.

Elias Lindholm and Marat Khusnutdinov scored for the Bruins. They are 2-2 since trading three longtime cornerstone players — including captain Brad Marchand — at the deadline.

Blues 5, Wild 1: Jordan Kyrou scored three goals for his fifth career hat trick and visiting St. Louis beat Minnesota.

Brayden Schenn had a goal and an assist, and Jake Neighbours also scored to help the Blues win for the third time in five games. Cam Fowler, Robert Thomas and Pavel Buchnevich each had two assists, and Joel Hofer stopped 17 shots.

Jake Middleton scored for the Wild, and Filip Gustavsson finished with 22 saves. Minnesota lost for the fourth time in five games.

Kings 1, Predators 0 (OT): Quinton Byfield scored at 3:20 of overtime, Darcy Kuemper made 24 saves for his second straight shutout and host Los Angeles beat Nashville for its fifth victory in a row.

Byfield ran his goals streak to six games, beating goalie Justus Annunen off a cross-crease pass from Adrian Kempe.

Kuemper has four shutouts this season and 35 overall. Annunen stopped 20 shots.

Canucks 6, Blackhawks 2: Elias Pettersson had a goal and an assist as host Vancouver beat Chicago.

Conor Garland and Pius Suter also each had a goal and an assist, and Quin Hughes, Nils Aman and Tyler Myers also scored for the Canucks. Kiefer Sherwood, Teddy Blueger and Nils Hoglander each had two assists.

Alex Vlasic and Wyatt Kaiser scored, and Ryan Donato had two assists for the Blackhawks. Arvid Soderblom had two assists as Chicago extended its losing streak to 0-3-1.