

Iran hits neighbors; Israel launches attacks

Trump extends Islamic Republic deadline 10 more days to open Strait of Hormuz

Bloomberg News

Iran and Israel exchanged missile fire and Tehran targeted several Gulf states, underscoring the willingness of the two sides to keep fighting even as President Donald Trump pushes for peace talks.

Saudi Arabian authorities reported several drones and missiles were intercepted Friday, many heading to the capital, Riyadh. In Qatar, residents of Doha got missile alerts on their phones for the first time in days, while Israel said it detected launches from Iran. Kuwait said drones damaged two ports. There were no casualties reported in any of the incidents.

Israel, meanwhile, continued to strike what it said were missile- and mine-production sites in Iran. Defense Minister Israel Katz said the military would escalate its assault on the Islamic Republic in response to the targeting of civilians, echoing the general sentiment from Israeli leaders that they remain com-

mitted to the campaign.

The attacks came hours after Trump pushed back his deadline for Iran to agree to reopen the Strait of Hormuz or face attacks on its power infrastructure. The 10-day extension was his second since Saturday's threat to destroy the critical infrastructure in the absence of Tehran reopening the critical waterway, a chokepoint that's become increasingly urgent with global energy and commodity shortages mounting.

Brent crude rose 2.7% to about \$111 a barrel on Friday, extending its climb this year to 82%. The conflict has caused fuel shortages and fears of stagflation across major and emerging market economies.

Iran has rejected a 15-point list of ceasefire terms delivered by the U.S. via intermediaries in Pakistan, and has countered with five conditions of its own, including the maintaining of sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz.

While the two sides appear far apart in the effort to reach an agreement, Trump said talks with Iran are going "very well." Still, he said the American war effort is "ahead of schedule," and the longer deadline allows more time for the U.S. to amass troops in the region.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the Pentagon is considering sending as many as 10,000 additional soldiers to the Middle East.

Some European governments think it's all but inevitable the U.S. will deploy ground troops, despite the high risk of casualties, according to a diplomat familiar with the matter who requested anonymity to discuss sensitive subjects.

Iran's government believes there's a high likelihood Trump will try to take over Kharg Island, the Persian Gulf site from which Iran sends most of its oil exports, according to an official from the Islamic Republic, who spoke.

Military analysts say that aside from Kharg Island, the U.S. could try to take control of the Iranian side of the Strait of Hormuz in a bid to reopen the vital waterway to oil and gas tankers and container ships. It could send special forces to retrieve Iran's roughly 440 kilograms of highly-enriched uranium, the whereabouts of which have been a mystery to nuclear inspectors since the U.S. and Israel last bombed Iran in June. All options would be highly risky for American troops.

Publicly, Iranian officials remain defiant and say Trump is backing down to try to bring down energy prices.

"I am pausing the period of Energy Plant destruction by 10 Days to Monday, April 6, 2026, at 8 P.M., Eastern Time," Trump said in a social media post on Thursday. "Talks are ongoing and, despite erroneous statements to the contrary by the Fake News Media, and others, they are going very well."

Senators see 'historically dangerous' strategic threats

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — A Senate Armed Services Committee hearing Thursday laid bare concerns in both parties about alarming advances in Russian and Chinese missiles, nuclear weapons and antisatellite capabilities.

Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., the committee's chairman, said at the hearing that these dangers are advancing by "leaps and bounds."

Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Is-

land, the committee's top Democrat, said: "We are operating in a historically dangerous strategic environment."

The hearing's purpose was to review the posture of U.S. space and nuclear forces. The witnesses were Space Force Gen. Stephen Whiting, the commander of U.S. Space Command, and Adm. Richard Correll, the commander of U.S. Strategic Command.

Wicker reiterated Strategic Command's 2023 finding that

China now has more land-based intercontinental missile launchers than the United States, though America still has more submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

As for the nuclear warheads that those missiles can deliver, America is still far ahead, but China is advancing, building about 100 more per year, the Pentagon has said. As of last year, China had about 600 warheads, versus more than 5,000 each for Russia and America,

according to the Arms Control Association. But the Pentagon has reported that China is expected to attain 1,000 warheads by 2030. And its missiles are in a launch-on-warning hair-trigger status, the Pentagon has said.

Meanwhile, China has grown its constellations of satellites in orbit to 1,300, including 510 "intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance" satellites — a 667 percent increase since 2015, Whiting of Space Command testified.

Court halts Trump ban on Anthropic AI tool

Bloomberg News

Anthropic PBC won a court order blocking a Trump administration ban on government use of the company's artificial intelligence technology, after the Claude chatbot maker argued the move could cost it billions in lost revenue.

US District Judge Rita F. Lin issued a preliminary injunction on Thursday, pausing the administration's plan to sever all ties with Anthropic while a legal

fight plays out in San Francisco federal court. She questioned the government's rationale for the ban, saying it didn't appear to be directed at its stated national security interests.

"If the concern is the integrity of the operational chain of command, the Department of War could just stop using Claude," the judge wrote. "Instead, these measures appear designed to punish Anthropic." Such a move, she wrote, "is classic ille-

gal First Amendment retaliation."

The company sued earlier this month to block a declaration by the Defense Department that Anthropic posed a threat to the U.S. supply chain, escalating a high-stakes dispute over safeguards on AI technology used by the military.

The startup demanded assurances that its AI wouldn't be used for mass surveillance of Americans or autonomous

weapons deployment, while the government cited national security in arguing it couldn't accept any restrictions.

Lin said the Justice Department had no "legitimate basis" to determine that Anthropic's firm stance regarding restrictions on the usage of its AI technology could lead it to "become a saboteur."

A spokesperson for Anthropic didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Trump considers sending troops back to Los Angeles

Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — When President Trump ordered immigration raids in Los Angeles last June, only a handful of those arrested were violent criminals. The sweeps split families, cost businesses millions of dollars and drove many undocumented residents into hiding.

Activists protested the Immigration and Customs Enforcement actions, prompting the president to deploy thousands of federal troops in what he called a security operation. A federal judge called it unlawful and said the deployment caused "greater harm" to the city.

Now, Trump wants a redo.

At a Cabinet meeting Thursday, he called on the mayors and governors of several blue cities and states to allow troops to "come in and stop the crime," pointing to purported successes in Washington, Memphis and New Orleans.

"Crime is down 75% in a short period of time," Trump told his top advisers. "We could do that for LA and we could do that for, frankly, San Francisco."

The president framed the deployments as both a crime-fighting and immigration en-

forcement tool, saying that federal authorities can remove people from cities in ways local officials cannot.

"We can do it much more effectively, because (local leaders) can't do what we do," Trump said. "All the time, people come up to me ... and they say 'thank you so much.' I know immediately what they're talking about. They're able to walk to work."

Trump also said this week that he would consider deploying the National Guard at airports to assist with mounting security delays amid a 40-day partial government shutdown.

The renewed call comes after a series of controversial federal interventions in cities across the country. In Washington, Trump has repeatedly touted a visible security presence near federal buildings, crediting it with improving public safety, though analysts have debated how much of any decline in crime can be attributed to his order.

Immigration sweeps in Los Angeles targeted workplaces, neighborhoods and churches, stirring widespread panic and forcing many undocumented residents into hiding.

Ethics panel weighs case against congresswoman

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — Members of a House Ethics subcommittee are weighing evidence against Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, D-Fla., after a marathon hearing Thursday that stretched into the night.

It was a rare moment for the typically secretive Ethics panel, as a public "trial" unfolded for the first time since 2010.

In a packed room that started to empty out over several hours, Cherfilus-McCormick sat next to her attorney, William Barzee, who is also representing her in her separate criminal case. She listened silently as committee lawyers accused her of campaign finance offenses and using a "straw donor scheme" as she ran for Congress.

Behind her in the audience sat Elijah Manley, who is challenging her in the Democratic primary for Florida's 20th district.

Members of the adjudicatory subcommittee retreated behind closed doors and had not released their findings as of early Friday morning.

If they ultimately agree they have enough evidence to say Cherfilus-McCormick violated

ethics rules and her conduct reflected poorly on the House, the full Ethics Committee will next meet to recommend a punishment. While the panel can't expel her from Congress on its own, it can suggest that action to the House, which would then require a two-thirds vote on the floor.

Cherfilus-McCormick also faces a federal criminal trial set to begin next month. She was indicted in November on charges of conspiring to steal \$5 million in federal disaster funds that were mistakenly overpaid to her family's health care company during the pandemic, with prosecutors saying she funneled money to her 2021 run for office and bought a diamond ring. She has pleaded not guilty.

The prospect of expulsion puts some Democrats in a tough spot. While they want to appear tough on corruption, some believe the ethics process was rushed and will interfere with Cherfilus-McCormick's coming day in court.

And with tight margins in the House, losing a Democrat would give Speaker Mike Johnson and his GOP majority more breathing room.

Senate approves funding for most of DHS

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — The Senate broke a logjam in the wee hours of Friday morning to pass a funding bill by voice vote that would effectively end a partial shutdown of the Department of Homeland Security.

After a late night of negotiations, the Senate agreed to a modified version of a bill that would fund all of the department with the exception of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and most of Customs and Border Protection — the two agencies that have been at the center of a partisan standoff over immigration enforcement practices.

“It’s not the way to fund the department,” Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said after the vote. “But we are out of time for the critical re-

sponsibilities and tens of thousands of workers currently going without pay.”

Thune said Democrats won none of the policy changes they had sought to immigration enforcement practices that had triggered the partial shutdown more than 40 days ago. He suggested Republicans were likely to seek funding for ICE and CBP through a filibuster-proof reconciliation bill.

Democrats had said for weeks they were willing to fund almost all of the department except for the immigration agencies as they continued to fight for more restrictions on federal agents in the wake of the fatal shootings of two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis earlier this year.

“This could have been accomplished weeks ago if Republicans hadn’t stood in the way,”

said Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y. “Democrats held firm in our opposition that Donald Trump’s rogue and deadly militia should not get more funding without serious reforms, and we will continue to fight for those reforms.”

The bill now heads to the House, which could take it up Friday. It wasn’t yet clear whether it would encounter strong opposition there.

The final push toward a deal also came hours after President Donald Trump intervened with plans to issue an executive order to begin paying Transportation Security Administration workers during the partial shutdown.

After the bill’s passage, Sen. Eric Schmitt, R-Mo., sought unanimous consent for passage

of a separate measure to fund ICE and CBP.

But Sen. Andy Kim, D-N.J., objected, saying Schmitt’s bill would provide the agencies \$100 billion for 10 years with no new restrictions on immigration agents.

Schmitt said Republicans are determined to secure the funding through a reconciliation bill, which can be passed in the Senate with a simple-majority vote instead of the normal 60-vote threshold.

“We will be back in reconciliation where 50-plus-one votes are enough and the filibuster cannot save you,” Schmitt said, referring to Democrats. “We’ll be back to deliver the funding ICE needs, and we’ll be back to deliver the policy changes the American people are demanding.”

Savannah Guthrie blames self in mother’s abduction

New York Daily News

NEW YORK — “Today” show host Savannah Guthrie broke down in tears during her first interview since the disappearance of her mother, at one point blaming herself for the apparent abduction.

“Do you think it was because of me?” Guthrie recalled asking her siblings.

“That it’s because she’s my mom and somebody thought, ‘Oh, that girl, that lady has money and we could make a quick buck.’ I mean, that would make sense, but I don’t know. But, yeah, that’s probably ... it’s just too much to bear,” she continued. “To think that I brought this to her bedside — that it’s because of me.”

She added: “And I have to say, ‘I’m so sorry, Mommy. I’m so sorry. ... I’m so sorry. If it is me, I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry.’”

Guthrie opened up about her guilt during a sit-down with

close friend and “Today” show alum Hoda Kotb, marking the first interview she has given since her mother vanished more than 50 days ago. She said she hoped her return to set may spark a breakthrough in the case, which has for weeks remained mostly a mystery with few answers.

Nancy, who at 84 years old is barely mobile and suffers from a heart condition, has not been heard from since Jan. 31.

Authorities have since released images of a possible suspect — stills lifted from a Ring doorbell cam — but they have yet to identify him. The FBI Phoenix office has described this person as “a male, approximately 5’9 — 5’10, with an average build.” He is also wearing a black, 25-liter Ozark Trail Hiker Pack backpack in the clip.

Investigators have announced few other breaks in the case.

Judge concerned about US sanctions on Maduro funds

New York Daily News

NEW YORK — A Manhattan judge on Thursday said he wouldn’t throw out narco-terrorism charges against ousted Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, but sounded sympathetic to arguments about U.S. sanctions interfering with their defense.

The Manhattan Federal Court hearing was the first for Maduro and Cilia Flores Maduro since their initial appearance in January following their stunning capture in Caracas by U.S. special forces, in which at least 100 people were reportedly killed.

The deposed Latin American leader, wearing prison garb and ankle shackles, appeared in good spirits despite the high stakes, jovially greeting his attorneys in Spanish when he was brought into the 26th-floor courtroom around 11:40 a.m. and gesturing a fin-

ger-gun salute to others by the defense table.

The couple asked Manhattan Federal Judge Alvin Hellerstein in February to dismiss the case, arguing that U.S. sanctions blocking them from using Venezuelan public funds to pay their legal bills violated their due process right to present a defense.

Hellerstein reserved a decision after hearing arguments for about an hour, though he quipped at one point, “I’m not going to dismiss the case,” and later suggested the request was premature.

But the 92-year-old jurist appeared sympathetic to the defense position on the sanctions, repeatedly acknowledging the significant resources needed to mount a defense against the sweeping prosecution and the burdens it would place on court-appointed lawyers.

Transgender women banned from competing in Olympics

Los Angeles Times

Transgender women athletes will be excluded from the Olympics beginning with the 2028 Los Angeles Games after the International Olympic Committee implemented a new eligibility policy on Thursday.

Eligibility for women's competition will be determined by a one-time mandatory genetics test, according to the IOC. The test requires screening through saliva, a cheek swab or a blood sample.

No transgender woman competed at the 2024 Paris Summer Games, and it is unclear if any trans women currently compete at an Olympic level. Weightlifter Laurel Hubbard of New Zealand was the last to do so, competing in the 2021 Tokyo Olympics without winning a medal.

The new eligibility policy is not retroactive and does not apply to recreational sports programs. The IOC said in a statement that it "protects fairness, safety and integrity in the female category."

"Eligibility for any female category event at the Olympic Games or any other IOC event, including individual and team sports, is now limited to biological females," the statement said.

Until now, individual sports federations have determined whether transgender women were allowed to compete in women's categories, with the IOC providing recommendations. Sports that placed restrictions on transgender athletes included track and field, boxing, swimming and rugby.

A 2023 systematic review of the literature on sports participation published in the National Library of Medicine cautioned against imposing blanket restrictions on transgender athletes.

"Reasonable accommodations for the inclusion of trans people are sport specific and could be based on the range of competitive advantages and abilities that are already accepted in the cisgender population," the review stated.

The IOC Executive Board nevertheless approved the new policy after 18 months of study. It mirrors the guidelines approved in June by the World Athletics Council, which will determine eligibility for the female category through screening for the SRY gene.

The IOC policy leans on scientific research that considers the presence of the SRY gene fixed for life and represents evidence that an athlete has experienced male sex development. Athletes who screen negative for the SRY gene will be eligible to compete in women's sports.

SRY (which stands for sex-determining region Y gene) is found on the Y chromosome. In the cell, it binds to other DNA, leading to testis formation, according to the National Library of Medicine. Even men who lack Y chromosomes still have a copy of the SRY region on one of their X chromosomes, which accounts for their maleness.

Jane Thornton, the IOC medical and scientific director, last year presented to the executive board findings from a two-year study that transgender athletes born with male sexual markers retained physical advantages for several years, even those who had received treatment to reduce testosterone.

Kirsty Coventry, a former gold-medal swimmer from Zimbabwe, was elected a year ago as the first female president of the IOC. She campaigned on the importance of protecting the women's category.

Battle for America's future seen at CPAC

The Dallas Morning News

GRAPEVINE, Texas — Republican leaders sought to rally their ranks and squash infighting at an influential conservative gathering Thursday as they aim to fend off Democratic wins in the midterm election.

Framing the election as a spiritual battle, conservatives warned that Democrats would dismantle President Donald Trump's victories and irrevocably damage the country if they wrestled away control of Congress.

"President Trump is not on the ballot, but his policies are," the Rev. Franklin Graham said at the Conservative Political Action Conference, known as CPAC. "We need a united front and go out and win these midterms. If we don't, we'll be through."

Thousands are gathering this week in Grapevine for the annual conference, which brings together grassroots activists, Republican lawmakers and conservative influencers.

Trump, a regular fixture at the conference, is not scheduled to appear this year. Still, this undoubtedly remains his show, with leaders and participants alike repeatedly invoking his name and presidency.

Although Trump's national approval ratings have fallen since he headlined the conference last year, he still enjoys widespread approval from his party. In a February Associated Press-NORC poll, 86% of conservatives said they approved of the president's job performance.

That popularity is evident at the conference, where vendors hawked cigar boxes emblazoned with Trump's face and bedazzled Make America Great Again jackets.

Trump signature to appear on currency

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump's signature will appear on future U.S. paper currency to mark the 250th anniversary of the country, a first for a sitting president, according to the Treasury Department.

"There is no more powerful way to recognize the historic achievements of our great country and President Donald J. Trump than U.S. dollar bills bearing his name," Treasury

Secretary Scott Bessent said in a statement.

U.S. currency has previously borne the signatures of the secretary and the treasurer.

The move comes as Trump has put his stamp on America's semiquincentennial this year, such as planning a UFC fight at the White House.

Trump's allies have pushed to attach his name to historic institutions while he's still serving — such as the John F. Kennedy

Center for the Performing Arts in Washington as well as the airport in Palm Beach, Trump's adopted Florida hometown.

Printing Trump's signature on U.S. currency "is not only appropriate, but also well deserved," U.S. Treasurer Brandon Beach said in the statement.

Beach said in October that the department was considering minting a \$1 coin featuring Trump's image.

Tip-in pushes Purdue into Elite Eight

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Trey Kaufman-Renn has heard coach Matt Painter remind the Boilermakers so many times during his four years at Purdue that it's not always the first shot of a possession that matters most.

"It's those tip-ins at the end of the games," Kaufman-Renn recalled of the message. "He said that my four years here, so it's kind of cool to experience that."

Yes, Kaufman-Renn's quick hands at the rim extended a special NCAA Tournament run for Purdue.

Kaufman-Renn tipped in a miss by Braden Smith with 0.7 seconds left, and the No. 2-seed Boilermakers edged hobbling Texas star Tramon Mark and the 11th-seeded Longhorns 79-77 on Thursday night in the Sweet 16.

Texas (21-15) tied it moments earlier when Dailyn Swain made a driving layup, was fouled and converted the three-point play with 11.9 seconds to go. Smith had scored on his own drive with 38 seconds remaining and finished with 16 points.

Kaufman-Renn hit his first seven shots — going 6 for 6 and grabbing five rebounds in the first half — on the way to 20 points. He was mobbed by teammates right after the final buzzer sounded at SAP Center.

Purdue will play top-seeded Arizona on Saturday night with a chance to advance to the Final Four.

Texas had subbed 7-foot center Matas Vokietaitis out of the game with 11 seconds left after Boilermakers big man Oscar Cluff had fouled out, giving Purdue a better opportunity in the paint. Kaufman-Renn got himself right under the front of the rim after Smith missed on his drive.

"The No. 1 thing for us to have a chance today was to rebound with Purdue," Texas coach Sean Miller said. "I thought we really struggled to rebound on defense."

Mark scored 29 for the Longhorns, grimacing and clearly in pain limping on his injured leg through the closing minutes when the sixth-year senior's team needed him most.

His points were the most by a Texas player in an NCAA Tournament game since Kevin Durant scored 30 against Southern California in the second round of the 2007 tournament.

Purdue (30-8) advances to Saturday's Elite Eight game against either top-seeded Arizona (35-2), which beat No. 4 seed Arkansas in the late game in San Jose.

Purdue and Texas traded baskets and chances most of the night.

Chendall Weaver scored off his offensive rebound with 1:03 to play pulling Texas within 73-72 after Smith had made only one of two free throws.

Vokietaitis hit two free throws with 20 seconds left before Purdue's C.J. Cox made two at the 19.4-second mark.

Another miss for Miller

Miller made his ninth Sweet 16 appearance in 21 seasons, the most of any coach who hasn't reached the Final Four. The Longhorns had won three straight following a three-game losing streak — this time with football coach Steve Sarkisian among an animated Texas crowd sitting a few rows off courtside.

"It feels really good to be a part of what we did, that's the one thing I would say," Miller said.

Smith's drive

Smith thought he'd taken a winning shot, then was left beneath the basket to watch his teammate deliver.

"I was standing under the rim, I was like 'Please get in there, please get in there,' and it did," said Smith, who also dished out five assists. "Trey tipped it perfectly and I was like 'Thank God, thank God that went in.'"

Top-seeded Arizona beats Arkansas in Sweet 16

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — From the opening minutes until the end of the game, Arizona scored almost at will.

The Wildcats used one of the best offensive performances in the NCAA Tournament to get over the Sweet 16 hurdle for the first time in more than a decade.

Brayden Burries scored 21 points and fellow freshman Koa Peat added 21 as part of a record-setting balanced attack that sent top-seeded Arizona to a 109-88 victory over Arkansas on Thursday night to reach the Elite Eight for the first time since 2015.

"This is the most fun I've had playing bas-

ketball, honestly," Peat said. "I love my teammates. Just seeing them be successful, it just makes me happy. Then they find me as well. So we went out there and played our Arizona brand of basketball. I thought everything fell in place, and I thought the whole team played really good today and a lot of guys stepped up."

There had never been a performance quite like the one Arizona (35-2) delivered as the Wildcats shot 63.8% from the floor for the best mark in the Sweet 16 since 2005.

Ivan Kharchenkov also had 15 points, while Jaden Bradley, Motiejus Krivas and Tobe Awaka scored 14 apiece as the Wild-

cats became the first team in NCAA Tournament history with six players scoring at least 14 points in a game.

The Wildcats will take a 12-game winning streak into the West Region final against second-seeded Purdue on Saturday night. The Boilermakers beat Texas 79-77 in the first game.

Freshman Darius Acuff Jr. scored 28 points for fourth-seeded Arkansas (28-9) in what might be the final college game for the talented freshman who scored 88 points in three tournament games. But he didn't get nearly enough help against the deeper Wildcats.

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Iowa continues improbable March run

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Alvaro Folgueiras converted a critical three-point play when Nebraska only had four defenders on the floor, and ninth-seeded Iowa continued its unpredictable NCAA Tournament run under first-year coach Ben McCollum, beating Nebraska 77-71 in a South Region semifinal on Thursday night.

Bennett Stirtz scored 20 points and Folgueiras had 16 for the Hawkeyes (24-12), who knocked off top-seeded Florida in the second round on Folgueiras' 3-pointer in the closing seconds.

Iowa will face another Big Ten rival, Illinois, on Saturday for a spot in the Final Four. McCollum, who won four Division II national titles at Northwest Missouri State, has now led

Iowa to its fifth Elite Eight and first since 1987.

Iowa became the lowest-seeded team from the Big Ten to reach a regional final since seeding began in 1979.

"Cinderella, whatever they want to call us, just we're in the Elite Eight," McCollum said. "That's what they need to call us."

No. 4 seed Nebraska (28-7) took an early 10-point lead against its conference foe, and Iowa tied it four times but never led until Stirtz buried a 3-pointer to make it 68-65 with 2:10 to go. Sage Tate hit another 3 to cap a 9-0 run and put Iowa ahead 71-65.

The Cornhuskers cut the lead to three on a second-chance 3 by Braden Frager, but they were disorganized on the inbound play, leaving Folgueiras un-

guarded near the rim. He slammed it home — popping up screaming after he finished through contact as Iowa fans roared — and converted the free throw for a six-point lead.

Another dunk by Folgueiras with 34 seconds left made it 76-68.

For Stirtz and McCollum, this March Madness run continues a journey that began at Northwest Missouri State and continued last season at Drake before the pair both moved on to Iowa.

"It's been a hell of a ride," McCollum said. "But it's far from over."

Stirtz credited McCollum for turning him into a "great person off the court and a great player on the court," but he had trouble sharing too much more about his coach.

"I don't want to talk about it

that much. I get emotional," he said. "That's just another topic for after the season that we can look at. Right now, just focus on the next game."

Iowa transfer Pryce Sandfort made six 3s and scored 25 points for Nebraska, which won the first two March Madness games in program history to get this far. Frager added 16 for coach Fred Hoiberg's Cornhuskers, who delighted a traveling contingent of red-clad fans during their tournament run.

"These guys will be a part of history of Nebraska basketball forever, for winning the first NCAA tournament game, getting to the Sweet 16, most wins in the history of the program, highest ranking," Hoiberg said. "They just did so many things to elevate our program. I'm really proud of them."

Illinois defeats Houston, locks up Elite Eight berth

Associated Press

HOUSTON — David Mirkovic had 14 points and 10 rebounds, and third-seeded Illinois flexed its defensive muscles to eliminate last year's national runner-up from the NCAA Tournament, beating Houston 65-55 in the South Region semifinals on Thursday night.

Next up is a meeting Saturday with ninth-seeded Iowa to see which Big Ten team will advance to the Final Four. It will be the 11th Elite Eight appearance for Illinois (27-8) and its second in three seasons under Brad Underwood.

In the Sweet 16 for a seventh consecutive time, the second-seeded Cougars (30-7) were thrilled to be playing just over two miles from their campus. But their poor shooting gave Houston fans little to cheer about and delighted the orange-

clad Illini faithful who made the long trip to Texas.

"At the beginning of the game Houston fans were a little louder, but as game was going, (our fans) started being louder in their city," Mirkovic said. "So it's just really important for us, I would say just like a wind to our back. They pushed us and thanks for them."

Star freshman point guard Kingston Flemings, who is expected to be an NBA lottery pick, had 11 points on 4-of-10 shooting and Milos Uzan made just 2 of 11 shots.

They were far from the only Cougars who struggled. The team shot 34% in its lowest-scoring game of the season.

Keaton Wagler had 13 points and 12 rebounds for the Illini, and Andrej Stojakovic — with his dad, three-time NBA All-Star Peja Stojakovic, in the stands — also scored 13.

Knueppel now youngest to make 250 3s in season

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Kon Knueppel scored 26 points and made six 3-pointers to become the youngest player in NBA history with 250 in a season, and Charlotte snapped New York's seven-game winning streak with the victory.

Knueppel, 20, nearly had his first career triple-double, finishing with 10 rebounds and eight assists.

LaMelo Ball added 22 points and Brandon Miller had 21 points and eight rebounds for the Hornets, who've won five straight. Miles Bridges and Coby White each chipped in with 17 points.

Jalen Brunson had 26 points and 13 assists for the Knicks, who would have clinched a playoff berth with a victory. OG Anunoby added 17 points in a game that featured a high-intensity postseason atmosphere.

Charlotte (39-34) pulled into a tie with Miami for eighth place in the Eastern Conference, although the Heat own the head-to-head tiebreaker.

Pistons 129, Pelicans 108: Jalen Duren had 30 points and 10 rebounds to lead Detroit past visiting New Orleans.

Kevin Huerter had 22 points and Daniss Jenkins added 19 for Detroit, which was coming off a 130-129 overtime loss to the Atlanta Hawks on Wednesday.

Zion Williamson scored 21 points for New Orleans, which lost its third straight after winning five of six.

Magic 111, Kings 107: Paolo Banchero had 30 points, nine rebounds and seven assists as Orlando stopped a six-game losing streak with a victory over visiting Sacramento.

Banchero logged his third straight game of 30-plus points for the Magic (39-34).

Mets chase Skenes in 1st, top Pirates

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Brett Baty laced a bases-loaded triple and the New York Mets chased Paul Skenes in the first inning of his worst major league start, beating the Pittsburgh Pirates 11-7 in their season opener at Citi Field.

Carson Benge homered in his first career game, going back-to-back with Francisco Alvarez at the bottom of a new-look lineup, and Freddy Peralta (1-0) won his Mets debut as New York improved to 42-23 on opening day before a sellout crowd of 41,449.

That's the best record of any big league team — even though the Mets lost their first eight openers from 1962-69.

Brandon Lowe homered twice and fellow Pirates newcomer Ryan O'Hearn also went deep, but Pittsburgh's pitching and defense were dreadful in a disappointing start.

Center fielder Oneil Cruz botched consecutive plays in the first inning, helping the Mets score five runs off a surprisingly ineffective Skenes (0-1), matching his career high. Last year's NL Cy Young Award winner was removed after getting only two outs on 37 pitches in the shortest of his 56 big-league starts.

Dodgers 8, Diamondbacks 2: Andy Pages hit a go-ahead, three-run homer in the fifth inning, and Los Angeles rallied past visiting Arizona, opening the season with a victory in pursuit of its third consecutive World Series championship.

Three of the Dodgers' first four hits in the fifth off Zac Gallen came with two strikes. Max Muncy singled, Teoscar Hernández reached on an infield single to Gallen, Pages' homer traveled 400 feet and Miguel Rojas singled. Shohei Ohtani drew a walk to chase Gallen, who began the game with four shutout innings and a 2-0 lead.

Arizona led 2-0 on Geraldo Perdomo's two-run homer off World Series MVP Yoshinobu Yamamoto (1-0) in the fourth.

Yamamoto allowed two runs and five hits in six innings while striking out six.

Nationals 10, Cubs 4: Brady House, Joey Wiemer and Jacob Young homered on opening day as visiting Washington beat Alex Bregman and Chicago for manager Blake Butera's first win with the team.

Michael Busch had three hits for Chicago, which begins the season with World Series aspirations after losing to Milwaukee in the playoffs last year. Pete Crow-Armstrong had two hits and two RBIs just days after agreeing to a \$115 million, six-year contract with the Cubs.

Bregman and Crow-Armstrong each got a loud ovation from the crowd of 39,712 when they were announced with the starting lineup. Bregman went 1 for 4 with a single and a walk in his first regular-season game since signing a \$175 million, five-year contract with the Cubs in free agency.

Brewers 14, White Sox 2: Jacob Misiorowski struck out 11 while allowing one run over five innings, and Milwaukee trounced visiting Chicago.

Jake Bauers hit a three-run homer, Sal Frelick produced a two-run blast and William Contreras delivered a three-run double as the Brewers began their pursuit of a fourth straight NL Central title.

Chase Meidroth and Munetaka Murakami hit solo shots for the White Sox.

Misiorowski (1-0), who turns 24 on April 3, got the opening-day assignment following an eventful rookie season in which he made the NL All-Star team just five starts into his career and threw as hard as 104.3 mph in the playoffs.

Orioles 2, Twins 1: Trevor Rogers pitched seven shutout innings and Colton Cowser and Blaze Alexander had seventh-inning RBIs to give host Baltimore a win over Minnesota.

Following a stellar 2025 season in which he went 9-3 with a 1.81 ERA, Rogers picked up where he left off in front of a sellout crowd at Camden Yards for the earliest opener in franchise history. The lefty allowed three hits, walked four and was especially effective when stuck in a jam.

Rogers (1-0) induced three double plays and limited Minnesota to 1-for-11 batting with runners in scoring position.

Twins righty Joe Ryan, making his second career opening-day start, allowed one hit and two walks over 5½ innings.

Red Sox 3, Reds 0: Garrett Crochet allowed only three hits in six innings, Cedanne Rafaela hit an RBI single in the seventh and Boston got its first opening-day shutout since 2015, beating host Cincinnati.

Roman Anthony had three hits for the Red Sox, who had their 11th opening-day shutout — with all but one on the road.

Crochet (1-0) became the first pitcher to start on opening day in each of his first three seasons as a starter, according to MLB. The right-hander struck out six and walked two en route to his first victory in an opener.

Tigers 8, Padres 2: Kevin McGonigle got four hits and drove in two runs in his auspicious major-league debut during Detroit's victory over host San Diego.

McGonigle, 21, hit a two-run double with the bases loaded on the first big league pitch he saw in the first inning. He had a second double and an infield single while scoring two runs in his next two at-bats, and added a single in the ninth.

McGonigle finished 4-for-5 while batting sixth and playing third base. After just 46 games last season in Double-A, the multi-position infielder made Detroit's major-league roster with an undeniably strong spring, skipping Triple-A entirely.

Two-time AL Cy Young award winner Tarik Skubal (1-0) pitched six innings of three-hit ball with six strikeouts in his third straight opening day start for Detroit, allowing only an unearned run.

Phillies 5, Rangers 3: Cristopher Sánchez struck out 10 and tossed three-hit ball over six shutout innings in his first start since he signed a \$104 million contract extension, and Kyle Schwarber and Alec Bohm each homered to lead Philadelphia to a win over visiting Texas.

Sánchez did not issue a walk over 87 pitches in his first career opening-day start and showed why the Phillies tore up his old deal before it expired and gave him a much more lucrative contract through the 2032 season. The 29-year-old left-hander won 13 games last season and finished runner-up behind Pittsburgh's Paul Skenes in NL Cy Young Award voting.

Angels 3, Astros 0: Mike Trout homered to launch what he hopes will be a bounce-back year, leading Los Angeles to a season-opening win at Houston.

Trout, 34, also walked three times and played center field for the first time since April 2024. The three-time MVP played 130 games last season, his most since 2019 because of various injuries.

Cardinals 9, Rays 7: Alec Burtleson hit a two-run homer to cap off an eight-run outburst in the sixth inning as host St. Louis rallied past Tampa Bay.

Rookie JJ Wetherholt also homered for St. Louis.

Guardians 6, Mariners 4: Rookie Chase DeLauter hit his first two career home runs as Cleveland won at Seattle.

DeLauter hit a home run in the first regular-season at-bat of his major league career in the top of the first. He became the fifth player in Cleveland's 126-year franchise history to hit a home run in his first career regular-season at-bat. DeLauter is the first to do so since Jhonkensy Noel on June 26, 2024.

Oilers defeat Golden Knights in OT

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Evan Bouchard scored at 3:10 of overtime, shortly after Edmonton killed off a Vegas penalty, and the Oilers defeated the Vegas Golden Knights 4-3 on Thursday night in a game with playoff implications.

The Oilers extended their lead for second place in the Pacific Division to two points over the Golden Knights. They are five points behind first-place Anaheim.

Edmonton captain Connor McDavid scored a goal and picked up two assists. His first assist gave him 800, making him the third-fastest player to reach that milestone. He got there in 785 games, behind only Wayne Gretzky (527 games) and Mario Lemieux (661).

McDavid, who has 121 points this season, has scored four goals in three games. Matt Savoie, a 22-year-old rookie, scored a goal for his fourth point (three goals, one assist) over six games since joining the top line. Zach Hyman also scored and Connor Ingram made 26 saves.

Islanders 2, Stars 1: Ilya Sorokin gave New York the type of elite goaltending it needed against one of the NHL's top teams while in the thick of a playoff chase, making 26 saves to beat visiting Dallas.

Bo Horvat scored his 30th goal of the season five minutes in and Calum Ritchie later picked up the 11th of his rookie year to provide enough offensive support. Matthew Schaefer, the face of the franchise at 18 years old, assisted on each to reach 54 points and tie Hall of Famer Denis Potvin for the second most by a rookie defenseman in Islanders history.

Canadiens 2, Blue Jackets 1: Zachary Bolduc scored the winner with his first goal since Dec. 23 as Montreal edged visiting Columbus.

Jayden Struble — with his first of the season — also scored, and Jakub Dobes made 25 saves as Montreal won its third consecutive game.

The Blue Jackets fell to 19-4-4 since Rick Bowness replaced Dean Evason as head coach Jan. 12.

The Canadiens sit third in the Atlantic Division with 11 games remaining.

Penguins 4, Ottawa 3 (SO): Ben Kindel scored the shootout winner to lead Pittsburgh to a victory at Ottawa.

Rickard Rakell scored twice and had an assist, and Erik Karlsson also scored for the Penguins, who moved into second in the Metropolitan Division.

Kraken 4, Lightning 3 (OT): Brandon Montour scored his second goal of the game 2:47 into overtime to give Seattle a victory at Tampa Bay.

Bobby McMann and Kaapo Kakko each had a goal and an assist. Philipp Grubauer stopped 30 shots for Seattle, which snapped a four-game losing streak.

Montour picked up the puck from Shane Wright and beat Vasilevskiy to keep the Kraken in the playoff race in the Western Conference.

Wild 3, Panthers 2: Joel Eriksson Ek scored the winning goal with 4.4 seconds left to lift visiting Minnesota over Florida.

Marcus Foligno and Ryan Hartman also had goals for the Wild and Jesper Wallstedt made 18 saves.

Minnesota, which is 3-4-1 in its past eight, is three points behind second-place Dallas and 14 points ahead of fourth-place Utah in the Central Division. The Panthers are 14 points behind the New York Islanders for the second wild card in the Eastern Conference.

Aaron Ekblad hammered a shot inside the left post to tie it for Florida with 1:13 left. But Eriksson Ek answered with the winner in the closing seconds of the third period.

Flyers 5, Blackhawks 1: Alex Bump and Sean Couturier scored in the first three minutes of the game and Philadelphia used the fast start to cruise to a victory over visiting Chicago.

Bump, Noah Cates and Christian Dvorak had a goal and an assist each for the Flyers, who have won six of their past eight to stay in the chase for a wild-card playoff spot. Denver Barkey also had a goal for Philadelphia and Samuel Ersson made 25 saves.

Connor Bedard scored his 30th goal of the season for Chicago to become the third Blackhawks player with a 30-goal season at age 20 or younger, joining Jonathan Toews (34 in 2008-09) and Eric Daze (30 in 1995-96).

Blues 2, Sharks 1 (OT): Dylan Holloway scored with 3 seconds left in overtime to lift St. Louis to a victory over visiting San Jose.

Dalibor Dvorsky also scored for the Blues, who won their third straight. Joel Hofer made 24 saves.

Alexander Wennberg had the lone goal for the Sharks, who have dropped six in a row (0-5-1). Yaroslav Askarov made 11 saves before leaving with an injury and was replaced by Alex Nedeljkovic.

Devils 4, Predators 2: Nico Hischier scored two goals to lead New Jersey to a vic-

tory at Nashville.

Jesper Bratt scored a goal and added two assists, Timo Meier scored an empty-net goal, and Jacob Markstrom made 16 saves for the Devils, winners of five of six. Jack Hughes and Jonas Siegenthaler had two assists apiece.

Reid Schaefer and Steven Stamkos scored and Justus Annunen made 26 saves for the Predators, who had their five-game winning streak snapped.

Nashville is one point ahead of the Los Angeles Kings for the Western Conference's second wild card berth.

Avalanche 3, Jets 2: Nathan MacKinnon scored his 47th and 48th goals of the season to propel Colorado to a victory at Winnipeg.

Jack Drury scored his career-high ninth goal of the season for the NHL-leading Avalanche, who ended a four-game road trip with a 4-0-0 record.

Artturi Lehkonen added an assist in his return after missing 11 games with an upper-body injury.

Capitals 7, Mammoth 4: Alex Ovechkin had his 34th career hat trick, Ivan Miroshnichenko scored twice, and Washington beat host Utah to snap a two-game losing streak.

Anthony Beauvillier and Rasmus Sandin also scored for the Capitals, while Logan Thompson made 35 stops for Washington, which scored four unanswered goals after falling behind 3-1.

Dylan Guenther scored twice for Utah. Logan Cooley and MacKenzie Weegar added a goal apiece and Vitek Vaneccek made 17 saves for the Mammoth, who have dropped six of their past seven games at home.

Ducks 3, Flames 2 (OT): Mikael Granlund capped his hat trick by scoring on the power play with 1 second remaining in overtime to give Anaheim a victory at Calgary.

Granlund has seven goals during a four-game goal streak that has him up to 19 on the season as Anaheim extended its winning streak to four games.

Kings 4, Canucks 0: Darcy Kuemper made 19 saves for his third shutout of the season and 39th of his career to lead Los Angeles to a victory at Vancouver.

Trevor Moore had a goal and an assist for the Kings, and Scott Laughton, Artemi Panarin and Quinton Byfield also scored. Mikey Anderson had two assists.

The victory moved the Kings one point behind the Nashville Predators, who hold the second wild-card spot in the Western Conference playoff race.