

## US, Iran at standoff a month into war

By LARA KORTE  
*Stars and Stripes*

When President Donald Trump launched Operation Epic Fury in late February, he vowed to raze Iran's missile industry to the ground, annihilate its navy and ensure that it could never obtain a nuclear weapon.

But one month into the war, Iran continues to reject U.S. demands to dismantle its nuclear program and has shown little interest in backing down.

After striking more than 10,000 targets, the U.S. military appears to have met many of its initial objectives — degrading Iran's weapons stockpiles, sinking most of its largest warships, and killing its top brass, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah

Ali Khamenei.

At the same time, the joint U.S.-Israel attacks and Tehran's retaliation have brought renewed turmoil to the Middle East. Thousands of people have fled the region, U.S. bases have sustained significant damage, and Gulf leaders have grown increasingly frustrated with the barrage of attacks hitting their nations on a daily basis.

Military officials say the U.S. is on track or ahead of its plan to eliminate Iranian power. But Iran's chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz has complicated matters — causing a surge in the price of fuel and putting global economies on edge.

Trump on Thursday extended the U.S. ceasefire on power

plants, giving Iran until April 6 to reopen the strait. The U.S. is also preparing to send some 15,000 additional troops to the region, according to news reports, and the president has not ruled out a ground invasion.

While the U.S. might have started the war looking for regime change, the primary objective now seems to be reopening the critical shipping corridor, said Kelly Grieco, a senior fellow at the Stimson Center and an expert in U.S. defense policy.

In that regard, Iran maintains an advantage, she said.

"I think the administration is trying to figure out how to bring this to an end. Because the problem they have is they don't have as much leverage as they would

like to do that," Grieco said. "It takes one party to start a war. It takes both parties, on both sides of a conflict, to end it."

Analysts say sending ground forces into Iran or trying to open the Strait of Hormuz by force would be difficult and could prolong the war while making it deadlier.

Iranians have framed the conflict as one that could determine their survival as a nation. At a meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Council on Friday, Iran's foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, accused the U.S. and Israel of attempting to commit genocide.

At least 1,900 people have been killed in Iran since the war began, Iran's Red Crescent said.

## Panel: Focus on Middle East leaves Arctic vulnerable

By GARY WARNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Russia and China are challenging the American and allied presence in the Arctic by expanding military and commercial activity around the North Pole at a time when American military focus is on other parts of the world, a congressional panel was told.

"If we do not maintain a sustained focus on strengthening America's Arctic security, we will have failed in our duty to protect the United States," Heather Conley, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, testified Thursday.

Conley and two other experts on Arctic security spoke Thursday at a joint hearing by two House Homeland Security Committee panels — the Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security and the

Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence.

The hearing was called "Arctic Security in an Era of Global Competition: Safeguarding U.S. Interests in Frigid Waters."

Rep. Carlos Gimenez, R-Fla., chairman of the House Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security, described the ongoing competition between countries for a dominant role in the "High North."

"In recent years, Putin's Russia has significantly expanded its military footprint in the region, while Communist China has sought to project its influence through increased deployments of icebreakers and other polar-capable vessels," he said.

The discussion of Arctic policy returned to the overall political approach of President Donald Trump.

Republicans and Democrats on the subcommittees, as well as Conley and other witnesses, agreed that the \$25 billion increase in funding for the Coast Guard — a key line of military defense in the Arctic — was an important policy step.

But more was needed, they said.

Russia has the largest fleet of icebreakers in the world, including some nuclear-powered models and a new design incorporating a deck gun and space for ship-to-ship missile launchers.

"Despite its ongoing war with Ukraine, Russia has quietly expanded its military footprint in the High North and reactivated its Cold War-era bases to deploy more advanced air and missile defense systems and increase complex naval operations across the region," Gimenez

said.

China has backed up its declaration as an emerging Arctic power with the construction of its own icebreakers as well as the expansion of commercial and scientific missions to the region.

Conley said Canada and Denmark have pledged major increases in spending to defend the Arctic. The United States needs to follow through on its own efforts as well, she said.

"The Arctic region is within Homeland Defense," Conley said. "It's part of our integrated defense of the Western Hemisphere. The ongoing modernization of our Arctic-based missile defense architecture, as well as developing a persistent presence in the maritime Arctic, with overdue investments in our icebreaker fleet, are critical components of this shift."

# US deploys drone boats in Iran conflict

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

U.S. drone speedboats capable of surveillance and military strikes are patrolling Middle East waters as part of Operation Epic Fury, according to a news agency report.

The unmanned surface vessels, known as Global Autonomous Reconnaissance Craft or GARC, have logged more than 450 hours and traveled more than 2,200 nautical miles during maritime patrols in support of U.S. operations against Iran, Capt. Tim Hawkins, a spokesman for U.S. Central Command, told Reuters on Thursday.

Hawkins did not identify other drone systems potentially in use, according to the Reuters

report. CENTCOM did not immediately confirm use of the drones in operations against Iran.

News of the Navy's use of the uncrewed boats comes as the United States considers options to reopen the Strait of Hormuz for oil tankers and other commercial ships. Tehran has effectively closed the strait since hostilities began in late February, attacking ships in the strategic waterway.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly rebuked European leaders, most recently in a Thursday post to his Truth Social account, for refusing to send military resources to help open the strait amid sharply rising prices for petroleum-based products.

The average price for a gallon of regular gasoline at the pump in the U.S. had risen by about \$1 over the past month to nearly \$4, the American Automobile Association reported Thursday. Prices were higher on the West Coast, where costs were nearing \$6 a gallon in some cases, AAA said.

The revelation about the surface drones also comes amid reports the U.S. is weighing sending as many as 10,000 additional ground troops to the Middle East as it negotiates with Iran to end the war that began Feb. 28.

It's not clear exactly where the U.S. drone boats are patrolling in the Middle East, but the Navy has previously used underwater, surface and aerial unmanned vehicles to track

Iranian military vessels in and around the Strait of Hormuz.

The service has maintained a drone presence in the region for years, standing up Task Force 59 in 2021 with a focus on integrating unmanned systems and artificial intelligence into Navy operations.

In recent years, the Bahrain-based task force has experimented with armed drones.

For example, a Navy littoral combat ship coordinated with unmanned surface and aerial drones to identify and destroy a target boat during an exercise in November 2023.

That exercise involved a MARTAC T-38 Devil Ray surface drone armed with missiles, Stars and Stripes reported at the time.

## DOD weighs sending more troops to Middle East

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Pentagon is considering sending up to 10,000 more ground troops to the Middle East to potentially support operations in Iran in a move aimed at giving President Donald Trump more military options, The Wall

Street Journal reported Friday.

If approved, the force would likely include infantry and armored vehicles, and would join the roughly 5,000 Marines headed to the region and thousands of Fort Bragg-based paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division, defense officials

told the Journal.

Axios on Friday also said the Defense Department was weighing dispatching 10,000 more troops to the region.

On Sunday, a top Iranian official warned the U.S. against a ground invasion, saying its troops would be set "on fire,"

The Associated Press reported.

Iran's parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, said Iranian forces were "waiting for the arrival of American troops on the ground to set them on fire and punish their regional partners forever," according to Iranian state media.

## USS Ford completes repairs in Greece, next steps unknown

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy—The aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford arrived in Croatia over the weekend after a stay of just three days in Greece for assessments and repairs following a fire aboard the ship earlier this month, according to the Navy.

The Ford left U.S. Naval Support Activity Souda Bay on the island of Crete on Thursday, arriving in Split, Croatia, on Saturday, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-

Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet said in a statement Saturday.

Meanwhile, the amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli arrived in the Middle East on Friday, U.S. Central Command announced in a post to its X account Saturday.

The ship is the lead vessel of the Tripoli Amphibious Ready Group, which includes the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit and some 3,500 sailors and Marines, along with transport and strike fighter aircraft, CENTCOM said.

The Tripoli group also includes the amphibious transport dock ship USS New Orleans.

A third vessel that operated with the Tripoli ARG earlier this month, the amphibious transport dock ship USS San Diego, remained in Sasebo, Japan, USNI News reported Monday.

The Navy did not say how long the Ford would be in Croatia or whether it would return to the Middle East or take up a po-

sition in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea in support of Operation Epic Fury, the U.S.-Israel campaign against Iran that began Feb. 28.

While some elements of the George H.W. Bush Carrier Strike Group, including the destroyers USS Ross and USS Mason, have started operations for an upcoming deployment, the carrier USS George H.W. Bush appeared to still be in port in Norfolk, Va., on Sunday.

# Millions protest Trump at 'No Kings' rallies across US

*Los Angeles Times*

LOS ANGELES — A rolling wave of “No Kings” protests swelled through America’s small towns and big cities Saturday, with crowds gathering to blast President Donald Trump, Immigration and Customs Enforcement crackdowns, the war in Iran and high gas and food prices.

Saturday’s demonstrations were expected to draw millions of people nationwide, including thousands for a downtown Los Angeles rally. More than 40 protests were planned for L.A., Orange and Ventura counties, part of the national “No Kings Day of Nonviolent Action.”

No Kings Coalition organizers were hoping that turnout for the rallies in all 50 states could combine to form the largest single-day protest in U.S. history. They pointed to growing anger over the country’s direction, including fatal ICE shootings and troops dispatched to the Middle East, since the first “No Kings” demonstration was held last June.

“I’m very disturbed by the degradation of human beings and the destruction of our democracy under this Trump tyranny,” said Rossana Foote, a 62-year-old teacher, who traveled to the downtown protest.

“We need to come together to show a strong voice, a strong movement that there are no kings, no one’s above the law,” Foote said.

Earlier in the day, hundreds gathered around the reflecting pool at Pasadena City College. A band rolled through with a fascism-themed parody of Johnny Cash’s “Folsom Prison Blues.” Sign-toting protesters lined Colorado Boulevard, drawing a constant stream of honking from the cars driving by. For many, the Iran war was top of mind.

“Every time we protest, there’s something completely new, which speaks to the chaos of the Trump administration,” Cindy Campbell told *The Times*. “ICE raids last year, Epstein files a few months ago. Now, war.”

Organizers sought to build political momentum in advance of November’s elections, when voters could tip control of the U.S. House and potentially the Senate to Democrats. Local political issues were also on display Saturday. Volunteers wound through the Pasadena crowd, collecting signatures for a variety of ballot initiatives, including a controversial proposed tax on the ultra-rich.

“This administration doesn’t serve us. It serves billionaires,” said Kent Miller, who participated in the Pasadena protest. “War with Iran is only making life harder for working people.”

Miller pointed to a Chevron gas station advertising gas for \$6.45 per gallon.

“See?” he said. The White House, in a Satur-

day statement, dismissed the protests as a “Trump Derangement Therapy Session.”

The National Republican Congressional Committee also scoffed at the events.

“These Hate America Rallies are where the far left’s most violent, deranged fantasies get a microphone,” Maureen O’Toole, spokesperson for the Republican group, told the Associated Press.

In Hannibal, Mo., protesters reported that some motorists flipped them off. In Huntington Beach, one driver waiting at the stoplight at Pacific Coast Highway and Main Street yelled: “There is no king, you [expletive] idiots!”

“This is a president that is ignoring the Constitution,” responded Gary Holtz, who helped organize the Huntington Beach rally.

“He’s ignoring the courts. He’s doing whatever he wants, and that’s indicative of a dictator or a king,” Holtz said. “We, the people, have to stand up, or we, the people, won’t have a democracy.”

National coordinators, however, said they have been encouraged by a surge of interest from groups in rural communities that wanted to join the loose-knit No Kings Coalition and hold protests. Events sprouted in Republican bastions, and some organizers reported that attendance was higher than expected.

## Long lines persist at US airports

*Bloomberg News*

Several U.S. airports advised travelers on Saturday to arrive at least four hours before their flights because of long security lines even after President Donald Trump said Transportation Security Administration workers would be paid by tapping funds from his 2025 tax and spending bill.

The Department of Homeland Security shutdown continues with no end in sight, with Congress having left for a two-week break after failing to agree Friday on a spending measure. Airports in Atlanta and Baltimore issued the four-hour warnings while Houston warned of much longer than usual waits.

House Republicans on Friday rejected bipartisan Senate legislation to end a partial government shutdown and fund most of DHS. Instead, they held a late Friday night vote on a stopgap spending package that would have funded the department — including Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement — until May 22.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer has made clear that such a measure is “dead on arrival” without new policies to restrict Trump’s immigration crackdown.

Trump signed a memo Friday directing TSA personnel to be paid as he tried to alleviate disruptions at U.S. airports, but it remains unclear how much it will do to improve wait times at security checkpoints, which have varied widely at different airports.

## Anthropic wins a court order pausing ban on 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.

U.S. District Judge Rita F. Lin issued a preliminary injunction, pausing the administration’s plan to sever all ties with Anthropic while a legal fight plays out in federal court. She questioned the government’s rationale for the ban.

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.

# Rubio spars with G7 diplomats over wars

*Bloomberg News*

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and his Group of Seven counterparts traded barbs over the wars in Iran and Ukraine, casting doubt on Europe bowing to President Donald Trump's demand for military help in the Persian Gulf.

"The United States is constantly being asked to help in a war," Rubio said before taking off for the Friday conclusion of a G7 gathering outside Paris. "But when the U.S. had a need, he didn't get positive responses," he added.

The Europeans have rebuffed Trump's bid for their navies to participate in opening the Strait of Hormuz, saying they'd help once the missiles have stopped flying. All the while, U.S. bases in

Europe have been key to the war effort and some European bases have provided logistical support.

"It is irritating, I have to say," German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl told Deutschlandfunk radio before a scheduled meeting with Rubio. Germany hasn't received a clear ask from the U.S. side. "At this point, the legal requirements for us for such an operation aren't met. And there is no specific request for us to take action at this time."

Nevertheless, French Foreign Ministry spokesman Pascal Confavreux said planning is underway. "It would take place after the end of the bombing first," he told Bloomberg TV. "To be only in a defensive situation. We are preparing such a mission with all

the willing partners. But we have made very clear that this war is not our war and we don't want to be entangled in it."

The U.S. clarified its position in France, saying it isn't asking allies for action now in the Strait of Hormuz, according to a person familiar with the conversations at the G7. But Washington wants allies to be ready to help secure the region after the fighting.

The naval group would need to have as many allies as possible participate and won't be U.S.-led, said the person, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, who added they expect the war to end in a matter of weeks, not months.

"There is, I believe, a consensus within the international community to preserve a common good, which is freedom of naviga-

tion," French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot told reporters.

The U.S. was considering sending as many as 10,000 additional troops to the Middle East, the Wall Street Journal reported, giving the U.S. president more military options as leading U.S. allies called for negotiations to end a conflict that is doing increasing damage to the global economy.

Ukraine remains Europe's primary concern, with its leaders trying to isolate Russia by connecting the two. The European Union's top diplomat, Kaja Kallas, said Thursday that Russia was providing Iran with intelligence to target and kill Americans, something her Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov denied on French TV.

## Zelenskyy eyes fuel deals while on Middle East tour

*Bloomberg News*

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he's using a Middle East trip to lock in lucrative long-term agreements on military cooperation and seek secure fuel supplies.

Ukraine signed 10-year defense agreements with Saudi Arabia and Qatar and plans to formalize a similar agreement with the United Arab Emirates, Zelenskyy told reporters on a call from Qatar on Saturday. The deals are worth "billions," he said without elaborating.

While Ukraine is seeking to reap benefits from sharing anti-drone expertise and technology with Persian Gulf countries as they face drone attacks from Iran, the war-torn country also wants to secure fuel supplies to guard against global supply constraints.

Zelenskyy said he signed a deal for more than a year of diesel supplies on Friday, when he visited Saudi Arabia and UAE. He didn't elaborate.

"We need long-term agreements with energy countries," Zelenskyy said.

With energy markets in turmoil over Iranian strikes on energy infrastructure in the Middle East, Ukraine repeatedly hit oil infrastructure in Russia in a bid to curb Kremlin's ability to finance war and retaliate for aerial barrages against Ukrainian energy assets.

Only 40% of capacity at the crucial Russian Baltic oil port of Ust-Luga remains intact after recent Ukrainian strikes, Zelenskyy said.

"Russia needs to stop striking our energy, in which case we won't be retaliating," he said.

With the war against Iran increasingly consuming U.S. military resources and the attention of President Donald Trump, there's concern that military supplies meant for Ukraine could be diverted to the Middle East.

Zelenskyy said he doesn't see signs of the U.S. shifting pledged aid away from Ukraine.

## Nimitz arrives in Pacific for Southern Seas 2026

**BY GARY WARNER**

*Stars and Stripes*

The USS Nimitz hosted senior Guatemalan military and political officials during a visit tied to the Southern Seas 2026 multinational exercises in the eastern Pacific.

The Nimitz has transitioned from the 3rd Fleet area of operations, which covers the Pacific as far south as Mexico, to the 4th Fleet area of operations, which includes the Pacific and Atlantic on either side of Central and South America, as well as the Caribbean.

The Nimitz deployed to the exercises on its way from its former homeport of Bremerton at Naval Base Kitsap near Seattle to its future homeport of Norfolk, Va. The ship will circumnavigate South America during the trip.

The Pentagon announced this month that the Nimitz, marking its 50th year with the Navy since commissioning in 1975, will remain in the active fleet until at least March 2027, when the new

USS John F. Kennedy carrier is scheduled to be delivered to the Navy.

The Nimitz had been slated to begin its retirement and decommissioning next month in Norfolk, but the Navy extended its service life to meet a congressional requirement for the fleet to have 11 aircraft carriers. The John F. Kennedy is the second of the new Gerald R. Ford-class carriers to be built.

The Guatemalan delegation that visited the Nimitz on March 26 was accompanied by John M. Barrett, charge d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala, as well as other senior officials from the Guatemalan government and the Ministry of Defense.

The Nimitz is expected to host additional foreign visitors during the exercises.

While aboard, the delegation met with U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Cassidy Norman, commander of Carrier Strike Group 11, and Capt. Joseph Furco, commanding officer of the Nimitz.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Chavez Day changed to Farmworkers Day**

**CA** SACRAMENTO — Just eight days after the emergence of allegations of sexual abuse of minors at the hands of Cesar Chavez, the California Legislature has stripped the labor organizer, until last week one of the state’s most iconic political figures, of his state holiday.

On Thursday, the state Senate passed a bill fast-tracked through the Legislature that changed Cesar Chavez Day, which falls on March 31, to Farmworkers Day, seeking to take a day dedicated to the now deeply sullied figure and convert it into a broader acknowledgment of largely immigrant workers who labor in California fields. Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom signed the bill into law later that day.

On March 18, The New York Times published substantiated allegations from two women that Chavez had sexually abused them beginning when they were 12 and 13 years old, and had sustained the abuse over years.

Dolores Huerta, who co-founded the United Farmworkers Union with Chavez and remains a progressive icon at age 96, also accused Chavez of raping her when she was in her 30s and working with him to build the union’s power. She kept her story a secret, she said, because she did not want to slow the movement’s momentum.

**Baltimore judge denies Glock dismissal motion**

**MD** BALTIMORE — Baltimore and

Maryland can proceed to discovery in their lawsuit against Glock after a Baltimore Circuit Court judge denied the gunmaker’s motion to dismiss, moving the case into the evidence-gathering phase.

The mayor and City Council of Baltimore, alongside the state of Maryland, filed a lawsuit against Glock and its Austrian parent company Glock GmbH in February 2025.

The lawsuit alleges Glock should have done more to prevent its pistols from being modified with illegal auto sears, commonly known as “Glock switches,” which can convert semi-automatic firearms into fully automatic weapons. It further claims the company has long been aware its handguns can be easily modified, putting Maryland residents at risk and contributing to public safety harms.

**\$1M SNAP, Medicaid fraud bust announced**

**MA** BOSTON — Another major public benefits fraud ring has been uncovered in Massachusetts, as U.S. Attorney Leah Foley announces a \$9 million scheme busted by the feds involving nine Dominican nationals who used stolen identities to enroll in public assistance programs.

The feds have charged nine Dominican nationals living in Massachusetts and New Hampshire as part of the U.S. Attorney’s ongoing effort to investigate and prosecute benefits fraud.

Foley’s office said Thursday the defendants used stolen identities — typically belonging to U.S. citizens from Puerto Rico

— to obtain government-issued IDs. They say this included credentials from the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles and U.S. passports to apply for and receive SNAP, Medicaid and Social Security benefits. The office says that some defendants allegedly stole identities for several years at a time — including one defendant who apparently lived under a stolen identity for over 20 years.

Incredibly, some defendants were arrested multiple times and even convicted under the same false identities, feds say.

**Delivery robots shatter 2 Chicago bus shelters**

**IL** CHICAGO — Food delivery robots have shattered two city bus shelters within the last week, fueling heated discussion amongst Chicago humans who say they shouldn’t have to share the public way with the apparently freewheeling automatons.

The first crash happened when a Serve Robotics device collided with a bus shelter in the West Town neighborhood. The second collision, involving a robot operated by California-based Coco Robotics, occurred at a bus shelter at North Avenue and Larrabee Street in Old Town.

In a statement, Coco confirmed the crash occurred Tuesday and said it was conducting an “internal investigation” to determine its cause. Serve also said it was “aware of the incident involving one of our robots in Chicago” and that its team responded “quickly” to clean up the area.

The collisions have added fuel to ongoing criticism of the

robots, which are operating under the confines of a pilot program that will end in May 2027 without further action from the City Council.

**Dad arrested for adding stop signs near park**

**CA** LOS ANGELES — A longtime El Segundo resident was arrested earlier this month after installing unauthorized stop signs at a neighborhood intersection he says has become increasingly dangerous for children.

Joseph Brandlin, 44, who has lived in El Segundo more than four decades, said he took matters into his own hands after months of unsuccessful attempts to get city officials to address safety concerns about the intersection of Loma Vista Street and Acacia Avenue.

The intersection is currently a two-way stop and is located near Acacia Park, a children’s park that reopened after renovation in 2021.

“I care deeply about the safety of our neighborhood and the families that live here,” Brandlin said.

Brandlin raised concerns about the intersection last year. He and other residents submitted a petition with roughly 50 signatures requesting additional stop signs. The city later said it conducted a traffic evaluation, but residents were not notified when it took place and saw no visible evidence of it, according to Brandlin.

The city ultimately determined the intersection did not meet the required traffic volume for additional stop signs, Brandlin said.

**-From wire reports**



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**Reporting World, National and Military News**

# Arizona reaches first Final Four in 25 years

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Coach Tommy Lloyd climbed the ladder, cut the last strand of the net and waved to the Arizona fans while they chanted, “Tommy! Tommy!”

Lloyd and the Wildcats are back in the Final Four for the first time since Lute Olson’s heyday 25 years ago as Arizona once again looks like a threat to win it all.

Freshman Koa Peat scored 20 points with his strength inside and the Wildcats’ defense bottled up Purdue in the second half to give top-seeded Arizona a 79-64 victory in the NCAA Tournament’s West Region final Saturday night.

“Just being a kid from Arizona, to take this team to a Final Four, man, it’s a blessing,” said Peat, who was named the region’s Most Outstanding Player. “I’m proud of these guys. We worked for this. We’re not done yet.”

After years of disappointment in March, Lloyd has gotten the Wildcats (36-2) back to being a

championship contender thanks to a talented freshman class led by Peat to go along with veterans like Big 12 Player of the Year Jaden Bradley.

Arizona showed it can win in almost any style. The Wildcats used a nearly flawless performance on offense to beat Arkansas in the Sweet 16 and then shut down one of the nation’s most efficient offenses against second-seeded Purdue (30-9) in front of a large crowd of Arizona fans.

“Making it to the Final Four is big,” Bradley said. “We appreciate Tucson, the supporters, and everybody behind the scenes. We just are happy that we get to reward them with this.”

The Wildcats frustrated the NCAA record-holder in assists, Braden Smith, and prevented his fellow four-year seniors Trey Kaufman-Renn and Fletcher Loyer from getting into a rhythm. The Boilermakers were held to their second-lowest point total of the season and shot just 38% from the field.

**Illinois 71, Iowa 59:** The Fighting Illini are heading to the Final Four for the first time in 21 years, and Andrej Stojakovic made clear they have much bigger goals.

“I don’t want anybody to think this is it,” he said. “We didn’t get to the Final Four just to get there. We’re coming to win two more games.”

Freshman Keaton Wagler scored 25 points and Illinois ended Iowa’s underdog March Madness run by dominating in the frontcourt, beating the Hawkeyes 71-59 on Saturday to end a Final Four drought that dated to 2005.

“It’s better than I dreamt it would ever be,” coach Brad Underwood said. “Thirty-nine years in the business and that’s all I’m going to say about my side of this. This is about these guys.”

This will be the sixth trip to the Final Four for the Illini, who have never won a national title. They will face either Duke or UConn next weekend in Indianapolis.

“This is what kids dream of,” said Wagler, who was named the South Region’s Most Outstanding Player. “I know I dreamed of this when I was growing up, playing in the Final Four, competing for a national championship. To be able to do it with the people around me, teammates, coaches, fans, managers, everyone, it means a lot ... but we’re not done yet.”

Underwood’s emphasis on recruiting Eastern Europeans has paid off in this tournament. Tomislav Ivisic of Croatia, who stands 7-foot-1, and his 7-2 twin brother Zvonimir have shined in March.

Much taller Illinois (28-8) outrebounded Iowa 38-21. David Mirkovic led the way with 12 rebounds. The Illini also outscored the Hawkeyes 40-12 in the paint.

“We were dominant on the glass from the first minute, even in the beginning of the game,” Tomislav said. “They started the game better, but rebounding kept us in the game.”

## Pistons beat Timberwolves, fasten hold on top East seed

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Tobias Harris led a balanced scoring attack with 18 points Saturday as the Detroit Pistons strengthened their hold on the top seed in the Eastern Conference with a 109-87 victory over the injury-riddled Minnesota Timberwolves.

Jalen Duren had 10 points and 13 rebounds for Detroit, which has won nine of its last 11 games. The Pistons began the day with a four-game lead over Boston in the race for the Eastern Conference’s top seed.

Minnesota’s Anthony Edwards (right knee inflammation) missed his sixth straight game. The Timberwolves also played without starting forward Jaden McDaniels (right knee soreness) and guard Ayo Dosunmu (right calf soreness).

Donte DiVincenzo hit five 3-pointers and led Minnesota with 22 points. Rudy Gobert had 14 points and 12 rebounds for the T-wolves, who shot a season-low 32% (27 for 85) from the floor and 21% (9 for 43)

from beyond the arc.

**Spurs 127, Bucks 95:** Stephon Castle had a triple-double with 22 points, 10 assists and 10 rebounds as hot-shooting San Antonio steamrolled host Milwaukee for its eighth consecutive victory.

The Bucks’ loss eliminated them from playoff contention, snapping their streak of nine consecutive postseason appearances.

**76ers 118, Hornets 114:** Joel Embiid scored 29 points, Paul George finished with 26 points and 13 rebounds and visiting Philadelphia rallied from 13 points down in the second half for a win over Charlotte.

With its fourth win in five games, the 76ers extended their lead over Charlotte to two games in the race for the seventh spot in the Eastern Conference playoff race.

**Hawks 123, Kings 113:** Nickeil Alexander-Walker scored 27 points and host Atlanta shot 8 of 12 on 3-pointers in the fourth quarter to survive a late surge from Sacramento for coach Quinn Snyder’s 500th ca-

reer victory.

The Kings, who have lost their first three games of a four-game road trip, fell to 19-56. DeMar DeRozan led Sacramento with 22 points.

**Grizzlies 125, Bulls 124:** Cedric Coward scored 24 points, including a pair of free throws with 6.5 seconds left, and had nine rebounds and host Memphis outlasted Chicago.

After Coward’s free throws, Josh Giddey made two foul shots with 4 seconds left to pull the Bulls within one point. Chicago had a chance to win after the Grizzlies turned over the ensuing inbound pass, but couldn’t get a shot off in time.

**Suns 134, Jazz 109:** Jalen Green scored 31 points, Devin Booker had 26 and host Phoenix routed Utah.

The win moved the Suns within 3½ games of sixth-place Houston, the last position to stay out of the Western Conference play-in round.

# Smith's walk-off slam caps Braves' rally

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Dominic Smith hit a walk-off grand slam and the Atlanta Braves stunned the Kansas City Royals with a six-run ninth inning in a 6-2 victory on Saturday night.

Smith hit a 3-2 pitch from Carlos Estévez (0-1) over the right field wall as Atlanta won for the second straight night.

Smith, whose mother died less than two weeks ago, became the first player in MLB history to hit a walk-off grand slam in his debut with a new team, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

"This team is just so awesome," Smith said. "I'm so blessed because of the love they showed me, the support every day. They're asking about her, asking about her well-being, my well-being, and that's all they really cared about. They didn't care about baseball."

Oswaldo Bido (1-0) picked up the win in his Braves debut after striking out all three batters in the ninth inning.

Atlanta trailed 2-0 entering the ninth, but Yastrzemski and Harris had RBI singles to tie it before Smith ended it with his home run.

Michael Wacha threw six shutout innings, and Salvador Perez hit a home run for Kansas City.

**Cubs 10, Nationals 2:** Cade Horton (1-0) threw four-hit ball into the seventh inning, Ian Happ broke the game open with a three-run homer in the sixth inning and host Chicago routed Washington.

Miguel Amaya homered and finished with two hits and two RBIs, and Pete Crow-Armstrong added two hits. Nico Hoerner, Matt Shaw and Carson Kelly drove in runs as the Cubs avenged Thursday's 10-4 opening day loss.

Horton (1-0), the runner-up in the 2025 NL Rookie of the Year race, retired the first nine batters he faced before James Wood led off the fourth with a solo homer. The 24-year-old righthander was charged with two

runs in 6½ innings, with four strikeouts and a walk.

**Cardinals 6, Rays 5 (10):** St. Louis rookie JJ Wetherholt lined a two-run, 10th-inning single after Michael McGreevy tossed six hitless innings to help the host Cardinals beat Tampa Bay.

Wetherholt, the seventh pick of the 2024 MLB amateur draft, lined a single to right field off Griffin Jax (0-1) in his second career game.

**Blue Jays 8, Athletics 7 (11):** Ernie Clement singled home the winning run in the 11th inning and host Toronto rallied to beat the Athletics.

Clement won it with a one-out single to left off Luis Medina (0-1), scoring Nathan Lukes for the Blue Jays' second-straight walk-off win.

**Twins 4, Orioles 1:** Royce Lewis hit a tiebreaking two-run homer in the fifth inning, and visiting Minnesota used a strong effort from its bullpen to beat Baltimore.

Kody Clemens added an RBI single in the seventh to help the Twins earn their first win for manager Derek Shelton, who was hired to turn around a team that went 70-92 last year.

**Rangers 5, Phillies 4 (10):** Jake Burger and Corey Seager each homered and visiting Texas recovered from blowing a three-run lead in the ninth inning to beat Philadelphia in 10 innings.

The Phillies tied the game with three unearned runs in the ninth aided by Burger's second error of the game at first base. Phillies closer Jhoan Duran (0-1) then uncorked a wild pitch in the 10th that scored automatic runner Brandon Nimmo and allowed an RBI single to Andrew McCutchen for a 5-3 lead.

**Reds 6, Red Sox 5 (11):** Dane Myers' single to left in the 11th inning scored designated runner TJ Friedl from third as host Cincinnati defeated Boston.

Myers' third career game-ending hit came off Justin Slaten

(0-1). Connor Phillips (1-0) got the win for the Reds.

**Marlins 4, Rockies 3:** Owen Caissie had three hits, including a go-ahead RBI single in the eighth inning and host Miami beat Colorado.

Liam Hicks homered and drove in three runs, while Agustín Ramirez singled twice and walked for the Marlins.

**Mets 4, Pirates 2 (11):** Luis Robert Jr. hit a three-run homer in the bottom of the 11th inning to give host New York a victory over Pittsburgh.

After starters Mitch Keller and David Peterson matched zeros in 42-degree weather, each team scored once in the 10th. Bryan Reynolds put the Pirates ahead with a two-out infield single in the 11th before Robert ended it in the bottom half.

**Yankees 3, Giants 1:** Aaron Judge homered for a second straight day to nearly the same left-field spot, Ben Rice hit a two-run double in the third inning and visiting New York beat San Francisco for a three-game sweep.

The Giants matched a franchise record dating to 1909 by going 20 straight innings without a run to start the season before Matt Chapman's RBI single in the third finally got San Francisco — and new manager Tony Vitello — on the scoreboard in 2026.

**Astros 11, Angels 9:** Carlos Correa and Isaac Paredes drove in two runs apiece and sparked an eight-run sixth inning for host Houston in a victory over Los Angeles.

Trailing 6-4, the Astros tied the game on a single by Correa and a throwing error by Angels catcher Logan O'Hoppe. Houston took a lead on a single from Christian Walker and would tag Angels reliever Walbert Ureña (0-1) for six runs on four hits in one inning.

**Brewers 6, White Sox 1:** Garrett Mitchell hit two singles, drove in two runs and stole two bases to help host Milwaukee

beat Chicago despite another home run by Munetaka Murakami.

Christian Yelich had three hits, and his RBI single opened the scoring in the Brewers' three-run first inning. Brice Turang also had three hits, which included two doubles, Joey Ortiz had two hits and drove in a run and Brandon Lockridge had an RBI single.

**Padres 3, Tigers 0:** Randy Vásquez and two relievers combined for a two-hitter, and Fernando Tatis Jr. hit an RBI single and his stolen base led to another run as host San Diego beat Detroit to avoid a three-game sweep.

Vásquez (1-0) struck out eight and allowed two hits — a single and double by Colt Keith — in six innings, with three walks. Kyle Hart struck out three in two perfect innings and closer Mason Miller walked one and struck out two in the ninth for the save in his season debut.

**Dodgers 3, Diamondbacks 2:** Will Smith hit a go-ahead, two-run homer with two outs in the eighth inning Saturday on his 31st birthday, lifting host Los Angeles to a season-opening three-game sweep over Arizona.

Smith began his bobblehead night going 0-for-3. After Mookie Betts walked, Smith sent a 2-2 pitch from reliever Juan Morillo (0-1) over the wall in center field, giving the Dodgers a 3-2 lead.

**Guardians 6, Mariners 5 (10):** Rookie outfielder Chase DeLauter hit his fourth career home run to give visiting Cleveland the lead for good in the 10th inning in a win over Seattle.

DeLauter, who Thursday became the fifth player in the franchise's 126-year history to hit a home run in his first career regular-season at-bat, extended his arms on an elevated fastball from Mariners closer Andrés Muñoz (0-1) and deposited it beyond the left-field wall at T-Mobile Park for a two-run home run that made it 6-3.

# Islanders top reigning champ Panthers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Brayden Schenn had a goal and two assists, Matthew Schaefer tied the rookie defenseman franchise scoring record and the New York Islanders rallied to beat the two-time defending champion Florida Panthers 5-2 on Saturday and keep pace in a competitive Eastern Conference playoff race.

Schenn, acquired at the trade deadline, scored the tying goal in the second period after U.S. Olympic gold medal-winner Matthew Tkachuk put Florida up 2-0 through 14 minutes. Fourth-liner Marc Gatcomb started the comeback and later assisted on Casey Cizikas' goal that made it 5-2.

Schaefer with a pair of assists matched Stefan Persson from 1977-78 at 56 points. His next goal will tie Schaefer with Brian Leetch for the most by a rookie defenseman in NHL history.

Ilya Sorokin allowed only the two goals from Tkachuk and stopped the other 17 shots he faced. Swedes Simon Holmstrom and Emil Heineman also scored for New York, which has won two in a row since losing three of its previous four.

The injury-ravaged Panthers moved a step closer to getting eliminated from playoff contention. They're without forwards Brad Marchand, Sam Bennett, Sam Reinhart, Anton Lundell, Evan Rodrigues and A.J. Greer and have not had captain Aleksander Barkov all season after he tore ligaments in his right knee during training camp.

**Bruins 6, Wild 3:** Pavel Zacha scored his 25th goal in the opening period and added a game-sealing score late in the game, leading host Boston past Minnesota to spoil its chance to clinch a playoff spot.

In a tight race with Montreal for third place in the Atlantic Division, the Bruins have won four of their last five games and 15 of their last 17 home games.

The Wild have lost six of their last nine but have a firm hold on

third place in the Central Division. A victory Saturday would have earned them a playoff berth.

**Lightning 4, Senators 2:** Defenseman Emil Lilleberg scored the go-ahead goal and had a career-high three points, and host Tampa Bay rallied to defeat Ottawa.

Brandon Hagel and Charle-Edouard D'Astous each had a goal and an assist, while Jake Guentzel scored for a third consecutive game. Andrei Vasilevskiy made 26 saves for the Lightning, who played without leading scorer Nikita Kucherov and others.

Nick Paul and Kucherov, who entered the weekend tied with Connor McDavid for the most points in the NHL, were both out because of illness. Despite not having them and captain Victor Hedman, who is on a leave of absence for personal reasons, the Lightning improved to 5-0-2 in the past seven games.

**Oilers 4, Ducks 2:** Connor McDavid had a goal and two assists to regain the NHL scoring lead as visiting Edmonton made a move up the Pacific Division standings, holding on to defeat Anaheim.

Zach Hyman had a goal and an assist and Jack Roslovic and Matt Savoie also scored for the Oilers, who won their third game in a row and moved three points back of the division-leading Ducks.

**Sharks 3, Blue Jackets 2:** Igor Chernyshov scored twice, including the go-ahead goal with 1:25 remaining, to rally visiting San Jose over Columbus.

The Sharks snapped a six-game losing streak and moved within four points of Nashville for the second Western Conference wild-card spot.

**Hurricanes 5, Devils 2:** Nikolaj Ehlers had a goal and assist to lead host Carolina over New Jersey.

Shayne Gostisbehere, Jackson Blake, Jordan Staal and Seth Jarvis also scored for the Hurricanes, who won for the fourth

time in five games. Brandon Busi stopped 17 shots to win his second straight start after losing his previous three.

**Stars 6, Penguins 3:** Mikko Rantanen had a goal and an assist in his return from injured reserve and visiting Dallas pulled away from Pittsburgh.

Jason Robertson reached the 40-goal plateau for the third time in his career, and assisted on Rantanen's goal with a slick cross-ice feed to the right circle that Rantanen — who hadn't played since getting hurt Feb. 20 while playing for Team Finland at the Milan Cortina Olympics — powered past Stuart Skinner for his first NHL tally since Feb. 2.

**Sabres 3, Kraken 2 (SO):** Tage Thompson and Jack Quinn scored in the shootout, and host Buffalo beat Seattle to end a three-game winless skid.

Rasmus Dahlin and Peyton Krebs had goals in regulation for the Sabres, and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 32 saves while stopping both Kraken attempts he faced in the shootout.

**Jets 4, Avalanche 2:** Cole Perfetti scored a tiebreaking goal late in the third period, and visiting Winnipeg kept its postseason hopes alive with a win over Colorado.

Connor Hellebuyck made 21 saves, Gabriel Vilardi had a goal and an assist, and Cole Koepke and Kyle O'Connor scored for the Jets. Winnipeg, with 74 points, is three behind Nashville for the second wild card in the Western Conference.

**Canadiens 4, Predators 1:** Ivan Demidov, Oliver Kapanen and Alex Newhook each scored a goal and an assist as visiting Montreal beat Nashville.

The Canadiens won their fourth straight in a streak that has them third in the Atlantic Division just ahead of Boston. They swept the season series with the Predators for a second straight season.

**Blues 5, Maple Leafs 1:** Dylan Holloway had a goal and an as-

sis, sparking host St. Louis over Toronto, its fourth win in a row.

Jordan Binnington registered 12 saves in making just second home start since the Olympics. Binnington had not started at Enterprise Center since Feb. 28 against New Jersey. His last four starts have come on the road. In his last start, Binnington registered 14 saves in a win over Vancouver last week.

**Flyers 5, Red Wings 3:** Owen Tippett scored a hat trick as visiting Philadelphia survived a late rally for a key win over Detroit.

Tippett's third career hat trick gives him seven goals in his last nine games. The Flyers have won seven of those nine and are now three points behind Columbus for the second Eastern Conference wild-card spot.

**Mammoth 6, Kings 2:** Alexander Kerfoot and Logan Cooley scored two goals each, Mikhail Sergachev tied a franchise single-game record with four assists and visiting Utah beat Los Angeles.

Nick Schmaltz and Jack McBain also scored, Karel Vejmelka made 29 saves, as the Mammoth avoided a second losing streak of at least three games in March.

**Flames 7, Canucks 3:** Matt Coronato extended his point streak to five games with a goal and two assists as host Calgary scored four times in the second period in a victory over Vancouver.

Morgan Frost also had a goal and two assists for the Flames. Joel Farabee, Ryan Strome, Olli Maatta, Zayne Parekh and Adam Klapka rounded out the scoring. Calgary finished 5-0-1 on its six-game homestand.

**Capitals 5, Golden Knights 4 (SO):** Dylan Strome scored once in regulation and the lone goal in the shootout as visiting Washington defeated Vegas.

After squandering an early 3-0 lead, the Capitals erased a 4-3 deficit to force overtime and pull out the win.