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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

White House wanted ship 'out of sight'?

7th Fleet says late senator's name not covered on USS McCain during Trump visit

By **SETH ROBSON**

Stars and Stripes

The White House asked the Navy to keep a destroyer named for the late Sen. John S. McCain "out of sight" during President Donald Trump's visit to the home of the 7th Fleet in Japan on Tuesday, according to reports by The Wall Street Journal and The Associated Press.

However, a 7th Fleet spokesman in an email Thursday to Stars and Stripes said McCain's name, emblazoned across the tail of the ship, was not covered during Trump's stop at Yokosuka Naval Base to speak to servicemembers aboard the USS Wasp.

Cmdr. Clay Doss said photos of a tarp over the McCain's name that were referenced by Wednesday's Journal report were taken last week.

The tarp was taken down before Trump arrived, he said.

"All ships remained in normal configuration during the president's visit," Doss said.

According to the Journal

report, a May 15 email from an unnamed U.S. Indo-Pacific Command official to Navy and Air Force officials dealing with preparations for Trump's visit to Yokosuka stated: "USS John McCain needs to be out of sight."

The email's existence was confirmed by the AP, which spoke to U.S. officials Wednesday on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss private email correspondence.

Two U.S. officials told the AP that all the ships in the harbor were lined up for Trump's visit, and they were visible from the Wasp. The officials said, however, that most of their names probably could not be seen since they were side by side but that the name of the McCain could be seen from the pier.

Asked if the tarp was meant to block Trump's view of the ship, the officials said it had been placed on the ship for maintenance and removed for the visit.

The president and McCain — a former Navy pilot who sur-

vived five and a half years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam — were often political foes. During the 2016 election campaign, Trump said McCain was "not a war hero," and that "I like people who weren't captured."

Trump took periodic swipes at McCain after his August death from brain cancer, sometimes citing the late senator's vote in July 2017 against legislation to repeal the Obama-era Affordable Care Act.

"I'm not a fan of John McCain and that's fine," Trump told Fox News in March.

The USS John S. McCain was originally named for the late senator's grandfather, naval aviator and World War II Pacific commander Adm. John S. McCain Sr., and his father, former Pacific Command chief Adm. John S. McCain Jr.

The late Sen. McCain's name was added to the ship in July 2018.

It is still undergoing repairs at Yokosuka for extensive damage caused by a 2017 collision near Singapore that killed 10 sailors.

Trump mentioned a half-dozen warships in his Memorial Day speech to servicemembers aboard the Wasp at Yokosuka, but not the McCain.

After the Journal's story was published, Trump tweeted: "I was not informed about anything having to do with the Navy Ship USS John S. McCain during my recent visit to Japan. Nevertheless, @FLOTUS and I loved being with our great Military Men and Women — what a spectacular job they do!"

In Jakarta, Indonesia, on Thursday morning, acting Defense Secretary Pat Shanahan told reporters, "When I read about it this morning, it was the first I heard about it." Asked if he would investigate, Shanahan said he would need to know more first.

McCain's daughter, Meghan, tweeted Wednesday that Trump will "always be deeply threatened by the greatness of my dad's incredible life."

Information from The Associated Press was used in this report.

Navy trades in situps for planking exercises on readiness test

By **JOSHUA KARSTEN**

Stars and Stripes

The Navy is doing away with situps and adding a planking exercise to the physical readiness test, the service's top officer said in an early morning announcement Thursday.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jon Richardson and Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith posted the announcement on the MCPON's Facebook page after a morning exercise with the crew of the

destroyer USS John Paul Jones in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

The service is also adding a rowing machine option for the cardio portion of the test, according to the announcement.

The post stated that the changes will take place in 2020 and were "based on feedback from the fleet and after testing and evaluation."

"We're going to eliminate the situps because those have been shown to do more harm than good," Richardson said in the brief video.

Planking has several forms, but the common forearm plank requires the participant to hold a position similar to a pushup for an extended time, stressing the core muscles.

The Navy physical fitness assessment is broken down into two parts: the body composition assessment and a physical readiness test that grades sailors based on age and completion of pushups, situps and a 1.5-mile run or a different cardio option.

Official guidance has not yet

been released but comments have already poured in on the MCPON's Facebook page.

"Been waiting for this, situps are horrible for the back, planks are a much better measure of core strength," a commenter said.

While the news was met mostly with cheers, the announcement left some questioning how long they will need to plank before the pushup and cardio portions.

EUCOM eyes diplomats' role in military war games exercises

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — U.S. European Command leaders are developing new military war games in coordination with some unconventional partners: American diplomats in Europe.

"It provides the reality," said Air Force Maj. Gen. John P. Healy, who leads EUCOM's exercises and assessments division. "Before you get to any kinetic operations, there is going to be a whole-of-government approach that precedes everything."

During the past several years, EUCOM's war games have grown in size and complexity, with thousands of troops taking part in exercises along NATO's eastern flank in connection with concerns about a more aggressive Russia. What's gotten

less attention is how commanders would coordinate with their civilian counterparts in an unfolding crisis.

Now, there is a push to bring U.S. Embassy teams in Europe into the training fold, with military and civilian officials coordinating their actions in mock crisis management scenarios, Healy said. That means bringing in ambassadors and embassy teams into exercise scenarios, where decisions must be made in real time.

"We need to be faster off the mark if something ever occurs and we need to carry that speed forward," Healy said.

Coordinating with embassies "is a fact of life, from the Baltics to Israel," Healy said. "We absolutely have to incorporate that into the exercises."

So far, embassies in Bulgaria, Greece and Italy have taken

part in the exercises, and the effort is expected to expand to other diplomatic missions in the future.

The behind-the-scenes coordination with diplomats is the latest tweak in what has been a five-year push at EUCOM headquarters to upgrade its ability to lead in a crisis. EUCOM's transformation began soon after Russia's 2014 intervention in Ukraine, a move that prompted U.S. military commanders to focus training on combat, along with command and control skills.

A high-profile aspect of that effort is EUCOM's summer series of military exercises, now underway, that brings together air, sea and ground troops and numerous allied contingents that conduct flashy live-fire exercises and large-scale troop movements.

Miss. shipyard expanding for Coast Guard icebreaker

Associated Press

PASCAGOULA, Miss. — A shipbuilder is expanding on the Mississippi Gulf Coast after receiving a \$746 million contract to make a heavy icebreaker for the U.S. Coast Guard.

VT Halter Marine will invest \$37.5 million at its Pascagoula shipyard and is expected to create 900 jobs over the next five years, Mississippi officials said Tuesday.

The state's economic development agency, Mississippi Development Authority, is providing a \$12.5 million grant for a dry dock and \$1.5 million for workforce training.

The Navy announced in April that Halter Marine received the contract to build the Coast Guard's first new heavy icebreaker since 1976. It said most work will be done by Halter in Pascagoula, with about a quarter of the work in New Orleans and Metairie, La.

Rehabilitation and modernization of the Pascagoula shipyard will begin late this year, and VT Halter Marine expects to deliver the icebreaker in 2024.

"The company's new contract will enable our country to effectively fulfill missions in the world's polar regions," Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant said in a news release Tuesday. "This is a tremendous victory for our state. ... Mississippi once again has proven our deep and abiding commitment to the armed forces."

"Our design package, the local workforce and facilities in Pascagoula set VT Halter Marine apart from our competitors and made this win possible," Ronald Baczkowski, the president and CEO of VT Halter Marine.

New York wholesaler charged with selling counterfeit military uniforms

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

A New York clothing wholesaler is accused of selling \$20 million worth of Chinese-made counterfeit U.S. military uniforms and other gear to the Department of Defense, other government purchasers and companies that supply the U.S. government, according to the Justice Department.

Ramin Kohanbash, 49, of Brooklyn, N.Y., was charged May 21 in U.S. District Court in Providence, R.I., with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and trafficking in counterfeit goods, the department said in a statement.

The Justice Department alleges that Kohanbash and oth-

ers provided samples of actual military uniforms and gear to manufacturers in China to replicate.

The department also alleges that Kohanbash and his co-conspirators provided, reviewed and approved photographs, descriptions and samples of tags and labels to be attached to the knockoff products so the counterfeit versions appeared legitimate, the department said.

"In many instances, this process allegedly involved copying the trademarks and brand names of actual U.S.-made products and adding them to the foreign counterfeit versions," the department said.

The Chinese-made knockoffs were shipped to Kohanbash and sold to other wholesalers

who ultimately marketed and sold them to military and government buyers as genuine, American-made products, the department said.

By law, goods sold to the military and certain other government buyers must be made in the United States or certain other designated countries. China is not one of those countries, the department said.

Kohanbash, who could face as much as 10 years in a federal prison for trafficking in counterfeit goods and five years on the charge of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, is scheduled to appear before a magistrate June 12, the department said.

Saudis ask nations to respond to Iran

Associated Press

JIDDAH, Saudi Arabia — Saudi Arabia's foreign minister on Thursday urged Muslim nations to confront with "all means of force and firmness" recent attacks in the Persian Gulf that U.S. and some Arab officials have blamed on Iran.

Ibrahim al-Assaf made the comments at a preparatory meeting of foreign ministers of the 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation, or OIC, ahead of a trio of summits in the kingdom's holy city of Mecca.

Saudi Arabia hastily called for the meetings in response to the spike in tensions with its key rival, Iran.

That King Salman could quickly bring regional leaders and heads of state to Mecca so rapidly reflects the kingdom's weight in the region and its desire to project a unified position on Iran.

The summits coincide with the final days of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, a time of intense worship when Muslims believe the Quran was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad some 1,400

years ago.

Saudi Arabia will seek to use the optics of the Mecca gatherings to send a clear and powerful message to Iran, which is also a member of the OIC.

In his opening remarks, al-Assaf said the alleged sabotage of oil tankers off the coast of the United Arab Emirates and a drone attack on a Saudi oil pipeline by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels in recent weeks threaten the global economy and endanger regional and international security.

"We should confront it with all means of force and firmness," he said.

Upon their arrival at the airport, each leader was shown Houthi military items, such as a destroyed drone, missiles and mortar shells used in the conflict with the Saudis. The leaders were given a brief explanation of the weapons on display by Col. Turki al-Maliki, spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition at war in Yemen.

An Iranian official was at the OIC meeting where al-Assaf spoke Thursday, but Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif did not attend.

Iran denies being involved in the attacks, which come amid heightened tensions between Tehran and the U.S. The crisis has its root in the Trump administration's decision to withdraw last year from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers.

The first of the three summits will start with a meeting of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council on Thursday evening.

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser Al Thani was expected to attend, making it the highest-level visit to Saudi Arabia by a Qatari official since 2017, when the kingdom and three other Arab states cut off ties with the tiny energy-rich Gulf state over its foreign policies.

The GCC meeting will be immediately followed with an emergency summit of the 22-nation Arab League, minus Syria whose membership remains suspended.

The third and final summit, on Friday, is expected to focus largely on Palestinian statehood and independence. It will bring together leaders from the 57-nation OIC, which is headquartered in Saudi Arabia.

US weaponry in China's sights amid trade war

Bloomberg

China's grip on the global market for rare-earth metals gives it the ability to target American weaponry in its trade war with the U.S.

Everything from Lockheed Martin Corp.'s F-35 Joint Strike Fighter jet to guided missiles and lasers used to determine targets rely on the elements to perform key functions. China accounts for as much as 95% of global output and the U.S. relies on the Asian nation for 80% of its rare-earths requirement.

Rare earths, which despite the name are more widely available than precious metals in the Earth's crust, have been thrust into the spotlight by a series of media reports in China signaling Beijing is gearing up to use the minerals as a counter in its trade battle with Washington. Tit-for-tat tariffs on a slew of commodities including soybeans, natural gas and aluminum have already roiled global markets and threatened global economic growth.

"The fact that rare earths are

on the menu again means China is using its most powerful political tool in the resources space," said Simon Moores, managing director at Benchmark Mineral Intelligence, an industry researcher. "Rare earths are a niche specialty and critical to the Defense Department."

The U.S. imported \$160 million worth of rare-earth metals and compounds in 2018, an increase of 17% from the prior year but down from \$519 million of refined rare-earths in 2012, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

Each F-35 Lightning II aircraft — considered one of the world's most sophisticated, maneuverable and stealthy fighter jets — requires approximately 920 pounds of rare-earth materials, according to a 2013 report from the U.S. Congressional Research Service. It's the Pentagon's most expensive weapons system and the first fighter designed to serve all three branches of the U.S. military.

Rare earths including yttrium and terbium are used for

laser targeting and weapons in Future Combat Systems vehicles, according to the Congressional Research Service report. Other uses are for Stryker armored fighting vehicles, Predator drones and Tomahawk cruise missiles.

The Pentagon didn't immediately respond when asked about the issue.

The Department of Defense accounts for about 1% of total U.S. consumption of rare earths, according to a 2016 report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office. Still, "rare earths are essential to the production, sustainment, and operation of U.S. military equipment. Reliable access to the necessary material, regardless of the overall level of defense demand, is a bedrock requirement for DOD," the GAO said.

The elements are also found in iPhones, electric vehicles and wind turbines, and rare-earth permanent magnets are used in miniature motors or generators that allow windscreen wipers, electric windows and

power steering to function.

While China uses rare earths "to strike fear into the heart of Washington, D.C. politicians," Moores said his research firm has been trying to ease concerns over its other uses in areas. Growth in rare-earths consumption is flat, and lithium-ion batteries — which use other critical raw materials that China is the biggest exporter of — will grow tenfold over the next decade, he said.

Still, the U.S. does still face a shortage. While America mines about 3,000 to 4,000 metric tons of rare-earth concentrates each month, it exports almost all of that to China, leaving it entirely dependent on supplies from abroad.

"The headline is that this is a trade war, but what if longer term, beneath the trade issues we get locked into a war for technology domination in the 21st century? There are no rulebooks here," said Dan McGroarty, the founder of Carmot Strategic Group, a consulting company that advises on rare-earths and critical minerals.

Trump lashes out after Mueller's statement

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump blasted special counsel Robert Mueller on Thursday, calling him a “never Trumper” who led a biased investigation on Russia’s interference in the 2016 election and failed to investigate his opponents who didn’t want Trump to be president.

Trump’s eruption came a day after Mueller pointedly rejected his repeated claims that he was cleared of obstruction of justice allegations and that the two-year inquiry was merely a “witch hunt.”

The president also offered mixed messages on Russia’s efforts to help him defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton, first tweeting that he had “nothing to do with Russia helping me get elected,” then minutes later, telling reporters, “Russia did not help me get elected.”

Trump said Mueller, who is a Republican, was “conflicted” and should have in-

vestigated law enforcement officials who the president claims tried to undermine him.

“Robert Mueller should have never been chosen,” Trump said, adding falsely that Mueller wanted the FBI director job, but the president told him no.

Mueller, who was appointed special counsel by Trump’s Justice Department, was previously FBI director, appointed by Republican President George W. Bush.

Speaking to reporters on the White House South Lawn, Trump insisted that he’s been tough on Russia and that Moscow would have preferred Hillary Clinton as president. The special counsel’s report said Russian interference in the election helped Trump defeat Clinton,

Asked about impeachment by Congress, he called it a “dirty word” and said he couldn’t imagine the courts allowing him to be impeached. “I don’t think so because there’s no crime,” he said.

Mueller said Wednesday that charging Trump with any crime in court was “not an option” because of federal rules, but he used his first public remarks on the Russia investigation to emphasize that he did not exonerate the president.

“If we had had confidence that the president clearly did not commit a crime, we would have said so,” Mueller declared.

The special counsel’s remarks on indicting Trump marked a counter to criticism, including by Attorney General William Barr, that Mueller should have reached a determination on whether the president illegally tried to obstruct the probe by taking actions such as firing FBI Director James Comey.

He said he believed such an action would be unconstitutional.

Mueller did not use the word “impeachment” but said it was the job of Congress, not the criminal justice system, to hold the president accountable for any wrongdoing.

Body believed to be missing Utah girl found

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — A body believed to be a missing 5-year-old Utah girl was found Wednesday less than a block from her home, bringing a wide-ranging search to a grim close five days after the child was taken from her home and killed by her uncle, police said.

The body believed to be Elizabeth “Lizzy” Shelley was found hidden under trees and brush after Alex Whipple, 21, told his lawyer where he had hidden her, Logan Police Chief Gary Jensen said. The discovery came hours after Whipple was charged with murder and other counts.

He provided the map in exchange for prosecutors taking the death penalty off the table, Jensen said.

Jensen said the discovery was disappointing but “nevertheless is closure and helps us be able to now deal with the investigation and help the family through their grief.”

In a statement read by a victim’s advocate, the girl’s mother, Jessica Whipple, said: “There are not words to express the sadness and heartbreak we feel today. This did not end the way we wanted to do but in the sadness we are comforted by the effort people put in to find Lizzy. We would never have expected this outpouring of love and

support. It was beautiful.”

The body was found after officers spent days combing the city set in a picturesque valley near the Idaho border about 80 miles north of Salt Lake City.

Crews previously searched the area where the body was buried but didn’t find her, Jensen said.

Alex Whipple’s attorney, Shannon Demler, said his client “knows he did something that’s inexcusable.”

Whipple hadn’t previously acknowledged involvement in his niece’s disappearance, but did tell police alcohol makes him “black out” and sometimes do “criminal things,” prosecutors said.

Malaysia’s PM seeks change in waste disposal practices

The Washington Post

TOKYO — It’s grossly unfair for rich countries to send their plastic waste to poor countries who are already struggling to cope with their own waste problems, and the practice needs to stop, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said Thursday.

His comments, made on a visit to Tokyo, came after Malaysia announced this week it was sending back more than 3,000 tons of non-recyclable plastic waste to countries such as the United States, Britain, Canada,

Australia and Japan that had apparently been smuggled into the country.

Malaysia’s government says it has become a dumping ground for rich nations after China banned the import of plastic waste last year.

China’s decision has sparked a crisis in the global waste disposal industry because neither the richer nations nor poorer ones have the capacity to process all the waste they are producing.

“This is going to be a problem for the whole world,” Mahathir said. “We are

producing too much waste and you have a problem trying to get rid of the waste.”

Landfills don’t serve any purpose any more, while waste can’t just be burned because of air pollution, he said. “So it is grossly unfair for rich countries to send waste to poor countries simply because the poor countries have no choice; maybe it contributes a little to their economy,” he said.

On Tuesday, Malaysian Environment Minister Yeo Bee Yin said 60 containers of contaminated waste would be sent back to their countries of origin.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man captures video of caterwauling lynx

ME BANGOR — A Maine man who was scouting fishing locations came across a rare sight: a pair of Canada lynx facing off on a dirt road.

Daniel Wadleigh, of Belgrade, told the Bangor Daily News that the two cats were so focused on their showdown that they didn't notice him. He stopped his truck and shot video showing them caterwauling at each other.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is drafting a rule to revoke Canada lynx's threatened listing across the Lower 48 states under the Endangered Species Act.

The government announced last year that the lynx no longer need special protections.

Residents advised to watch for rogue bison

MN ROCHESTER — Authorities in Rochester were asking residents to keep an eye out for a rogue bison that's been on the loose since the weekend.

A farmer spotted the bison walking through his fields in southwest Rochester on Sunday. Officers approached the animal, but it started acting aggressively.

Olmsted County sheriff's officials have been in touch with the bison's owner. Capt. Scott Behrens said people should stay away from the bison if they see it because it could charge if it feels threatened.

Bald eaglet back in air after stay in hospital

LA METAIRIE — A bald eagle hatched this spring in a New Orleans sub-

urb was released Tuesday in the same neighborhood after two weeks in Louisiana State University's Wildlife Hospital.

Dozens of neighbors who had watched over the eagle family cheered as the mottled brown bird hopped out of the cage in which it had traveled from Baton Rouge and launched itself into the air in Metairie.

The eaglet sat for a while on the roof of a house in the shadow of its nest, fending off a pair of mockingbirds that were dive-bombing it. Then it flew off.

The eaglet had been taken to the LSU veterinary school's Wildlife Hospital on May 11. It had been found May 10, walking in a nearby street and barely able to fly.

Authorities search for bear that bit hiker

CO ASPEN — Wildlife officials were searching for a black bear that bit a woman's leg as she hiked in Colorado.

The woman and her husband told wildlife officials they saw the bear Monday walking toward them on a trail near Aspen and stepped aside to give it space to pass.

As the bear walked by, they say it charged the woman and bit her thigh before running off, Colorado Parks and Wildlife said.

Officials said her injury did not appear serious.

Because the bear was aggressive, wildlife officers plan to euthanize it if they find it.

Snake slithers out of toilet, bites man

FL CORAL SPRINGS — Authorities said a ball python slithered out of a toilet and bit a South Florida man on the arm.

Coral Springs police spokes-

man Chris Swinson said the man was treated at the scene after the 4-foot snake bit him when he lifted the toilet seat. The snake is nonvenomous.

Swinson told news outlets the snake didn't belong to the man and it was unclear how it got into the apartment.

The South Florida SunSentinel reported the Coral Springs Humane Society took the snake to a veterinarian's office. It was being treated for a scale infection.

Man charged with assault, blames bear

AK ANCHORAGE — A 50-year-old Alaska man suspected of assaulting his mother told investigating officers that she had been attacked by a bear.

KTVA-television reported Karl Engelke, of Anchorage, was charged with felony assault and evidence tampering.

A police dispatcher took a 911 call and heard a woman saying "help me quick" before the phone went dead.

Engleke met police at the home and said his 76-year-old mother had been attacked by a bear.

Officers found her in a shed, bleeding and vomiting blood. She was missing teeth and had suffered facial fractures.

She said she had told her son she wanted him to move out. She said she may have been attacked with a brick.

Suspect bails out as car flies off cliff

AZ PRESCOTT VALLEY — A vehicle theft suspect who led police on a 60-mile chase in central Arizona jumped out of an SUV just before it flew over a cliff and into a canyon, authorities said.

The chase started when a

state trooper spotted a stolen Mercedes SUV in Phoenix, and John Felipe Jaimes, 29, allegedly refused to stop, Department of Public Safety spokesman Bart Graves said.

Graves said a DPS helicopter followed the vehicle as it proceeded north on Interstate 17 and headed into Yavapai County, where the driver allegedly made two unsuccessful carjacking attempts.

An officer saw Jaimes bailing out of the car around Prescott Valley just before it went over the cliff, Graves said. He was later found hiding in a tree on the canyon's rim and was treated for minor injuries.

Jaimes was arrested on suspicion of drunken driving, theft of means of transportation and failing to comply with officers.

Woman found living in van with 21 dogs, bird

CT WETHERSFIELD — A Massachusetts woman was charged with animal cruelty after police in Connecticut say they found her living in a van with 21 dogs and a bird.

Wethersfield police said Suzanne Muzaffer Eser, 58, of Peabody, Mass., was arrested after a traffic stop.

Police said the van was strewn with garbage and animal waste.

Police said Eser told them she and the animals had been living in the Ford Transit van for several months.

The dogs and the macaw were taken to local animal shelters.

Police said several of the dogs appeared to have serious health issues.

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STARS AND STRIPES®

NBA Finals takes on international flair

Associated Press

TORONTO — Sometime in the next couple of weeks, either the Toronto Raptors or the Golden State Warriors will proclaim themselves to be world champions.

They won't be true "world" champions, of course.

But these NBA Finals have a very distinct international feel.

Game 1 of the series on Thursday was played in Canada, the first time a finals game was played outside the U.S. Raptors President Masai Ujiri was born in Nigeria. There are players from eight different countries — the U.S., along with Canada (Chris Boucher), Spain (Marc Gasol), Britain (OG Anunoby), Cameroon (Pascal Siakam), Congo (Serge Ibaka), Australia (Andrew Bogut) and Sweden (Jonas Jerebko).

"It says a lot that the first NBA Finals outside of America is being played here," Ujiri said. "Maybe one day it will be real 'world champions' or something, but this is what we dream of."

It's even a homecoming of

sorts for Warriors guard Stephen Curry, again.

His first four trips to the finals pitted him against Cleveland, not far from Akron, Ohio — where he and LeBron James both were born. Toronto has even more direct ties than Cleveland does for Curry; his wife Ayesha was born and raised in Toronto until she was 14, and his father Dell Curry played for the Raptors. So Stephen Curry lived in Toronto for a bit, and went to school there.

"A lot of family history," Stephen Curry said.

The finals will be aired in 215 countries, three Canadian networks will air the series live (one of them in French), and broadcasters speaking in 50 different languages will work the games. There are a half-dozen networks from Australia, Estonia, Hong Kong and New Zealand airing the finals for the first time.

More of what to know going into this series:

Farewell, Oracle: Game 4 or Game 6 of this series will be the last time the Warriors call Oracle Arena home. The team

is moving from Oakland to the new Chase Center in San Francisco next season.

The Warriors have played more than 2,000 games at Oracle, and since this run of NBA Finals appearances began when Steve Kerr took over as coach five years ago they are a staggering 218-40 in their soon-to-be-former home building.

"You cannot tell the story of professional basketball without including Oracle," said ESPN analyst Mark Jackson, a former Warriors coach. "Those fans have been incredibly loyal from the beginning to the end. ... As a former coach, as a former player coming into that building, as an analyst, it's as good as it gets."

Still waiting: With Toronto now in the finals for the first time, that means there are only six active franchises that still haven't been to the championship series.

The Los Angeles Clippers, Charlotte Hornets, Denver Nuggets, Minnesota Timberwolves, New Orleans Pelicans and Memphis Grizzlies are still waiting for their first trip to the

NBA Finals.

Second to one: Golden State is in the finals for the fifth consecutive year. That's the second-longest such streak in NBA history, only to Boston's run of 10 consecutive appearances from 1957 through 1966.

Boston (this time in 1984 through 1987, separate from the 10-straight streak), Miami (2011-2014), Cleveland (2015-2018) and the Los Angeles Lakers (1982-1985) had all reached the finals in four consecutive seasons.

Finishing strong: Even with the No. 2 seed in the Eastern Conference locked up, the Raptors finished the regular season with a flourish — winning seven of their last eight games.

This was why.

A 58-24 record meant the Raptors finished a game ahead of Golden State's 57-25 mark, and that's why Game 1 of this series is in Toronto.

A good omen for the Raptors: Under the current playoff format, teams with home-court advantage in the NBA Finals have ultimately prevailed 26 out of 35 times.

Top-ranked Osaka rallies to win second-round match

Associated Press

PARIS — Naomi Osaka is grinding her way through the French Open the hard way.

To cling onto her quest for a third consecutive Grand Slam title, the top-ranked Osaka again had to rally from first-set woes to beat former No. 1 Victoria Azarenka 4-6, 7-5, 6-3 Thursday in the second round.

Serena Williams and Novak Djokovic also advanced, with far easier straight-set wins.

Osaka considered herself unfortunate to be drawn against Azarenka and the powerful, accurate tennis produced by the 29-year-old Belarusian playing in her 12th French Open showed why.

Although now ranked No. 43 and without a major title since winning the Australian Open in 2012 and 2013, Azarenka took a

4-0 lead on Court Suzanne Lenglen and kept Osaka under constant pressure.

"I got rolled," Osaka said. "She kind of killed me in the first set."

Broken by a backhand volley at the net from Azarenka in the fifth game of the second set, the U.S. Open and Australian Open champion from Japan seemed to be in deep trouble. But, as she did against first-round opponent Anna Karolina Schmiedlova, Osaka again proved her resilience.

The eighth game of the second set was pivotal. After saving two break points, Azarenka double-faulted. Osaka leveled at 4-4 and the momentum started to shift. It was the seventh break point Azarenka had faced in the set, and the first she had failed to save.

But Azarenka still saved

three set points before Osaka finally leveled the match with a backhand cross-court winner.

The third set was packed with drama, too, with Osaka finally taming Azarenka with her third match point, when her combative opponent hit long.

Azarenka, still working her way back into the upper echelons of the game after injuries, a pregnancy and a custody battle over her child, said she would learn from the defeat.

Osaka's next opponent, 42nd-ranked Katerina Siniakova, hasn't been past the third round in her 18 previous Grand Slam tournaments.

Williams will play Sofia Kenin, an American ranked No. 35, in the third round. The 23-time major champion defeated Japanese qualifier Kurumi Nara, 6-3, 6-2 to advance.

Djokovic notched up another

career milestone: His young son, Stefan, watched him play, and win, at Roland Garros for the first time. The top-ranked player bidding to win his fourth consecutive major beat 104th-ranked Henri Laaksonen 6-1, 6-4, 6-3. Djokovic will play 147th-ranked Salvatore Caruso of Italy in the third round.

Also, Dominic Thiem overcame some trickery from Kazakh opponent Alexander Bublik to advance to the third round with a 6-3, 6-7 (6), 6-3, 7-5 victory. Bublik surprised Thiem with an underarm serve in the first set and frustrated the Austrian with a series of drop shots, spins and volleys.

Thiem will next face Pablo Cuevas, another master of trick shots. Cuevas was leading 7-6 (3), 6-3, 2-1 when Kyle Edmund retired from their match because of a left knee injury.

Blues top Bruins in OT, even series

Associated Press

BOSTON — Blues defenseman Carl Gunnarsson bumped into coach Craig Berube in the bathroom before the start of overtime and told him: “I just need one more.”

“He hit the post in the third there, and he just felt good about himself, obviously. Which he should have,” Berube said. “I liked hearing it.”

After clanging the potential winner off the post in the final two minutes of regulation, Gunnarsson scored on a delayed penalty 3:51 into overtime to give St. Louis a 3-2 victory over the Boston Bruins and tie the Stanley Cup Final at a game apiece.

Jordan Binnington made 21 saves, and Robert Bortuzzo and Vladimir Tarasenko scored in regulation to send a game in the championship series to overtime for the first time since 2016.

It was the Blues’ first victory in the Stanley Cup Final in franchise history after 13 straight losses.

“I guess that’s a little bonus and pretty cool if you think about it that way,” Gunnarsson said. “We’re pretty sure we’re not going to stop here.”

Charlie Coyle and Joakim Nordstrom scored and Tuukka Rask made 34 saves for Boston, which won 4-2 in Game 1 on Monday night for its eighth straight postseason victory.

Game 3 is Saturday night in St. Louis.

Gunnarsson also assisted on Bortuzzo’s first-period goal and then hit the post behind Rask with about 2 minutes left in regulation. In the final minute, Boston’s David Pastrnak had a chance off a faceoff, but Binnington turned it away.

“Would have loved to have it in the third, but who cares?” Gunnarsson said on the ice moments after the victory. “It’s great, taking this home.”

After a furious first period that ended in a 2-all tie, the

teams went on defense in the second. Despite four penalties, including a high-sticking, blood-drawing double-minor against Boston’s Connor Clifton, neither team was able to score.

It stayed tied through a hard-hitting third period, with both teams failing to convert good scoring chances.

But after the break, it was all Blues.

Boston did not get off a shot in overtime, and the Eastern Conference champs struggled to clear it out of their own zone. Alexander Steen drew a hooking penalty in front of the net, and the Blues pulled Binnington for an extra skater.

Gunnarsson worked it around to the blue line, passed it to Oskar Sundqvist and then got it back for a rifle shot over Rask’s stick side into the corner of the net.

“He got a second chance at it and made the most of it,” forward Brayden Schenn said. “The boys are happy for him.”

Gunnarsson also fed Bortuzzo midway through the first period for a shot that deflected off Matt Grzelcyk’s stick past Rask to make it 1-1.

Nordstrom scored just 40 seconds later to give Boston a 2-1 lead, but that lasted less than five minutes before Tarasenko took advantage of a mistake by Brad Marchand and lifted the puck over Rask with a second effort to tie the score again at 2.

“It was kind of like a crazy first. We got the lead, tie, lead, tie, kind of bounced back and forth,” Rask said. “It probably wasn’t our best game today.”

Grzelcyk left with about two minutes left in the first period after taking an elbow to the back of the head from Sundqvist. He left the arena for the hospital; Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said he had no other update.

The Bruins did not score on the ensuing power play.

“They seemed to play with more urgency than they did in Game 1,” Cassidy said. “We played with less.”

One goal in first two games for Boston’s top line

Associated Press

BOSTON — The Bruins’ eight-game playoff win streak ended with a thud, marred by missed opportunities and continued futility from their best players.

One of the hottest teams in the NHL over the past two rounds of the playoffs, Boston was beaten up during its 3-2 overtime loss to the Blues in Game 2 of the Stanley Cup Final on Wednesday night.

Carl Gunnarsson’s goal gave St. Louis the victory, but it came after the Bruins’ top line was shut down again. Boston had to get a boost from its fourth line to keep pace with an invigorated Blues attack.

The Bruins head to St. Louis suddenly facing questions of how to jump-start their offense after watching their dynamic scorers silenced for the second straight game. Game 3 is Saturday night.

“Missed opportunity,” Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said. “They seemed to play with more urgency tonight than they did in the first game. They didn’t allow us to get the space. As a result, we didn’t seem to win as many races as we did in Game 1 to the pucks. Some of that is on us.”

St. Louis allowed only first-period goals by Charlie Coyle and Joakim Nordstrom and limited Boston’s first line of Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak to seven shots on net.

Through the first two games, the trio is a combined minus-7 when they are on the ice. They still don’t have an even-strength point in the series. Marchand has the only goal between them, an empty netter in the closing minutes of Game 1.

“Yeah, we need to do better. We can’t play like that,” Marchand said. “We can control the mistakes that are made.”

During the winning streak,

Boston held a 32-11 scoring margin, scored a startling 34.5% of the time on the power play and limited opponents to 3.8% with the man advantage (1-for-26). Goaltender Tuukka Rask also was a virtual wall between the pipes, with a 1.38 goals-against average and two shutouts. Six of Boston’s eight wins also came by two or more goals.

None of it mattered in Game 2.

Despite being handed five power-play opportunities for the second time in as many games, Boston’s lone power-play goal came 3:55 into the game when Coyle capitalized on a goaltender interference penalty called on Blues’ winger Sammy Blais.

Rask was far more busy this game, too. After turning aside 20 shots in the opener, he managed to stop 33 shots but didn’t get much help from a defense that allowed the Blues to pile up a 37-23 advantage in shots.

It also didn’t help that defenseman Matt Grzelcyk left the game in the first period when he went down following a check into the boards by Oskar Sundqvist. He was helped off the ice and sent to a hospital for evaluation. His status for Game 3 was to be determined.

“They were the better team,” Rask said. “You scout enough and see enough video to know what the other team is all about. You got to play like you have a chance to win. Obviously Grizzly going down in the first, were are down to five on D. ... You’ve got to simplify things and they were just hard on us so we couldn’t get any room and were off our game.”

Coyle said despite a rough night, the team is confident the issues can be fixed.

“You can’t get too high or too low. It’s 1-to-1. We’re still in a good spot here,” he said. “We just have to go into their building and try to get one. That’s all you can do.”

Hendricks helps Cubs avoid sweep

Associated Press

HOUSTON — After a forgettable April, Kyle Hendricks wrapped up a fabulous May with another strong start.

Hendricks pitched eight terrific innings, Kyle Schwarber homered for the second straight game and Kris Bryant added a solo shot in his return to the lineup to help the Chicago Cubs avoid a sweep with a 2-1 win over the Houston Astros on Wednesday night.

Hendricks was 1-4 with a 5.33 ERA in five April starts before going 4-0 with a 1.81 ERA in six outings this month.

“When he gets on a roll, he normally stays on a roll,” Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. “He has that kinetic energy that he demonstrates. ... When he’s sharp and he’s starting to feel it, you just leave him alone.”

The game included a scary and jarring moment when a young fan sitting near third base was hit by a foul line drive off the bat of Albert Almora Jr. in the fourth inning. The girl was apparently conscious and crying as she was whisked away and nearby fans looked on.

After the game, the Astros issued a statement saying the fan was taken to a hospital, but did not disclose any further details on her condition.

Almora, the Cubs’ center fielder, and other players from both teams were visibly shaken by the scene.

Still upset after the game, a somber Almora said he received “unofficial updates” on the girl’s condition but was advised not to share any details.

“Right now I’m just praying and I’m speechless,” he said. “I’m at loss of words. Being a father, two boys ... but God willing I’ll be able to have a relationship with this little girl for the rest of my life. But just prayers right now and that’s all I really can control.”

Hendricks (5-4) allowed four hits and one run with seven strikeouts for his fourth straight win.

MLB roundup

Santana, Indians rout BoSox

Associated Press

BOSTON — Carlos Santana homered and hit Cleveland’s first triple of the season, Greg Allen added a pair of three-baggers and the Indians pounded out a season-high 18 hits in a 14-9 win over the Boston Red Sox on Wednesday night.

Santana, who finished a single shy of the cycle, was 3-for-4 with five RBIs as Cleveland matched its season best for runs.

Jose Ramirez had two doubles and two RBIs. Allen and Kevin Plawewski also drove in two runs apiece for the Indians, who won two of three against the World Series champions in Boston.

Cleveland, shut out over the first seven innings Tuesday night before rallying with seven runs over the last two for a 7-5 win, scored at least once in each of the first seven innings Wednesday.

Mookie Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr., Andrew Benintendi and Xander Bogaerts homered for the Red Sox. Boston scored three in the eighth, two on Bogaerts’ 10th home run of the season, to pull to 14-9 and loaded the bases with one out in the ninth before the Indians called on Brad Hand to close it out for his 15th save.

Dodgers 9, Mets 8: Cody Bellinger hit a tying double in the ninth inning and host Los Angeles scored four runs off All-Star closer Edwin Diaz to rally past New York.

Joc Pederson and Max Muncy opened the bottom of the ninth with consecutive homers off Diaz (1-3), who was pitching for the fourth time in five days. Justin Turner doubled and scored on Bellinger’s double.

With the bases loaded and still nobody out, Alex Verdugo’s sacrifice fly easily scored Bellinger with the winning run.

Phillies 11, Cardinals 4: Bryce Harper hit his 10th homer, his 200th career double and drove in four before foul-

ing a ball off his foot and exiting in the fifth inning, and host Philadelphia beat St. Louis.

The hot-hitting Harper drove a two-run homer in the third and followed an inning later with a two-run hustle double. He had three hits when he left the game with the Phillies ahead by 10 runs.

Aaron Nola (6-0) struck out eight over seven innings. Scott Kingery and Maikel Franco hit back-to-back homers in the fifth, and Andrew McCutchen hit a two-run shot two batters later to blow the game open.

Angels 12, Athletics 7 (11): Gold Glove first baseman Matt Olson made a rare throwing error in the 11th inning to allow the go-ahead run to score and Los Angeles won to send host Oakland to its second straight loss after a 10-game winning streak.

Mike Trout was rested a day after fouling a ball off the top of his right foot.

Noe Ramirez (2-0) retired six batters to win. Cesar Puello had three hits, including his first career home run, and drove in four runs.

Pirates 7, Reds 2: Josh Bell tied a franchise record with his 12th homer in May, and visiting Pittsburgh stopped Derek Dietrich’s home run spree in beating Cincinnati for a split of the teams’ four-game series.

Bell’s three-run homer tied Jason Bay’s mark from May 2006. His 23rd extra-base hit in May left him one shy of Paul Waner’s club record for any month. He had three hits, raising his average to .345 with 18 homers overall.

Yankees 7, Padres 0: DJ LeMahieu and Luke Voit jolted rookie Chris Paddack with instant home runs, James Paxton pitched four hitless innings in his return from the injured list and host New York beat San Diego.

Gio Urshela also connected off Paddack, Gleyber Torres hit a late homer and Voit added his first big-league triple as the Yankees won their eighth

straight series.

San Diego didn’t get a hit until the sixth when Wil Myers’ blooper bounced out of LeMahieu’s glove.

Nationals 14, Braves 4: Anibal Sanchez allowed one hit in six scoreless innings, Howie Kendrick hit a three-run double and Washington withstood a grand slam by rookie Austin Riley to win at Atlanta.

Sanchez (1-6) returned to Atlanta, where he thrived in 2018, to earn his first win of the season. He was perfect through 5¹/₃ innings and allowed one hit and one walk with seven strikeouts.

Juan Soto and Matt Adams homered for the Nationals, who have won five of six.

Rockies 5, Diamondbacks 4: Jeff Hoffman pitched five solid innings and beat out a bunt single to drive in a key run as host Colorado topped Arizona.

Brendan Rodgers had a two-run single and Trevor Story added three hits for the Rockies, who won their season-high fourth in a row at home and clinched a series win in the four-game set.

Rangers 8, Mariners 7: Nomar Mazara and Asdrubal Cabrera hit consecutive doubles in the ninth inning, lifting Texas to a win at Seattle.

Marlins 4, Giants 2: Jorge Alfaro had a career-high four hits and host Miami handed San Francisco its seventh straight loss.

Tigers 4, Orioles 2: Brandon Dixon hit a tiebreaking two-run homer in the ninth inning to lead Detroit to a win at Baltimore.

Rays 4, Blue Jays 3 (11): Willy Adames delivered a long single against a five-man infield in the 11th inning, driving in the winning run as host Tampa Bay beat Toronto.

White Sox 8, Royals 7: Six innings after being beamed with a pitch from Kansas City starter Glenn Sparkman, Tim Anderson doubled in the go-ahead run in the eighth, lifting host Chicago over Kansas City.