

LCS fleet still in search of a mission

The San Diego Union-Tribune

Almost 15 years ago, the U.S. Navy christened the first of a new class of warship designed to fight the global war on terror. The so-called littoral combat ships would be fast and agile, operating close to shore against missile-firing boats and small submarines.

Today, the Navy has a new mission — or rather, has returned to its old mission, facing off against more capable warships deployed by China and Russia. And the service is still trying to figure out what to do with its \$16 billion LCS fleet.

It doesn't help that some of the ships have suffered embarrassing breakdowns in mid-ocean. Or that the Navy discovered recently that the transmission in one of the two classes of ships was defective and needed to be redesigned. And while Congress has eagerly funded construction of the two very different classes of ships, it cut funding from the mission modules needed by the ships to fulfill their missions.

That unfortunate combination explains the ignominious nickname assigned to the LCS by some sailors: Little Crappy Ships.

The Navy intends to spend an additional \$61 billion to maintain and operate the ships, according to the Government Accountability Office. But at the same time, the service announced plans last year to retire four of the earliest ships — all based in San Diego — beginning this summer, well ahead of the end of their projected service lives.

The Independence, the second ship of the LCS class, will decommission on July 31, followed by the first LCS, the Freedom, on Sept. 30, according to the San Diego-based Naval Surface Force Pacific. Plans to decommission the third ship of the class, the Fort Worth, and the fourth, the Coronado, were nixed by Congress in this

year's budget.

The Coronado only entered service in 2014. The ships, the Navy says, were designed to operate for at least 25 years.

The Navy said the money it saves in maintaining the first two ships will be put to better use elsewhere. Those ships, along with the Fort Worth and Coronado, are test platforms and are configured differently than newer littoral combat ships.

"To remain ahead of our competitors, particularly under fiscal constraints, it is important for the Navy to carefully review our force structure regularly and divest of legacy capabilities that no longer bring sufficient lethality to the fight," said Cmdr. Nicole Schwegman, a Surface Force spokeswoman.

When the Navy's first littoral combat ship contract was awarded in 2005, the country was in the throes of fighting al-Qaida. U.S. troops occupied Iraq and Afghanistan and the Navy was looking for a small, maneuverable vessel to operate in the world's littoral waters, or those close to shore. The ships were designed for automation and minimal manning — early on, the Navy planned to only put 40 sailors on board each ship, a number that has since expanded to 70.

In an unusual move, the Navy also elected to field two different versions of the ship from different shipbuilders — the steel-hulled 387-foot Freedom class, designed by Lockheed Martin and built by Marinette Marine in Marinette, Wis., and the 421-foot all-aluminum trimaran Independence class, designed by General Dynamics and built by Austal USA in Mobile, Ala. Both versions were meant to have "modular" mission capability — the ability to go to sea with one of three interchangeable mission packages: anti-mine, anti-submarine or surface warfare.

In 2016, that modular model was abandoned, and the Navy said

each ship would be dedicated to one of those three mission configurations.

"The Navy is not getting what they expected to get out of LCS at this point," said Shelby Oakley, who oversees the GAO's work on Navy shipbuilding. "There was a lot of over-promising of capability and technology and concepts that didn't come to fruition."

Littoral combat ships don't just look different than anything else on the waterfront — the differences continue inside the skin of the ships.

On the Kansas City — commissioned in San Diego last year, the 22nd LCS to enter the fleet — the bridge more closely resembles that of the fictional starships of "Star Trek" than a traditional Navy ship. Two pilot's seats reminiscent of aircraft cockpit seats are positioned center and forward on the bridge. The ship's commanding officer, Cmdr. Christopher Brusca, explained that the officer of the deck drives the ship by controlling both the power and direction of the ship's four water jets with a joystick-like dial, rather than the traditional setup of a helmsman steering with a wheel. The ships have no rudders.

The trimaran hull gives the ship another notable advantage, Brusca said: it only sits about 14 feet deep in the water, meaning it can get closer to shore than most ships. This gives the ship an advantage not just in warfighting, but in diplomacy, he said.

"We can pull into ports that some other ships can't because those harbors are shallower," he said. "So we've been able to pull into ports in Asia and have relationships with other countries and other communities within those countries that the Navy has not been able to go to before."

The main problem with littoral combat ships, according to GAO watchdogs, is the way the Navy went about developing and pur-

chasing the vessels. The technology on the ships was being developed at the same time as the ships were being constructed.

"LCS is certainly one of those programs ... that was set up with a high-risk approach," Oakley said. "And the outcome was reduced quantities, reduced capability, increased cost, schedule delays — all those things that you don't want to have happen that happen all too frequently."

Diana Maurer, who has been monitoring the LCS program since the beginning for the GAO, stopped short of calling the program a boondoggle.

"I think the simple way to answer whether this is or is not a success is just to look at the fact that the Navy is in the process of buying an entirely new class of ships — the frigate — because of shortfalls in the LCS," Maurer said. "I think the thing that is most troublesome is ... who answers for the millions, the billions that have been left unused?"

The Navy currently has 12 Independence-variants and 10 Freedom-variants in the fleet, including the two set for decommissioning this year. The program will produce a total of 35 ships, Schwegman said.

However, the Navy also plans to field at least 20 new frigates over the next decade, at a cost of about \$20 billion, according to data from the Congressional Budget Office. These new 496-foot frigates will be built out of steel and use propeller propulsion.

It's unlikely littoral combat ships will find themselves part of the long-term Navy fleet alongside the aircraft carriers, destroyers and other surface combatants that have been around for decades, Oakley said. The new class of frigates — and, increasingly, unmanned ships and aircraft — will likely do the jobs the Navy once envisioned for LCS.

Israel, Hamas strikes continue despite cease-fire calls

The Washington Post

TEL AVIV, Israel — Israeli fighter jets pounded targets in the Gaza Strip and Hamas militants fired rockets and mortars at cities in southern Israel on Tuesday, as Palestinian demonstrators staging a general strike in solidarity with Gaza faced off against Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank.

The Israeli military said 62 fighter jets dropped 110 “guided armaments” overnight and early Tuesday on targets in Gaza, including Hamas commanders, rocket launchpads and the militant group’s tunnel network in the territory.

Palestinian militants targeted nearby Israeli towns and cities with rockets and large-caliber mortars, the armed groups said in statements Tuesday.

Dramatic footage circulating on social media Tuesday showed a rocket slamming into the side of a high-rise building in Ashdod, a port city north of Gaza.

Israeli police said Tuesday that rocket fire from Gaza killed two Thai workers in the Eshkol region in southern Israel. One Israeli soldier was injured in a mortar attack near the Gaza border and was evacuated to a hospital for treatment, the Israeli military said.

The armed wing of Hamas said earlier that it had “bombarded” the city of Sderot, launched missiles at Ashdod and attacked a group of Israeli soldiers north of

Gaza.

The fresh fighting prompted Israel to shutter the Kerem Shalom border crossing it said was opened earlier Tuesday to allow for some aid to enter the besieged enclave.

Israel showed little sign of scaling back its campaign despite growing international pressure and U.S. President Joe Biden’s call for a cease-fire. Israel has so far declined entreaties from outside mediators, including Egyptians, that it agree to a halt, two officials familiar with the cease-fire talks told *The Washington Post*. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss negotiations.

“The IDF [Israel Defense Forces] is not talking about a cease-fire. We’re focused on the firing,” the military’s chief spokesman, Brig. Gen. Hidai Zilberman, told Israel’s Army Radio on Tuesday, Reuters reported.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the U.S. received intelligence from Israel on its bombing Saturday of a high-rise building in Gaza that housed media offices of *The Associated Press* and other outlets, but he declined to comment on the substance of the information.

“We did seek further information from Israel on this question,” the secretary of state said at a news conference in Iceland as a part of his tour of Nordic countries. “It’s my understanding that we’ve re-

ceived some further information through intelligence channels, and it’s not something I can comment on.”

The destruction of the 12-story al-Jalaa tower came amid an Israeli bombardment of Gaza City following a barrage of Hamas rocket fire from the Gaza Strip. The leveling of the building prompted international condemnation. Israel said the tower contained military assets belonging to Hamas.

The ongoing fighting in Gaza came amid a nationwide strike by Palestinians in the West Bank and Arab citizens of Israel in solidarity with residents of Gaza.

The Israeli military said Tuesday that soldiers thwarted an attack by an armed Palestinian man in Hebron. The Palestinian Health Ministry said the man was a protester who was shot and killed by Israeli forces, local media reported.

In Bethlehem, witnesses said Israeli forces fired tear gas and rubber bullets at demonstrators. Images from a demonstration near the Israeli settlement of Beit El showed crowds chanting and waving Palestinian flags, amid a cloud of dark smoke from burning tires.

The strike, organized by an array of grass-roots groups and political parties, also included Arab communities in Israel. In Jaffa, a historically Palestinian neighborhood south of Tel Aviv, shops were shuttered and streets were quiet Tuesday.

No serious injuries as 2 Navy planes collide midair

BY ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

One pilot sustained minor injuries after two Navy training aircraft collided in mid-air Monday, with one crashing among ranches in south Texas, according to service officials and local law enforcement.

Two T-45 Goshawk aircraft, which are used to train Navy and Marine Corps pilots to fly jets, crashed at about 11 a.m. in Ricardo, a town about nine miles south of Naval Air Station Kingsville, according to Naval Air Training Command. Both aircraft are part of the base’s Training Squadron 22.

One aircraft landed safely at NAS Kingsville. The instructor and student pilot flying in the other aircraft ejected safely, according to officials for the training command, which is headquartered at Naval Air Station

Corpus Christi.

One pilot had minor injuries and was taken to CHRISTUS Spohn Hospital in Kleberg, the training command reported. It’s unclear which aircraft that pilot was in. Navy officials also did not provide details about how the planes collided.

“Everything worked out fine and the pilots are safe. That’s more important than everything else,” said Jaime Garza, chief deputy of the Kleberg County Sheriff’s Office.

Sheriff’s deputies and units from the Texas Department of Public Safety were sent to help locate the pilots, one of whom landed near a road, Garza said. Weekend rains made it difficult to reach the crash site, located in a remote area of King Ranch off U.S. Highway 77.

“The incident is currently under investi-

gation and the Navy is cooperating fully with local authorities,” according to the training command.

William Rogers, an area resident who was working in his garden at the time of the crash, told KRIS 6 News that he saw a plane ascending, then heard the engine “blow out.”

“It traveled about another half-mile south and just got completely silent. The engines cut out and [I] didn’t hear anything else. I then saw the explosion when it hit the ground [and I saw] the mushroom cloud and about 20 minutes later some officers came by here looking for parachuters,” Rogers told the TV station.

Officials have asked if anyone encounters any aircraft debris to leave it alone and report the location to 361-516-6303.

Slain interpreter's family to come to US

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The family of an Afghan man who was killed after aiding U.S. troops has received emergency approval to come to America, lawyers and advocates for the family said.

The man, known by the pseudonym Mohammad, worked for 12 years for the U.S. Embassy and military in Afghanistan and is believed to have been killed by Taliban insurgents while waiting for a U.S. immigration visa.

His widow and six children continued to face threats after his murder and applied for humanitarian parole, a status that allows those under immediate threat to seek refuge in the United States.

Their application was approved last week and advocacy groups are ready to greet them, said Cress Clippard, a Marine veteran and a volunteer for the Houston-based Combined Arms SIVs and Allies.

"I firmly believe that this decision is saving the lives of Mohammad's wife and children," Clippard said. "He served alongside us, and his family deserves to be taken care of. Houston is ready and willing to take them in and support them."

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services declined to comment on the case Monday due to privacy restrictions.

Mohammad waited almost a decade for a Special Immigrant

Visa, which allows those facing threats after aiding the U.S. to immigrate with their families, said the family's lawyer, Julie Kornfeld of the International Refugee Assistance Project.

His SIV application was wrongfully delayed, and prior to his murder in January, he faced constant threats on his life from the Taliban for working with the Americans, his son told Stars and Stripes.

Mohammad's case has received wide attention, with a petition on Change.org calling for his family to receive refugee tallying almost 150,000 signatures by Tuesday.

Several lawmakers in Congress advocated for the family, with Rep. Jason Crow, D-Colo.,

recounting their story in a hearing last week.

Lawmakers at the hearing criticized the SIV program for bureaucratic inefficiencies and long wait times. They called for an immediate increase in visas for Afghan interpreters and translators who aided U.S. forces, which are fully withdrawing from Afghanistan by Sept. 11.

Mohammad's family members remain in hiding in Afghanistan as they prepare to come to the U.S., their lawyer Kornfeld said.

Advocates have started a fundraiser, p2p.onecause.com/mohammedfamilysupport, to help the family with expenses upon arriving in America.

US to boost world vaccine sharing to 80M doses overall

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden said Monday that the United States will share an additional 20 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines with the world in the coming six weeks as domestic demand for shots drops and global disparities in distribution have grown more evident.

The doses will come from existing production of Pfizer, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson vaccine stocks, marking the first time that U.S.-controlled doses of vaccines authorized for use in the country will be shared overseas. It will boost the global vaccine sharing commitment from the U.S. to 80 million.

"We know America will never be fully safe until the pandemic that's raging globally is under control," Biden said at

the White House.

The announcement comes on top of the Biden administration's prior commitment to share about 60 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, which is not yet authorized for use in the U.S., by the end of June. The AstraZeneca doses will be available to ship once they clear a safety review by the Food and Drug Administration.

Biden also tapped COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients to lead the administration's efforts to share doses with the world.

The Biden administration hasn't yet said how the new commitment of vaccines will be shared or which countries will receive them.

To date, the U.S. has shared about 4.5 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccine with Canada and Mexico.

Daily virus deaths are up, cases fall in India

Associated Press

NEW DELHI — India's total virus cases since the pandemic began swept past 25 million on Tuesday as the country registered more than 260,000 new cases and a record 4,329 fatalities in the past 24 hours.

The numbers continue a trend of falling cases after infections dipped below 300,000 for the first time in weeks on Monday. Active cases in the country also decreased by more than 165,000 on Tuesday — the biggest dip in weeks.

But deaths have continued to rise and hospitals are still swamped by patients.

India has recorded nearly 280,000 virus deaths since the pandemic began. Experts warn that both the number of deaths and total reported cases are likely vast undercounts. Infections in India have surged since February in a disastrous turn blamed on more contagious variants as well as government decisions to allow massive crowds

for religious festivals and political rallies.

In the last month, cases have more than tripled and reported deaths have gone up six times — but testing has only increased by 1.6 times, according to Bhramar Mukherjee, a biostatistician at the University of Michigan tracking India's battle with the virus. With infections out-running testing capabilities, there are fears that many cases are going undetected.

Experts also say India has lagged behind in doing the testing needed to track and better understand a worrisome virus variant first detected in the country. On Monday, the Health Ministry said 17 new labs will be brought online to help track variants.

The variant first identified in India has prompted global concern — most notably in Britain, where it has more than doubled in a week, defying a sharp nationwide downward trend in infections.

High court to review Miss. abortion law

Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court said Monday that it would hear a major challenge to the reach of the landmark *Roe v. Wade* abortion ruling and decide whether states may bar nearly all abortions after 15 weeks of a pregnancy.

The justices said they had voted to hear an appeal from Mississippi that urges the court to “reconsider the bright-line viability rule” that says states may not prohibit abortions until the time a fetus is viable or capable of living on its own. This is generally about the 23rd week of a pregnancy.

It is the court’s first major move to reconsider abortion rights since Justice Amy Coney

Barrett replaced Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who died in September shortly after Mississippi had lodged its appeal. Barrett, who has acknowledged being personally opposed to abortion, is widely expected to be the vote that would allow the court’s conservative majority to rein in abortion rights.

Several other Republican-led states have passed laws to forbid abortions at early stages of a pregnancy, but all those measures have been blocked because of the court’s precedents on abortion. Arguments in the case, *Dobbs vs. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, will be heard in the fall when the new court term begins.

Monday’s announcement followed an unusually long debate inside the court. The Mississippi appeal was pending when Barrett took her seat in late October, and the justices listed it for discussion in every weekly conference since the first week of January. It takes four votes to grant review of a case, and five to make a majority.

The justices may have been struggling with the question of what it would mean if they ruled for Mississippi. Could the court adopt a new constitutional limit that protected legal abortions through the 15th week of a pregnancy, or would doing so implicitly invite conservative states to set even earlier cutoffs? If so, the court would be setting the stage

— not just to further limit the right to abortion for women—but also to repeal it.

“Alarm bells are ringing loudly about the threat to reproductive rights. The Supreme Court just agreed to review an abortion ban that unquestionably violates nearly 50 years of Supreme Court precedent and is a test case to overturn *Roe v. Wade*,” said Nancy Northup, president of the Center for Reproductive Rights. “The consequences of a *Roe* reversal would be devastating. Over 20 states would prohibit abortion outright. Eleven states—including Mississippi—currently have trigger bans on the books which would instantaneously ban abortion if *Roe* is overturned.”

Russia’s northernmost base projects its power

Associated Press

NAGURSKOYE, Russia — During the Cold War, Russia’s Nagurskoye airbase was little more than a runway, a weather station and a communications outpost in the Franz Josef Land archipelago.

It was a remote and desolate home mostly for polar bears, where temperatures plunge in winter to minus-43 degrees Fahrenheit and the snow only disappears from August to mid-September.

Now, Russia’s northernmost military base is bristling with missiles and radar and its extended runway can handle all types of aircraft, including nuclear-capable strategic bombers, projecting Moscow’s power and influence across the Arctic amid intensifying international competition for the region’s vast resources.

The shamrock-shaped facility — three large pods extending from a central atrium — is called the “Arctic Trefoil” and is painted in the white-red-and-blue of the national flag, brightening the otherwise stark vantage point on the 3,470-mile Northern Sea Route along Russia’s Arctic coast. Other buildings on the Island, which is called Alexandra Land, are used for radar and communications, a weather station, oil storage, hangars and construction facilities.

Russia has sought to assert its influence over wide areas of the Arctic in competition with the United States, Canada, Denmark and Norway as shrinking polar ice from the warming planet offers new opportunities for resources and shipping routes. China has also shown an increasing interest in the region, believed to hold up to one-fourth of the Earth’s undiscovered oil and gas.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has cited estimates that put the value of Arctic mineral riches at \$30 trillion.

Tensions between Russia and the West will likely loom large over Thursday’s meeting of the Arctic nations’ foreign ministers in Reykjavik, Iceland, where Moscow is set to take a rotating chairmanship in the Arctic Council.

Moscow has declared its intention to introduce procedures for foreign ships and assign Russian pilots for guidance along the route, which runs from Norway to Alaska. As part of that effort, Russia has rebuilt and expanded facilities across the polar region, deploying surveillance and defensive assets.

NATO is increasingly worried about the growing Russian military footprint in the Arctic, and Washington sent B-1 bombers to Norway this year.

Associate of lawmaker pleads guilty in case of sex trafficking

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — A Florida politician who emerged as a central figure in the Justice Department’s sex trafficking investigation into Rep. Matt Gaetz pleaded guilty Monday to six federal charges and agreed to cooperate with prosecutors as part of a plea deal.

Joel Greenberg, a longtime associate of Gaetz’s, appeared in federal court in Orlando. He pleaded guilty to six of the nearly three dozen charges he faced, including sex trafficking of a minor, and he admitted that he had paid at least one underage girl to have sex with him and other men.

Greenberg’s cooperation — as a key figure in the investigation and a close ally of Gaetz’s — may escalate the potential legal and political liability that the firebrand Republican congressman is facing.

Federal prosecutors are examining whether Gaetz and Greenberg paid underage girls and escorts or offered them gifts in exchange for sex, according to two people familiar with the matter. Investigators have also been looking at whether Gaetz and his associates tried to secure government jobs for some of the women, the people said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: Officer had meth lab at his home

NJ LONG BRANCH — A domestic disturbance call at a veteran police officer's home in a residential New Jersey town led to the discovery of a methamphetamine lab he was operating there, authorities said.

Christopher Walls, a 19-year veteran of the Long Branch force, was suspended without pay from his job following his arrest.

Police who had responded to the domestic disturbance call at the Long Branch home were told by someone there that Walls was operating the lab, according to the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office. A state police hazmat team responded and found equipment and substances commonly used to make meth in the home's basement and in a shed on the property, along with books about making the drug, explosives and poison.

Mayor saves skydiving partner after glitch

OH MIDDLETOWN — An Ohio mayor has been credited with saving the life of her skydiving partner after an equipment malfunction during a training exercise in Middletown.

Middletown Mayor Nicole Condrey was connected to her teammate by straps as the pair skydived carrying a large American flag, the Dayton Daily News reported.

John Hart, the owner of Team Fastrax, a professional skydiving team, was unable to release the strap as the pair approached the ground and Condrey executed an "emergency procedure" to release the strap about 100 feet

off the ground.

After the maneuver, Condrey crashed into the side of a hangar and Hart hit a nearby fence. Condrey broke her right arm and Hart suffered four broken ribs.

Woman arrested for drugs with 5 kids in car

WI HIXTON — Authorities said a Wisconsin woman was arrested for allegedly taking illegal drugs while driving with five children in the car.

The Wisconsin State Patrol said it learned of the incident when a father called to request a welfare check on his 12-year-old daughter. The girl was in a car headed to Wisconsin Dells with a friend and the friend's family and told her father the adults were "smoking drugs."

Troopers discovered that 4-year-old twins, an 11-year-old and an 8-year-old were also in the vehicle.

The patrol said the driver, a 31-year-old woman, showed signs of impairment and a field sobriety test confirmed she was "under the influence of a controlled substance."

State again removing toxic debris from island

WA CAMANO ISLAND — The Department of Natural Resources has returned to Camano Island again to remove creosote-coated pilings carried by the tide into Elger Bay.

In 2009, the DNR pulled 100 tons of creosote-coated pilings from the area, KING-TV reported.

Creosote was used for over a century to protect wood pilings in the salt water of Puget Sound. Creosote contains hundreds of

chemicals, including known carcinogens.

Chris Robertson, Aquatic Restoration manager for DNR's Aquatics Division, said that infrastructure has broken down over time and the pilings enter the aquatic system and end up along Washington shorelines.

Engineers work to quiet loud hum on bridge

CA SAN FRANCISCO — The Golden Gate Bridge is making a racket and engineers are trying to figure out how to shut it up.

The San Francisco Chronicle reported that the iconic span started emanating a loud hum following a retrofit last year of the sidewalk safety railing on its western side. Crews replaced some 12,000 wide slats with narrower ones, to give the bridge a slimmer profile and make it safer in high winds.

But as safety was increased, so was the noise, as gusts whipped through the new slats, the newspaper said.

Engineers are reportedly using full-size sections of the bridge railing inside a wind tunnel to find a solution.

Woman fleeing police catches fire after crash

SC PICKENS — A woman accused of fleeing from law enforcement in South Carolina caught fire when she crashed the car in which she was hauling several containers of fuel, according to authorities.

Deputies with the Pickens County Sheriff's Office were trying to pull the car over after finding it was reported stolen, the agency said in a statement.

The motorist, Jessica Dale Patterson, 28, crashed and

flipped while trying to evade authorities, according to the sheriff's office. The car caught fire, triggering several explosions and igniting the woman, authorities said.

Rescuers grab rabbits found in city park

OH MIDDLETOWN — Officials said animal shelter workers and volunteers worked over the weekend to round up dozens of domesticated rabbits left in an Ohio park.

Middletown city spokesperson Shelby Quinlivan said rescuers recovered 33 rabbits from Smith Park, and no deceased animals were found.

The exact number of rabbits apparently left in the park was unclear. Officials said a dozen more rabbits were removed from a home, and a woman will face abandonment charges.

Wildlife bridge plan gets \$25 million upgrade

CA LOS ANGELES — A plan to build a bridge over a major Southern California highway to enable mountain lions and other wildlife to move between wilderness areas has received a \$25 million challenge grant to advance the project, organizers said.

The challenge grant from Wallis Annenberg and the Annenberg Foundation to the National Wildlife Federation's "SaveLACougars" campaign would raise donations so far to \$44 million, but requires that another \$35 million be raised.

The proposed wildlife crossing would be built west of Los Angeles at Liberty Canyon, stretching over 10 lanes of freeway.

— From wire reports

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Fowler needed help getting to major

Associated Press

There was a time when being side-by-side with Tiger Woods at a major was a good sign. That wasn't the case for Rickie Fowler, mainly because they were nowhere near a golf course.

Woods was watching the Masters from home in Florida while recovering from broken bones in his legs, the worst of more than a decade of injuries. Fowler was watching with him because for the first time in a decade, he wasn't eligible to play.

At least he gets a chance in the PGA Championship at Kiawah Island, courtesy of a special invitation that received more attention than it warranted, mainly because of who he is.

Still to be determined is whether Fowler will be at Torrey Pines next month for the U.S. Open. He hasn't missed it since his rookie year when he didn't make it through qualifying.

"It's been humbling," Fowler said. "For someone who's been

positive, when you go this long through a low point, it tests all facets of life."

How long?

He has gone 49 tournaments worldwide since he last won, the Phoenix Open, moving him to No. 8 in the world. He has gone 29 tournaments since he last finished in the top 10, at The American Express, that one moving him back into the top 25.

He now is No. 122, his lowest ranking in more than 11 years. He goes into the PGA Championship having missed his last two cuts. Now it's a matter of finding his way back from what can either be described as a process, a journey or a grind.

"You can pick them all. It's been a bit of everything," Fowler said. "A big part of it was playing too much golf swing, which needed to be done early on. But I think it went on for too long. Now it's back to playing golf and hitting shots."

The invitation to the PGA Championship was not surpris-

ing. The PGA of America takes players from the last Ryder Cup team if they're still among the top 100 in the world — Fowler was just outside it at the time — and any player just outside the top 100 as it tries to make sure no one cracks the top 100 at the last minute.

Fowler stands out mainly because of his popularity, which has led to some of the biggest endorsement deals, along with no shortage of commercials. Fowler makes people notice. That's not always a good thing.

Jordan Spieth can relate. He went three full seasons without winning as he coped with the first real struggle he's had in golf. Spieth finally turned it around early this year, and he capped it with a victory in the Texas Open.

"For him — and I think for me, too — the most difficult thing about struggling is when you've had a lot of success and it's then almost impossible to struggle in silence, in darkness," Spieth said. "There's just

going to be so much noise around and so much emphasis on results versus the true understanding of what your end goal is and how much time that can take in golf."

The change began toward the end of 2019 when Fowler decided to change coaches from Butch Harmon to John Tillery, who also works with Kevin Kisner. It didn't help that golf shut down for three months during the COVID-19 pandemic. The farther he fell, the greater the struggle.

"It's not like he's giving me bad information or we're working on the wrong things," Fowler said. "We're all out here to try to be better. Sometimes it doesn't work out as quickly as you want. It's unfortunate that it has taken this long. As the same time, it's been humbling. You learn a lot when you're at tough points. These are things that can make or break you. They test you.

"I'm still upright and moving forward."

New York suspends Baffert due to ongoing Derby probe

Associated Press

Bob Baffert was suspended Monday from entering horses at New York racetracks, pending an investigation into Kentucky Derby winner Medina Spirit's failed postrace drug test.

Baffert will temporarily not be allowed to stable any horses at Belmont Park, Aqueduct Race-track and Saratoga Race Course or run any of his horses at the New York Racing Association's tracks. That ban includes races at Belmont Park, with the Belmont Stakes coming up June 5.

"In order to maintain a successful thoroughbred racing industry in New York, NYRA must protect the integrity of the sport for our fans, the betting public and racing participants," NYRA President and CEO Dave

O'Rourke said. "That responsibility demands the action taken today in the best interests of thoroughbred racing."

Baffert had not committed to entering any horses in the third leg of the Triple Crown but had many in consideration for other races on Belmont Stakes day.

NYRA officials say they took into account Baffert's previous penalties in Kentucky, California and Arkansas, along with the current situation with Medina Spirit, and expect to make a final determination about the length and terms of the suspension based on information revealed by Kentucky's ongoing investigation.

Baffert's attorney, Craig Robertson, said in an email to The Associated Press that he is re-

viewing NYRA's decision and will discuss the situation and legal options with his client before their camp makes any formal statement.

Kentucky Derby winner Medina Spirit tested positive for the steroid betamethasone in postrace testing and faces disqualification unless a second test comes back negative. Baffert on May 9 said 21 picograms of the corticosteroid, which can be used to help a horse's joints, showed up in the blood sample.

Baffert a day later said an ointment used to treat Medina Spirit for a skin condition daily up until the Derby included the substance.

Even a trace amount of betamethasone in a horse's system is not allowed on race day in Ken-

tucky, Maryland and New York.

Maryland officials required Medina Spirit and Baffert-trained Preakness runner Concert Tour and Black-Eyed Susan entrant Beautiful Gift undergo three rounds of prerace testing before they'd be allowed to run last weekend at Pimlico. All three passed and were cleared to race.

Medina Spirit finished third and Concert Tour ninth in the Preakness on Saturday. Beautiful Gift was seventh in the Black-Eyed Susan on Friday.

Baffert has had five violations involving impermissible levels of medication in his horses over the past 13 months. He was fined in Kentucky and Arkansas and avoided a suspension in Arkansas following appeal.

Bruins, Marchand even series with Caps

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — All Brad Marchand had to show for the first 60 minutes of Monday night's game was two penalties for post-whistle antics.

He needed less than a minute to make up for it.

Marchand scored 39 seconds into overtime and the Boston Bruins rallied to beat the Washington Capitals 4-3 Monday night, tying the East Division first-round playoff series at a game apiece.

After a hard-fought victory in which Marchand played a significant role, the Bruins will almost certainly take the good and the bad of their leading scorer who likes to get under the skin of his opponents.

"There's way, way more good than bad, and I think he wanted to drag us into the fight — and we needed it," coach Bruce Cassidy said. "I think he's matured enough now to not

take himself out of the game. Maybe that would have been a game in the past he would've let it get to him and he wouldn't have been an effective player, but he found his game and certainly a big part of the win with the overtime winner."

Marchand ripping a one-timer past Craig Anderson to send the series back to Boston tied will be remembered far more than him jabbing Capitals defenseman Brenden Dillon below the belt at the end of a scrum in the first period or slashing Anthony Mantha when they got into it in the second. But those won't be forgotten, and could have derailed him.

"It's about just being able to kind of get back into the game," said Marchand, who ranked third in the NHL with 69 points during the regular season. "We're obviously on the biggest stage right now and got to stay out of the box in these games, so I've got to do a little bit better job there."

The Bruins are at their best when Marchand is toeing that line and also producing. So it was captain Patrice Bergeron's job to grab him, reel him in and get Marchand re-focused on the task at hand. It worked, and Boston doesn't want Marchand any other way.

"That's who he is," said Bergeron, who scored in the first along with Jake DeBrusk. "He competes at all times. His will and his want to be the difference is there every time."

This series has helped the NHL playoffs get off to a roaring start with five consecutive one-goal games, including four reaching overtime. Washington and Boston are certainly no strangers to it. They've now played nine consecutive one-goal games in the post-season dating to their 2012 series.

"I think we'll be there with a response," Capitals coach Peter Laviolette said.

Staal, Niederreiter lift Hurricanes past Predators in Game 1 of series

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Carolina Hurricanes had a building full of rowdy fans again, players back from injury and a strong showing from their captain to help break open a close game.

The Central Division champions got the start they needed in the postseason.

Jordan Staal scored twice and Nino Niederreiter beat Juuse Saros for the go-ahead goal early in the third period, helping the Hurricanes to a 5-2 win over the Nashville Predators on Monday night to open their first-round playoff series.

Carolina trailed 1-0 early against a team that added some size to the lineup and a physical edge, but the Hurricanes began to establish their style of play more effectively in the second period and then took over the final 20 minutes.

By the end, Carolina had finished with a 38-24 edge in shots on goal and outhit the Predators in a game with plenty of chippy moments and chesty exchanges between the teams.

"I'm not concerned at how the game is going to be played, because we kind of have shown that all year," coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Whatever style ends up playing, we've answered the bell, always. If it's an up-and-down game, OK, we can do that. If it ends up being a little grittier, that ac-

tually suits us, too."

Niederreiter hammered the puck past Saros from between the circles at 2:26 of the third, finishing a perfect pass from Martin Necas only moments after Saros had made a big stop on Vincent Trocheck. That broke a 2-all tie as the Hurricanes made their move.

Staal followed with his second goal midway through the second, created partly by his own pressure on the forecheck. After Saros stopped a shot near the post from Warren Foegele, the captain gathered the loose puck and pushed it past Saros for a 4-2 lead at the eight-minute mark.

Andrei Svechnikov added the clinching empty-netter on a breakaway at 18:13 for Carolina.

"Obviously that third period wasn't our strongest period," said Nashville forward Filip Forsberg, who had the game's first goal.

Teuvo Teravainen scored a first-period goal for the Hurricanes, while Alex Nedeljkovic made 22 saves in his first playoff start.

Erik Haula also scored for the Predators, while Saros — who entered the postseason as one of the league's hottest players — finished with 33 saves.

The Hurricanes host Game 2 on Wednesday night before the best-of-seven series shifts west to Nashville in neighboring Tennessee.

Avalanche take Game 1 vs. Blues

Associated Press

DENVER — Gabriel Landeskog found an early way to calm down the Colorado Avalanche — he dropped the gloves and brawled.

That fighting spirit energized a roaring crowd — biggest of the season — and certainly rubbed off on the team.

Nathan MacKinnon scored the tiebreaking goal 30 seconds into the third period and wrapped it up with an empty-netter, Philipp Grubauer stopped 22 shots and the Avalanche beat the St. Louis Blues 4-1 on Monday night in Game 1 of their first-round playoff series.

"We're skilled and fast, but I also think we're a tough team," Landeskog said. "I thought we showed that tonight."

Landeskog recorded a "Gordie Howe hat trick" with a goal, assist and a fighting major, which he earned in the first period by sticking up for a teammate following a big hit.

It breathed some energy into the Avalanche.

"We were kind of tiptoeing our way into it a little bit," Landeskog said. "I thought that was going to calm us down a little bit and get the crowd into it."

Landeskog added a third-period goal by tipping in a blue-line blast from MacKinnon and assists on both of MacKinnon's goals.

Injuries likely to impact NBA playoffs

Associated Press

The NBA playoffs should be entertaining, as they always are.

Just don't count on the basketball being as good as usual.

Not after a truncated season during which the injuries were too frequent, the practice time too scarce, to allow teams to peak for the postseason.

"It's been much more devastating to culture and to establishing momentum for sure, for all of us," Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said. "And I definitely think that, I hate to say it but it's the truth: There's no way it can be the best basketball for all the teams."

LeBron James was a spectator the night the Lakers raised the banner for the championship they won last year, as he was for most of the second half of the season because of an ankle injury. The Brooklyn Nets assembled an explosive Big

Three of Kevin Durant, James Harden and Kyrie Irving, then went three months in between getting to play them for the seventh and eighth time.

The Utah Jazz won the Western Conference, but will have played for more than a month without All-Star Donovan Mitchell by the time he returns from an ankle injury.

Rusty or not, at least those contenders have their All-Stars. Denver will play this postseason without Jamal Murray. Just getting from the play-in to the playoffs might be difficult for the Celtics after the season-ending wrist surgery for All-Star Jaylen Brown.

More than ever, this postseason might be more about being healthy than being great. The teams still playing survived this historically demanding NBA season, but nobody really thrived.

"So, is the level of play going

to be the same in these playoffs? I don't know, but you know what, there is opportunity out there for teams," Chicago coach Billy Donovan said.

Championship contenders like to use the regular season to build a team ready to roll once it's over. The Golden State Warriors worked themselves into a postseason powerhouse that went 16-1 in 2017, Durant's first season.

He's unsure if anybody can find that type of form now.

"I don't know, but that stuff does play a factor, a long regular season," said Durant, who along with Harden had lengthy absences because of hamstring injuries.

"It was just a different year for everybody, getting used to the COVID year, the traveling on the road throughout COVID, just everything, the protocols. But I feel like a lot of teams are excited that they got through

this season and a lot of teams are excited that they head into the playoffs healthy, so we'll see."

The condensed 72-game schedule left many teams limiting or simply canceling practices. Coronavirus protocols kept them from bonding off the court, not to mention hampered them on it when players became unavailable.

It all contributed to wrecking a Celtics team that had championship expectations but finished .500. But coach Brad Stevens predicts a quality postseason around the league.

"When we were in the bubble, I thought it was the highest level I'd ever seen, just as far as like intensity, effort, teams again playing at just a ridiculous level," Stevens said. "And I just think the playoffs brings that out of people every year, and so I anticipate the playoffs will be great."

Ohtani leads Angels past Indians with 13th home run

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Shohei Ohtani hit his major league-leading 13th home run and the Los Angeles Angels defeated the slumping Cleveland Indians 7-4 on Monday night after star outfielder Mike Trout was injured early.

Trout strained his right calf in the first inning. The three-time AL MVP was limping after running to third on an inning-ending pop.

Angels manager Joe Maddon said Trout was undergoing further evaluation, including an MRI, and the team would know more on Tuesday.

"I saw nothing. I looked up and he was limping to the third base bag," Maddon said. "It was kind of innocuous and I had no idea why. It was hurting him pretty good."

Ohtani connected off Sam

Hentges (1-1) during a five-run second to give the Angels a 6-1 lead. The Japanese superstar, who hit the go-ahead homer with two outs in the ninth inning Sunday at Boston, has gone deep in consecutive games twice this season.

"He might have been looking for it. He is covering the whole zone and doing interesting things at the plate," Maddon said. "Just keep watching, it is pretty interesting to watch."

Tony Watson (2-1), the second of seven Los Angeles pitchers, earned the win and Raisel Iglesias picked up his seventh save.

Cesar Hernandez, Franmil Reyes and Harold Ramirez homered for Cleveland, which has dropped four straight.

Dodgers 3, Diamondbacks 1: Albert Pujols delivered an RBI single in his debut for host Los Angeles and Walker Buehler

pitched seven scoreless innings of one-hit ball in a win over Arizona.

Pujols went 1-for-4 while playing first base and batting cleanup for the defending World Series champions, who added the 10-time All-Star on Monday after the Los Angeles Angels cut him earlier this month.

Cubs 7, Nationals 3: Willson Contreras, Jason Heyward and Javier Báez homered off Jon Lester in his return to Chicago, and the Cubs beat Washington.

Rangers 5, Yankees 2: Adolis Garcia and Willie Calhoun homered as host Texas ended a six-game losing streak, beating New York and denying Gerrit Cole's bid to become the American League's first six-game winner.

Mets 3, Braves 1: Pinch-hitter James McCann broke a scoreless tie with a seventh-inning double, Tomás Nido had three hits and

New York overcame more injuries to win at Atlanta.

White Sox 16, Twins 4: Nick Madrigal had three hits, including his first major league homer, and Danny Mendick launched his first career grand slam as visiting Chicago routed struggling Minnesota.

Giants 6, Reds 3: Logan Webb pitched six shutout innings and San Francisco backed him with three home runs to win at Cincinnati.

Padres 7, Rockies 0: Yu Darvish struck out 10 in seven brilliant innings and also doubled and scored, and Manny Machado hit a two-run homer as host San Diego beat Colorado for its fourth straight win.

Tigers 4, Mariners 1: Eric Haase hit two home runs, Casey Mize took a two-hit shutout into the eighth inning and Detroit won at Seattle.