

Navy charts new course after ship issues

Associated Press

BATH, Maine — The Navy's speedy littoral combat ships had propulsion failures. The gun on its stealthy destroyer is a dud because of expensive ammo. Its newest aircraft carrier had problems with the system that launches aircraft.

On top of that, embarrassing photos of rusty ships online have underscored delays in maintaining warships, made worse by the pandemic.

The Navy's troubles have caused delays and cost billions of dollars. They come as tensions are growing in the South China Sea, Russia's navy is emboldened and Iranian speedboats are harassing vessels in the Persian Gulf.

"Are we ready to meet the threat from China? No," said Loren Thompson, a defense analyst at the Lexington Institute.

Adm. Mike Gilday, chief of naval operations, insists the Navy is now on a "positive trajectory" but the Navy will have to rebuild confidence under congressional scrutiny as it prepares a new strategic plan that'll include another long-term investment: unmanned vehicles. The Biden administration is readying a Navy budget proposal this week to send to lawmakers.

The Navy fleet currently falls shy of 300 ships, despite a stated goal of 355 ships. The Chinese fleet now outnumbers the

U.S. Navy.

"The Chinese are closer to our goal than we are," said Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, who sits on the Appropriation Committee and wants to boost Navy spending.

Democratic Sen. Jack Reed and Republican Sen. Jim Inhofe, chairman and ranking member of the Armed Services Committee, have criticized delays and cost overruns on lead ships, and urged the Navy to ensure technology is ready before putting it aboard.

Members of Congress, who control the purse strings, have said that the Navy must also spend billions of dollars more in its public shipyards that maintain the ships.

"The Navy has got to get their derriere in gear," said Rep. Rob Wittman, a Republican from Virginia, who described the Navy as "at one of those crossroads."

The Navy's problem, as Thompson sees it, is that leaders rushed ambitious new ship classes to production and started construction before designs were finalized and technology fully tested.

"It tried too hard to leap ahead technologically at the beginning of the last decade," Thompson said. "As a result, every vessel that it started had severe problems."

For example, the electric-drive Zum-

walt, commissioned in 2016, was designed to get close to shore to bombard land targets. But its 155mm advanced gun system is being scrapped because each rocket-propelled, GPS-guided shell costs nearly as much as a cruise missile.

Meanwhile, two versions of the speedy littoral combat ship were envisioned as chasing down pirate ships off Somalia. One version had class-wide propulsion problems, and both were criticized as too lightly armored for open ocean combat. The Navy is already scrapping the first four of them.

The most expensive ship in Navy history, meanwhile, is the newest aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald Ford. It has had problems with the system that launches jets and the elevators that move weapons, among other things. It was supposed to cost \$10.5 billion, but the price tag has risen to \$13.3 billion and "four weapons elevators are still not finished and the reliability of key systems is low," said Inhofe, a Republican from Oklahoma.

Maintaining the existing fleet is also going to mean upgrades to the nation's four public shipyards as well as hiring and training thousands of workers, said Democratic Rep. Jim Langevin of Rhode Island.

"Deferred maintenance is never a good idea," he said.

General: As US scales back in Mideast, China could step in

Associated Press

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — As the United States scales back its military presence across the Middle East to focus on great power competition with China and Russia, it risks giving those two countries a chance to fill the gap and expand their influence around the Gulf, the top U.S. commander for the region said Sunday.

While traveling through the Middle East over the past week, Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, who heads U.S. Central Command, fielded a persistent ques-

tion from the military and political leaders he met: Is the U.S. still committed to their country and the region, and what more support can they get?

From the dusty battlefields in Syria to the rocket-pummeled neighborhoods in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, they worry that America's pivot to Asia means they will be left without the troops, ships, aircraft and other military aid they need to battle Iranian-backed militants attacking their people.

If the U.S. is slow to respond, they may look elsewhere in the

world for help.

"The Middle East writ broadly is an area of intense competition between the great powers. And I think that as we adjust our posture in the region, Russia and China will be looking very closely to see if a vacuum opens that they can exploit," McKenzie told reporters traveling with him. "I think they see the United States shifting posture to look at other parts of the world, and they sense there may be an opportunity there."

There is ongoing discussion within the Pentagon about send-

ing more assets to the Pacific to fight a rising China. And U.S. military commanders around the globe, including McKenzie, may lose troops and resources as a result. Those could include warships such as the aircraft carrier now sitting in the Gulf, providing security for the Afghanistan withdrawal.

Military commanders caution that China's growing assertiveness isn't limited to Asia, noting that Beijing is aggressively seeking footholds in Africa, South America and the Middle East.

UFOs went from joke to security concern in DC

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — In 2007, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid called his colleagues Ted Stevens and Daniel Inouye to a specially secured room in the Capitol where highly classified information was discussed.

Stevens, a Republican from Alaska, and Inouye, a Democrat from Hawaii, controlled funding for supersecret Pentagon operations. Reid wanted to put an idea on their radar, one that needed to be kept hush-hush not just for national security but because it was, as Reid's aides told him, kind of crazy.

He wanted the Pentagon to investigate UFOs.

"Everyone told me this would cause me nothing but trouble," said Reid, a Democrat who represented Nevada, home of the military's top-secret Area 51 test site, a central attraction of sorts for UFO hunters. "But I wasn't afraid of it. And I guess time has proven me right."

Last summer, the Defense Department issued a news release with the following headline: "Establishment of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena Task Force." The mission of the UAPTF, an acronym mouthful, "is to detect, analyze and catalog UAPs that could potentially pose a threat to U.S. national security," according to the Pentagon.

A few months later, as part of President Donald Trump's spending and pandemic relief package, the Senate Intelligence Committee, led by Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., included a provision calling for the director of national intelligence to help produce an unclassified report on everything government agencies know about UFOs, including scores of unusual sightings reported by military pilots.

That report is due next month.

Reid is retired but still talking about UFOs to anyone who asks. The man at the center of Washington chatter on the matter these days is Luis Elizondo, a former military intelligence officer who, according to Reid, ran the Defense Department unit that emerged from the secret meeting held in the Capitol building.

The country cannot wait any longer to take the matter seriously, Elizondo said.

Space Command chief: 'Our pacing threat is the Chinese'

By **SETH ROBSON**

Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — China is the primary challenge not only on the surface but also for U.S. forces preparing to fight and win in any future conflict in space, according to the chief of the U.S. Space Command.

"Our pacing threat is the Chinese, so we are watching how they are growing their space capability," Army Gen. James Dickinson, who oversees the command based at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo., said during a stop at the home of U.S. Forces Japan in western Tokyo on Saturday.

The Army's senior air defense artillery officer has led the military's 11th and newest combatant command since August when he took over from Gen. John Raymond, the Space Force's chief of space operations.

The Space Force, established in December 2019, gets plenty of attention but the Space Command, formed four months earlier, is the organization that would oversee any war in space, Dickinson said.

"The Space Force is responsible for organizing and equipping space forces. We are about warfighting," he said of the difference

between the two organizations.

Space Command is the equivalent of the Tampa, Fla.-based Central Command, which has managed the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in recent decades, or the Hawaii-based Indo-Pacific Command, responsible for an area of operations that covers more than half of the globe, Dickinson said.

Space Command's area of operations is outer space, which extends from an altitude of 62 miles above the ground to infinity, he added.

Global powers such as China, Russia and the United States have resisted positioning weapons in space or destroying the assets, like satellites, of other nations, but the weaponization of space is likely unless countered by effective international opposition, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists.

"Space is very important right now," Dickinson said. "We are seeing what our competitors are doing in space."

Space Command makes sure that service branches can communicate and access global positioning and navigation data they need to support air, sea and land operations, Dickinson said.

Plebes place cover after over 3 hours

The (Annapolis, Md.) Capital

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — The Naval Academy Class of 2024 almost set a new record in their effort to scale the Herndon Monument — just maybe not the one they had hoped for.

The now 4th class midshipmen Saturday recorded the second-slowest Herndon Climb in Naval Academy history at 3 hours, 41 minutes exactly.

As the plebes fought their way to the top of the 21-foot obelisk, slick with water and shortening, the cannon signaling three and a half hours had passed boomed out over the Yard. Groans and chants of "we suck" rippled through the exhausted hoard, covered in grass, mud and sweat. But in the final hour, the class hugged tightly together around the gray granite, forming a more

stable base than the one they'd cobbled together over the previous three. Forty-one minutes later, a skinny Tennessean named Michael Lancaster scrambled atop.

Lancaster stretched, both hands gripping the midshipman's cover, but he couldn't quite make it. Shimming to the right, his foot found higher purchase atop another classmate. One shove, then another. The cap stayed, freeing the plebes from their fight just in time to avoid breaking the Class of 1998's 4 hour, 5 minute and 17 second all-time longest climb.

Ushered over to the gazebo, Lancaster faced his beaming classmates and threw a fist in the air.

"We are the COVID class. We've beat COVID! We beat Herndon! And we are plebes no more!" he shouted.

Ex-USAF worker pleads guilty to \$1.1M theft

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

A former Air Force employee who coordinated travel for members of Congress has pleaded guilty in federal court to the theft of Pentagon funds through cash advances on his government-issued travel card as part of a \$1.1 million embezzlement scheme.

Eddie Ray Johnson Jr., 60, of Brandywine, Md., used his Citibank travel card over more than three years to put cash advances into a Bank of America account at the Pentagon, court documents said. The scheme cost the Air Force \$26,500 in banking and service fees, they said.

Under a plea deal on May 14, Johnson admitted to diverting

at least \$774,000 of the stolen funds for personal use, such as buying a baby grand piano, making loan payments for a Harley-Davidson and taking family vacations.

“Eddie Johnson betrayed his position of trust for his personal gain,” Acting U.S. Attorney Jonathan F. Lenzner said in a statement last week. “Corrupt public employees rip off the taxpayers and undermine everyone’s faith in the government.”

Johnson was an Air Force civilian employee for 15 years until his resignation in 2018. The theft occurred while he worked as a travel coordinator in the Air Force Secretary’s Office of Legislative Liaison, where he planned congressional travel

and approved accounting packages submitted by accompanying Air Force personnel.

Employees of the office were permitted to use travel cards to obtain cash advances for official use, which they deposited and withdrew from noninterest-bearing accounts in their own names at the Pentagon’s Bank of America branch.

Johnson was issued a government credit card with a \$50,000 limit, court documents show. From March 2014 through September 2017, he put about \$1.13 million in cash advances into the Bank of America account.

Johnson then wrote checks to himself and family members for “claimed reimbursements that had not in fact been incurred,” a

court document filed with Johnson’s plea agreement stated. For example, he would at times ask his wife to pay household expenses out of her bank account, which he would then reimburse in cash.

A search of his home in Brandywine in 2019 recovered over \$15,000 in cash, of which Johnson said at least \$4,000 were proceeds from his theft scheme. In all, his actions cost the government nearly \$1.16 million.

Under the plea deal, he agreed to a restitution order in the full amount, and that he would try to sell the piano prior to sentencing, which is scheduled for Sept. 3.

Johnson faces up to 10 years in prison.

National Guard mission to protect Capitol is over

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Nearly five months after being deployed to the U.S. Capitol to help quell the Jan. 6 insurrection, National Guard troops were set to leave and turn over security of the area to Capitol Police.

Guard troops, their mission ending Sunday, were expected to be leaving Monday, a person familiar with the plan told The Associated Press. The person was not authorized to discuss the plan by name and requested anonymity.

The Pentagon announced last week that an extension of the Guard presence — 2,149 troops — had not been requested.

The planned departure came as Democrats and Republicans sparred over how to fund fortifications of the Capitol and whether to form an independent bipartisan commission to investigate the attack that sought to overturn former President Donald Trump’s loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

Some Republican lawmakers have begun downplaying the

event despite the handful of deaths, injuries to scores of police officers, hundreds of arrests, damages to the building and shouted threats against lawmakers from many of those who stormed the building. Much of the violence was caught on camera.

Retired Lt. Gen. Russel Honore, who oversaw a security review in the wake of the rioting, told CBS’ “Face the Nation” on Sunday that the Capitol itself will be secured by Capitol Police but that the complex will remain closed to the general public because of the strain on the police force.

“God bless the National Guard,” Honore said. “They’ve done significant work.”

The House on Thursday approved — by a single vote largely along party lines — a \$1.9 billion measure to fortify the Capitol. The next day, the House approved with 35 Republican votes the formation of an investigative commission. Both measures face an uncertain future in the evenly divided Senate.

Okinawa surge continues; US military reports 6 new cases in Japan, S. Korea

By JOSEPH DITZLER

Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — The U.S. military in Japan and South Korea reported six new cases of COVID-19 between Friday and 6 p.m. Monday.

A South Korean contractor at Camp Humphreys, the headquarters for U.S. Forces Korea south of Seoul, tested positive for the coronavirus respiratory disease Friday, according to a USFK news release. The contractor is now isolated at a South Korean medical facility after having contact with another contractor who had developed COVID-19 symptoms.

Camps Kinser and Hansen, both on Okinawa, each have one new case of COVID-19, according to a Facebook post Monday by Marine Corps Installations Pacific. Kadena Air Base, also on Japan’s southern island prefecture, had three people contract COVID-19, according to a base Facebook post on Friday. One

was identified while in quarantine after traveling outside of Japan, the second tested positive after developing symptoms and the third had contact with another recently infected person.

Okinawa prefecture on Sunday reported 231 newly infected people, a pandemic one-day high for the prefecture, according to its coronavirus tracking website. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suge declared a state of emergency there starting Sunday until June 20, according to public broadcaster NHK.

The Okinawa prefectural government is asking individuals traveling to Okinawa to have a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours of their arrival, according to a Monday post on Yokota Air Base’s Facebook page.

Okinawa expects bars and restaurants that serve alcohol to close and shopping malls and sport clubs to close at 8 p.m., according to NHK.

India coronavirus deaths pass 300K

Associated Press

NEW DELHI — India crossed another grim milestone Monday with more than 300,000 people lost to the coronavirus, while a devastating surge of infections appeared to be easing in big cities but was swamping the poorer countryside.

The milestone, as recorded by India's Health Ministry, comes as slowed vaccine deliveries have marred the country's fight against the pandemic, forcing many to miss their shots, and a rare but fatal fungal infection affecting COVID-19 patients has further worried doctors.

India's death toll is the third-highest reported in the world after the United States and Brazil, accounting for 8.6% of the nearly 34.7 million coronavirus fatalities globally, though the true numbers are thought to be significantly greater.

The Health Ministry on Monday reported 4,454 new deaths in the last 24 hours,

bringing India's total fatalities to 303,720. It also reported 222,315 new infections, which raised the overall total to nearly 27 million since the pandemic began. Both are almost certainly undercounts.

From the remote Himalayan villages in the north, through the vast humid central plains and to the sandy beaches in the south, the pandemic has swamped India's underfunded health care system after spreading quickly across the country.

In the capital, New Delhi, residents have died at home with no oxygen as hospitals exhausted limited supplies. In Mumbai, COVID-19 patients have died in crowded hospital corridors. In rural villages, fever and breathlessness took people before they were even tested for the coronavirus.

While the megacities have seen signs of improvement in recent days, the virus isn't finished with India by any means. It

appears to have already taken a ghastly toll in the country's vast rural areas, where a majority of the people live and where health care is limited.

In recent weeks, hundreds of bodies have washed up on the banks of the Ganges River in Uttar Pradesh state. Many others have been found buried in shallow graves along its sandy banks. It has prompted concerns that they're the remains of COVID-19 victims.

India's vaccination drive has also slowed recently, and many states say they don't have enough vaccines to administer.

The world's largest vaccine-producing nation has fully vaccinated just over 41.6 million people, or only 3.8% of its nearly 1.4 billion people. On Monday, the federal government enabled walk-in registration at government-run vaccination centers for those aged between 18 to 44 to "minimize vaccine wastage."

Guide disputes Nepal denials of virus cases located on Everest

Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal — A coronavirus outbreak on Mount Everest has infected at least 100 climbers and support staff, an expert mountaineering guide said, giving the first comprehensive estimate amid official Nepalese denials that the disease has spread to the world's highest peak.

Lukas Furtenbach, of Austria, who last week became the only prominent outfitter to halt his Everest expedition due to virus fears, said Saturday that one of his foreign guides and six Nepali Sherpa guides have tested positive.

"I think with all the confirmed cases we know now — confirmed from (rescue) pilots, from insurance, from doctors, from expedition leaders — I have the positive tests so we can prove this," Furtenbach told The Associated Press in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu.

"We have at least 100 people minimum positive for COVID in base camp, and then the numbers might be something like 150 or 200," he said.

He said it was obvious there were many cases at the Everest base camp because he could visibly see people were sick, and could hear people coughing in their tents.

A total of 408 foreign climbers were issued permits to climb Everest this season, aided

by several hundred Sherpas and support staff who've been stationed at base camp since April.

Nepalese mountaineering officials have denied there are any active cases this season among climbers and support staff at all base camps for the country's Himalayan mountains. Mountaineering was closed last year due to the pandemic.

Nepalese officials could not immediately be reached for comment Saturday. Other climbing teams have not announced any COVID-19 infections among their members or staff. Several climbers have reported testing positive after they were brought down from the Everest base camp.

Furtenbach said most teams on the mountain were not carrying virus testing kits and that before his team pulled out, they had helped conduct tests and had confirmed two cases.

Most teams are still at base camp, hoping for clear weather so they can make a final push to the summit before the climbing season closes at the end of the month, Furtenbach said.

Nepal reported 8,607 new infections and 177 deaths on Friday, bringing the nation's totals since the pandemic began to more than 497,000 infections and 6,024 deaths.

Italy probes why cable car brake failed in crash

Associated Press

STRESA, Italy — The investigation into Italy's cable car disaster that killed 14 people will focus on why the lead cable snapped and why the emergency brake didn't engage and prevent the cabin from careening back down the mountain until it pulled off the support line and crashed to the ground, the lead prosecutor said Monday.

Verbania Prosecutor Olimpia Bossi outlined the contours of her investigation based on what she said was objective, empirical fact of what occurred: "The brakes of the security system didn't work. Otherwise the cabin would have stopped," she said. "Why that happened is naturally under investigation."

Bossi spoke to reporters as the lone survivor of Sunday's horrific tragedy, a 5-year-old Israeli boy living in Italy, remained hospitalized in Turin in intensive care with multiple broken bones.

The Israeli foreign ministry identified him as Eitan Biran. His parents, younger brother and two great-grandparents were among the dead, the ministry said, correcting an earlier statement that had included Eitan among the victims.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Toddler accidentally shoots younger sister

FL LAKELAND — A 3-year-old boy accidentally shot his 2-year-old sister after finding a gun that had been hidden between sofa cushions by a family friend, Florida authorities said.

The girl was in “exceptionally” critical condition, said Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd at a news conference.

After the girl was shot, three men in the home at the time scooped up the children and jumped in a car to drive to a hospital. On their way, they got into a crash with another vehicle, causing several injuries. The girl and one of the adults were taken to the hospital by a good Samaritan who had stopped to offer assistance after the crash, Judd said.

Kevonte’ Wilson, 23, told investigators he had placed the gun between sofa cushions so that it would be hidden from the children. He was arrested on charges of failing to safely store a firearm, carrying a concealed firearm and possession of marijuana. He could face other counts, Judd said.

Inmate had material that could make explosives

IA ANAMOSA — Authorities found a household substance in an inmate’s cell at Anamosa State Penitentiary that could be used to make explosives.

The state Department of Corrections said that the substance was found in a cell at the prison where two employees were killed about two months ago, according to the Des Moines Register.

Authorities said the substance isn’t dangerous by itself, but it

could be used to create an explosive substance if it was combined with additional materials.

Corrections Department Chief of Staff Cord Overton said investigators are looking into how the prisoner managed to get and hide the substance, as well as whether any accomplices were involved.

New exhibit spotlights space exploration history

AZ TUCSON — A new exhibit at the Arizona History Museum in Tucson aims to make sure the state’s place in the history of space flight is not forgotten.

“Ready to Launch: Arizona’s Place in Space” showcases how the Grand Canyon State helped create a path to the stars. It will be on display until Nov. 30 at the museum just west of the University of Arizona campus.

The exhibit includes plenty of relics, such as a spacesuit worn by Apollo 11 astronaut Buzz Aldrin on loan from NASA.

Couple accused of stealing from booster club

NC CHARLOTTE — A North Carolina couple is accused of stealing \$200,000 from a high school booster club and using COVID-19-relief business loans to cover their crime, federal authorities said.

Anthony and Deana Sharper are both charged with wire fraud, which carries up to 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine upon a conviction, The Charlotte Observer reported.

Anthony Sharper is also accused of a range of additional crimes, including making false statements to a financial institution and filing a false tax return. If convicted of all charges, he faces decades in prison and mil-

lions of dollars in penalties.

The charges involve Charlotte’s South Mecklenburg High School, where Anthony Sharper was club president and Deana Sharper served as concession stand and school store coordinator, according to court documents.

According to the indictment, over a three-year period starting in 2017, the Sharpers wrote more than \$100,000 in checks to themselves for fraudulent reimbursements, wired booster club money directly to their personal bank accounts and also used booster credit and debit cards to run up thousands of dollars in personal expenses across six states.

Applications taken for public lands gator harvest

LA BATON ROUGE — The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is taking lottery applications to harvest alligators on public lands. Applications are due by June 30 for hunts from Aug. 25 through Oct. 30.

There are 431 opportunities on 19 wildlife management areas, 28 public lakes and one Army Corps of Engineers property. Each hunter gets tags for three alligators.

Program managers reported that 2,278 people applied last year for 421 available opportunities, department spokesman Robert “Trey” Iles said.

Applications are on the department website at la-web.s3licensing.com.

Man admits to stealing \$276K in dating scams

VA RICHMOND — A Maryland man pleaded guilty in Virginia to defrauding women whom he met

through online dating websites, using phony identities to dupe them into sending him money.

Eugene Johnson Jr., 39, of Leonardtown, Md., stole more than \$276,000 total from at least eight women, according to a court filing that accompanied his guilty plea to a mail fraud charge.

Johnson faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison. U.S. District Judge Henry E. Hudson is scheduled to sentence Johnson on Sept. 17.

Johnson used false names and identities, such as posing as a U.S. Marine with a son whose mother had died, to strike up romantic relationships with his victims and solicit money from them “for various pressing financial needs,” the court filing said.

Police mark 2nd video sighting of mountain lion

KS WICHITA — Another mountain lion sighting has been captured on a doorbell camera in the Wichita area, and Kansas wildlife officials suspect it’s the same big cat caught on camera last week sauntering through a Wichita alley.

Police in the Wichita suburb of Andover said the most recent video showed the puma padding along a sidewalk in front of a house in Andover. That’s about 12 miles away from the site in Wichita’s Riverside neighborhood where a doorbell camera showed a cougar trotting through an alley May 10.

Kansas Department of Wildlife Research Biologist Matt Peek confirmed that the cat in the latest video is a mountain lion and likely the same one as spotted last week, as it would be rare to have two pumas sharing the same territory.

— From wire reports

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Bruins' top guys finish off Capitals

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — David Pastrnak couldn't control his excitement with the opportunity to help the Boston Bruins advance in the playoffs, and captain Patrice Bergeron approached the clinching game as if it was the reason he played hockey.

It showed.

With Pastrnak, Bergeron and goaltender Tuukka Rask leading the way, the Bruins eliminated the Washington Capitals in five games with a 3-1 victory Sunday night. Pastrnak dazzled with a highlight-reel goal, Bergeron scored twice at timely moments and Rask made 40 saves to set up a second-round showdown against either the Pittsburgh Penguins or New York Islanders.

"These games are fun," Pastrnak said. "The feeling you get with the guys after the game in the locker room and the happiness like little kids, it's something that you play the game for."

Chants of "TUUKK!" emanated from a large group of black and gold-clad Boston fans who were part of the limited-capacity sellout crowd of 5,333. Those were occasionally interrupted by "We want the Cup!" — the trophy the Bruins last won a decade ago after a 39-year title drought.

They're 12 wins away, thanks to their best players dominating in Game 5.

"Let's face it: Our top guys came through," coach Bruce Cassidy said.

The only shot that beat Rask was Conor Sheary hammering home his own rebound 11 seconds into the third period. That ended an even-strength goal drought of 147:44, but wasn't enough to rally the Capitals, who outshot the Bruins 41-19 and had a would-be goal by Lars Eller with 5:37 remaining waved off for goaltender interference.

Mickelson, 50, wins PGA

Associated Press

KIAWAH ISLAND, S.C. — Standing on the 18th tee with a two-shot lead in a championship he refused to imagine himself winning, Phil Mickelson took one last violent swing with a driver — the club that betrayed him 15 years earlier in the U.S. Open.

His tee shot Sunday in the PGA Championship at Kiawah Island landed only a few yards off the fairway, but it still nestled among the people — the gallery packed tightly between the ropes and a row of hospitality tents — screaming the name of their aging hero.

After Mickelson's approach shot settled on the green, assuring the 50-year-old of becoming the oldest major champion in history, the crowd swallowed him up entirely.

Phil Mickelson, the people's champion.

"It's an incredible experience. I've never had something like that," Mickelson said. "It was a little bit unnerving, but it was exceptionally awesome, too."

Golf can be cruel to veteran, sentimental favorites. Ben Hogan at the 1955 U.S. Open. Greg Norman at the 1996 Masters and the British Open a dozen years later. And, perhaps most heartbreaking, 59-year-old Tom Watson at the 2009 British Open.

Mickelson, too, has had as many close calls as major victories — most of them at the U.S. Open, where he's been runner-up six times. Winged Foot — where he gave away a one-shot lead on the 72nd hole in 2006 — wasn't the first, or the last.

But now, the two biggest stars of their generation have a signature late-career win. Tiger Woods overcame four back surgeries, turmoil in his personal life and 11 years of frustration in major championships to win the Masters two years ago at age 43.

Mickelson — happy at home and injury-free — merely stretched the limits of what's possible after a half-century on Earth.

"There's no reason why I or anybody else can't do it at a later age. It just takes a little more work," Mickelson said.

Nine days earlier, Mickelson accepted a special exemption to play in the U.S. Open at Torrey Pines in his hometown of San Diego. Now he's assured at least five more cracks at the lone major that has eluded him. The victory makes him exempt at the U.S. Open through 2025.

Already a Hall of Famer, Mickelson joined Nick Faldo and Lee Trevino as six-time major winners. Only 11 players have won more. If he somehow won another in his 50s, he'd match Arnold Palmer, Bobby Jones, Gene Sarazen, Sam Snead and Harry Vardon.

"I don't know how to describe the feeling of excitement and fulfillment and accomplishment to do something when — you know, of this magnitude when very few people thought that I could," Mickelson said.

The record will show Mickelson closed with a 1-over 73 for a two-shot win over Brooks Koepka (73) and Louis Oosthuizen (74). That doesn't begin to describe the wild fluctuations of Sunday on the menacing Ocean Course, where Mickelson and Koepka hit shots that were both spectacular and shocking, sometimes on the same hole.

The records Mickelson shattered were numerous. Julius Boros for 53 years held the distinction of golf's oldest major champion. He was 48 when he won the 1968 PGA Championship.

Mickelson became the first player in PGA Tour history to win tournaments 30 years apart. The first of his 45 titles was in 1991, when he was still a junior at Arizona State and Koepka was 8 months old.

Avs complete dominant sweep of Blues

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Philipp Grubauer made 18 saves and Gabriel Landeskog scored the go-ahead goal in the second period as the Colorado Avalanche completed a four-game sweep of the St. Louis Blues with a 5-2 win Sunday in Game 4 of the West Division series.

Brandon Saad, Mikko Rantanen, Nathan MacKinnon and Valeri Nichushkin also scored for Colorado, which recorded its first series sweep since beating Vancouver in the 2001 Western

Conference quarterfinal round.

The Avalanche outscored the Blues 20-7 and trailed for only 7:12 over the four games. Grubauer stopped 103 of 110 shots over the four games.

Predators 4, Hurricanes 3 (2OT): Luke Kunin scored his second goal at 16:10 of the second overtime and host Nashville beat Carolina to tie the first-round series 2-2.

Kunin broke his stick and went to the bench for another. He then skated up and beat Alex Nedeljkovic from the inside

edge of the left circle off a pass from Mikael Granlund.

Jets 5, Oilers 4 (OT): Nikolaj Ehlers scored his second goal of the game at 9:13 in overtime, completing a massive rally for host Winnipeg, which erased a three-goal deficit in the third period to beat Edmonton and take a 3-0 lead in the opening-round playoff series.

Mathieu Perreault, Blake Wheeler and Josh Morrissey scored for Winnipeg in a stretch of 3:03 of the third to tie it and force overtime.

Lux, Urías pace red-hot Dodgers

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Julio Urías has shared his thoughts on how hard it is to hit at the major league level. He certainly kept the Giants off balance from the mound and did some rare damage in the batter's box with a pair of key swings.

"That was really fun," he said.

Gavin Lux launched a grand slam, Urías drove in three runs to help back his pitching gem, and the Los Angeles Dodgers pounded the Giants 11-5 on Sunday for their eighth straight win and a weekend sweep of rival San Francisco.

Urías didn't allow a baserunner until Mike Tauchman's one-out infield single in the sixth, then Austin Slater hit a two-run homer one out later as the Giants made things a little interesting after falling behind 11-0.

"It would have been something really incredible to hang your hat on," Urías said of joining the no-hit crew of 2021.

Urías (7-1) struck out 10 over six stellar innings to beat San Francisco for the first time in 10 career starts and 16 appearances after three no-decisions in 2020. He hit a two-run double in the second and an RBI single in the Dodgers' seven-run third that chased starter Anthony DeSclafani (4-2) after 54 pitches.

With two hits on the day, Urías has already set a career high with four this season. He delivered his third double-digit strikeout game of the year, didn't walk a batter and gave up three hits and two runs in all.

"Julio, he's a veteran big league pitcher now — and there's no more project, there's no more prospect," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said.

Lux hit his second career slam after his first came Tuesday against Arizona. Max Muncy had a full-count homer in the fourth, going deep for a second straight day.

Mike Yastrzemski hit a two-

run double in the eighth and Donovan Solano had a sacrifice fly for the Giants, who lost their third straight game following a five-game winning streak.

"We got beat every which way in this series," Giants manager Gabe Kapler said. "They made more pitches than us, they got more big hits than us, they played better defense, converted more plays into outs than we did."

DeSclafani, who won his previous two starts, yielded 10 runs — all earned — on nine hits in 2 2/3 innings.

He is one of three Giants pitchers since at least 1906 to allow 10 or more earned runs against the Dodgers, joining Jim Barr (10) on July 3, 1977, and Max Lanier (10) on April 19, 1952, according to Sportradar.

Padres 9, Mariners 2: Fernando Tatis Jr. homered twice, including a 447-foot grand slam, and host San Diego beat Seattle to sweep a nine-game home-stand.

The 22-year-old Tatis sent Petco Park into a frenzy on a sunny afternoon when he drove a 1-0 pitch from Robert Dugger to the base of the batter's eye in straightaway center field with one out in the seventh. It was his 13th homer this season and his second career grand slam.

Tatis also hit a 441-foot home run into Petco Park's second deck leading off the second and singled in the go-ahead run during a three-run rally in the sixth.

Rays 6, Blue Jays 4: Austin Meadows, Manuel Margot and Mike Brousseau drew consecutive bases-loaded walks with two outs in the ninth inning in Dunedin, Fla., and Tampa Bay rallied for its 10th straight win.

The Rays trailed 4-2 going into the ninth, but took advantage of five walks by relievers Tyler Chatwood (0-1) and Travis Bergen to send Toronto to its fifth straight loss.

Yankees 5, White Sox 4: Aaron Judge walked against Liam

Hendriks with the bases loaded in the ninth inning, and host New York overcame Aroldis Chapman's first blown save on the way to its sixth straight win.

Jameson Taillon completed a historic scoreless turn through the Yankees' rotation. But pinch-hitter Andrew Vaughn sprinted around the bases after tying it at 4 with his one-out homer in the ninth.

Brewers 9, Reds 4: Christian Yelich hit his first homer of the season and Kolten Wong had three hits, powering Milwaukee to the win at Cincinnati.

Yelich, who has been hampered by back trouble for much of the season, hit a solo drive in the ninth against Brad Brach. The 2018 NL MVP finished with two hits and two RBIs.

Rangers 3, Astros 2 (10): Adolis García's infield single scored automatic runner Nick Solak in the 10th inning, giving host Texas a victory over Houston and a sweep of their in-state rivals.

It was the second game-ending hit in the 10th in the three-game series for García after a three-run homer in the opener. He also went deep twice during Saturday's 8-4 victory.

Phillies 6, Red Sox 2: Zack Wheeler struck out a career high-tying 12, and host Philadelphia stopped a four-game skid.

Brad Miller hit a three-run homer as the Phillies averted a sweep and snapped Boston's four-game win streak.

Angels 6, Athletics 5: Justin Upton hit a tiebreaking sacrifice fly in the eighth inning, and host Los Angeles avoided a sweep.

The Angels won for just the second time in seven games since three-time AL MVP Mike Trout went on the injured list with a calf strain. They trailed 4-1 after five innings.

Braves 7, Pirates 1: Austin Riley drove in five runs while hitting two of host Atlanta's three homers.

Dansby Swanson added a two-run homer. The Braves hit 15 homers, adding to their major league lead, while winning three of four games against Pittsburgh.

Marlins 5, Mets 1: Rookie Cody Poteet pitched seven scoreless innings, retiring his last 14 batters, and collected his first major league hit and RBI during host Miami's five-run second inning.

The Marlins took the rubber game of the three-game series to close to within two games of NL East-leading New York (21-19), which has been riddled by injuries and finished 3-6 on a three-city Southern swing.

Nationals 6, Orioles 5: Kyle Schwarber homered in the first inning, and host Washington completed a three-game sweep.

Trea Turner had two hits for the Nationals, and his fourth-inning sacrifice fly broke a 4-all tie. Alex Avila doubled twice and scored the go-ahead run.

Twins 8, Indians 5 (10): Kyle Garlick hit a three-run homer in the 10th inning off James Karinchak, lifting Minnesota to a victory at Cleveland.

Garlick entered the game in right field in the seventh as a replacement for Max Kepler, who hit his 13th career homer at Progressive Field in the fourth, also a three-run shot.

Royals 3, Tigers 2: Carlos Santana hit a two-run homer in the ninth inning to lift host Kansas City to the victory.

Rockies 4, Diamondbacks 3: Trevor Story hit a leadoff homer in the bottom of the ninth inning, giving host Colorado the win.

Cubs 2, Cardinals 1 (10): Jávier Báez hit a two-run homer in the 10th to break a scoreless tie and propel Chicago to a win at St. Louis.

Báez hit the second pitch he saw from Alex Reyes (2-1) 417 feet for his 11th home run of the season. It was just the second earned run allowed by Reyes in 25 innings this season.

Booker, Suns down Lakers in Game 1

Associated Press

PHOENIX — All-Star guard Chris Paul was grimacing in pain early in the fourth quarter, playing essentially with one shoulder. Cameron Payne had just been ejected. Players had to be separated and emotions were heated.

Phoenix coach Monty Williams had warned his young Suns there would be moments like this in the NBA playoffs, especially against the defending champion Los Angeles Lakers.

It's safe to say they passed the first test.

Devin Booker scored 34 points, Deandre Ayton had 21 points and 16 rebounds and the Suns won their first playoff game in 11 years, beating the Lakers 99-90 on Sunday.

For Booker, his long awaited appearance in the postseason lived up to the hype.

"The intensity's different, the physicality is different," Booker said. "And it's only one game."

It was the first playoff appearance for several Phoenix players, including Booker, Ayton and Mikal Bridges, but they didn't look like postseason rookies against LeBron James and Los Angeles. They helped the Suns offset a tough game for Paul, who didn't look healthy after a right shoulder injury in the second quarter.

Phoenix led 86-70 early in the fourth, but the Lakers quickly cut it to 86-77 with 9:02 left.

That's about the time things got a little

rowdy. L.A.'s Alex Caruso and Payne got into an altercation near the sideline after Payne knocked Caruso to the ground. The Lakers' Montrezl Harrell jumped into the fray and both teams had to be separated. Caruso and Harrell were each given a technical foul, and Payne was given two technicals and ejected.

Added Bridges: "Times get tough, we don't separate. We're going to fight through it together."

Booker kept making shots and Ayton was a force on the glass, finishing with eight offense rebounds and shooting 10 of 11 from the field. Los Angeles never got within striking distance in the final minutes.

Harris, Sixers down Wizards

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Tobias Harris picked a pair of Philadelphia's deep reserves to knock him around and toughen his game on the low post. The trio talked smack, and their post-practice workout sessions resembled a kind of bully ball for most of the last three months, all so Harris was better equipped for the postseason grind.

"I know the people who watch, the people who see, my teammates, they respect that," Harris said.

And the payoff?

"You have a night like this," Harris said.

Harris showed why the top-seeded 76ers might have their own Big Three worthy of winning a championship. He scored 37 points, carrying Philadelphia's offense

when it sagged early, and the 76ers survived the sub-.500 Washington Wizards in a 125-118 Game 1 victory on Sunday.

Harris scored 28 points in the first half, making a case that Philly has — with All-Stars Joel Embiid and Simmons — three big stars that could rival the superstar trio of Kevin Durant-James Harden-Kyrie Irving in Brooklyn.

Embiid finished with 30 points. Game 2 is Wednesday in Philadelphia.

The Sixers needed Harris' outburst to offset an upset-minded Wizards team that was within five points with 45 seconds left. Bradley Beal scored 33 points and Russell Westbrook had 16 — but neither sensational scorer took over in long enough stretches needed for an upset.

Grizzlies stun Jazz in Game 1

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — The Memphis Grizzlies have not completely consigned their grit-and-grind days to the past.

The eighth-seeded Grizzlies beat top-seeded Utah 112-109 on Sunday night in the opening game of their first-round playoff series by relying on hard-nosed physical defense to keep the Jazz off balance on offense much of the game.

Game 2 of the series is on Wednesday.

Utah never found a rhythm from the perimeter, shooting just 12-for-47 from long distance. Defensively, the Jazz couldn't stop Dillon Brooks for long stretches.

Brooks had 31 points and seven rebounds to lead Memphis. He set a single-game franchise scoring record for a Grizzlies player making a playoff debut, surpassing the 24 points scored by Marc Gasol against San Antonio on April 17, 2011.

"He brings a lot of energy to the floor," guard Ja Morant said. "As soon as we get here in the locker room, he's already active and loud and carries it onto the floor for us during the game. We just continue to play off of him. I think everybody on this team gets a lot of energy from him, just seeing how active he is on the floor."

Morant added 26 points. Jonas Valanciunas chipped in 15 points and 12 rebounds, and Kyle Anderson added 14 points.

Bojan Bogdanovic scored 20 of his 29 points in the fourth quarter to lead Utah. Mike Conley had 22 points, 11 assists, and six rebounds.

Young carries Hawks past Knicks

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Trae Young made a runner in the lane with 0.9 seconds left to lift the Atlanta Hawks to a 107-105 defeat of the New York Knicks in a thrilling postseason return for both teams.

Young finished with 32 points, 10 assists and seven rebounds. He frustrated the Knicks with his ability to draw fouls and made all nine free throws when he did. He was the target of the fans for most of the night.

"I've always looked at it that I'm doing something right if I'm affecting them with my play that much that they hate me that much,"

he said. "I'm obviously doing something right and just got to let my play do the talking."

He looked like Reggie Miller in the 1990s, feeding off a New York crowd — featuring a rowdy Spike Lee, just like those days — that cursed his name repeatedly when he made a shot or drew a foul.

"He's small but he's a tough kid and he's not afraid," Hawks coach Nate McMillan said.

He got the final word when he drove right through the Knicks' defense and floated in his shot from right of the basket, then put his fingers to his lips to tell the crowd to quiet down.