

## Russians urged to contact CIA via darknet

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The CIA says Russians disaffected by Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine may be trying to get in touch with U.S. intelligence — and it wants them to go to the darknet.

The agency on Monday began a new push to promote its presence on a part of the internet accessible only through specialized tools that provide more anonymity. The CIA has a darknet site that has the same features as its regular homepage but accessible only through the Tor internet browser, which has encryption features not available on most regular browsers.

Instructions in English and Russian on how to access the darknet site appeared Monday on the CIA's social media channels. The agency hopes Russians living abroad can share the instructions with contacts inside the country.

While many Russians appear to support what the Kremlin officially calls a "special military operation," longtime Russia watchers think Putin's management of the war may push away some powerful people who disagree with him. Even with immense capabilities to capture communica-

tions and satellite imagery, it remains critical for Western intelligence agencies to recruit human sources who can offer insight into the Kremlin and conditions inside Russia.

"Our global mission demands that individuals can contact us securely from anywhere," the agency said in a statement.

A CIA official speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive intelligence matters says the agency knows "there are concerned Russians who are desperately trying to reach CIA." The official declined to say how many people had tried to reach out since the war began.

"It's not safe to directly engage Americans physically or virtually" in Russia, the official said. "For those people that want to engage with us securely, this is the way to do it."

Launched in 2019, the CIA's darknet site is accessible through the Tor browser. Tor, short for "The Onion Router," routes internet traffic through multiple third parties to mask a user's identity and destination. After downloading the Tor browser, the user typically inputs a long string of characters followed by ".onion."

Using Tor strips away cookies and many other means of tracking the typical internet user. And while no form of communication is completely secure at all times, intelligence officers say a potential tipster will be better protected on the darknet from Russian snooping.

Russians have long had to find ways to circumvent government blocks on the internet. In response to the Kremlin's crackdown since the war began, some media outlets and Twitter have promoted usage of their own ".onion" sites or the use of virtual private network software.

While officials would not disclose specifics, U.S. intelligence can be safely assumed to be working inside Russia. Calling attention to the darknet site now promotes to prospective contacts that the CIA is paying attention to their safety, said Mark Kelton, who retired from the CIA in 2015 after serving as chief of counterintelligence.

"When people decide to reach out, they're very well aware of what they're doing and what the risks are," Kelton said. "The issue here is to reassure them that on the other end, there are people concerned with protecting them."

## USS Paul Ignatius joins US 6th Fleet in Spain

**By ALISON BATH**

*Stars and Stripes*

One of the Navy's newest and most advanced destroyers is moving to Spain, where it will join four others based at Naval Station Rota.

The USS Paul Ignatius left its homeport in Mayport, Fla., on Wednesday for an inaugural patrol in the U.S. 6th Fleet area of responsibility, which includes Europe and Africa, the Navy announced in a statement.

After its patrol, the Paul Ignatius will be homeported at Rota in Spain's south, alongside USS Arleigh Burke, USS Roosevelt, USS Porter and USS Ross.

The move is one of several

planned homeport shifts in a long-term strategy to rotate the Rota-based destroyers gradually, the Navy said.

The Paul Ignatius is the second of eight planned Flight IIA "technology insertion" ships, which contain planned elements of the next-generation Flight III ships.

The technology upgrade adds air and missile defense capability, enabling the ships to simultaneously perform anti-air warfare and ballistic missile defense, according to the statement. The improvement addresses a critical need, the Navy said.

"Together with our em-

barked helicopter detachment, we are bringing a lot of capability to the U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations," said Cmdr. Aaron Arky, the ship's commanding officer.

Deployment of the Paul Ignatius follows the return April 24 of the destroyer USS Donald Cook to its homeport in Mayport after a three-month rapid deployment to 6th Fleet.

The Donald Cook was one of four destroyers hurriedly deployed in January after Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered the USS Harry S. Truman carrier strike group to remain in the Mediterranean Sea amid rising tensions in central

and Eastern Europe.

The tensions were sparked by the vast military buildup by Russia that preceded a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Officials have said that the increased Navy presence is meant as a sign of U.S. commitment to NATO defense and as reassurance to allies and partners.

Two ships that were in the strike group, USS The Sullivans and USS Mitscher, returned to their homeports in mid-April. The USS Gonzales remains in the Mediterranean as part of the Truman carrier strike group.

# Navy officer convicted in death of wife

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

A Navy officer accused of shoving his drugged wife out the window of their seventh-floor apartment in Belgium in late 2015 has been convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison.

A U.S. military court in Belgium sentenced Lt. Craig R. Becker on Saturday after finding him guilty of premeditated murder, assault consummated by a battery and two counts of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman, said Lt. Cmdr. Matthew Comer, a spokesman for Navy Region Europe Africa Central.

Becker was accused of killing his 32-year-old wife, Johanna Hove-Becker, who died Oct. 8, 2015. He was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole, along with dismissal from the Navy, Comer said.

The verdict and sentencing ended a lengthy legal process that included an order by former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis that the Navy take over the case in 2018 after

years of deferring.

Before that, the case had been left to Belgian authorities despite the NATO Status of Forces Agreement, which gives the Navy primary jurisdiction. Navy officials at the time expressed concerns to lawmakers that a military court might not be able to use evidence collected by Belgian investigators.

Becker was an explosive ordnance disposal technician serving at a NATO command near Mons, the Navy Times reported in 2019.

He was arraigned at Naval Base San Diego in February 2019, but the case was postponed while the U.S. Navy-Marine Corps Court of Criminal Appeals considered two appeals of a ruling that statements by Hove-Becker before her death could not be used by prosecutors.

In February 2021, the appeals court ultimately found for the government and allowed the statements. Throughout that time, Becker maintained his innocence, saying that his wife was an alcoholic who had mental health problems and that she had died by

suicide.

Court records show that Becker was accused of beating and choking his wife in August 2013 in a U.S. Army hotel in Belgium. During a subsequent investigation, she said Becker had been physically abusive with increasing severity, court records show.

The couple reconciled and the investigation was dropped. But in September 2015 the couple signed a separation agreement. Hove-Becker was preparing to move into her own apartment when she was killed, according to court records.

Becker told police his wife had jumped from the window of their apartment after drinking wine and taking medication, court records show. Her death initially was ruled a suicide by Belgian police.

But toxicology results revealed that at the time she died, Hove-Becker hadn't consumed alcohol. However, a morphine-based pain reliever and a high level of a sedative were in her system, according to court records.

## Denmark and Sweden say Russia flew into airspace

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

A Russian spy plane violated NATO airspace in recent days, prompting the Kremlin's ambassador to Denmark to be summoned over the incident, the top Danish diplomat announced.

Sweden, a non-NATO country that is strongly considering submitting an application for alliance membership soon, also accused the aircraft of crossing into its territory.

"This is completely unacceptable and particularly worrying in the current situation," Danish Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod said Sunday in a statement.

The Russian aircraft entered Danish airspace Friday in the vicinity of the island of Bornholm, Kofod said. The AN-30 propeller aircraft was followed and photographed after violat-

ing Swedish airspace, the Swedish Defense Ministry said in a statement, as quoted by TheLocal.se.

Kofod said the Russian ambassador would be summoned Monday because of the "new Russian violation of Danish airspace."

Sweden is following suit. Defense Minister Peter Hultqvist called the violation "unacceptable" and "unprofessional," Reuters reported Sunday.

The airspace intrusions come at a time of high tension over Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and ongoing war, which has prompted Sweden and neighboring Finland to give serious consideration to NATO membership. Moscow has lashed out at the idea, warning the Nordic states against such a move.

## US Marines observe drill to prep for disasters in Japan

By FRANK ANDREWS  
AND MARI HIGA  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — U.S. Marines from Okinawa were observers recently at an evacuation drill held annually to mark a tsunami that killed thousands in the most remote part of Japan.

During the drill on April 24, CH-47J helicopters of the Japan Air and Ground Self-Defense Forces airlifted 30 people from Taketomi Island and the northern part of Ishigaki Island to higher ground, a spokesman for Ishigaki city's Disaster Prevention and Crisis Management department told Stars and Stripes in an email Thursday.

The drill is a rehearsal for the day another natural disaster strikes the islands.

The scenario assumed that a

large-scale earthquake had struck Ishigaki, causing a tsunami that isolated some residents who needed relief, a spokesman for the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force's 15th Brigade told Stars and Stripes by phone Wednesday.

U.S. Marines attended the drill because of the U.S. cooperation in past relief efforts, according to the brigade spokesman.

Five personnel, including U.S. Marine Col. Jason Perry, the assistant division commander of 3rd Marine Division, came to observe the drill for the first time, wrote the Ishigaki city spokesman.

The 15th Brigade sent 130 personnel and the Air Self-Defense Force sent nine, according to the spokesman from Ishigaki city.

# First Ukrainian civilians leave steel plant

Associated Press

ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine — The first civilians evacuated from the bombed-out steel plant that has become the last stronghold of Ukrainian fighters in Mariupol slowly made their way toward safety Monday, as others who managed to escape the city described terrifying weeks of bombardment and deprivation.

More than 100 civilians — including elderly women and mothers with small children — left the sprawling, rubble-strewn Azovstal steel mill on Sunday and set out in buses and ambulances for the Ukrainian-controlled city of Zaporizhzhia, about 140 miles to the northwest, according to authorities and video released by the two sides.

Mariupol Deputy Mayor Sergei Orlov told the BBC that the evacuees were making slow progress and would probably not arrive on Monday as hoped for. Authorities gave no explanation for the delay.

At least some of the evacuees

were apparently taken to a village controlled by Russia-backed separatists. The Russian military said that some chose to stay in separatist areas, while dozens left for Ukrainian-held territory.

In the past, Ukraine has accused Moscow's troops of taking civilians against their will to Russia or Russian-controlled areas. The Kremlin has denied it.

Orlov said high-level negotiations were underway among Ukraine, Russia and international organizations on more evacuations.

The steel-plant evacuation, if successful, would represent rare progress in easing the human cost of the almost 10-week war, which has caused particular suffering in Mariupol. Previous attempts to open safe corridors out of the southern port city and other places have broken down, with Ukrainian officials accusing Russian forces of shooting and shelling along agreed-on evacuation routes.

Before the weekend evacua-

tion, overseen by the United Nations and the Red Cross during a brief cease-fire around the steelworks, about 1,000 civilians were believed to be in the plant, along with an estimated 2,000 Ukrainian defenders. Russia has demanded that the fighters surrender; they have refused.

As many as 100,000 people overall may still be in Mariupol, which had a prewar population of more than 400,000. Russian forces have pounded much of the city to rubble, trapping civilians with little food, water, heat or medicine.

Some Mariupol residents got out of the city on their own, by way of often damaged private cars.

As sunset approached, Mariupol resident Yaroslav Dmytryshyn rattled up to a reception center in Zaporizhzhia in a car with a back seat full of youngsters and two signs taped to the back window: "Children" and "Little ones."

"I can't believe we survived," he said, looking worn but in good spirits over their safe ar-

rival after two days on the road.

"There is no Mariupol whatsoever," he said. "Someone needs to rebuild it, and it will take millions of tons of gold." He said they lived just across the railroad tracks from the steel plant. "Ruined," he said. "The factory is gone completely."

In other developments, European Union energy ministers met Monday to discuss new sanctions against the Kremlin, which could include restrictions on Russian oil. But some Russia-dependent members of the 27-nation bloc, including Hungary and Slovakia, are wary of taking tough action.

In the wake of the evacuation from the plant, Russian forces resumed shelling there Sunday, according to one of the defenders.

Denys Shlega, commander of the 12th Operational Brigade of Ukraine's National Guard, said in a televised interview that several hundred civilians remained trapped alongside nearly 500 wounded soldiers and "numerous" bodies.

## Americans feel pull to help Ukrainians battle Russians

Associated Press

Harrison Jozefowicz quit his job as a Chicago police officer and headed overseas soon after Russia invaded Ukraine. An Army veteran, he said he couldn't help but join American volunteers seeking to help Ukrainians in their fight.

Jozefowicz now heads a group called Task Force Yankee, which he said has placed more than 190 volunteers in combat slots and other roles while delivering nearly 15,000 first aid kits, helping relocate more than 80 families and helping deliver dozens of pallets of food and medical supplies to the southern and eastern fronts of the war. It's difficult, dangerous work. But Jozefowicz said he felt helpless watching from the United States last year during the U.S.

pullout from Afghanistan, particularly after a close friend, Staff Sgt. Ryan Knauss, died in a suicide bombing at Kabul.

"So, I'm just trying to do everything I can to make sure I can help others not go through what I went through," he said Saturday during an interview conducted through a messaging platform.

A former U.S. Marine who died last week was believed to be the first American citizen killed while fighting in Ukraine. Willy Joseph Cancel, 22, died Monday while working for a military contracting company that sent him to Ukraine, his mother, Rebecca Cabrera, told CNN.

An undetermined number of other Americans — many with military backgrounds — are thought to be in the country bat-

ting Russian forces beside both Ukrainians and volunteers from other countries even though U.S. forces aren't directly involved in fighting aside from sending military materiel, humanitarian aid and money. The U.S. government discourages Americans from fighting in Ukraine, which raises legal and national security issues.

Russia's invasion has given the Ukrainian Embassy in Washington the task of fielding inquiries from thousands of Americans who want to help in the fight, and Ukraine is using the internet to recruit volunteers for a foreign force, the International Legion of Defense of Ukraine.

"Anyone who wants to join the defense of security in Europe and the world can come and stand side by side with the Ukrainians

against the invaders of the 21st century," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a recruitment pitch.

Texan Anja Osmon, who did tours in Iraq and Afghanistan while serving in the U.S. Army, said she went to Ukraine on her own. A medic, she said she arrived March 20 and lived in the woods with other members of the International Legion before a new commander sent her away because he didn't want female fighters. Osmon, 30, said her mother wants her home by September. But she's anxious to get out of the Lviv hotel where she is staying and catch on with another fighting force.

"I can't turn away from injustice," she said. "No one should be scared."



# COVID-19 mutations not slowing over time

*The Washington Post*

During those terrifying early days of the pandemic, scientists offered one piece of reassuring news about the novel coronavirus: It mutated slowly. The earliest mutations did not appear to be consequential. A vaccine, if and when it was invented, might not need regular updating over time.

This proved overly optimistic.

The coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, has had billions of chances to reconfigure itself as it has spread across the planet, and it continues to evolve, generating new variants and subvariants at a clip that has kept scientists on their toes. Two-and-a-half years after it first spilled into humans, the virus has repeatedly changed its structure and chemistry in ways that confound efforts to bring it fully under control.

And it's not showing signs of settling down into a drowsy old age. Even with all the changes so far, it still has abundant evolutionary space to explore, according to virologists who are tracking it closely. What that means in

practical terms is that a virus that's already extremely contagious could become even more so.

"This virus has probably got tricks we haven't seen yet," virologist Robert F. Garry of Tulane University said. "We know it's probably not quite as infectious as measles yet, but it's creeping up there, for sure."

The latest member of the rogue's gallery of variants and subvariants is the ungainly named BA.2.12.1, part of the omicron gang. Preliminary research suggests it is about 25% more transmissible than the BA.2 subvariant that is currently dominant nationally, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC said the subvariant has rapidly spread in the Northeast in particular, where it accounts for the majority of new infections.

"We have a very, very contagious variant out there. It is going to be hard to ensure that no one gets COVID in America. That's not even a policy goal," President Joe Biden's new COVID-19 coor-

ordinator, Ashish Jha, said in his inaugural news briefing last week.

He was answering a question about Vice President Kamala Harris, who recently tested positive for the virus and went into isolation. Harris had recently been boosted for the second time — her fourth shot of vaccine.

Her case highlights what has become painfully obvious in recent months: No amount of vaccination or boosting can create a perfect shield against infection from SARS-CoV-2. What the vaccines do very well, however, is greatly reduce the risk of severe illness. That is hugely consequential as a matter of public health, as is the wider use of therapeutics, such as the antiviral Paxlovid.

The vaccines currently deployed were all based on the genomic sequence of the original strain of the virus that spread in late 2019 in Wuhan, China. They essentially mimic the spike protein of that version of the virus and trigger an immune response that is protective when the real virus shows up.

But the variants that have emerged can evade many of the neutralizing antibodies that are the immune system's front line of defense.

"It's evolving at a fairly rapid rate," said Jesse Bloom, a computational biologist at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle. "I do think we need to aggressively consider whether we should update vaccines, and do it soon."

BA.2.12.1 brings the novel coronavirus up another step on the contagiousness scale. Its close relative, BA.2, was already more transmissible than the first omicron strain that hit the country in late 2021.

And omicron was more transmissible than delta, and delta was more transmissible than alpha, and alpha was more transmissible than earlier variants that did not have the glory of a Greek alphabet name.

Most mutations are not advantageous to the virus. But when a mutation offers some advantage, the process of natural selection will favor it.

## Biden honors Mondale at delayed memorial service

*Associated Press*

MINNEAPOLIS — President Joe Biden saluted his "friend of five decades" Walter Mondale on Sunday, traveling to the University of Minnesota to remember the former vice president and Democratic Party elder whose memorial service was delayed for a year due to the pandemic.

Mondale died in April 2021 at age 93. He is credited with transforming the office of the vice presidency — which Biden himself held for eight years under President Barack Obama — expanding its responsibilities and making himself a key adviser to President Jimmy Carter.

Mondale "was a giant in American political history," Biden said

of Mondale, known to friends as "Fritz." He added that Mondale was one of the "toughest, smartest men I've ever worked with" both as Senate colleagues and as a mentor when Biden was Obama's No. 2 and then later as president.

Democratic Sen. Amy Klobuchar described once being an intern who climbed under chairs and a table to carry out a furniture inventory when Mondale was vice president.

"That was my first job in Washington. And, thanks to Walter Mondale, this was my second," Klobuchar said of being a senator, noting that Mondale encouraged her to run and taught "the pundits in Washington how to say my name."

## Muslims mark Eid with joy, worry and in-person prayer

*Associated Press*

CAIRO — For the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Fitr, the smell of freshly baked orange biscuits and powdered sugar-dusted cookies typically fills the air in Mona Abubakr's home. But due to higher prices, the Egyptian housewife this year made smaller quantities of the sweet treats, some of which she gives as gifts to relatives and neighbors.

The mother of three has also tweaked another tradition this Eid, which began Monday in Egypt and many Muslim-majority countries and marks the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. She bought fewer outfits for her sons to wear during the three-day feast.

"I told them we have to compromise on some things in order to be able to afford other things," she said.

This year, Muslims around the world are observing Eid al-Fitr — typically marked with communal prayers, celebratory gatherings around meals and new clothes — in the shadow of a surge in global food prices exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. At the largest mosque in Southeast Asia, tens of thousands attended prayers Monday. The Istiqlal Grand Mosque in Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, was shuttered when Islam's holiest period coincided with the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 and was closed to communal prayers last year.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Coyote attack seriously injures girl on beach**

**CA** HUNTINGTON BEACH — A coyote attacked and seriously injured a girl on Southern California's famed Huntington Beach, police said.

Officers were called to the beach near the Huntington Beach Pier, police spokesperson Jennifer Carey said in a statement. "Upon arrival, officers located an injured female child.

"The child was transported to a local hospital with serious but non-life-threatening injuries," she said.

Carey said police were working with the California wildlife authorities to track and euthanize the coyote.

**Arrests made in sturgeon poaching investigation**

**CA** SACRAMENTO — California wildlife authorities arrested nine people on suspicion of poaching sturgeon and other sea creatures and selling the animals on the black market, officials said.

Officers were looking into two separate poaching cases starting last year when they discovered a connection between the suspects and the investigations were merged, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife said.

Eight men were arrested on suspicion of poaching white sturgeon from Sacramento Valley waterways, the department said in a news release. A ninth man was arrested on suspicion of selling Dungeness crab and red abalone on the black market.

Potential charges include conspiracy to poach sturgeon and multiple violations related

to sturgeon fishing and the unlawful sale of sturgeon caviar and meat.

**Man running in traffic bites sheriff's deputy**

**FL** TAMPA — A man who was running through traffic on a busy Tampa street bit a sheriff's deputy who tried to restrain him, officials said.

Drivers on Causeway Boulevard called 911 to report that a man was running between cars on the four-lane highway, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office said in a news release.

Deputies ordered the man to get out of the road, but he refused, spokeswoman Crystal Clark told news outlets. He began running and the deputies chased after him. The man bit the deputy multiple times on the hand and arm, she said.

The man had multiple drugs in his system, including methamphetamine, she said.

**Bear destroys inside of truck before fleeing**

**CT** CORNWALL — A Connecticut man got the surprise of his life after he noticed a light on in his mother's car.

When Cody Gillotti went to investigate, he discovered the intruder wasn't your average prowler — it was a hungry black bear looking for food.

"I knew something was in it, I just didn't know what," Gillotti told NBC Connecticut.

The bruin had destroyed the inside of Gillotti's truck and then moved to his mother's car outside their Cornwall home.

Gillotti called the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, and an officer arrived and got the bear to

flee by opening the car door with a rope and firing a round from a bean bag gun.

**Man leads police on chase in ambulance**

**OR** PORTLAND — Oregon State Police said they arrested a 30-year-old Winnetka, Calif., man who led them on a wild chase in a stolen ambulance.

Troopers responded to a single-vehicle crash on Interstate 5 near Portland, KPTV reported. The driver started to run, but returned and stole the ambulance that had responded.

The driver took the ambulance north into Portland, where police soon started receiving calls about it driving on sidewalks and the wrong way down one-way streets. Eventually the driver got on I-5 southbound.

Police arrested him after he stopped the ambulance and tried to get into another car on the freeway. Authorities said he had a blood alcohol content of 0.21, nearly three times the legal limit.

**Wildlife officials warn of invasive frogs**

**WA** ISSAQUAH — An invasive species is consuming and competing with native species in western Washington, including salmon.

Scientists have spotted African clawed frogs in Issaquah, Lacey and Bothell, KING5 reported. The frogs were initially brought into the United States to be used in pregnancy tests and later became pets, said state wildlife scientist Max Lambert.

"These are considered one of the worst invasive species on earth," Lambert said. "They'll

eat a lot of native insects, which are good forage food for our fishes and our amphibians, they will eat tadpoles of our native salamanders, and they'll eat fish."

Since Trout Unlimited began trapping in January, the organization has caught about 300 frogs, Rebecca Lavier said.

**New exhibit explores evolution of Derby**

**KY** LOUISVILLE — A new permanent exhibit at the Kentucky Derby Museum tells the story of how the horse race evolved over the years to become an iconic event.

The 500-square-foot exhibit called This is the Kentucky Derby is presented by Kroger. It explores the history, culture, spectacle, economic impact and tradition of the race, the museum said in a statement.

**Town sued for not hiring man with HIV as officer**

**IN** CLARKSVILLE — The federal government is accusing a southern Indiana town of discriminating against a man with HIV who applied to become a police officer.

The Justice Department said it filed a lawsuit against Clarksville. Clarksville police had offered a job to a man who was already working as a volunteer reserve officer but then dropped the offer in 2015 based on his HIV status, the Justice Department said.

Clarksville's town manager, Kevin Baity, said the town is working with the Justice Department to "find an amicable solution."

The man got a job with another police department.

— From wire reports

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# NHL's Panthers made an art out of comebacks

Associated Press

The phenomenon of the Comeback Cats really seemed to take off back in late November. The Florida Panthers were trailing the Washington Capitals 4-1 early in the third period, and a three-goal deficit that deep into a game almost always means a loss.

Not that time, it didn't. The Panthers scored four goals, including the gamewinner with 15 seconds left, somehow pulling out a 5-4 win.

"There's a belief in that room that we're never out of a fight," Florida's Ryan Lomberg said that night.

That belief never wavered, either.

The best regular season in franchise history — and the best regular season by any team in the NHL this season — is now complete. No team this season had more come-from-behind wins than the Panthers, who now will get ready to see the Capitals again in an Eastern Conference first-round playoff series that starts Tuesday.

"You don't have too many times in your career or in your life that you can be on a team like this," Florida interim coach Andrew Brunette said. "And we're a long, long way from getting to where we want to be. But I think we've enjoyed each other. They love playing with each other. They love to compete together. And those are all fun signs and, for me, just to be part of that is pretty special."

The Panthers had an NHL-best 29 comeback wins this season. They had 24 wins after giving up the first goal, the most in the NHL since Calgary's 26 such games in 1990-91. They pulled off five wins after trailing by three goals; the rest of the NHL had 14 of those. They had two wins in games where they trailed by four goals; the rest of the

NHL combined for three.

"It's been incredible," said Jonathan Huberdeau, the team's leading scorer and Hart Trophy candidate.

The resiliency for Florida this season wasn't limited to what was happening on the scoreboard.

There was no secret that the Panthers were expecting to be Stanley Cup contenders entering this season, and one of the biggest reasons why was the person calling the shots on the bench. Joel Quenneville is a three-time Stanley Cup-winning coach, someone who gave Florida incredible credibility, and had by far the best winning percentage of any Panthers coach ever. Quenneville got Florida off to a 7-0-0 start — and never coached again.

Quenneville, the second-winningest coach in NHL history, had to resign after he was among those implicated for not swiftly responding to Kyle Beach's allegations of being sexually assaulted by another coach with the Chicago Blackhawks during the 2010 Stanley Cup playoffs. Quenneville was Chicago's head coach when Beach said he was assaulted by video coach Brad Aldrich.

The season could have fallen apart right there. It didn't. The Panthers beat Detroit in Brunette's first game and kept on winning. They said the chemistry in the locker room would get them through the coaching change. They were right.

"We come to the rink every day and have fun," Florida's Brandon Montour said. "And obviously, we've got a heck of a hockey club in there. We take each shift, each game, game by game and it's been showing all year."

There was no shortage of adversity, either. Team captain Aleksander Barkov es-

aped serious injury when he took a scary knee-to-knee hit in November. Almost half the roster was dealing with COVID-19 in December. Top defenseman Aaron Ekblad was lost to a knee injury in mid-March, though he is expected back at some point in the playoffs.

The Panthers just kept winning, then made some tweaks around the trade deadline, bringing in — among others — Claude Giroux from Philadelphia. Giroux has yet to hoist the Stanley Cup. He decided Florida would be the best opportunity to change that.

"That's the reason I'm here," Giroux said. "I'm here to win."

The Panthers have done a ton of that this season. A partial list of the team single-season records: most wins (by 11, 58-47), most goals (340 this season, breaking the old mark by a staggering 93), most standings points (by 19), most shots on goal (by 240), and most points by a player (Huberdeau had 115, breaking Barkov's previous record by 19).

They won the Presidents' Trophy for the first time. They had the longest winning streak in the NHL this season, 13 games. They were the only team to have two separate double-digit winning streaks at home. They were only the third team in NHL history to have separate winning streaks of eight and 13 games in the same season.

All great stuff. All pales in comparison to what the team really wants. The franchise — which hasn't won a playoff series since 1996 — has never won the Stanley Cup. This team's singular goal is to change that.

"I think we have to be appreciative," Brunette said. "But we also understand there's a lot more moments that we need to attain to get the big one."

## O'Ward shifts focus from contract, picks up a victory

Associated Press

LEEDS, Ala. — All it took was a change of mindset for Pato O'Ward to turn around his IndyCar season.

Now he's on the verge of signing a new contract and a win Sunday at Barber Motorsports Park moved him back into the championship picture.

"It's all smiles and unicorns, man," O'Ward said Sunday after his first victory of the season.

O'Ward entered the season

vocally unhappy about his current contract with Arrow McLaren SP, which has the popular Mexican signed through 2024 to team-friendly terms. O'Ward wanted more money, more assurances for his Formula One aspirations and a new contract.

But when his unhappiness began to hurt his on-track performance, O'Ward made a conscious decision to compartmentalize his complaints and focus on his job. The effort led to Sun-

day's win, his first of the year and third of his career.

O'Ward used a strong outside pass of pole-sitter Rinus VeeKay after both pitted for fresh tires to take the lead then drive away for the victory. The win broke a Team Penske stranglehold on this year's IndyCar results.

"Man, it sucks to be at war within your own team, right? So I'm glad there's been more positive talks for the future," said O'Ward, who has agreed with

McLaren on principle on an extension.

"I was tired of being 10th and 11th and fifth and I said 'Let's get a win under our belts so we can climb back into this championship race.'"

The victory rocketed O'Ward from ninth to fifth in the standings.

Penske drivers Scott McLaughlin and Josef Newgarden swept the first three races of the season.



# Warriors rally past Grizzlies in Game 1

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Ja Morant and the Memphis Grizzlies have shown they can finish fourth quarters this postseason.

Well, the Golden State Warriors have been doing this for years, with the championships to prove it.

Klay Thompson hit a go-ahead three-pointer with 36 seconds left, and the Warriors overcame Draymond Green's first-half ejection to edge the Grizzlies 117-116 on Sunday in Game 1 of the Western Conference semifinals.

"The core, we've got championship DNA, and we wanted to utilize that," Stephen Curry said. "At this stage, that's what it's all about. Never let go of the rope in terms of feeling like you're out of a game. Big win for us."

Jordan Poole led Golden State with a career-high 31 points off the bench, hitting a playoff-best 5 of 10 three-pointers. Curry added 24 points, Andrew Wiggins had 17 and Thompson finished with 15.

Green was ejected for a flagrant foul just before halftime.

"We knew that was a tough break that didn't go our way and we were all kind of shocked by the decision, but we were confident and determined and the guys stayed with it," Warriors coach Steve Kerr.

Thompson missed both free throws with 6.7 seconds left, then Memphis won a jump ball before a timeout with 3.6 seconds remaining to set up the final play. The Grizzlies ran a play similar to Ja Morant's last-second layup to win Game 5 in the first round, but Morant's layup went off the backboard and over the rim.

"Ja to go make a play," Memphis coach Taylor Jenkins said of the final possession. "Got a great look. It just didn't happen to go in."

Morant added: "Klay hit a big-time three, and I missed the layup."

Thompson helped defend Morant on the final drive, picking up when Gary Payton II was beaten. Thompson called it a "gut-check win" for a team that's been through so much the past couple of years with injuries and missing the playoffs.

"In playoffs, all that matters is that final box-score score and handle business, but we're far from satisfied," Thompson said.

Morant finished with 34 points and 10 assists, and Jaren Jackson Jr. matched his season high with six three-pointers and had a career-high 33 points as the Grizzlies' first pair of teammates to score at least 30 in a playoff game. D'Anthony Melton added 14, and Brandon Clarke had 12.

The Grizzlies finished their first-round

series against Minnesota by coming back from double-digit deficits in their final three wins — the first team in NBA history to do that more than once in a postseason, let alone a series. They came in leading the NBA in the fourth with an average of 33 points and outscoring opponents by 10.3 points a game.

This time, they could only match the Warriors point for point in the period.

Memphis edged the Warriors out for the No. 2 seed in the West by tying the franchise record with 56 wins, and the Grizzlies also took three of four in the season series. Thompson only played one and Green two of those games and Curry three.

This was a rematch with role reversals from the 2015 semifinal the Warriors won as the younger team with Memphis led by experienced vets. This also was just the first time the Warriors started a conference semifinal on the road and third playoff series. Golden State didn't start at home with Kerr as coach.

The Warriors mixed up their lineup, benching Poole in favor of Payton to focus on defending Morant, the Grizzlies' All-Star point guard and the NBA's Most Improved Player this season.

Morant had 14 to help the Grizzlies lead 32-24 after the first quarter. The Grizzlies led by as much as 13 in the second quarter..

# Giannis triple-double lifts Bucks past Celtics in Game 1

Associated Press

BOSTON — Giannis Antetokounmpo had already picked up his dribble and spent half of a Eurostep when he realized he had nowhere to go with the ball.

Instead of attempting an off-balance shot or passing to a well-guarded teammate, the two-time NBA MVP flicked the ball high off the backboard, then followed it to the rim for a slam dunk.

"What did I see? I had the ball and I was like, 'Oh, crap. I'm going to get stuck,'" Antetokounmpo said after recording his second career postseason triple-double to lead the Milwaukee Bucks to a 101-89 victory over the Boston Celtics in Game 1 of their second-round series on Sunday.

"I threw it to the backboard," he said. "I'm lucky enough that God blessed me with the ability

to jump. I had a good jump to go get it again and I was able to finish the play."

Antetokounmpo had 24 points, 13 rebounds and 12 assists as the defending NBA champions swiped home-court advantage in the best-of-seven series. (He does not get an assist for passing the ball to himself.)

"That's just pure talent, just pure instinct," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said. "He's a great player. He does things that are unique and special and timely. That's one of those plays where you're happy he's on our side."

Jrue Holiday had 25 points and 10 rebounds, and Bobby Portis had 15 points and 11 boards for Milwaukee, which is back at the TD Garden for Game 2 on Tuesday night.

Jayson Tatum scored 21 and Jaylen Brown had 12 points, but the two Celtics stars combined to shoot 10-for-31 in the game. Al Horford added 12 points and 10 rebounds for Boston, which fired up 50 three-pointers, making 18, and shot 33% from the floor as a team.

"Offensively, not our best night. I thought we guarded well enough," Celtics coach Ime Udoka said. "To lose a 12-point game when we shot so poorly bodes well for us. In a way it's good to get this dud out of the way, offensively."

After shutting down Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving in a four-game sweep of the Brooklyn Nets, Boston couldn't stop Antetokounmpo — even with green-haired Defensive Player of the Year Marcus Smart shaking

off a shoulder injury.

Antetokounmpo scored eight straight Bucks points at the end of the first half to bring a double-digit lead into the break. The Celtics were within seven in the final minute of the third quarter before going without a bucket for more than four minutes while Milwaukee scored 11 of the next 14 points — including the Greek Freak's freakish alley-oop to himself that gave the Bucks a 94-78 lead.

"I can't do that. I wouldn't even think about trying," Holiday said. "He's got a great nickname."

Boston won 26 of its last 32 games in the regular season and was the only team to sweep its first-round playoff series. Now Milwaukee has won four in a row.

# Judge hits 2 HRs, Yanks win 9th straight

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Luis Severino had a good vantage point to watch Aaron Judge send a pitch 453 feet to straightaway center field in the first inning Sunday, and the Yankees starter marveled at the nearly 400-foot homer that the slugger added in the ninth.

It was the 30-foot oopsie RBI that Judge hit in between that helped get Severino off the hook for a loss.

Along with running his homer streak to three straight games, Judge drove in the tying run in the seventh on a checked swing that trundled slowly down the first-base line, helping New York rally for a 6-4 victory over the Kansas City Royals that pushed the club's winning streak to nine games.

"What can I say?" Severino asked. "The guy's a monster."

Not on that groundout, though. It traveled all of 30 feet. But certainly on the two homers, which combined to travel nearly the length of three football fields. They gave Judge five in his last five games and eight on the season.

"I mean, the way he cleaned that first one out, man — it's hard to hit one more pure," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said.

Josh Donaldson drove in the go-ahead run in the seventh on a fielder's choice. Clarke Schmidt (2-2) pitched a scoreless inning in relief to earn the win, then was optioned to Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre afterward. Aroldis Chapman left the tying run on base in the ninth to earn his sixth save of the year and 20th in a row.

**Angels 6, White Sox 5:** Mike Trout homered, doubled and scored three runs, Michael Lorenzen pitched into the ninth inning and visiting Los Angeles held off Chicago for its seventh win in eight games.

Shohei Ohtani had an RBI as the Angels' designated hitter. The two-way AL MVP went 0-for-3 and exited in the ninth inning because of tightness in his right groin. Manager Joe Maddon said Ohtani might have tweaked his groin running to first in the seventh inning on a grounder. The Japanese-born star said he expects to play Monday.

Trout walked in three other plate appearances. Andrew Velazquez and Jo Adell each doubled in a run and Anthony Rendon had an RBI as the Angels took a 6-0 lead.

**Mets 10, Phillies 6:** Dominic Smith went 4 for 4 with three RBIs to back an inconsistent Max Scherzer, and host New York won its seventh straight series to begin the season by beating Philadelphia.

Jeff McNeil also had four of the Mets' 15 hits, and Starling Marte drove in three runs. New York took two of three in a weekend

set. The Mets (16-7) had never won more than five straight series to start a season before this year.

Scherzer (4-0) struck out his first five batters for the first time in his career. He struck out nine and walked one in six innings. He gave up four runs and five hits.

**Mariners 7, Marlins 3:** Logan Gilbert kept up his run of impressive starts, Julio Rodriguez hit his first major league homer and visiting Seattle ended Miami's seven-game winning streak.

J.P. Crawford also homered, while Jesse Winker had three hits and two RBIs for the Mariners, who snapped a four-game skid.

Making his first start against an NL club, Gilbert (4-0) held the Marlins hitless until Jon Berti's two-out single in the fifth.

**Dodgers 6, Tigers 3:** Walker Buehler (3-1) pitched five scoreless innings and host Los Angeles beat Detroit and overcame Miguel Cabrera's 503rd career home run and his first this season.

Cabrera hit a two-run homer off reliever Phil Bickford in the eighth inning to help the Tigers avoid the shutout. Cabrera, who got his 3,000th career hit last week, tied George Brett for 18th in major league history with 1,119 extra-base hits.

**Padres 5, Pirates 2:** Joe Musgrove struck out eight in seven solid innings and visiting San Diego beat Pittsburgh in a game that was delayed 1 hour, 22 minutes at the start by a line of heavy rain showers.

Manny Machado hit an RBI single in the third off Mitch Keller (0-4) to put the Padres in the lead. Trent Grisham hit a two-run single after shortstop Cole Tucker's two-out throwing error in the seventh.

**Blue Jays 3, Astros 2:** Santiago Espinal drove in the go-ahead run with an RBI single in the seventh inning, Bo Bichette added a two-run homer and host Toronto edged Houston.

Kevin Gausman (2-1) struck out a season-high 10 in seven innings to win his second straight decision as the Blue Jays took two of three from the Astros and have won nine of 12 overall. Gausman allowed two runs and six hits and has not walked a batter in 31⅓ innings this season. According to MLB Stats on Twitter, Gausman is the first pitcher since Cy Young in 1906 to not walk a batter or allow a home run in five straight starts to begin a season (minimum 20 innings pitched).

**Cubs 2, Brewers 0:** Marcus Stroman threw two-hit ball for seven innings, outpitching Cy Young Award winner Corbin Burnes and leading visiting Chicago over Milwaukee.

Patrick Wisdom homered as Chicago ended a four-game losing streak. It had been outscored 20-2 in dropping the first two games of the series at the Brewers.

**Rangers 7, Braves 3:** Adolis Garcia highlighted a three-hit, four-RBI day with a bases-clearing triple in the third inning to help host Texas beat Atlanta.

Taylor Hearn (1-2) allowed two runs on four hits and three walks in five innings for his first victory since Sept. 12 of last season.

The Rangers scored all seven runs in the first three innings to go 3-4 in a homestand against last year's World Series teams — 2-1 vs. the Braves and 1-3 against Houston.

**Cardinals 7, Diamondbacks 5:** Harrison Bader and Nolan Arenado homered in the seventh inning to help host St. Louis rally past Arizona and win for the third time in five games and salvage a split of the four-game series.

Jordan Luplow hit two homers for the Diamondbacks and Nick Ahmed and Christian Walker also went deep.

**Nationals 11, Giants 5:** Yadiel Hernandez drove in a career-high five runs with three hits as visiting Washington beat San Francisco.

Juan Soto also had three hits and scored three times for the Nationals. Washington's Lucius Fox got his first two hits in the majors after beginning his career 0-for-20.

**Guardians 7, Athletics 3:** Triston McKenzie threw 6⅓ scoreless innings and Cleveland completed its first sweep in Oakland in 22 years.

Franmil Reyes, mired in a 1-for-27 slump entering the day, had a two-run single in the third when the Guardians scored four times to take control at 5-0. Andres Gimenez had two hits and an RBI, finishing 6—for-12 with six RBIs in the three-game series.

**Twins 9, Rays 3:** Jorge Polanco drove in four runs with a pair of doubles, Carlos Correa had his fourth straight game with multiple hits and visiting Minnesota beat Tampa Bay.

The Twins broke out quickly for five runs in the first inning off Rays starter Josh Fleming (2-3) and coasted to their ninth win in 10 games. Byron Buxton homered for Minnesota.

**Rockies 10, Reds 1:** Kyle Freeland tossed seven strong innings for his first win of the season and host Colorado completed a series sweep of struggling Cincinnati.

**Orioles 9, Red Sox 5:** Jordan Lyles pitched six gritty innings, Rougned Odor homered in a six-run sixth and host Baltimore beat skidding Boston.