

Steel mill battle rages; Ukraine repels attacks

Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine — Heavy fighting raged Thursday at the shattered steel plant in Mariupol as Russian forces attempted to finish off the city's last-ditch defenders and complete the capture of the strategically vital port.

The bloody battle came amid growing suspicions that President Vladimir Putin wants to present the Russian people with a major success — or announce an escalation of the war — in time for Victory Day on Monday. That is the biggest patriotic holiday on the Russian calendar, marking the Soviet Union's triumph over Nazi Germany.

Some 2,000 Ukrainian fighters, by the Russians' estimate in recent weeks, were holed up in the tunnels and bunkers under the sprawling Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol, the last pocket of resistance in a city largely reduced to rubble over the past two months. A few hundred civilians were also believed trapped there.

Capt. Sviatoslav Palamar, who as deputy commander of Ukraine's Azov Regiment led defenders inside the mill, told Ukrainian Channel 24 that Russian troops were inside the plant for a third day and were meeting fierce resistance.

"Heavy fighting is underway," Palamar said.

In a video posted online late Wednesday, Anton Gerashchenko, an adviser to Ukraine's Internal Affairs Ministry, said the Russians managed to get inside with the help of an electrician who knew the layout.

"He showed them the underground tunnels which are leading to the factory," Gerashchenko said. "Yesterday, the Russians started storming these tunnels, using the information they received from the betrayer."

The Kremlin denied its troops were storming the plant.

Mariupol's fall would be a major success for Moscow, depriving Ukraine of a vital port, allowing Russia to establish a land cor-

ridor to the Crimean Peninsula, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014, and freeing up troops to fight elsewhere in the Donbas, the eastern industrial region that the Kremlin has said is now its chief objective.

Palamar pleaded with the world to pressure Russia into allowing more civilians to be rescued from the steelworks along with wounded troops. About 100 civilians were evacuated over the weekend.

"Wounded soldiers are dying in agony due to the lack of proper treatment," he said via video.

The Kremlin has demanded the fighters surrender, to which they have refused. Russia has also accused them of preventing the civilians from leaving.

Meanwhile, 10 weeks into the devastating war, Ukraine's military claimed it recaptured some areas in the south and repelled other attacks in the east, further frustrating Putin's ambitions after his abortive attempt to seize Kyiv. Ukrainian and Russian

forces are fighting village by village.

The head of Britain's armed forces, Chief of the Defense Staff Adm. Tony Radakin, said Putin is "trying to rush to a tactical victory" before Victory Day.

But he said Russian forces are struggling to gain momentum in the Donbas.

Radakin told British broadcaster Talk TV that Russia is using missiles and weapons at such a rate that it is in a "logistics war" to keep supplied.

He added: "This is going to be a hard slog."

Fearful of new attacks surrounding Victory Day, the mayor of the western Ukrainian city of Ivano-Frankivsk urged residents to leave for the countryside over the long weekend and warned them not to gather in public places. The southeastern city of Zaporizhzhia, a key transit point for evacuees from Mariupol, also announced a curfew from Sunday evening through Tuesday morning.

Army lieutenant not punished for refusing virus orders

BY ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

An Army lieutenant was convicted in a court-martial for failing to comply with orders related to coronavirus prevention efforts in his unit's offices at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., according to base officials.

However, the judge in the case declined to punish 1st Lt. Mark Bashaw for his actions.

The court-martial concluded Friday in Col. Robert Cohen's courtroom within the 1st Judicial Circuit, according to the Army's online court records. Bashaw pleaded not guilty.

The charges stem from Bashaw's actions on Nov. 30 when he failed to obey orders meant to prevent the spread of coronavirus,

which violates Article 92 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, said Amburr Reese, a spokeswoman for the base.

The charge, issued Jan. 12, carried three counts, two of which were combined during the court-martial, the Army said. Bashaw, an entomologist, was wrongfully present at his place of duty after failing to submit a negative coronavirus test or submitting to a test prior to reporting to work. He then wrongfully remained at his place of duty. He also wrongfully failed to obey an order to wear a mask indoors.

At that time, Bashaw knew the captain in command of Army Public Health Center Headquarters Company had issued an order to telework until providing a negative coronavirus test, according to a summary of

Bashaw's charge sheet.

"After a careful consideration of the evidence, a military judge exercised lawful authority not to adjudge punishment for 1st Lt. Mark Bashaw," Reese said. "Receiving no punishment at a court-martial is not without precedent."

The conviction will be included in Bashaw's military record, which is reviewed during promotions and job placements.

Reese said the federal conviction alone "carries lifelong collateral consequences," including "social consequences and difficulty in obtaining future employment, as criminal convictions are generally public information and frequently reported in federal and state criminal and licensing databases."

Lawmakers question Navy shipbuilding plan

(Newport News, Va.) Daily Press

The Navy's new long-term shipbuilding plan seems to raise as many questions for Congress as it answers — including when or if it will reach the long-standing goal of a 355-ship fleet and what it wants to do about the amphibious ships that carry Marines to hostile shores.

Along with a fiscal year 2023 budget proposal that calls for decommissioning 24 ships next year — and all of the Navy's 22 cruisers by 2027 — the Navy wouldn't reach 2021's fleet of 294 ships until 2032.

The new 30-year shipbuilding plan breaks tradition by setting out three scenarios. Two assume no funding increase above the rate of inflation; each expects a fleet of 300 ships by 2035, growing to either 316 or 327 by 2052 — the big difference would be the pace of attack submarine construction after 2030, although they also suggest different totals for destroyers and amphibious ships. The third alternative calls for 300 ships in 2033 and 367 by 2052 — the only plan that eventually gets to the official 355-ship goal.

"Is it really a plan if you present three plans?" said Rep. Elaine Luria, D-Va., a 20-year Navy veteran who is vice chair of the House Armed Services Committee.

"It's like choose your own adventure ... There's one plan that emphasizes surface ships, one that's about submarines and one

that's just a throwaway because we don't think we'll get the money. Do you know when the last time we had more than 300 ships? It was in 2002."

The Chinese Navy is already at 355 ships — not counting patrol boats and boats that carry anti-ship cruise missiles — and on track to grow to 420 ships by 2025 and 460 by 2030. Luria and Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Va., agree the vagueness and slow pace of the U.S. Navy's plan is dangerous.

"I think it could be a provocation. China would say, 'Yeah, you're right, this is our window,'" said Wittman, a senior Republican on the Armed Services committee's seapower subcommittee.

The three alternatives also leave open the question of which of the different mixes of ships the Navy thinks the nation really needs, a Congressional Research Service review noted.

One of the biggest issues involves ships such as the Hampton Roads, Va.-based USS Kearsarge, USS Arlington and USS Gunston Hall, currently deployed in European waters. The Navy is looking to decommission Gunston Hall and several others of its type.

"I'm still really puzzled about amphib ships," said Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The Marine Corps has said the lack of funds for more LPDs is the top item on its list

of unfunded priorities.

"It's critical," to the Marine Corps mission as the nation's crisis response force, Lt. Gen. Karsten Heckl told the Senate seapower subcommittee this week.

"Without those LPDs and other amphibious L-class ships ... we cannot be there and we're struggling now," he said.

As an example, Heckl said when NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe asked the 22 Marine Expeditionary Unit, now embarked with the Kearsarge group ships, to deploy early as Russia prepared to launch its invasion of Ukraine, "we were not able to sortie the ships."

The Marine Corps has said it needs the Navy fleet to include 31 amphibious ships. Under the Navy's 2023 budget program and long-term plan, it would have 28 as of fiscal year 2023, and 24 in 2024. It wouldn't reach 31 until 2031.

The fiscal 2023 budget says the third of an updated version of the Arlington, a type designated a LPD, will be the last to be built, a major cut from an original plan to build 13.

The plans also postpone for two years the purchase of a new class of Light Amphibious Warships until fiscal year 2025. These are key to the Marine Corps' new "expeditionary advanced base operations" concept — focusing on small, mobile units that move quickly and are hard for adversaries to detect.

US resumes training of Ukrainian forces in Germany

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — A Ukrainian officer had an encouraging message for the contingent of U.S. soldiers that left a Ukrainian military base shortly before Russia launched its full-fledged invasion of the country in February.

"That (Ukrainian) officer specifically stated that the biggest mistake that the Russians made was giving us eight years to prepare for this," said Lt. Col. Todd Hopkins, deputy commander of the Florida National Guard's 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat

Team.

Hopkins' Guard soldiers are again working side by side with Ukrainian forces, this time in Grafenwoehr, Germany, as troops train to operate an array of weaponry heading to the front.

The resumption of the Joint Multinational Training Group Ukraine mission, which was suspended in February as U.S. forces departed Ukraine for security reasons, has Ukrainian soldiers working with 155 mm howitzers, radars and other gear.

"Now what we're doing is we're running through a stream-

lined course here on the new equipment that they'll be receiving," Brig. Gen. Joseph Hilbert, head of the 7th Army Training Command in Grafenwoehr, told reporters Tuesday. "The goal in all of this is to get them back as soon as possible."

More than two months into the war, Russian forces have encountered stiff resistance from a smaller and less formidably armed Ukrainian military.

At Grafenwoehr and other European training locations, the first groups of Ukrainian troops already have completed coursework on howitzers and other

weaponry. Now, the second contingent of Ukrainian troops is on site, Hilbert said.

"The soldiers that we are receiving here who are taking the training are absolutely motivated, incredibly professional," Hilbert said.

Added Hopkins: "They are absolutely focused at the task at hand and getting back to Ukraine."

Training is centered on technical instruction and incorporation of the weapons systems with the Ukrainians' own battlefield tactical experiences, Hilbert and Hopkins said.

New Mexico wildfire zone declared disaster

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS, N.M. — Firefighters slowed the advance of the largest wildfire in the U.S. as heavy winds relented Wednesday, while President Joe Biden approved a disaster declaration that brings new financial resources to remote stretches of New Mexico devastated by fire since early April.

U.S. Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez announced the presidential disaster declaration during an evening briefing by the U.S. Forest Service about efforts to contain the sprawling wildfire in northeastern New Mexico, which has fanned out across 250 square miles of high alpine forest and grasslands at the southern tip of the Rocky Mountains.

Fire bosses said they are seizing upon an in-

terlude of relatively calm and cool weather to keep the fire from pushing any closer to the small New Mexico city of Las Vegas and other villages scattered along the fire's shifting fronts. Airplanes and helicopters dropped slurries of red fire retardant from the sky, as ground crews cleared timber and brush to starve the fire along crucial fronts.

Bulldozers for days have been scraping fire lines on the outskirts of Las Vegas, population 13,000, while crews have been conducting burns to clear adjacent vegetation. Aircraft dropped more fire retardant as a second line of defense along a ridge just west of town in preparation for intense winds expected over the weekend.

An estimated 15,500 homes in outlying ar-

eas and in the valleys of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains that border Las Vegas have been affected by mandatory evacuations. The tally of homes destroyed by the fire stands around 170.

The president's disaster declaration releases emergency funds to recovery efforts in three counties in northeastern New Mexico where fires still rage, as well as portions of southern New Mexico where wind-driven blazes killed two people and destroyed over 200 homes in mid-April.

The aid includes grants for temporary housing and home repairs, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses and other relief programs for individuals and businesses, a statement from the White House said.

Several tornadoes strike in Texas and Oklahoma

Associated Press

SEMINOLE, Okla. — A springtime storm system spawned several tornadoes that whipped through areas of Texas and Oklahoma, causing damage to a school, a marijuana farm and other structures.

There were no reports of serious injuries following the Wednesday night tornadoes, but the system was causing flooding in parts of Oklahoma and Arkansas and more stormy weather was expected Thursday.

Significant damage was reported in the Oklahoma city of Seminole, about 60 miles southeast of Oklahoma City, the Oklahoma

Department of Emergency Management said. The Academy of Seminole took a direct hit but no one was injured, the school said on Facebook.

Video footage from Oklahoma TV station KOCO showed a tornado hit a marijuana farm in the nearby town of Maud.

Several roads and highways were closed Thursday morning in parts of Oklahoma and Arkansas because of flash flooding.

In Texas, a "large and dangerous tornado" was spotted Wednesday in the rural community of Lockett, about 170 miles northwest of Dallas, said the National

Weather Service office in Norman, Okla.

There were no significant injuries or deaths to residents in Wilbarger County, Sheriff Brian Fritze told KAUZ-TV. He said several homes and barns appeared to sustain extensive damage.

The Wednesday storms were the latest in several rounds of severe weather in the central United States. Last week, a tornado damaged more than 1,000 buildings in the Wichita suburb of Andover, Kan. Three University of Oklahoma meteorology students died in a car crash while returning from storm chasing.

Procedural ruling kills medical marijuana bill in SC

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — A seven-year fight to pass a medical marijuana bill may have abruptly ended Wednesday in South Carolina when a House leader ruled the proposal contains an unconstitutional tax increase and cannot be considered further.

The decision shocked leaders in the state Senate and may have repercussions well beyond failing to make South Carolina one of about 40 states allowing patients to use marijuana as medicine.

Senate leaders, stunned to see years of hard work by respected colleague Sen. Tom Davis cast aside with no debate, said their deteriorating relationship with the House will need to be repaired after the decision. The chambers are more than \$1 billion apart on a budget and threatening each other over an early voting bill.

The decision "will likely have significant consequences" between the Senate and the House and hopefully "cooler heads can prevail," Senate Majority Leader Shane Massey said as a stunned Davis walked around talking to his colleagues.

Davis said he understood he had about 70 votes — roughly 10 more than he needed to pass the legislation. The Republican said he would spend Wednesday night looking for some other bill he might be able to attach a medical marijuana plan to that wouldn't get caught up in such a ruling. Backers are seeking to get the legislation through the General Assembly in the four days remaining in the session.

"We suffered a setback procedurally in the House today. I can't cry about it. I can't pout about it. I can't go back and lash out and hurt other people's bills. That's not productive,"

Davis said.

The House appeared to be ready to debate the bill Wednesday. One thousand amendments organized in binders had been rolled on a cart to the front of the chamber. Davis, who has fought for the bill since 2015, was in the back of the House.

But just before debate began, one of the chief opponents of the bill asked Speaker Pro Tem Tommy Pope to rule that a 6% fee on medical marijuana sales to pay for regulations in the bill creates a new tax — a power only allowed under the state constitution by a bill that originates in the House.

Davis' bill started in the Senate and — after considering the point for nearly three hours — Pope ruled the bill was out of order, killing it.

House members voted 59-55 to back Pope's ruling, meaning this medical marijuana bill is dead for this year.

WHO: 15M deaths associated with COVID-19

Associated Press

LONDON — The World Health Organization estimates that nearly 15 million people were killed either by coronavirus or by its impact on overwhelmed health systems in the past two years, more than double the official death toll of 6 million. Most of the fatalities were in Southeast Asia, Europe and the Americas.

In a report Thursday, the U.N. agency's chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus described the figure as "sobering," saying it should prompt countries to invest more in their capacities to quell future health emergencies.

Scientists tasked by WHO with calculating the actual number of COVID-19 deaths between January 2020 and the end of last year estimated there were between 13.3 million and 16.6 million deaths that were either caused directly by the coronavirus or were somehow attributed to the pandemic's impact on health systems, like people with cancer unable to seek treatment when hospitals were full of COVID patients.

The figures are based on country-reported data and statistical modeling, but only about half of countries provided information. WHO said it wasn't yet able to break down the figures to distinguish between direct deaths from COVID-19 and others caused by the pandemic, but said a future project examining death certificates would probe this.

"This may seem like just a bean-counting exercise, but having these WHO numbers is so critical to understanding how we should combat future pandemics and continue to respond to this one," said Albert Ko, an infectious diseases specialist at the Yale School of Public Health who was not linked to the WHO research.

For example, Ko said, South Korea's decision to invest heavily in public health after it suffered a severe outbreak of MERS allowed it to escape COVID-19 with a per-capita death rate around a 20th of that of the United States.

Accurate numbers on COVID-19 deaths have been problematic throughout the pandem-

ic, as the figures are only a fraction of the devastation wrought by the virus, largely because of limited testing and differences in how countries count COVID-19 deaths. According to government figures reported to WHO and to a separate count kept by Johns Hopkins University, there have been more than 6 million reported coronavirus deaths to date.

Scientists at the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington guessed there were more than 18 million COVID deaths from January 2020 to December 2021 in a recent study published in the journal *Lancet*, and a team led by Canadian researchers estimated there were more than 3 million uncounted coronavirus deaths in India alone.

WHO's new analysis estimated there were more than 4 million missed deaths in India, ranging between 3.3 million to 6.5 million.

Some countries, including India, have disputed WHO's methodology for calculating COVID

deaths, resisting the idea that there were many more deaths than officially counted.

Dr. Bharat Pankhania, a public health specialist at Britain's University of Exeter, said the world may never get close to the true toll of COVID-19, particularly in poor countries.

"When you have a massive outbreak where people are dying in the streets because of a lack of oxygen, bodies were abandoned or people had to be cremated quickly because of cultural beliefs, we end up never knowing just how many people died," he explained.

Although Pankhania said the estimated COVID-19 death toll still pales in comparison to the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic — when experts estimate up to 100 million people died — he said the fact that so many people died despite the advances of modern medicine, including vaccines, is shameful.

He also warned the cost of COVID-19 could be far more damaging in the long term, given the increasing burden of caring for people with long COVID.

Abortion battles in states fire up after draft opinion leak

Associated Press

The Supreme Court's apparent intention to abolish a nationwide right to abortion, spelled out in a draft opinion leaked this week, will expand the battlefield of the nation's most highly charged culture war, taking it to states where abortion access has long been assured.

Democrats in blue states are bracing for a wave of legal attacks and other maneuvers seeking to undermine access, and some are even taking steps to enshrine the right to abortion in their constitutions, making it much more difficult to impose a ban in the future.

Republican states are expected to ban or restrict abortion, but tactics also could include an aggressive effort to go beyond their borders to sue abortion providers.

The potential to roll back established abortion rights has already emerged in states with divided political control, including Pennsylvania and Virginia. California and Colorado are pushing to protect abortion access in their constitutions, a stronger step than passing a law. Connecticut and Washington state have already taken steps to shield providers from possible lawsuits as they anticipate women seeking abortions would cross state lines.

"We will not allow the tentacles of Texas to get into Washington state," said Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee, who vowed to make Washington a sanctuary for those seeking abortion.

Oregon lawmakers included \$15 million in their state budget to help pay for people to travel to the

state to get abortions, and California has a similar bill.

The rhetoric on both sides points to a growing fight over access, with anti-abortion advocates hoping to shrink the number of states where the procedure remains legal if Roe is overturned. Roughly half of U.S. states are expected to move quickly to ban or greatly restrict abortion if that happens. A new law in Idaho, currently blocked by the state Supreme Court, would allow family members of all involved to sue abortion providers, an example of the tactics to come.

"The next chapter of the conflict is really going to be about essentially what happens with interstate conflicts," said Mary Ziegler, a legal historian at Florida State University's law school.

Many states with one-party control of government already have chosen their side. The handful of states with divided politics are up for grabs. In North Carolina, Gov. Roy Cooper and other state Democrats have framed the election as one in which they must prevent the GOP from winning back veto-proof majorities in the Legislature. With every seat up for election in November, Republicans need to gain five seats to restore that control.

"Republicans in our state are on the verge of gaining veto-proof supermajorities in Raleigh. If they succeed, you can add North Carolina to the list of states that will ban abortions," Cooper, who has vetoed efforts to limit abortion since 2019, said in a recent fundraising letter.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

\$8M settlement awarded to man hit by snow plow

IA DES MOINES — An Iowa state board has approved an \$8 million payment to an Illinois man who was left permanently disabled when he was hit in 2019 by an Iowa Transportation Department snow plow.

On Monday, the three-member Iowa State Appeal Board approved the settlement to Terry Bunting, 64, of Viola, Ill., the Des Moines Register reported.

Officials have said Bunting was clearing the windshield of his semitrailer in January 2019 after pulling over on U.S. Highway 67 in Le Claire when he was hit by the blade of a passing IDOT plow. Court records say the driver of the plow saw Bunting and moved to retract the plow's blade, but pulled the wrong lever, leaving it extended.

The impact caused acute kidney and spine injuries and multiple broken bones and left Bunting paralyzed. Bunting has already accumulated more than \$1.25 in medical bills, records show.

Feds: Man sold pot from a home vending machine

MI DETROIT — A man told investigators that he was making \$2,000 a day selling marijuana from a vending machine attached to his Detroit home, federal agents said.

The man, who has a felony record, was arrested and charged with illegally possessing guns. He explained how he made a living when agents arrived in March with a search warrant.

The man "owned and operated the marijuana vending ma-

chine attached to the residence for four years, making approximately \$2,000 per day," an agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives said in a court filing.

Agents, acting on a tip, were aware of the machine because they had made purchases to collect evidence in February and March. Agents seized 18 firearms in the house, dozens of rounds of ammunition and several pounds of suspected marijuana.

'Aggressive' Assateague horse moved out of state

MD ASSATEAGUE ISLAND — A wild horse who has become "extremely aggressive" with staff and visitors at Assateague Island National Seashore in Maryland has been relocated to a Texas wildlife sanctuary, National Park Service officials announced Monday.

Park service officials said the harem stallion Delegate's Pride, also known as Chip, has become aggressive with people in pursuit of human food or with staff redirecting him or his band away from crowds, The Daily Times reported. He is being moved to Cleveland Armory Black Beauty Ranch in Murchison, Texas.

Since 2017, the horse has been involved in more than half of the incidents that resulted in injuries for visitors and he resists efforts to move horses away from potentially dangerous situations, the park service said.

62 stolen guns found in vehicle left in hospital lot

LA ALEXANDRIA — Scores of guns stolen last year in northwest Louisiana

have been found 120 miles away, in a vehicle left in a hospital parking lot in central Louisiana, authorities said.

The discovery came months after a man and woman were indicted on a charge accusing them of taking 62 guns in a burglary Nov. 14 at the Guns-N-Ammo Store in Benton. Burglars made a hole in the roof to get in, the Bossier Parish Sheriff's Office said in November.

Attorneys for Salih or Silah Reed — federal court records have it spelled "Salih" and the sheriff's office has "Silah" — and Jessica Moore declined to comment about the charges against them or the discovery of the guns.

The weapons were found after security employees at St. Francis Cabrini Hospital notified Alexandria police about an abandoned vehicle, Bossier Parish Sheriff Julian Whittington said in a news release Friday. Every gun stolen from Guns-N-Ammo was found, he said.

Man gets 14 years in fake military dating scheme

NJ CAMDEN — A man who helped dupe dozens into sending millions of dollars to people posing as U.S. military personnel in an online dating scheme has been sentenced to 14 years in federal prison.

Rubbin Sarpong, 38, of Millville, N.J., must also pay more than \$3 million in restitution to 36 victims under the sentence imposed Tuesday, as well as more than \$385,000 to the IRS. He had pleaded guilty in November to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and money laundering and tax evasion counts.

Federal prosecutors say the scheme ran from January 2016

to September 2019. They say Sarpong and his co-conspirators, several of whom live in Ghana, set up phony profiles on online dating sites using fictitious or stolen identities and posing as U.S. military personnel. They eventually pretended to forge romantic relationships with at least 40 victims overall and sought money from them, often purportedly to ship gold bars to the U.S.

Ice Classic winning time is 6:47 p.m. Monday

AK ANCHORAGE — The ice has gone out on the Tanana River, bringing to an end this year's Nenana Ice Classic, one of Alaska's most famous guessing games.

Ice classic manager Cherrie Forness said the game ended at 6:47 p.m. Monday.

The game involves placing bets on when the ice will break up and move out on the Tanana River, and it ends when a tripod moves far enough down the river to trip a clock, Anchorage TV station KTUU reported. The tripod is hooked to a rope and lever that trigger the stopping of the clock when it moves far enough down the river. The tripod toppled over on Sunday but at that time had not moved far enough to trip the clock.

This year's jackpot is \$242,923. Forness said guesses were still being entered into a database and the classic would contact the winners when that process was complete.

The event began in 1917 as a bet among railroad engineers waiting for the river ice to break up. People pay \$2.50 per ticket to enter.

— From wire reports

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Kaprizov's hat trick lifts Wild over Blues

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — The scoreless streak for the Minnesota Wild was pushing 70 minutes when they finally caught a break with a broken St. Louis stick.

Joel Eriksson Ek got the game's first goal a few seconds later, and the entire Wild bench jumped up in elation — with a bit of relief.

Kirill Kaprizov had a hat trick and Eriksson Ek scored twice for the Wild, who snapped back at the St. Louis Blues with a 6-2 victory to even their first-round playoff series at one game apiece Wednesday night.

"It's for sure helping to build confidence, knowing you can take the lead and run with it," Eriksson Ek said.

Frederic Gaudreau and Ka-

prizov scored on the power play for the Wild, who went 0-for-6 with the man advantage in their 4-0 defeat in Game 1 and were 1-for-9 against the Blues over three regular-season losses. The Wild beat their Central Division rivals in regulation for only the third time in 16 games since the Blues won the Stanley Cup in 2019.

The Blues didn't score on Minnesota goalie Marc-Andre Fleury until Jordan Kyrour's power-play goal midway through the second period. They lost defenseman Robert Bortuzzo to injury after he blocked a shot with the side of his face in the first.

"Once you know it hit him in the head, obviously that's really scary," St. Louis defenseman Colton Parayko said. "As a teammate and a friend, it's

tough to see. Hope he feels better."

Vladimir Tarasenko had a goal and an assist for the Blues, who host Game 3 in St. Louis on Friday night.

"You come here, get a split and go home. You're satisfied with that," coach Craig Berube said. "It's going to be a long series and you've got to battle and stay with it."

Eriksson Ek, the 2015 first-round draft pick from Sweden who was a Selke Award finalist last summer for the NHL's best defensive forward, has elevated his offense in a big way during this first season of the eight-year, \$42 million contract he signed last summer.

Eriksson Ek broke Blues goalie Ville Husso's shutout streak at 69:33 when he scored on Minnesota's first on-target

shot. After Bortuzzo's stick broke on a clearing attempt, Jordan Greenway grabbed the puck and — passing it right past the defenseless Bortuzzo — fed Eriksson Ek on the sweet spot of his stick for the one-timer.

"It was obviously super important for us to get that momentum to get kind of feeling good about the game," Kaprizov said through a translator. "I think the fans were into it right away."

Kaprizov, the precocious Russian star who set franchise records this season with 47 goals and 108 points, gave the Wild a 5-2 lead with a slick tap-in of Mats Zuccarello's pass on the rush. He added an empty-netter with 7:08 left after Berube pulled Husso in a last-ditch effort.

Injury to goaltender Raanta doesn't slow Hurricanes

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Carolina Hurricanes didn't flinch after losing yet another goaltender. Instead, they responded with a physical and even confrontational edge against a team that has twice bullied them out of recent NHL playoffs.

And now, they're up 2-0 on the Boston Bruins in their first-round series.

Sebastian Aho and Nino Niederreiter each scored twice and the Hurricanes overcame the early loss of goalie Antti Raanta to beat the Bruins 5-2 on Wednesday night.

Jesper Fast had the game's first goal for Carolina in another strong offensive showing to start this series. Rookie goaltender Pyotr Kochetkov came on in relief of Raanta to finish with 30 saves.

Perhaps just as importantly, the Hurricanes looked ready for a fight at every moment as the Bruins racked up penalties and time in the box while facing yet another uphill climb.

"We're not going to get pushed around, I guarantee you that," said Carolina defenseman Tony DeAngelo, who had three assists.

This game quickly went from competitive to feisty and downright ornery in quick fashion — namely after Boston's David Pastrnak knocked Raanta from the game midway

through the first period when he struck the goaltender in the head with a gloved hand as he tried to skate past him.

Already down injured No. 1 goalie Frederik Andersen to start the playoffs, Carolina turned to Kochetkov as Raanta exited while bleeding from an apparent mouth injury.

After Raanta's exit, the teams constantly traded words and hits, along with repeatedly tussling after the whistle. Notably, there was the jarring shoulder-to-chest blast by Carolina's Andrei Svechnikov that leveled Hampus Lindholm and left him wobbly as he was helped to the locker room late in the second.

Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said he thought Svechnikov's hit was "on time certainly but it looked high." Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour was more irritated by Pastrnak's hit on Raanta.

"You never want to see guys get hurt," Brind'Amour said. "I don't like seeing our goalie get taken out either. But one was legal, one was not, if you really want to break it down."

Patrice Bergeron scored both of Boston's goals, the first on a loose rebound in the second and then another on a redirection near the crease in the third.

Lightning 5, Maple Leafs 3: Victor Hedman had a goal and three assists for his first

four-point playoff game and visiting Tampa Bay beat Toronto in Game 2 to even the first-round series.

Nikita Kucherov added a goal and two assists and Brayden Point, Corey Perry and Brandon Hagel also scored for two-time defending Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay. Andrei Vasilevskiy made 31 saves in a bounce-back performance after the Lightning dropped the opener 5-0.

Mitch Marner had a goal and an assist for Toronto, Michael Bunting and Alexander Kerfoot also scored and Jack Campbell made 29 saves. Auston Matthews had two assists.

Oilers 6, Kings 0: Mike Smith bounced back with a perfect 30-save night and host Edmonton beat Los Angeles to even their first-round playoff series through two games.

Evander Kane had two goals and an assist, Ryan McLeod had one of each and Jesse Puljujarvi, Darnell Nurse and Leon Draisaitl also scored. Connor McDavid added two assists.

Smith, who made the fatal puck-handling mistake that led to Edmonton's 4-3 loss in Game 1 on Monday, completed his fifth playoff shutout.

Jonathan Quick stopped 30 of 36 shots for the Kings.

Adebayo, Butler lead Heat past 76ers

Associated Press

MIAMI — Bam Adebayo caught a lob for an alley-oop dunk midway through the fourth quarter, then threw a lob to Jimmy Butler for another dunk about a minute later.

Both were very easy.

Joel Embiid could complicate those plays going forward — and the Miami Heat are heading north expecting that he might be waiting for them.

Adebayo scored 23 points, Butler had 22 points and 12 assists, and the Heat beat the Philadelphia 76ers 119-103 on Wednesday night for a 2-0 lead in the Eastern Conference semifinals.

“It’s always nice to win,” Butler said. “We just did what we’re supposed to do at home.”

Victor Oladipo scored 19 points on his 30th birthday and Tyler Herro added 18 for the Heat, the East’s No. 1 seed. Oladipo had 10 of those points in the fourth quarter.

Tyrese Maxey scored 34 points for Philadelphia, which got 21 from Tobias Harris and

20 from James Harden.

“We’ve just got to go back to the drawing board and try to figure it out,” Maxey said.

A 10-0 run in the fourth turned an eight-point Miami lead into an 18-point edge, sealing the win and ensuring the Heat would hold home court before the series shifts north. Game 3 is Friday in Philadelphia.

And now, the Heat will hope history holds — and the 76ers will hope it doesn’t.

Miami has taken a 2-0 lead in 18 previous series, including the first round this season against Atlanta, and won the matchup every time. The 76ers’ franchise has dropped the first two games of a matchup on 19 other occasions, never recovering to win the series.

The question going into Friday will revolve around whether Embiid could be ready for Game 3. The league’s scoring champion and MVP finalist is recovering from an orbital fracture and concussion and has, not sur-

prisingly, been big-time misled by the 76ers.

“We don’t have a big man right now,” Philadelphia coach Doc Rivers lamented.

Adebayo surely isn’t complaining. He was 8-for-10 from the field and 8-for-8 from the line in Game 1; he followed that up with a 7-for-11 night from the floor on Wednesday.

But he said he’s preparing as if Embiid will play Friday. And Butler, who is close with Embiid from their time together as teammates in Philadelphia, is hoping his MVP pick can play in the series.

“I want to compete against him,” Butler said. “I really do.”

Rivers, however, didn’t sound optimistic about the possibility of Embiid being ready.

“He’s got so many steps to go through,” Rivers said. “I don’t think he’s cleared any of them right now.”

It wasn’t just the absence of Embiid, though, that hurt Philadelphia. The 76ers were aw-

ful again from three-point range, shooting 8-for-30 in Game 2. They’re now 14-for-64 from deep in the series.

“When it comes down to it, you’ve got to make shots, especially when you’re on the road against a really good team,” Harden said. “It’s pretty simple.”

Danny Green was 1-for-10 from the field — the second time in his playoff career that he had that many attempts and shot that poorly in a postseason game. The other? A 1-for-12 effort for San Antonio in 2013, also in Miami, the night the Heat won their third and most recent NBA title.

The Heat aren’t close to that yet. But they are two wins from the East finals.

“It’s not easy to get playoff wins.” Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. “We had some great stretches, particularly defensively. We had some really good stretches offensively. ... Our defense really carried us to the win, but we had some really timely offensive plays.”

Paul’s spectacular fourth helps Suns blow past Mavs

Associated Press

PHOENIX — The top-seeded Phoenix Suns were braced for another fourth-quarter playoff fight on Wednesday night.

Chris Paul turned it into an early knock-out.

The 12-time All-Star scored 28 points, including 14 in another spectacular final period, to lead the Suns over the Dallas Mavericks 129-109 for a 2-0 lead in the Western Conference semifinals.

Paul, who turns 37 on Friday, almost single-handedly turned a tight game into a comfortable victory — the Suns’ 11th win in a row against the Mavericks counting regular-season games.

“You’ve just got to lean on the work,” Paul said. “It all goes back to the work. You can’t cheat the game. You’ve got to do the strength and conditioning, you’ve got to lift, you’ve got to get your rest, you got to get your shots up.

“When you do that, you live with the re-

sults.”

Suns guard Devin Booker said he’s run out of ways to describe Paul’s fourth-quarter heroics.

“You guys tell me, you’re watching the same thing,” Booker said. “It impresses us every time we see it, but it doesn’t surprise us. It’s just the will to win.”

The Mavs led 60-58 at halftime but the Suns quickly recaptured the lead after Booker hit back-to-back three-pointers early in the third. The Suns took an 89-83 advantage going into the final quarter and it looked like a tough fight was coming.

But that’s about the time Paul decided the game was his to control, hitting six shots in a row on everything from three-pointers to mid-range jumpers to layups. The feisty Mavericks finally didn’t have an answer. Booker hit a pair of three-pointers midway through the fourth to give the Suns a 114-95 lead.

Booker led the Suns with 30 points on 11-for-19 shooting, including 5-for-8 from three-point range. The Suns shot 64.5% overall — which was a franchise record in the playoffs — and made 52% of their three-pointers. They shot 84% from the field (16-for-19) in the fourth quarter.

“We have good players,” Suns coach Monty Williams said. “I’d love to sit here and tell you I’m moving the chess pieces around, but we have good players who can knock down shots.”

The Mavericks will go home in a 2-0 hole, desperately needing contributions from someone other than Luka Doncic, who scored 35 points on 13-for-22 shooting two nights after a 45-point performance in Game 1.

“He had a great game, but no one else showed,” Mavs coach Jason Kidd said. “We’ve got to get other guys shooting the ball better. We can’t win with just him out there scoring 30 a night.”

Blue Jays end Yanks' win streak at 11

Associated Press

TORONTO — Jordan Romano stranded the bases loaded in the ninth inning, making Vladimir Guerrero Jr.'s tiebreaking single stand up as the Toronto Blue Jays beat the Yankees 2-1 Wednesday night to end New York's winning streak at 11.

Matt Chapman homered and Yusei Kikuchi (1-1) allowed a run over a season-high six innings for Toronto, which narrowly held on.

Giancarlo Stanton hit a one-out single off Romano in the ninth and was replaced by pinch-runner Tim Locastro, who advanced to second on Josh Donaldson's hit. Aaron Hicks struck out and Joey Gallo walked to load the bases for Isiah Kiner-Falefa, who grounded out to end it.

Romano leads the majors with 12 saves in 13 tries. Toronto avoided being swept in the three-game series.

Brewers 18, Reds 4: Rowdy Tellez homered twice and set a

Milwaukee record with eight RBIs in a blowout of visiting Cincinnati.

Angels 10, Red Sox 5 (10): Los Angeles scored six runs in the 10th inning, including a two-run homer by Taylor Ward and a three-run shot from Jared Walsh, to win at Boston.

White Sox 4, Cubs 3: Lucas Giolito struck out 10, Luis Robert made a game-saving catch and Matt Foster worked out of a major jam as the White Sox beat the Cubs at Wrigley Field.

Diamondbacks 8, Marlins 7: Pavin Smith hit a two-run homer in the ninth inning, and visiting Arizona beat Miami after left-hander Madison Bumgarner was ejected.

Dodgers 9, Giants 1: Mookie Betts and Max Muncy homered, Freddie Freeman added a two-run triple and host Los Angeles swept a short series with San Francisco.

Orioles 9, Twins 4: Cedric Mullins and Ramón Urías each hit a two-run homer during

host Baltimore's six-run third inning for a win over Minnesota, which lost for the just the second time in 13 games.

Braves 9, Mets 2: Adam Duvall hit a two-run double during visiting Atlanta's seventh inning.

Rockies 5, Nationals 2: Jose Iglesias had a two-run double and Connor Joe a two-run triple in consecutive at-bats in the fourth inning after a crucial error by shortstop Alcides Escobar, and host Colorado rallied to beat Washington.

Rangers 2, Phillies 1: Brad Miller hit a two-run single in the 10th inning to give visiting Texas a win over Philadelphia.

Padres 5-5, Guardians 4-6: San Diego's Mike Clevinger had an impressive first start since undergoing elbow surgery in 2020, and Manny Machado hit a two-run homer in the first game of a doubleheader.

And Rookie Steven Kwan's RBI single in the 10th inning

gave host Cleveland the split.

Astros 7, Mariners 2: Justin Verlander pitched five-hit ball into the seventh inning, helping host Houston close out a three-game series sweep.

Cardinals 10, Royals 0: Adam Wainwright pitched seven sharp innings for visiting St. Louis, and Nolan Arenado hit a three-run shot and finished with five RBIs.

Rays 3, Athletics 0: Manuel Margot hit a two-run single in the eighth inning, and visiting Tampa Bay blanked Oakland to complete a three-game sweep.

Tigers 3-2, Pirates 2-7: Willy Castro and Akil Baddoo scored on third baseman Ke'Bryan Hayes' two-out error during their team's three-run fifth inning, and host Detroit edged Pittsburgh in the first game of a doubleheader.

But Bryan Reynolds doubled in Pittsburgh's two-run seventh inning to split the doubleheader.

Yakteen has 2 top horses in his first Derby in charge

Associated Press

ARCADIA, Calif. — Tim Yakteen has been to the Kentucky Derby with good horses before. Now the trainer is at Churchill Downs in charge for the first time with two top contenders that used to be trained by Hall of Famer Bob Baffert.

Yakteen worked two different stints earlier in his career as an apprentice under Baffert, who won't be at the Derby on Saturday because he's serving a 90-day suspension imposed by Kentucky racing officials. The six-time Derby winner has also been banned for two years by Churchill Downs Inc.

It may seem uncomfortable to most everyone except Yakteen.

"I wouldn't say that I think that there's any awkwardness

there," he said. "I just feel really lucky and fortunate."

A surprised Yakteen took calls from the owners of Messier and Taiba asking him to train their budding stars.

"I was honored they had the confidence that I could continue to carry the torch," he said, perched on a trunk near Messier's stall in his Santa Anita barn.

Baffert relinquished the colts to serve the punishment handed down after last year's Derby winner, Medina Spirit, tested positive for an anti-inflammatory medication that isn't allowed on race day.

Baffert's suspension bars him from Santa Anita and Yakteen said they've had no conversations since he took charge of Messier, the early 8-1 third

choice in the Derby, and Taiba, a 12-1 shot.

Taiba is owned by Amr Zedan, who campaigned Medina Spirit before that colt died in December after a workout at Santa Anita.

Yakteen has about 30 horses of varying abilities in his barn. Adding Messier and Taiba has provided a jolt of positive energy, he said.

"I have never, ever woken up and not wanted to go to work," he said. "I enjoy it tremendously."

Yakteen's career highlights include four Grade 1 stakes victories, including Taiba in the recent Santa Anita Derby, and an Eclipse Award for champion sprinter Points Offthebench. He has over 250 career victories and purse earnings of over

\$12 million.

Hall of Fame jockey Mike Smith will ride Taiba in the Derby, having successfully teamed with Yakteen in California.

"He's one of those guys you feel confident when you ride for him," Smith said. "He's been around long enough. I think he'll be great."

Yakteen was raised in Germany, where his Lebanese father was stationed with the U.S. Army after becoming an American citizen.

He moved to the United States at age 18 in 1982, joining a sister who lived next to Los Alamitos racetrack in Cypress, Calif. He attended the races for the first time and was hooked.

"That night was electrifying, and it's been with me ever since," he said.