

Last stronghold in Mariupol abandoned

Associated Press

Nearly 1,000 last-ditch Ukrainian fighters who had held out inside Mariupol's pulverized steel plant have surrendered, Russia said Wednesday, as the battle that turned the city into a worldwide symbol of defiance and suffering drew toward a close.

The Ukrainian fighters who emerged from the ruined Azovstal steelworks after being ordered by their military to abandon the last stronghold of resistance in the now-flattened port city face an uncertain fate. Some were taken by the Russians to a former penal colony in territory controlled by Moscow-backed separatists.

While Ukraine said it hopes to get the soldiers back in a prisoner swap, Russia threatened to put some of them on trial for war crimes.

Amnesty International said the Red Cross should be given immediate access to the fighters. Denis Krivosheev, Amnesty's deputy director for the region, cited lawless executions allegedly carried out by Russian forces in Ukraine and said the Azovstal defenders "must not meet the same fate."

It was unclear how many fighters remained inside the plant's labyrinth of tunnels and bunkers, where 2,000 were believed to be holed up at one point. A separatist leader in the region said no top commanders had emerged from the steelworks.

The plant was the only thing standing in the way of Russia declaring the full capture of Mariupol. Its fall would make Mariupol the biggest Ukrainian city to be taken by Moscow's forces, giving a boost to Putin in a war where many of his plans have gone awry.

Military analysts, though, said the city's capture at this point would hold more symbolic importance than anything else, since Mariupol is already effectively under Moscow's control and most of the Russian forces that were tied down by the drawn-out fighting have already left.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said 959 Ukrainian troops have abandoned the stronghold since they started coming out Monday.

Video showed the fighters carrying out their wounded on stretchers and undergo-

ing pat-down searches before being taken away on buses escorted by military vehicles bearing the pro-Kremlin "Z" sign.

Mariupol's defenders grimly clung to the steel mill for months and against the odds, preventing Russia from completing its occupation of the city and its port.

Its full capture would give Russia an unbroken land bridge to the Crimean Peninsula, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014. It also would allow Russia to focus fully on the larger battle for the Donbas, Ukraine's industrial east.

For Ukraine, the order to the fighters to surrender could leave President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's government open to allegations it abandoned the troops he described as heroes.

"Zelenskyy may face unpleasant questions," said Volodymyr Fesenko, who heads the independent Penta think tank in Kyiv. "There have been voices of discontent and accusations of betraying Ukrainian soldiers."

A hoped-for prisoner swap could also fall through, he cautioned.

NATO talks over Finland, Sweden membership falter

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — NATO envoys failed to reach a consensus on Wednesday about whether to start membership talks with Finland and Sweden, diplomats said, as Turkey renewed its objections to the two Nordic countries joining.

The envoys met at NATO headquarters in Brussels after Finland and Sweden's ambassadors submitted written applications to join the military organization, in a move that marks one of the biggest geopolitical ramifications of Russia's war on Ukraine — and which could rewrite Europe's security map.

The diplomats, who did not want to be named because of the sensitive nature of the proceedings, declined to say precisely who or what was holding up the procedure. They pointed to the messages from many of the 30 NATO allies welcoming Finland and Sweden's request.

Lithuanian Ambassador Deividas Matu-

lonis told Swedish and Finnish media that the envoys had exchanged views about their national security. "The discussion was about that, but it is up to Turkey to comment," he said.

NATO officials also refused to provide details. They underlined remarks earlier Wednesday by Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, that "we are determined to work through all issues and reach a rapid conclusion." Meetings and diplomatic outreach aimed at resolving the problem will continue.

But Turkey is the only ally to have clearly voiced its opposition. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan insists that Finland and Sweden must show more respect for Turkish sensitivities about terrorism. He is refusing to budge over what he says is their alleged support for Kurdish militants.

Erdogan accuses the two countries of turning a blind eye to activities of the

banned Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, even though the group is on the European Union's anti-terror blacklist.

"You will not hand over terrorists to us, but you will ask us to allow you to join NATO. NATO is a security entity. It is a security agency. Therefore, we cannot say 'yes' to depriving this security organization of security," he said Wednesday, in an address to ruling party lawmakers.

The day had started off on an upbeat note. Stoltenberg had said that the military alliance stands ready to seize a historic moment and move quickly on allowing Finland and Sweden to join its ranks, after the two countries submitted their membership requests.

The official applications set a security clock ticking. Russia, whose war on Ukraine spurred them to join the military organization, has warned that it wouldn't welcome such a move, and could respond.

IG warns over growing strength of ISIS-K

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

The Islamic State group's branch in Afghanistan will likely develop the ability to target the U.S. homeland within the next 12 to 18 months, a Pentagon report said.

The group, known as ISIS-K, has grown stronger and recruited more fighters since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, U.S. Central Command said in Tuesday's report by the Defense Department Inspector General.

The report did not elaborate on the group's capabilities or how it might target America.

ISIS-K's growth comes as the

U.S. military's abilities to track and stop threats in Afghanistan have become "significantly reduced," military officials said in the report.

The findings reviewed plans to check terrorist threats from Afghanistan in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from the country last year.

The Taliban agreed to prevent terrorists from using Afghan soil to threaten America in the deal that secured the withdrawal of U.S. and allied troops.

But the Taliban government is finding it difficult to contain the estimated 2,000 members of ISIS-K, the report said.

"Absent effective pressure, that threat will only grow and metastasize over time," former chief of Central Command Gen. Frank McKenzie said in March.

Meanwhile, U.S. efforts to contain terrorist threats from afar are facing challenges, the report said.

The United States created a new "over the horizon" counterterrorism mission, Operation Enduring Sentinel, which has approximately 100 staff members operating out of Doha, Qatar, at a cost of about \$19.5 billion a year, the report said.

This mission provides unmanned aircraft to watch Afghanistan and conduct airstrikes,

the report said.

While U.S. generals have said the Pentagon will retain the ability to launch airstrikes in Afghanistan from afar, the military has not launched any airstrikes on targets in the country since the troop withdrawal ended Aug. 29, 2021, the report said.

The long distance between Qatar and Afghanistan means U.S. drones can surveil targets there only for a limited amount of time, said Gen. Michael Kurilla, head of Central Command.

The U.S. also lost intelligence sources when the Taliban took over the country, which prompted an exodus of allies.

Probe finds US-Taliban deal scared Afghan military

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

The signing of a deal between the United States and the Taliban devastated morale in the Afghan security forces and was the most important factor leading to their rapid collapse last summer, a government watchdog agency report issued Wednesday said.

"Many Afghans thought the U.S.-Taliban agreement was an act of bad faith and a signal that the U.S. was handing over Afghanistan to the enemy as it rushed to exit the country," John Sopko, the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, said in the report.

It outlines how U.S. actions during the

withdrawal from Afghanistan, often done without communication to Afghan allies, fueled mistrust and paranoia, which led to mass surrenders.

The Afghan military, despite years of American training and some \$90 billion in investment by the U.S., fell to a Taliban onslaught in August 2021 that captured all but one of the country's provinces in just 10 days.

But the collapse began in early 2020, after Afghan troops and politicians learned of the Trump administration's deal with the Taliban, the report said, drawing on interviews with 40 Afghan and U.S. officials.

The deal stipulated the U.S. would with-

draw all military personnel and contractors from Afghanistan in exchange for Taliban promises not to attack U.S. troops, as well as agreements on counterterrorism and peace talks with the government in Kabul.

News of the deal led to a dramatic loss in morale among Afghan troops, many of whom believed their allies were signing a deal to surrender their country to their enemies, the report said.

Afghan leaders and commanders were unnerved their U.S. allies did not share with them what was contained in secret written and verbal agreements with the Taliban, the report said.

Pentagon decides no punishments for US strike in Syria

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — No laws of war were violated and no troops will be held accountable for U.S. airstrikes three years ago that killed civilians in Baghuz, Syria, according to a summary of a classified Pentagon report.

The incident's investigation should have been completed and reported publicly much sooner, however, investigators concluded in the summary released Tuesday.

On March 18, 2019, Islamic State fighters in Baghuz launched "a successful counter-attack against the Syrian Democratic Forces," prompting the Syrian troops to request "air support" from U.S. coalition forces, according to the report.

The unnamed U.S. commander then had his team work to validate the ISIS threat and investigate whether civilians were in the area before authorizing the strikes.

The military "repeatedly received confirmations" that no civilians were in the blast

range before conducting the airstrikes, but the information was wrong, Army Gen. Michael Garrett wrote in the report.

The attack killed 52 enemies and four civilians, and injured two enemies and 15 civilians, chief Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Tuesday.

Though civilians were harmed, Garrett's investigation found the U.S. "acted reasonably and within the bounds of the [rules of engagement] and [law of war]," according to the report.

DOD updates Congress on UFO sightings

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Congress held a rare public hearing Tuesday into the existence of what the government calls unidentified aerial phenomena, more commonly known as UFOs, a subject of scrutiny by the Pentagon and U.S. intelligence agencies following an increase in sightings by military personnel and pilots in recent years.

By taking testimony from senior government officials, lawmakers intended to bring “out of the shadows” a Defense Department organization that has been tracking the sightings, said Rep. André Carson, D-Ind., chairman of the House Intelligence’s Committee’s panel on counterterrorism, counterintelligence and counterproliferation.

That effort, revealed in 2017, has collected eyewitness accounts, including from naval

aviators who said they saw flying objects that seemed to lack any visible means of propulsion and defied human understanding of aerodynamics and physics.

The hearing was the first time in more than 50 years that U.S. officials have provided testimony for public consumption about their investigation of UFOs. The Air Force closed its inquiry into the subject, Project Blue Book, in 1970.

“We know that our service members have encountered unidentified aerial phenomena,” Ronald S. Moultrie, the undersecretary of defense for intelligence and security, told the bipartisan panel of lawmakers. “We are committed to an effort to determine their origins.”

While the hearing marked a significant moment in the government’s efforts to reveal

more of what it knows about unexplained objects in the sky, it was short on revelations. Scott Bray, deputy director of naval intelligence, played a brief video of what he described as “a spherical object” with a reflective surface as it zoomed past the cockpit of a U.S. F-18 fighter jet.

“I do not have an explanation for what this specific object is,” Bray said.

Lawmakers asked Bray to replay the video and pause on the fast-moving object, which was difficult given its speed.

The video was newly declassified and aired for the first time at the hearing.

Earlier footage from naval aircraft and ships has shown other unexplained phenomena observed for longer periods.

One of the most famous of those sightings, taken by jets from the USS Nimitz aircraft

carrier in 2004, shows an object that appears to dart through the air in many directions at tremendous speed. UFO researchers have dubbed it the Tic Tac because of its capsule-like shape.

The highly-trained pilots who witnessed the object — which Bray said remains unexplained — have said publicly that they were baffled and reluctant to discuss their experience, owing to a persistent culture of stigmatizing aviators who report UFOs.

Bray and Moultrie said the military wants to change that culture. In recent years, personnel have been encouraged to report sightings, and the military now has a standardized system to track and analyze information.

“The message is clear: If you see something, you need to report it,” Bray said.

NM wildfires prompt forest closures; governor seeks aid

Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — New Mexico’s governor said Tuesday that given the ferocity and swift movements of a record-setting wildfire burning in the northeastern part of the state, the damage will be significant with estimates of burned homes and other structures likely to range between 1,000 and 1,500.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham stressed that was only a rough estimate but likely not an exaggeration, saying it’s clear to state and federal officials there are many victims who have lost their homes and have had their businesses affected.

“And their families are suffering,” the governor said during a news conference with Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Criswell and top state officials. “And that’s my takeaway, the number of families that we have to help.”

The fire has charred more than 468 square miles over the last 42 days to earn the distinction of being the largest fire in the arid state’s recorded history. It’s also the largest fire currently burning in the United States.

Evacuation orders remain in place for some villages. Crews have been working on

multiple fronts around the fire’s massive perimeter to herd the flames around homes by building more dozer lines, clearing brush, raking pine needles and setting up sprinkler systems.

A fraction of an inch of precipitation fell over parts of the fire Monday, but a meteorologist assigned to the blaze said those places along the perimeter that needed it most missed out on the moisture.

Fire managers said during a briefing Tuesday evening that they were concerned about potentially erratic winds that could result from thunderstorms that will cross the area.

Lujan Grisham warned that many residents, depending on whether they live, should be ready for potential evacuations all summer given the likelihood for higher fire danger due to strong winds, warmer temperatures brought on by climate change and forecasts for little to no precipitation.

Officials with three of New Mexico’s five national forests announced closure orders will take effect Thursday, prohibiting public access because of active wildfires and extreme fire danger. All of the Santa Fe National Forest will be off limits along with the Cibola National Forest that borders Albu-

querque and the Carson National Forest in far northern New Mexico.

Another fire burning in the Gila National Forest in southern New Mexico had grown more than 57 square miles in one day, causing concern among state officials. Forest roads and trails in the area were closed.

Federal officials acknowledged during Tuesday’s briefing that recovery for northern New Mexico will be a long process and that the initial aid provided through emergency programs was not meant to make people whole but rather provide reimbursements for lodging, medical expenses and emergency home repairs. More than 2,000 people already have registered with FEMA.

Lujan Grisham recognized the emotions that many people are feeling after losing homes and property that have been in their families for generations — and in some cases for centuries. She said the goal of state and federal officials is to save all lives and as many properties as possible.

“We have lives to put back together,” she said, adding that she was hopeful Congress would approve pending legislation that would allow additional damages to be paid to New Mexico residents and business owners.

Tight race for Pennsylvania GOP Senate nod

Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa.— Donald Trump's preferred candidate in Pennsylvania's Senate Republican primary was essentially tied with a more traditional rival, while his pick for governor notched a commanding victory Tuesday as the former president worked to expand his hold on the GOP.

Doug Mastriano was already surging in the governor's race when Trump issued an endorsement over the weekend supporting the far-right state senator. But Mehmet Oz, the celebrity heart surgeon endorsed by Trump, was locked with former hedge fund manager David McCormick in a race that was too early to call Wednesday.

Pennsylvania law requires

recounts when the margin between the top two candidates is 0.5 percentage points or less. With just a few hundred votes separating Oz and McCormick, the result may not be clear for several days.

Tuesday marked the busiest night of the nascent primary season, with contests also being waged in North Carolina, Kentucky, Oregon and Idaho. Both parties are choosing candidates to enter the fall general election, when control of Congress, governor's mansions and key elections posts are up for grabs.

In the perennial battleground of Pennsylvania, Mastriano's victory was notable for what it signaled about the direction of the GOP. With the future of abortion rights in ques-

tion at the U.S. Supreme Court, Mastriano has said he supports banning the procedure from conception, with no exceptions.

He has also promoted Trump's lies about nonexistent, widespread voter fraud costing him the 2020 election and was outside the U.S. Capitol when a mob overran it during the deadly 2021 insurrection. He's also been subpoenaed by the House committee investigating the Capitol riot following his efforts to name a slate of alternate Electoral College electors in Trump's favor.

If Mastriano were to win in the fall, he would shape how elections are conducted in Pennsylvania — where the governor appoints the secretary of state, who oversees how elections are run. He has pledged

to take the extraordinary step of requiring voters to "re-register" to vote, a move that would almost certainly encounter legal hurdles.

Such positions could repel critical moderate voters in the general election. But speaking to his supporters on Tuesday, Mastriano denied he was an extremist.

"They like to call people who stand on the Constitution far right and extreme. I repudiate that. That is crap. That is absolutely not true," Mastriano said, adding that it was Democrats who have "gone extreme."

Mastriano, a retired Army colonel, will face Democratic state Attorney General Josh Shapiro, who was unopposed in his primary.

Trump's primary results mixed; bad behavior dooms Cawthorn

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former President Donald Trump's support was enough to elevate his Senate candidate to victory in North Carolina on Tuesday, while his pick in Pennsylvania remained in a tough fight in that state's Senate primary.

In a key congressional race, a Republican congressman's bad behavior finally caught up with him.

And in the Pennsylvania governor's race, a Trump-backed candidate who has spread lies about the 2020 vote count won the GOP nomination, putting an election denier within striking distance of running a presidential battleground state in 2024. But in Idaho, with incumbency on his side, the sitting governor weathered a primary challenge from his far-right lieutenant governor.

The former president entered the primary season on a high after JD Vance, his endorsed candidate in Ohio's hypercompetitive GOP Senate contest, shot from third to first. But Trump's tally Tuesday night included wins, losses and a marquee race too early to call.

Trump had shocked party faithful in North Carolina when he endorsed U.S. Rep. Ted Budd, a little-known congressman, last June for the Senate seat being vacated by retiring Republican Richard Burr. But af-

ter a rocky start, Budd easily captured his party's nomination, passing a crowded field of GOP rivals that included the state's former governor, Pat McCrory.

And in Pennsylvania's GOP race for governor, Trump's endorsed candidate, the far-right Doug Mastriano, easily won the nomination — though he was already well ahead in the polls when Trump weighed in just days before the primary.

His nod was widely seen as an effort to hedge his bets and guarantee a victory in the state in case his endorsed candidate for Senate, celebrity heart surgeon Mehmet Oz, loses his race. Oz and former hedge fund CEO David McCormick were virtually tied early Wednesday, with more votes left to be counted.

In North Carolina, meanwhile, Rep. Madison Cawthorn lost his reelection bid Tuesday even after Trump urged voters to "give Madison a second chance!" Trump also whiffed when Idaho Lt. Gov. Janice McGeachin, his pick, failed to defeat Gov. Brad Little in that state's primary. Trump is facing down another possible defeat in next week's high-stakes governor's primary in Georgia, where his candidate is trailing in both polls and fundraising.

Cawthorn, the youngest member of Congress, was ousted from office on Tuesday by state Sen. Chuck Edwards after a rocky first

term filled with salacious headlines and scandals. The young congressman, who uses a wheelchair after a car accident, became a media sensation when he first won a House seat at age 25, but he may have gotten singed under the spotlight.

Cawthorn last month was cited for carrying a handgun through an airport security checkpoint — his second such citation. In March, he was cited for driving with a revoked license after being stopped for speeding twice. He angered local Republicans by choosing to run in a different district after new congressional maps were drawn this year, then coming back to his original district when litigation shifted the lines again. And, most notoriously, Cawthorn insinuated that Washington Republicans had invited him to at least one cocaine-fueled orgy.

Trump sought to give Cawthorn a boost on Monday, urging voters to keep him in office.

But voters decided not to. Edwards, who was endorsed by Republican Sen. Thom Tillis, inched past Cawthorn in the primary. Still, the big picture wasn't that close — with eight candidates in the contest, Cawthorn won just 3 in 10 voters in the district. That's a warning for other Republicans who may feel that Trump's ability to hold his base's loyalty through repeated scandals makes them bulletproof, too.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Disney rhinoceros fitted with fitness tracker

FL ORLANDO — Someone new is joining the ranks of fitness enthusiasts who monitor the number of steps they take each day with Fitbits and other fitness tracking devices. Only Helen isn't human: She's a 30-year-old white rhino at Walt Disney World.

The purpose is to gather data on the number of steps she takes each day, whether she is walking, running or napping, and which part of the man-made savanna at the Kilimanjaro Safaris attraction at Animal Kingdom she favors the most. The device, about a foot in diameter, has an accelerometer and a GPS tracker and it's fitted around her ankle.

The data it produces will be shared with more than two dozen other institutions participating in a large research project studying the best ways to care for rhinos at facilities, said Scott Terrell, a veterinarian who is director of Animal & Science Operations, Walt Disney Parks & Resorts.

School bus drags boy when strap gets stuck

ME BUXTON — A kindergarten whose backpack got stuck in the door of a school bus was dragged about 575 feet before the driver noticed, officials said.

The boy's mother, Athena Lavigne, watched in horror as her 6-year-old son's backpack strap got stuck as the door closed. She ran after the bus as it drove away.

"I was screaming at the top of my lungs. I just wanted him to

stop. I didn't think he was going to stop. I thought he was going to just keep driving," she told WGME-TV.

The boy, who was wearing shorts and sneakers, suffered road rash and was taken to a hospital for treatment.

The district says the 63-year-old bus driver is relatively new. He's since been placed on administrative leave.

Workers stab each other at restaurant

NC ASHEBORO — Two workers at a North Carolina fast-food restaurant stabbed each other after getting into a fight, police said.

The Asheboro Police Department said in a news release that officers responded to a reported stabbing at a Wendy's restaurant, news outlets reported.

Officers found one of the stabbing victims at the scene. The victim was taken to a local hospital for treatment.

The Randolph County Sheriff's Office sighted the suspect's car in Randleman and took them into custody during a traffic stop. The suspect was taken to a hospital for treatment, authorities said.

6 Black colleges get cybersecurity centers

LA NEW ORLEANS — Six historically Black universities in five Southern states will be getting the first IBM cybersecurity centers aimed at training underrepresented communities, the company said.

The schools are Xavier University of Louisiana, that state's Southern University System,

North Carolina A&T, South Carolina State, Clark Atlanta and Morgan State universities, according to a news release.

IBM said it plans more than 20 such centers at historically Black colleges and universities nationwide.

Fishing haul fell during first pandemic year

ME PORTLAND — America's commercial fishing industry fell 10% in catch volume and 15% in value during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, federal regulators said recently.

The 2020 haul of fish was 8.4 billion pounds, while the value of that catch was \$4.8 billion, officials with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said.

NOAA made the announcement as it unveiled its "Status of the Stocks" report, which provides details about the health of the nation's commercial fishing industry.

The report said there were 51 fish stocks on the federal government's "overfished list" in 2021. That list includes stocks that have been depleted by excessive fishing and the number was an increase of two from the previous year.

2 climbers rescued after a crevasse fall

WA MOUNT RAINIER NATIONAL PARK — Two climbers were rescued by helicopter after one fell into a crevasse on Mount Rainier.

The climbers had been in contact with the National Park Service when they stopped their summit bid at 12,800 feet be-

cause of adverse weather, according to the NPS.

They didn't initially ask for assistance, the Seattle Times reported. But the climbers called for help after one of them fell 80 feet into a crevasse at about 12,200 feet above sea level and suffered arm and leg injuries, officials said.

The climber who fell was able to communicate with Mount Rainier National Park dispatchers, as well as his partner on the Kautz Glacier, but authorities could not immediately launch a rescue effort because of deep snow, limited visibility and strong and erratic winds, according to the Park Service.

Heavy winds thwarted rescuers' initial efforts to reach the climbers, but they were able to reach the pair later in the day.

Father, son convicted of drug charges jailed

MA BOSTON — A father and his son have been sent to prison for more than 12 years for their roles in a large-scale drug trafficking organization that distributed cocaine and opioids in New England, federal prosecutors said.

Isaac Cardona, 34, and Rafael Cardona Sr., 61, both of Springfield, were indicted in November 2017 as part of a 14-month wiretap investigation, prosecutors said.

The Cardonas conspired with David Cruz to traffic cocaine and heroin from Mexico, through California, to the Springfield area, prosecutors said.

The Cardonas were convicted by a jury in October.

— From Associated Press

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Fowler searching for his game at PGA

Associated Press

TULSA, Okla. — Rickie Fowler stood for nearly 20 minutes answering still more questions about his game and how can he get it back to where it used to be when he was a force in golf and notably in the majors.

Every now and then he'd cross his arms, or scratch his elbow, subconsciously flashing the Olympic rings tattoo across his right forearm.

That tattoo is a link back to 2016 in Rio de Janeiro, when Fowler represented the United States at the Olympics and was at the top of his game in a three-year run that saw him reach as high No. 4 in the world. A zest for fun (note the tattoos), easy smile and breezy demeanor made Fowler one of

the most popular players on tour. Eight years later, Fowler, 33, is three years removed from his last victory heading into this week's PGA Championship, and on the verge of falling out of the top 150 in the world for the first time since his rookie year in 2010.

There's some consolation that he's back "home" in Oklahoma, where the California native was a two-time college All-American at Oklahoma State and got to play the course at Southern Hills more than a dozen times.

"So excited about the week and yeah, anytime I get to be in Oklahoma, I feel at home," Fowler said.

Sweet nostalgia only lasts so long. It won't find the fairways or roll the putts.

Fowler has been searching hard for the elusive answers to the struggles that have left him far off the leaderboards of late. He says the struggles have been both mental and physical.

"It's been a lot longer road than we've wanted it to be ... I'm not trying to be the same as I was or anything like that. I'm trying to be best that I can be," Fowler said.

"I know it's there. It's more just the confidence building right now. The last couple of years, it's been really tough to build momentum, and momentum is really what builds confidence and you can kind of start riding that wave," Fowler said. "Yeah, there's been no swell. I haven't been able to ride anything."

Fowler's last win was in 2019. But there was a time when he a force in the major with eight top-five finishes, including three as runner-up. His best finish at the PGA Championship was third in 2014 when he was a threat in every major that year.

The drop-off has been dramatic. Fowler has one top-10 finish and six missed cuts in 13 events this season. He had only three top-10 finishes the previous two years.

There have been flickers of the old form. He finished tied for eighth at the PGA Championship to earn his spot this year. A few weeks ago, he was tied for 21st at the Wells Fargo Championship after missing the cut the previous two tournaments.

Butler scores 41, Heat take Game 1

Associated Press

MIAMI — His team was down by eight at halftime, and Miami coach Erik Spoelstra went into the locker room ready to deliver a big speech.

Turns out, one wasn't needed.

Jimmy Butler decided to let his play do the talking.

Butler scored 27 of his 41 points in the second half, and a huge third quarter by the Heat carried them to a 118-107 win over the short-handed Boston Celtics in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference finals on Tuesday night.

"Jimmy Butler is an elite competitor," Spoelstra said. "There's a lot of guys in this league that are playing basketball. He's competing to win. That's a totally different thing and he does that as well as anybody in this league."

Tyler Herro scored 18 and Gabe Vincent added 17 for Miami, which outscored Boston 39-14 in the third quarter. Butler had 17 alone in the third, outscoring the Celtics by himself over those 12 minutes.

Boston shot 2 for 15 in that third quarter.

"We won three quarters other than that, but obviously that one is going to stand out," Boston coach Ime Udoka said. "We semi-bounced back in the fourth and started to play well again and matched their physicality, but 39-14 on 2-for-15 is tough to overcome."

Along with the 41 points, the rest of Butler's line: nine rebounds, five assists, four steals and three blocked shots. Since the NBA started charting all those stat categories, only five other players — Anthony Davis, Hakeem Olajuwon, David Robinson, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and James Harden (who did it twice) — had all those numbers in a single game. None happened in a playoff game, until now.

"I continued to play basketball the right way: Shoot the ball when I'm open, attack, hit the open guy," Butler said. "Honestly, it was a team effort."

Max Strus scored 11 and Bam Adebayo added 10 for the Heat.

Jayson Tatum scored 29 for the Celtics, who were without starters Marcus Smart (foot) and Al Horford (health and safety protocols). Jaylen Brown added 24 for Boston, which got 18 apiece from Robert Williams III and Payton Pritchard.

Game 2 is Thursday.

The Celtics led by 13 in the first half and took a 62-54 lead into halftime. A 22-2 run was how Miami started the second half, the run punctuated by steals that led to baskets on three consecutive possessions. Strus had one, the next two by Butler pushed the lead out to 76-64, and the Heat were off and running.

"They just came out and imposed their will," Udoka said.

Orlando wins NBA lottery for draft's No. 1 pick

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Orlando Magic president of basketball operations Jeff Weltman was supposed to be at the podium for the NBA draft lottery.

He benched himself in favor of coach Jamahl Mosley.

"I haven't been very good at this," Weltman said. "Coach was feeling lucky and we let him roll the dice. Tonight, he's the Coach of the Year."

And next season, he'll likely be coaching the No. 1 pick. The Magic won the lottery Tuesday night and landed the top overall pick for the first time since they landed Dwight Howard in 2004.

Oklahoma City got the second pick, followed by Houston and Sacramento. The Kings moved up from the No. 7 spot entering the lottery. Detroit picks fifth, with Indiana, Portland, New Orleans, San Antonio and Washington rounding out the top 10. The rest of the lottery results are: New York, Oklahoma City, Charlotte and Cleveland.

The lottery, with 14 pingpong balls numbered 1 through 14 placed into a hopper, sets the first four picks. The remainder of the non-playoff teams go in reverse order of their finish.

Manson's OT goal lifts Avs over Blues

Associated Press

DENVER — Josh Manson was simply trying to hold his ground near the blue line with players flying at him.

Not on the winning goal — he was that open — but from the group of teammates charging his way.

Manson scored his first career playoff goal 8:02 into overtime, Darcy Kuemper made 23 saves in his return to the net from an eye injury, and the Colorado Avalanche beat the St. Louis Blues 3-2 on Tuesday night in Game 1 of their second-round series.

“I was just looking out because there’s a lot of guys coming at me with a lot of speed,” Manson said of the group hug. “It feels good to get that (win) with your team.”

The play was set up by captain Gabriel Landeskog, who was down low and dished the puck out to Manson. From there, the defenseman sent a liner through a sea of players that went in just over the shoulder of Jordan Binnington.

Valeri Nichushkin and Samuel Girard also scored for an Avalanche team that had a weeklong layoff after sweeping Nashville. It showed early on, too, before they found their stride. They outshot the Blues by a 54-25 margin, including 13-0 in OT. Colorado also

hit three posts and two crossbars.

“We were a real resilient group,” said Landeskog, who had two assists. “We just stressed, just keep playing, just keep playing, keep doing what we were doing, creating a lot and it’s just a matter of time. We were able to hem them in and (Manson) put it top shelf.”

Ryan O’Reilly had a first-period goal and Jordan Kyrrou tied it late for St. Louis. Binnington kept the Blues close with one sprawling save after another. He stopped 51 shots to become the fourth goaltender in franchise history to record 50 or more saves in a post-season game, according to NHL Stats.

“He played unbelievable, gave us a chance to win,” St. Louis defenseman Colton Parayko said. “They have a good team. They’re fast. We have a good team. We’ve been a good team all season long. I expect there to be a lot of close games.”

Kuemper suffered a scary eye mishap in Game 3 of the Predators series when a stick blade went through his mask and caught him around his eyelid. It took a few days for the swelling to subside.

“Thought he was good,” Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said. “He came up big when he needed to.”

Kyrrou scored on the power play to tie the game with 3:14 remaining. The Blues have been potent on the power play, going 9-for-27 during the playoffs.

Girard staked Colorado a 2-1 lead midway through the second period on a shot that went through Binnington’s pads. Defenseman Erik Johnson nearly scored moments earlier with a wide-open net, but couldn’t get speed on his shot. Binnington reached out with his glove while on the ground to stop the rolling puck.

O’Reilly took advantage of Cale Makar’s miscue to score early in the first period. O’Reilly has a goal in five straight playoff games, matching the longest playoff goal streak in St. Louis history. He tied the mark held by Phil Roberto (1972) and Joe Mullen (1982), according to NHL Stats.

The Avalanche didn’t look particularly sharp in the opening 20 minutes. Artturi Lehkonen hit the post, while Nazem Kadri and Mikko Rantanen had shots clang off the crossbar.

But Landeskog, who’s coming off late-season knee surgery, refused to buy into the rust argument.

“We played a pretty good game, to be honest,” Landeskog said.

Lightning strike first against Panthers, win Game 1

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — The Tampa Bay Lightning won the first two games of their playoff series with the Florida Panthers on the road last year.

They’re halfway to a repeat performance.

Pierre-Edouard Bellemare scored the go-ahead goal early in the third period, Andrei Vasilevskiy remained red-hot with 34 saves and the Lightning topped the Panthers 4-1 in Game 1 of an Eastern Conference semifinal series Tuesday night.

In Tampa Bay coach Jon Cooper’s estimation, Vasilevskiy was the story.

“Look at the saves he makes at the times we need them,” Cooper said. “To me, that’s what great goaltenders do and they give you a chance to win a hockey game and that’s what our guy did again

tonight.”

Nikita Kucherov and Corey Perry each had a goal and an assist, and Ross Colton also scored for the two-time defending Stanley Cup champions.

Time and again, Vasilevskiy slammed the door on Florida. Over his past three games — all of them wins, including Game 7 at Toronto on Sunday — he’s stopped 94 of 99 shots.

“He brings 100 percent effort every single game and everybody’s just trying to take his energy and bring it to your game,” Kucherov said. “He’s a leader ... he’s our best player.”

Anthony Duclair scored for Presidents’ Trophy-winning Panthers, who got 32 saves from Sergei Bobrovsky. Including the qualifying round that was held when the NHL restarted during the pandemic in 2020, Florida

has lost seven consecutive Game 1s — a streak that goes back to 1997.

Game 2 is Thursday night.

“They are too good of a team, a veteran team, and they’re not going to open the door for you,” Panthers interim coach Andrew Brunette said. “We had our opportunities. On to the next game.”

Duclair, a 31-goal scorer, was scratched by Florida for its series-clinching win at Washington, but he was back Tuesday and gave his team the lead by scoring on a pass from Jonathan Huberdeau at 14:01 of the first.

Duclair’s goal came after the Panthers killed two early penalties — one from MacKenzie Weegar and the other from Duclair — as special teams became a factor in the game.

Florida went 0-for-18 on the

power play in the series win against the Capitals and was scoreless on three tries Tuesday. The Lightning cashed in three of their six chances.

After Kucherov was hooked by Weegar, he went right around Panthers defenseman Aaron Ekblad and fed Perry for a tap-in goal at 16:22 of the second period.

Bellemare’s goal came 3:35 into the third period. Tampa Bay won a faceoff in the Florida zone and Perry took a quick shot from the slot that Bobrovsky stopped, but the rebound squirted right to Bellemare.

He beat Bobrovsky to the glove side for a 2-1 lead.

The Lightning left no doubt late, with Kucherov and Colton each getting power-play tallies in the final 4:06 to put the game away.

Astros rough up Red Sox, Eovaldi

Associated Press

BOSTON — Five Houston players homered off Boston's Nathan Eovaldi in the second inning, tying a major league record as the Astros beat the Red Sox 13-4 on Tuesday night.

Yordan Alvarez, Kyle Tucker, Jeremy Peña, Michael Brantley and Yuli Gurriel all went deep for Houston, which set a franchise mark for home runs in an inning. It has happened seven other times in the majors.

Tucker added his second homer of the night and seventh of the season in the fourth inning — a grand slam off Tyler Danish — as the Astros won for the 13th time in 15 games.

José Urquidy (3-1) allowed 12 hits and four runs, including home runs to Rafael Devers and J.D. Martinez, but lasted five innings.

Eovaldi (1-2) became the third pitcher in major league history to surrender five homers in an inning. His line: 1½ innings, eight hits, nine runs (six earned) and five home runs on 39 pitches.

Yankees 5, Orioles 4: Aaron Judge homered twice after his first-inning drive bounced off the new left-field wall at Camden Yards, and New York held off Baltimore for its 20th win in 23 games.

Judge came within a few feet of a three-homer game. His bid in the first hit high off the wall — which was moved back and made taller before this season. He settled for an RBI double, then hit solo shots in the third and fifth to increase his major league-leading home run total to 14.

Cubs 7, Pirates 0: Keegan Thompson combined with three relievers on a five-

hitter, and host Chicago shut out Pittsburgh for the second straight game while extending its winning streak to a season-best four.

Jonathan Villar hit a go-ahead, solo homer in the third and added an RBI single.

Braves 3, Brewers 0: Marcell Ozuna hit a two-run homer and Atlanta ended its scoring drought while winning at Milwaukee.

Adam Duvall scored an unearned run in the fifth to end a string of 20 straight scoreless innings for the Braves. Ozuna extended the lead to 3-0 in the eighth with his sixth homer of the season, a 421-foot shot to left off Brad Boxberger.

Rangers 10, Angels 5: Corey Seager triggered a seven-run eighth inning with a bloop double and host Texas rallied to beat Los Angeles.

Dodgers 7-12, Diamondbacks 6-3: Edwin Rios hit a three-run homer during a six-run second inning and host Los Angeles erased another early deficit to sweep Arizona in the first doubleheader between the NL West rivals.

In the opener of the day-night twinbill, Mookie Betts, Trea Turner and Justin Turner homered in a five-run sixth for the Dodgers.

Blue Jays 3, Mariners 0: José Berríos and two relievers combined on a six-hitter, George Springer provided all the offense with a bases-loaded triple, and host Toronto beat Seattle.

Mets 3-3, Cardinals 1-4: Tyler O'Neill redeemed himself after setting a St. Louis record for a doubleheader with six strikeouts, beating out a tiebreaking infield single in the ninth inning for a doubleheader

split at New York.

In the opener, Jeff McNeil and Dominic Smith each had two hits, including an RBI double apiece in the third inning., and Trevor Williams was sharp in a spot start for the Mets.

Padres 3, Phillies 0: Mike Clevinger tossed one-hit ball over five shutout innings and combined with two relievers to lead San Diego to a win at Philadelphia.

White Sox 3-1, Royals 0-2: Brady Singer pitched seven scoreless innings to out-duel Davis Martin, and host Kansas City won the second game to earn a doubleheader split with Chicago.

In the opener, Jose Abreu hit a two-run double in a three-run fifth inning and Dylan Cease pitched scoreless ball into the sixth for the White Sox.

Reds 5, Guardians 4 (10): Mike Moustakas drew the third straight walk in the 10th inning by Nick Sandlin to force in a run, and Cincinnati held on to win at Cleveland.

Giants 10, Rockies 7: Tommy La Stella homered on the second pitch of the game and doubled twice as visiting San Francisco extended its dominance over Colorado.

Rays 8, Tigers 1: Kevin Kiermaier, Kevin Phillips and Randy Arozarena each homered and drove in two runs, Shane Bieber struck out seven in seven innings and host Tampa Bay beat Detroit.

Marlins 5, Nationals 1: Miguel Rojas homered, doubled and singled to lead host Miami past Washington.

Athletics 5, Twins 2: Seth Brown hit a tiebreaking double in the seventh inning, Sean Murphy followed with a two-run single and host Oakland stopped its four-game losing streak against Minnesota.

O's Harvey suspended 60 games for drug distribution

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Baltimore Orioles pitcher Matt Harvey was suspended for 60 games by Major League Baseball on Tuesday for distributing a prohibited drug of abuse, a punishment stemming from his admission of providing opioids to a teammate who fatally overdosed.

The former New York Mets star also admitted in February during a federal trial in Texas stemming from Los Angeles An-

gels pitcher Tyler Skaggs' death that he used cocaine while in New York and California.

"We support all aspects of MLB's joint drug prevention and treatment program and their ruling in this particular case," Orioles general manager Mike Elias said in a statement. "I am glad that Matt now has the opportunity to put this part of his past behind him and pursue another shot with our organization after serving his suspen-

sion."

Harvey, a 33-year-old right-hander, agreed last month to a minor league contract with Baltimore that called for a \$150,000 salary while in the minor leagues, a \$1 million salary while in the major leagues and a \$500,000 assignment bonus if traded while under a major league contract. He has been working out at the team's extended spring training facility and has not pitched in any

games.

The suspension is retroactive to April 29. Under an agreement between MLB and the players' association, minor league games will count toward the suspension, a person familiar with that provision told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of anonymity because that was not announced.

Harvey would be eligible to be active on July 8, if there are no postponements.