

US mulls rocket system for Ukraine

The Washington Post

The Biden administration is preparing to send advanced long-range rocket systems to Ukraine as the country suffers losses in the east from advancing Russian forces, said U.S. administration officials and congressional staffers.

The move, which could be announced in the next few days, involves the provision of the Multiple Launch Rocket System, or MLRS, a U.S. weapon capable of firing a torrent of rockets many miles farther than current Ukrainian capabilities.

The rocket system has been a top request from Ukrainian officials who say it is necessary to curb the advance of Russian forces, which claimed full control of the strategic eastern city of Lyman on Friday, handing Moscow another victory in its offensive in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region. CNN first reported on U.S. preparations to send the system.

The transfer is subject to a final decision by the White House.

The Kremlin has warned that any coun-

try providing advanced weaponry to Ukraine will face harsh repercussions. On Friday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the West has "declared total war" against Russia.

The Biden administration is attempting to help Kyiv defend itself without provoking Russian retaliation on U.S. forces or allies. In a closed-door briefing on Capitol Hill, State Department officials said that some White House officials had concerns that providing the MLRS with a range of more than 180 miles could result in Ukrainian forces firing rockets into Russian territory and causing a major escalation, according to people familiar with the briefing, who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss military matters.

The State Department officials in the meeting said such concerns would probably be addressed with the Ukrainian leadership.

A senior U.S. official said the White House is comfortable with providing the MLRS system to Ukraine but will seek to

manage the escalation risk by withholding the longest range rockets compatible with the system.

Typical rockets fired by these systems have a range of about 43 miles, according to Army data. Specialized rockets called Army Tactical Missile Systems can strike much farther at distances up to 186 miles.

Those missiles were used during the Gulf War and the 2003 Iraq War and are used to pulverize critical infrastructure, such as air defense sites and forward bases.

Even the shorter-range rockets would more than double the reach of Ukrainian firepower. Kyiv's forces are using U.S.-delivered M777 howitzers, which have a range of about 18 miles. Other sophisticated weapons the United States has sent include thousands of Stinger and Javelin shoulder-fired missiles.

Despite the flood of U.S. and Western arms to Ukraine, Moscow maintains an advantage in firepower, which Ukrainian officials say is causing them to lose ground in Donbas.

Police inaction moves to center of shooting probe

Associated Press

The actions — or more notably, the inaction — of a school district police chief and other law enforcement officers moved swiftly to the center of the investigation into this week's shocking school shooting in Uvalde, Texas.

The attack that left 19 children and two teachers dead in a fourth grade classroom was the nation's deadliest school shooting in nearly a decade, and for three days police offered a confusing and sometimes contradictory timeline that drew public anger and frustration.

By Friday, authorities acknowledged that students and teachers repeatedly begged 911 operators for help while the police chief told more than a dozen officers to wait in a hallway at Robb Elementary School. Officials said he believed that the suspect was barricaded inside adjoining classrooms and that there was no longer an active attack.

The chief's decision — and the officers'

apparent willingness to follow his directives against established active-shooter protocols — prompted questions about whether more lives were lost because officers did not act faster to stop the gunman, and who should be held responsible.

The delay in confronting the shooter — who was inside the school for more than an hour — could lead to discipline, lawsuits and even criminal charges against police.

"In these cases, I think the court of public opinion is far worse than any court of law or police department administrative trial," said Joe Giacalone, a retired New York police sergeant. "This has been handled so terribly on so many levels, there will be a sacrificial lamb here or there."

As the gunman fired at students, law enforcement officers from other agencies urged the school police chief to let them move in because children were in danger, two law enforcement officials said.

The officials spoke on condition of ano-

nymity because they had not been authorized to talk publicly about the investigation.

One of the officials said audio recordings from the scene capture officers from other agencies telling the school police chief that the shooter was still active and that the priority was to stop him. But it wasn't clear why the school chief ignored their warnings.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who at a news conference earlier in the week lauded the police for saving lives, said he had been misled about the initial response and promised there would be investigations into "exactly who knew what, when, who was in charge" and what they did.

"The bottom line would be: Why did they not choose the strategy that would have been best to get in there and to eliminate the killer and to rescue the children?" Abbott said.

Criminal charges are rarely pursued against law enforcement in school shootings.

Killer rests with heroes in Arlington

The Washington Post

Every year ahead of Memorial Day, a soldier from the Army's 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment places a small American flag by the vault of Navy Lt. Andrew J. Chabrol, an honor accorded to every grave at Arlington National Cemetery.

The thought makes Judi Farmer sick.

Before the internment of Chabrol's ashes at the nation's most hallowed military burial ground, he was executed by the commonwealth of Virginia for the 1991 abduction, rape and murder of Petty Officer 2nd Class Melissa Harrington, an enlisted sailor who'd reported him for stalking and harassment. For those who remember Chabrol's crimes, the knowledge of his dignified resting place is an open wound — an insult to her memory.

Farmer, herself a Navy veteran, is determined to see the remains removed from Arlington, an act she believes will close a grim and shameful chapter of military history.

"Back in the early '90s, there was hardly any justice" for victims of sexual assault, she said. "All of the things that should have been done to give her justice when she was living didn't even occur."

Though Arlington officials have said they lack legal authority to remove Chabrol, Farmer and others are unsatisfied with that answer. She hopes the military's most senior leaders — or even the commander in chief — will be compelled to intervene. And in support of those efforts, Navy veterans who knew Harrington are sharing her story for the first time in more than 30 years.

Harrington was 27 years old when her lifeless body was discovered rolled up in a rug inside

Chabrol's Virginia Beach home. According to news reports from the time and subsequent historical accounts, the 34-year-old harbored a grudge against Harrington for having complained to superiors about his intimidating and unwelcome behavior.

Despite the accusation, Navy leaders allowed Chabrol to leave military service without facing any serious professional consequences. He immediately got to work plotting what was described in journal entries as "Operation Nemesis," according to trial testimony, and on July 9, 1991, he brought Harrington to his home and tied her to a bed. She managed to free one of her hands and, in a final, desperate bid for survival, clobbered Chabrol as hard as she could. He "went berserk" and strangled her.

Farmer had served as an advocate for sexual assault survivors in addition to her other military duties. She learned about Chabrol's case in 2018, several years after retiring from the Navy, and, even though they did not know one another, she said that for her the case feels personal.

Farmer first started an online petition to have Chabrol's remains exhumed. When it failed to gain traction, she wrote to Arlington National Cemetery. The Army, which operates the facility, never responded.

The 2020 murder of 20-year-old Vanessa Guillen, an Army specialist, renewed Farmer's resolve, she said. Guillen, who reported being sexually harassed before her disappearance from Fort Hood in Texas, has become a symbol of the military's broader failures in supporting sex assault victims and ensuring their perpetrators are held accountable.

Earlier this year, in response

to a new letter, Farmer was contacted by Renea C. Yates, director of the Office of Army Cemeteries at the Pentagon. Yates informed her that a law allowing the Army and the Department of Veterans Affairs to reconsider interments applied only to those occurring after its enactment in 2013.

Farmer bristled at the explanation.

"If the [defense secretary] is a sexual assault prevention advocate, would he be able to find a solution to honor the hundreds of thousands of women that have served, that have been victims of sexual assault, so that perpetrator is not buried on our grounds?" she said. "Because those are our grounds."

While Arlington National Cemetery is running out of space, and eligibility for burial is limited largely to military retirees, recipients of certain awards and those killed while conducting duties, most veterans with at least a day of service and an honorable discharge can have their ashes inurned at the cemetery.

Robert Taber, Chabrol's brother-in-law and one of his last surviving family members, said in an interview that he had no plans to seek disinterment. "I like where he's at myself," Taber said, "and I don't want to change anything. Because he earned that with his service in the military."

Even without a clear path forward, more people who knew Harrington — she is buried in Forest Lawn Cemetery, near her Norfolk, Va., home — now support a review of Chabrol's case. Joe Harrington, Melissa's widower and a Navy veteran, did not know the killer's burial circumstances until he was approached last year by the co-author of a forthcoming book

about death-row inmates.

In "Crossing the River Styx," co-written by Todd C. Peppers, death-row chaplain Russ Ford calls Chabrol "fundamentally evil and beyond redemption." He describes observing Chabrol beam with pride and satisfaction when he received word from the Navy, shortly before his 1993 execution, that he would be buried in Arlington.

"The national honor elated the demoniac," Ford wrote. "This monster would rest among heroes."

Joe Harrington said he was stunned to learn where Chabrol was buried.

"A good friend of mine, who was also my division officer years ago, was over in Vietnam and got shot," said Harrington, now 63. "He was a hero. He was a warrior. And he's in Arlington, and it just pisses me off that Chabrol could be there."

Nancy Walsh, who served with her onboard the submarine service ship L.Y. Spear before Harrington moved to a Navy testing unit in Norfolk, remains haunted by her death. Walsh said she learned about Chabrol's burial circumstances 10 or 15 years ago.

"At first I thought he was buried in the same cemetery that she was buried in — that really made me cry," she said. "But then they told me it was Arlington and I was like, wait a minute, how can you deserve that?"

Farmer said she hopes that going public with Harrington's story will inspire those with influence to take interest in her cause.

"Maybe there's a rule or something in our way," she said. "Usually, we try to find a solution: OK, how can we do the right thing? But there doesn't seem to be any appetite here to do the right thing."

Russia aims to widen battle in Ukraine's east

Associated Press

KRAMATORSK, Ukraine — Russia asserted Saturday that its troops and separatist fighters had captured a key railway junction in eastern Ukraine, the second small city to fall to Moscow's forces this week as they fought to seize all of the country's contested Donbas region.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said the city of Lyman had been "completely liberated" by a joint force of Russian soldiers and the Kremlin-backed separatists, who have waged war in the eastern region bordering Russia for eight years.

Lyman, which had a population of about 20,000 before Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, serves as a regional railway hub. Ukraine's train system has ferried arms and evacuated citizens during the war, and controlling the city would give Russian troops another foothold for advancing on larger Ukrainian-held cities.

The Kremlin said Russian President Vladimir Putin held a telephone call Saturday

with the leaders of France and Germany in which he warned against the continued transfers of Western weapons to Ukraine and blamed the conflict's disruption to global food supplies on Western sanctions.

During the 80-minute call, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and French President Emmanuel Macron urged an immediate ceasefire and a withdrawal of Russian troops, according to the chancellor's spokesperson.

Both urged Putin to engage in serious direct negotiations with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to end the fighting, the spokesperson said.

A Kremlin readout of the call between Macron, Putin and Scholz said the Russian leader affirmed "the openness of the Russian side to the resumption of dialogue." The three leaders agreed to stay in contact, according to the readout.

But Russia's recent progress in Donetsk and Luhansk, the two provinces that make up the Donbas, could further embolden Putin. Since failing to occupy Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, Russia has set out to seize the last

parts of the region not controlled by the separatists.

"If Russia did succeed in taking over these areas, it would highly likely be seen by the Kremlin as a substantive political achievement and be portrayed to the Russian people as justifying the invasion," the British Ministry of Defense said in a Saturday assessment.

On Tuesday, Russian troops took over Svitlodarsk, a small municipality that hosts a thermal power station, while intensifying efforts to encircle and capture the larger city of Sievierodonetsk.

Fighting continued Saturday around Sievierodonetsk and nearby Lysychansk, which are the last major areas under Ukrainian control in Luhansk province. Zelenskyy called the situation in the east "difficult" but expressed confidence his country would prevail with help from Western weapons and sanctions.

"If the occupiers think that Lyman or Sievierodonetsk will be theirs, they are wrong. Donbas will be Ukrainian," he said.

Depp-Heard trial: Jury must weigh libel not abuse

Associated Press

FAIRFAX, Va. — A seven-person civil jury in Virginia will resume deliberations Tuesday in Johnny Depp's libel trial against Amber Heard. What the jury considers will be very different from the public debate that has engulfed the high-profile proceedings.

For six weeks, testimony focused on details of alleged abuse that Heard says she suffered at the hands of Depp. Heard has outlined more than a dozen specific instances where she says she was assaulted by Depp.

Depp has denied any physical or sexual abuse, and says Heard concocted the claims to destroy Depp's reputation. Depp's legions of online fans have focused on their belief that Heard has been untruthful, and that that will determine the outcome.

But the case itself is a defamation claim. Depp sued Heard for libel — for \$50 million — in Fairfax County Circuit Court over a December 2018 op-ed she wrote in *The Washington Post* describing herself as "a public figure representing domestic abuse."

That article never even mentions Depp by name, but his lawyers say he was de-

famed nonetheless. Most of the article discusses public policy as it relates to domestic violence, and Heard's lawyers say she has a First Amendment right to weigh in.

In closing arguments, though, Depp lawyer Camille Vasquez argued that Heard's free-speech rights have limits.

"The First Amendment doesn't protect lies that hurt and defame people," she said.

Depp's lawyers point to two passages in the article that they say clearly refer to Depp.

In the first passage, Heard writes that "two years ago, I became a public figure representing domestic abuse, and I felt the full force of our culture's wrath." Depp's lawyers call it a clear reference to Depp, given that Heard publicly accused Depp of domestic violence in 2016 — two years before she wrote the article.

In a second passage, she states, "I had the rare vantage point of seeing, in real time, how institutions protect men accused of abuse." (Depp's lawyers are also seeking damages over a headline that appeared above the online version of the article, even though Heard didn't write it.)

The jury, which has to come to a unanimous decision for a verdict, must decide whether those passages in the *Post* are de-

famatory. And the verdict form gives them step-by-step instructions on how to determine that.

Heard's lawyers say they have presented a mountain of evidence that Heard was abused. But they say that even if the jury were somehow to believe that she was never abused even a single time, she should still prevail in the lawsuit.

That's because libel law spells out several factors that must be considered. First, the alleged defamatory statements have to be about the plaintiff. Heard's lawyers said the article is not about Depp at all.

He's not mentioned, and they say the focus is on Heard's experience about the aftermath of speaking out. Those statements remain objectively true even if she wasn't in fact abused, her lawyers contend.

Depp's lawyers, though, say the two passages are clear references to Depp, given the publicity that surrounded their 2016 divorce proceedings.

In addition, because Depp is a public figure, Heard can be found guilty of libel only if the jury decides that Heard acted with "actual malice," which requires clear and convincing evidence that she either knew what she was writing was false or that she acted with reckless disregard for the truth.

GOP escalates standoff with riot panel

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy is making it clear that he will likely defy a subpoena from the House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol attack, escalating a standoff with the panel over his and other GOP lawmakers' testimony.

In an 11-page letter to the panel Friday, an attorney for McCarthy argued that the select committee does not have the authority to issue subpoenas to the lawmakers under House rules and demanded answers to a series of questions and documents if his client were to comply.

Attorney Elliot Berke requested a list of

"topics that the Select Committee would like to discuss with the Leader, and the constitutional and legal rationale justifying the request."

"I expressly reserve Leader McCarthy's right to assert any other applicable privilege or objection to the Select Committee's subpoena," Berke wrote.

Committee spokesperson Tim Mulvey responded Friday evening, "Leader McCarthy and other Members who have been served subpoenas are hiding behind debunked arguments and baseless requests for special treatment."

He added, "The refusal of these Members to cooperate is a continued assault on

the rule of law and sets a dangerous new precedent that could hamper the House's ability to conduct oversight in the future." Mulvey said committee Chairman Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., "will formally respond to these Members in the days ahead."

The House panel believes testimony from the Republican lawmakers is crucial to their investigation as each of the men was in contact with then-President Donald Trump and his allies in the weeks and days leading up to the Capitol insurrection. Some participated in meetings and urged the White House to try to overturn the 2020 presidential results.

US traces NM wildfire to planned burns

Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. — Two fires that merged to create the largest wildfire in New Mexico history have both been traced to planned burns set by U.S. forest managers as preventive measures, federal investigators announced Friday.

The findings shift responsibility more squarely toward the U.S. Forest Service for initiating a natural disaster that has destroyed at least 330 homes as flames raged through nearly 500 square miles of high-altitude pine forests and meadows. The wildfire also has displaced thousands of residents from rural villages with Spanish-colo-

nia roots and high poverty rates, while unleashing untold environmental damage.

Roughly 3,000 firefighters, along with water-dropping planes and helicopters, continue to fight the blaze as it approaches mountain resorts and Native American communities. Firefighting costs already surpass \$132 million, climbing by \$5 million a day.

Fire and law enforcement officials offered a cautious but hopeful Friday night status report, with fire behavior analyst Stewart Turner noting they would need to watch the so-called "red flag" conditions — warm, dry weather with high winds —

which were expected starting Saturday.

"The weather is a big concern for us," Turner acknowledged, saying even an errant pine cone rolling down a slope and crossing a control line could spread flames. "Red flag warning is a big message for tomorrow."

He said dry conditions are expected through Tuesday, but some moisture and even thunderstorms are possible starting Wednesday.

The Forest Service has not yet released detailed planning documents for the original planned burns that might indicate whether fire protocols were followed.

Deliberations underway in trial on Trump-Russia probe

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A lawyer for Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign hid his partisan interests from the FBI as he pushed "pure opposition research" related to Donald Trump and Russia in the weeks before the election, a prosecutor asserted Friday during closing arguments of the attorney's trial.

But Michael Sussmann's legal team denied prosecutors' claims that he lied. And even if jurors believed Sussmann did lie, the defense said the alleged false statement did not matter because he was presenting national security information that the FBI would have looked into no matter the source. At the time of Sussmann's meeting with the FBI in September 2016, the bureau was already investigating whether Russia and the

Trump campaign were colluding to sway the election won by Trump that November.

"It was a very contentious time. The Russians had hacked the DNC. They were leaking emails. And there was an ongoing FBI investigation irrespective of this," Sussmann lawyer Sean Berkowitz told jurors, referring to the Democratic National Committee. "And that was viewed as incredibly serious."

The case is the first courtroom test of special counsel John Durham's work since his appointment three years ago to search for government misconduct during the investigation into potential ties between Russia and Trump's campaign. Jurors began deliberating Friday afternoon.

A guilty verdict would be cheered by Trump and his supporters, who have looked

to the Durham investigation to undercut the original Trump-Russia probe that they have long seen as politically motivated. But the case against Sussmann is narrow in nature, involves a peripheral aspect of that probe and alleges misconduct by a tipster to the government rather than by anyone at the FBI or any other federal agency.

Nonetheless, the two weeks of testimony in federal court in Washington have exposed the extent to which Democratic interests, opposition research, the media and law enforcement all came to be entangled in the run-up to the presidential election.

"It wasn't about national security," said Jonathan Algor, a Durham team prosecutor. "It was about promoting opposition research against the opposition candidate, Donald Trump."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man kills plumber he calls to house for job

WA SPANAWAY — A man was charged with murder after a plumber called to the man’s home south of Tacoma was shot and killed.

Jacques Dothard, 55, pleaded not guilty to first-degree murder and five counts of unlawful possession of a firearm in an incident that left Tom Lorezca dead, KING 5 reported.

The Pierce County Sheriff’s Department said Dothard called for a plumber because he had run over a drainpipe.

When Lorezca arrived, Dothard accused him of hitting his gate, sheriff’s officials said.

Surveillance video reviewed by investigators showed Dothard walking up to Lorezca’s vehicle and firing seven shots, according to charging documents.

Paint project affects some cruise passengers

VA NORFOLK — A painting project is to blame for a recent odor that affected some cruise ship passengers in Virginia and prompted the U.S. Coast Guard to send a crew to investigate, Carnival Cruise Line said. The Coast Guard first received reports of an odor and people feeling ill on the Carnival Magic ship, Petty Officer Stephen Lehmann said, adding that a crew went to the vessel but no one needed to be evacuated for medical treatment.

The odor was produced by an outside painting project taking place, Carnival said in a written statement. Carnival didn’t specify how many people were affected or what assistance pas-

sengers received, but said the ship returned to Norfolk as scheduled.

Police seeking woman in death of pro cyclist

TX AUSTIN — The search continues for a woman suspected in the fatal shooting of professional cyclist Anna Moriah Wilson at an Austin home.

Wilson, 25, was found dead May 11. Austin police issued a murder warrant for Kaitlin Marie Armstrong, 34, on May 19.

Wilson, a competitive gravel and mountain bike racer and Vermont native, had been in Austin for a cycling event. According to an affidavit, Wilson had previously dated Armstrong’s boyfriend, cyclist Colin Strickland.

According to the affidavit, Armstrong’s SUV was seen on surveillance video outside the home where Wilson was found shot to death.

Lady accused of leaving 4 dogs to die in hot car

FL NEW SMYRNA BEACH — A 25-year-old Missouri woman is accused of leaving four dogs locked in a hot car while she had lunch in a central Florida restaurant, police said.

The woman, who was visiting the area from Gainesville, Mo., was arrested on charges of animal cruelty, New Smyrna Beach police officials said.

A police report said she left a 4-year-old Goldendoodle, 2-year-old Boxer and two 12-week-old Goldendoodle puppies in her car while she had lunch. There was no air conditioning and the windows were rolled up, the report said.

She told investigators she checked on the dogs once during the meal, but found them dead when she returned an hour later, police said.

Gun, ammunition found in 2nd grader’s desk

CA SACRAMENTO — A gun and a loaded magazine were found in a second grade student’s desk at a California school after other students alerted the staff that a classmate had brought the weapon to school, officials said. The incident happened at Edward Kemble Elementary in Sacramento, the Sacramento City Unified School District said in a statement to families.

School staff called police “who secured the weapon and opened an investigation,” the statement said.

Man under \$10M bond after fentanyl bust

NC WILMINGTON — A North Carolina man was jailed under a bond of more than \$10 million after a drug bust in which sheriff’s deputies seized more than 1,000 pills laced with fentanyl.

The New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office said that Scott Kenneth Aubrey was stopped and arrested after detectives found he had “a significant amount of counterfeit pressed pills.”

Detectives seized approximately 300 illicit pills, and on the next day, search warrants led to an additional 783 illicit pills, steroids and U.S. currency, officials said. The majority of the pills tested positive for fentanyl and/or heroin, a news release said.

Aubrey faces multiple charg-

es, including six counts of trafficking opiates and possession of heroin.

2 swimmers exposed to toxic gas, hospitalized

MD WEST OCEAN CITY — A woman and 6-year-old girl were taken to a hospital after they were exposed to a toxic gas while swimming at an indoor pool in West Ocean City, officials said.

The Worcester County Fire Marshal’s Office said firefighter paramedics responded to the Francis Scott Key Family Resort for a report of two people complaining of having difficulty breathing from a possible chemical leak, news outlets reported.

The investigation revealed that during routine maintenance, muriatic acid and chlorine were both accidentally released, forming a toxic gas that was discharged into the pool, the fire marshal’s office said.

Colossal cat: Man catches record catfish

WV SOUTH CHARLESTON — An Ohio man has caught a record blue catfish in West Virginia.

Steve Price of Lancaster, Ohio, used cut shad bait to catch the fish from a boat on the Kanawha River between Buffalo and Point Pleasant, the Division of Natural Resources said in a news release.

Price’s record fish was 50.7 inches long, breaking the record of 50.15 inches set last year. It also weighed a record 67.22 pounds. That topped the mark of 61.28 pounds set earlier this year.

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With 5 cars, Ganassi has best shot in Indy

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Chip Ganassi skipped his 1982 graduation ceremony at Duquesne to qualify for the Indianapolis 500. The Pittsburgh native made the field but turned out to be just an OK race car driver.

His strengths were outside the car and inside the boardroom. In the 40 years since, Ganassi has built one of the top open-wheel programs in North America. Ganassi has collected 14 championships and won four Indy 500s as a team owner, though the last one for Chip Ganassi Racing was a decade ago.

That's a drought the boss doesn't find at all acceptable.

"It's been 10 years since we won here. We should be trying to win this thing," Ganassi said Friday.

Well, come Sunday, the Indy 500 appears to be Ganassi's race to lose. He's got not one, not two, not three, but five thoroughbreds in the stable and Ganassi cars have been untouchable for nearly two weeks at In-

dianapolis Motor Speedway.

Scott Dixon starts from the pole for the fifth time in his career as the six-time IndyCar champion continues his determined quest for a second Indy 500 win. The New Zealander won from the pole in 2008 but has fallen short in 18 other tries.

Dixon has been runner-up three times, and his loss to Takuma Sato in 2020 stings the most. The race ended under yellow, and Dixon had to helplessly follow Sato across the finish line. Over the past week, he set an Indy 500 pole-winning record in qualifying with laps over 240 miles per hour and now is chasing the item atop his to-do list.

"I just want to win, that's all it comes down to," Dixon told The Associated Press. "When you are younger, you don't really give a (crap). The first championship? The first Indy 500? I had no idea. It took some (crap) years for it to actually sink in what big achievements

those are.

"And so those close misses, those are the ones that leave you pissed off. Those are the ones that make you keep knocking on the door, and winning another Indy 500 is top of the list. Out of everything, that is what matters most at the moment."

The competition will come from within his own camp: Ganassi driver Alex Palou, the reigning IndyCar champion and last year's Indy 500 runner-up, starts second. Dixon and Palou are both 13-2 race favorites, according to FanDuel Sportsbook.

Ganassi drivers Marcus Ericsson and 47-year-old Tony Kanaan, the oldest driver in the field, start fifth and sixth, respectively, and were fastest in Friday's "Carb Day" final practice.

And back there in 12th? Why, it's Jimmie Johnson, the seven-time NASCAR champion making his Indy 500 debut. He's achieving his childhood dream

at age 46 after proving to his wife that Indy cars have dramatically improved in safety.

Johnson knows his way around the Indianapolis Motor Speedway — he won four times at the track in NASCAR — and if not for a bobble that led to a remarkable save in qualifying, Johnson would be starting much closer to his Ganassi teammates.

"Each day we get closer to the 500, it gets busy. The pressure is ramping up," said Johnson, who was recently sent to "The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon" by IndyCar to promote the 106th running of the race.

Ganassi is quick to point out that trophies aren't awarded in practice and his five-car fleet has accomplished nothing yet.

"I like our chances. We're as prepared as we can be," Ganassi said. "You're always hesitant to feel good about the race at this place, but I probably feel as good as any car owner going into the race."

Swiatek maintains focus, runs streak to 31-straight wins

BY HOWARD FENDRICH

Associated Press

PARIS — It's been so long since No. 1-ranked Iga Swiatek lost — 31 matches in a row — and even since she ceded so much as a set — that last happened more than a month ago — that she could be forgiven if she couldn't recall how to react when in trouble on a tennis court.

Which is why it was worth watching as the 2020 French Open champion navigated a couple of tricky spots in the third round at Roland Garros on Saturday.

Turns out Swiatek didn't panic and didn't allow thoughts about this dominant run coming to an end distract her in what would become a 6-3, 7-5 victory against hard-hitting Danka Kovinic of Montenegro.

"Thinking about all these stats, it's not really helpful. So basically I try to be really strict in terms of my thoughts and try to really focus on ... finding solutions," said Swiatek, a 20-year-old from Poland whose last name is pronounced shvee-ON'tek. "The thoughts are there, but I'm accepting that."

Two high-seeded women departed Saturday: No. 3 Paula Badosa and No. 7 Aryna Sabalenka.

Badosa stopped playing because of a health issue while trailing No. 29 Veronika Kudermetova 6-3, 2-1, and Sabalenka lost to Camila Giorgi 4-6, 6-1, 6-0.

After Saturday's setback, Kovinic said she was dealing with a nerve issue in her right shoulder and felt tingling in that arm and

two of her fingers.

Early on, when a 3-0 lead shrank to 4-3, Swiatek grabbed eight consecutive points to own that set. In the second, she dropped four straight games to trail 5-4. Might have been time to think, "Uh, oh." Instead, Swiatek adjusted to Kovinic's style by using guile instead of attempting to match power with power, and she reeled off the last three games to finish the job.

Her next opponent is Zheng Qinwen, a 19-year-old from China who is ranked 74th and in her second Grand Slam tournament.

Other women's fourth-rounders are Jessica Pegula vs. Irina-Camelia Begu, who was fined \$10,000 after she threw her racket and it bounced into the stands and brushed a child

earlier in the week; Daria Kasatkina vs. Giorgi; Veronika Kudermetova vs. Elena Rybakina or Madison Keys.

The relatively surprise-free men's results continued to pour in, with No. 2 Daniil Medvedev, No. 4 Stefanos Tsitsipas, No. 7 Andrey Rublev, No. 11 Jannik Sinner, No. 12 Hubert Hurkacz and No. 20 Marin Cilic advancing. All won in straight sets, except for Rublev, who required four.

The top seven men's seeds are into the fourth round; No. 8 Casper Ruud played later Saturday.

No. 11 Pegula, whose parents own the NFL's Buffalo Bills and NHL's Buffalo Sabres, and Swiatek are the only two of the top 15 seeds remaining in the women's bracket.

Butler, Heat beat Celtics to force Game 7

Associated Press

BOSTON — Kyle Lowry listened politely while Jimmy Butler shared the credit for Miami's Game 6 victory until his fellow All-Star took the humility too far and called his 47-point, elimination-avoiding performance "decent."

"It's (expletive) incredible," Lowry corrected him, apologizing for his language to the TV cameras in the back of the room and begging not to be fined by the league. "It's incredible to have a guy like him next to me. I've played with some great players, and he's one of the best."

Butler scored 47 points — a career playoff high and one of the best performances by a player facing elimination in NBA history — and the Heat forced the Eastern Conference finals to a decisive seventh game by beating the Boston Celtics 111-103 on Friday night.

Ten years after LeBron James scored 45 points in a Game 6 in Boston en route to the first of the Heat's back-to-back NBA titles, Butler scored 17 points in the fourth quarter to top him and send the series back to Miami.

With a victory at home, the Heat would advance to the NBA Finals for the second time in three years.

"This is the way it should be, with these two teams. It should have gone seven games," Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said. "I'm just really thrilled that our group gets an opportunity to compete in a Game 7 in front of our home crowd."

The winner of Game 7 on Sunday will advance to the NBA Finals against Golden State, which eliminated the Dallas Mavericks in five games Thursday night. Warriors forward Draymond Green said afterward that he expected to play the Celtics.

In the most back-and-forth game of the series, Boston took a 97-94 lead on Derrick White's three-pointer with under five minutes to play — the first time all series the lead has changed hands in the fourth quarter. Lowry answered with a three and then added two free throws as Miami scored 11 of the next 13 points.

Lowry finished with 18 points and 10 assists before fouling out with 2:18 left. Butler made 16 of 29 shots — including 4-for-8

from three-point range — and all 11 free throws.

"He came out from the jump and kind of put his imprint on the game," White said. "That's just who he's been his whole career, constantly attacking and doing what he does to help his team win. We knew it was coming, and we've got to do a better job in Game 7."

Jayson Tatum had 30 points and nine rebounds for Boston, and White came off the bench to score 11 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter. The Celtics are trying to reach the Finals for the first time since 2010, two years after the New Big Three of Kevin Garnett, Paul Pierce and Ray Allen won the franchise's 17th NBA title — a record since tied by the Lakers.

Jaylen Brown scored 20 points for Boston, missing a pair of free throws with the game tied at 99 after Lowry fouled out.

Avoiding elimination

Butler's 47 points were the seventh-most in NBA history for a player facing elimination.

Elgin Baylor had 61 against Boston in Game 5 of the 1962 finals. Wilt Chamberlain topped 50 three times, Sleepy Floyd

had 50 against the Lakers in 1987 and Jamal Murray scored 50 against Utah in 2020.

It was also the third-most to stave off elimination against the Celtics. In addition to Baylor, Chamberlain had 50 in Game 5 of the East finals in 1960.

James' 45 against Boston in Game 6 of the 2012 conference finals set the stage for a Game 7 win in Miami.

The Heat are hoping Butler's performance can do the same.

"I get it, people can easily draw the comparisons between the two," Spoelstra said. "That's a different era. That's a different team. I want our guys to embrace this moment."

In and out

Miami guard Tyler Herro missed his third straight game with a strained groin, costing the team its No. 2 scorer. Kyle Lowry (hamstring), Max Strus (hamstring) and P.J. Tucker (knee) had been listed as questionable but were in the starting lineup.

Boston's Marcus Smart (sprained right ankle) and Robert Williams III (sore knee) tested their injuries pregame and were also in the lineup.

Source says Lakers will hire Ham as next coach

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A person with knowledge of the decision says Darvin Ham has accepted an offer to be the next head coach of the Los Angeles Lakers.

The person spoke with The Associated Press on Friday on the condition of anonymity because the deal has not been publicly announced.

The 48-year-old Ham is getting his first head coaching job as the 28th coach in Lakers history. He has been an assistant to Mike Budenholzer with the Milwaukee Bucks since 2018, and he played a signif-

icant role in their run to the 2021 NBA title.

Ham will be the successor to Frank Vogel, who was fired one day after the Lakers wrapped up one of the most disappointing seasons in NBA history by going 33-49 and missing the playoffs.

The Lakers flopped despite another impressive season from LeBron James, who welcomed his new head coach on social media even before the move was publicly announced.

"So damn EXCITED!!!!!!!!!!" James tweeted. "Congrats and welcome Coach DHam!!"

Ham will be the 15th Black

coach currently in the NBA, the most ever at one time.

Ham was a player development assistant coach with Kobe Bryant's Lakers from 2011-13 on the staffs of head coaches Mike Brown and Mike D'Antoni. Ham then had a five-year stint on the Atlanta Hawks' staff under Budenholzer, developing a reputation as an effective communicator with versatile tactical knowledge.

Budenholzer's staffs with the Hawks also included Taylor Jenkins, Quin Snyder and Kenny Atkinson, who all became NBA head coaches.

Vogel led the Lakers to the franchise's 17th title exactly 18 months before his firing. He failed to coax a winning season out of a veteran-laden roster led by James, oft-injured Anthony Davis and newcomer Russell Westbrook, who had a dismal first season with his hometown team. Westbrook is under contract for another season with the Lakers.

Ham played eight seasons in the NBA and won a championship with the Detroit Pistons in 2004 before moving into coaching in 2008. The Michigan native played collegiately at Texas Tech.

Alonso's 4 RBIs help Mets hold off Phillies

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Pete Alonso homered, doubled and drove in four runs, taking over the major league RBIs lead and powering the New York Mets past the Philadelphia Phillies 8-6 Friday night.

Down 7-0 to Carlos Carrasco (5-1), the Phillies made it close by scoring six times in the sixth inning, capped by Garrett Stubbs' three-run homer.

Mets relievers Drew Smith, Joely Rodríguez, Seth Lugo and Edwin Díaz held on, helping the NL East leaders beat Philadelphia for the seventh time in 10 games this season. Díaz got his 11th save in 14 chances.

Alonso had a sacrifice fly in a three-run first, a two-run homer — his 12th — in the third and an RBI double in the fourth.

Francisco Lindor scored three runs for the Mets, and Starling Marte (RBI) had two hits and scored twice. They each stole a base.

Mariners 6, Astros 1: Rookie Julio Rodríguez hit the first of his team's four home runs off ace Justin Verlander, and host Seattle beat Houston.

Rodríguez, Kyle Lewis, Ty France and Taylor Trammell all

went deep off Verlander, tying his career-high for homers allowed in a start. Verlander (6-2) gave up six earned runs to the Mariners, all via the long ball.

Yankees 2, Rays 0: Jameson Tallion pitched two-hit ball for eight innings, following Nestor Cortes to give his team its longest consecutive starts in nine years and leading visiting New York over Tampa Bay.

Gleyber Torres put the Yankees ahead with a homer in the fourth off Jeffrey Springs (2-2) and Matt Carpenter, in his second game with New York, homered later in the inning.

Braves 6, Marlins 4: Ozzie Albies' bloop double in the seventh inning drove in two runs and host Atlanta recovered after squandering an early three-run lead in a win over Miami.

Orioles 12, Red Sox 8: Anthony Santander hit a tiebreaking single in the ninth inning and also had a two-run homer, helping visiting Baltimore overcome a pair of six-run deficits to beat Boston.

Baltimore trailed 8-2 before Jorge Mateo hit a three-run homer in the seventh inning and Austin Hays added a two-run shot in the eighth.

Cardinals 4, Brewers 2: Paul Goldschmidt hit a two-run homer in the third inning to extend his hitting streak to 18 games and lead host St. Louis over Milwaukee.

Twins 10, Royals 7: Jorge Polanco homered in a four-run first inning and Carlos Correa hit a go-ahead homer in the fourth as host Minnesota had a season-high 15 hits in a win over Kansas City.

Bobby Witt Jr. finished a double shy of the cycle for the Royals, who have lost seven of eight.

Reds 5, Giants 1: Rookie right-hander Graham Ashcraft earned his first victory with six strong innings and host Cincinnati beat San Francisco following a scuffle between Tommy Pham and Joc Pederson before the game.

Pham agreed to be scratched from Cincinnati's lineup. Pederson said that he was accused of cheating in a fantasy football league.

Padres 4, Pirates 3: Wil Myers drove in Manny Machado with a shattered-bat single in the eighth inning and host San Diego edged Pittsburgh.

Rangers 8, Athletics 5: Pinch-hitter Andy Ibañez drove

in a pair of runs with a two-out single off closer Dany Jiménez, and visiting Texas scored three runs in the ninth inning for the second consecutive night to beat Oakland.

The Rangers rallied with six runs in the final three innings and extended their winning streak to three.

Dodgers 6, Diamondbacks 4: Edwin Ríos and Mookie Betts hit back-to-back homers in the second inning, Trea Turner added a solo shot in the sixth and visiting Los Angeles beat Arizona.

Ríos slugged a three-run homer and Betts followed with a solo shot for the Dodgers, who have won 11 of 13 games and lead the National League at 31-14.

Blue Jays 4, Angels 3: Alejandro Kirk scored on an error by right fielder Juan Lagares in the ninth inning and visiting Toronto rallied for a victory over Los Angeles.

Kirk led off the ninth with a single to center and advanced to second on a sacrifice bunt. Lourdes Gurriel Jr. lined a base hit to right field to move Kirk to third, and he scored when Lagares misplayed the ball.

Helm scores late, Avs beat Blues to close out series

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS— Colorado coach Jared Bednar had been looking for a little extra aggressiveness from veteran center Darren Helm.

Bednar got his wish on Friday night.

Helm scored with 5.6 seconds left and Darcy Kuemper stopped 18 shots as the Avalanche finished off their second-round series with a 3-2 win over the St. Louis Blues in Game 6 on Friday night.

"We wanted him to be assertive and not so safe," Bednar said.

J.T. Compher scored twice for Colorado, which advanced to the

Western Conference finals for first time since 2002. The Avalanche had been eliminated in the second round each of the past three years.

Colorado opens the series against Edmonton on Tuesday night in Denver.

Jordan Kyrrou and Justin Faulk scored for St. Louis. and Ville Husso made 36 saves.

On the winning goal, the 35-year-old Helm blasted a shot from the faceoff circle that went over the glove of Husso.

"We had three guys going hard to the net," Helm said. "I was just kind of trailing. The pass bounced off the side wall. I just

wanted to get the puck on the net and it found its way."

It was the second series-clinching goal for Helm. As a member of the Detroit Red Wings, he nailed down the Western Conference championship with an overtime goal in Game 5 against Chicago, exactly 13 years ago.

"There's no other guy that deserves it as much as he does," Colorado forward Gabriel Landeskog said. "You talk about his work ethic, but he's the guy that comes to the rink with a smile on his face, gets along with everybody."

Kuemper, who missed part of

the first-round series against Nashville with an eye injury, improved to 6-2. He also enjoyed watching Helm record the biggest tally of the series.

"A super-clutch goal," Kuemper said. "It's always fun to see someone like Darren, who plays the game so hard, (but) always doesn't get rewarded with the points, to come up with a big goal like that is really special."

Compher, who had been held scoreless over the Avalanche's first nine games of the playoffs, broke free at the perfect time. He pounced on the rebound of a shot from Josh Manson to tie the score 1-1 early in the second period.