

Virus rate higher than last Memorial Day

The Washington Post

For the third year, Americans are greeting the unofficial start of summer shadowed by the specter of the coronavirus amid rising COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations across the country.

The United States is recording more than 100,000 infections a day — at least five times higher than this point last year — as it confronts the most transmissible versions of the virus yet. Immunity built up as a result of the record winter outbreak appears to provide little protection against the latest variants, new research shows. And public health authorities are bracing for Memorial Day gatherings to fuel another bump in cases, potentially seeding a summer surge.

It's a far cry from a year ago, with predictions of a "hot vax summer" uninhibited by COVID concerns. Back then, coronavirus seemed to teeter on the brink of defeat as cases plummeted to their lowest levels since spring 2020 and vaccines became widely available for adults. Even the vaccinated and boosted now grudgingly accept the virus as a formidable foe that's here to stay as governments abandon measures to contain it.

As the virus morphs and the scientific understanding of how it operates shifts with each variant, Americans are drawing their own lines for what they feel comfortable doing.

"This time last year, I was so hopeful," said Margaret Thornton, a 35-year-old Philadelphia researcher preparing to spend her summer socializing mostly outdoors because of her weakened immune system. "Now, I don't know when it's going to be over, and I don't think there is necessarily a light at the end of the tunnel. Or rather, if there is a light, is it an opening to get out? Or is it a train?"

Parents of children too young to be vaccinated are making cross-country travel plans. Octogenarians are venturing to bars. And families are celebrating graduations and weddings with throngs of mostly unmasked revelers — mindful they may get sick. Again.

More than half of the U.S. population is living in areas classified as having medium or high COVID-19 levels by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The latest cases have yet to overrun hospitals, but that could change as the virus spreads among more vulnerable people. The dominant strains circulating in the United States are the most contagious thus far.

"This one is really revved up, and it's probably getting up there with something as transmissible as measles," said Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College, describing the BA.2.12.1 subvariant now accounting for

more than half of new cases. "Over the Memorial Day holidays, if you are in settings where you are indoors with large numbers of people without masks ... there is a good likelihood you will suffer a breakthrough infection."

Experts had hoped that the explosion of the omicron variant this winter, estimated to have infected a quarter of Americans who hadn't already been infected, and the subsequent spring wave of omicron's even more transmissible subvariants, would provide a buffer against future surges.

But an emerging body of research suggests those infections will not confer lasting protection as the virus's latest iterations show remarkable ability to escape immunity. Experts say the recently infected who also received booster shots can count on at least several months of immunity, while the unvaccinated should expect little protection.

"You should not think, 'Oh, I had omicron, I don't need any shots' or 'I don't need any more shots,'" said Melanie Ott, director of the Gladstone Institute of Virology and a co-author of a paper recently published in *Nature* finding limited natural immunity from the omicron variant. "We are going into a surge of the omicron subvariants that are more and more able to infect people who have preexisting immunity."

Russian troops push into key Ukrainian city

Associated Press

KRAMATORSK, Ukraine — Russian troops pushed farther into a key eastern Ukrainian city and fought street by street with Kyiv's forces Monday in a battle the mayor said has left the city "completely ruined" and driven tens of thousands from their homes.

Military analysts painted the battle as part of a race against time for the Kremlin, which they said wants to complete its capture of the industrial Donbas region before more West-

ern arms arrive to bolster Ukraine's defenses. Weapons from the West have already helped Kyiv's forces thwart a Russian advance on the capital in the early weeks of the war. That failure forced Moscow to withdraw, regroup, and pursue a more limited objective of seizing the Donbas, where Moscow-backed separatists already held swaths of territory and have been fighting Ukrainian troops for eight years.

In recent days, the fighting has focused on Sievierodonetsk

in a battle Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has called "indescribably difficult." Relentless Russian artillery barrages have destroyed critical infrastructure and damaged 90% of the buildings, and power and communications have been largely cut to a city that was once home to 100,000 people.

"The number of victims is rising every hour, but we are unable to count the dead and the wounded amid the street fighting," Mayor Oleksandr

Striuk told *The Associated Press* in a phone interview, adding that Moscow's troops advanced a few more blocks toward the city center.

"The city has been completely ruined," he added, and only about 12,000 to 13,000 residents remain, sheltering in basements and bunkers to escape the Russian bombardment — a situation that recalls the siege of Mariupol that trapped residents and led to some of the worst suffering of the war.

After Texas shooting, schools boost security

Associated Press

In the aftermath of the elementary school massacre in Uvalde, Texas, schools around the U.S. have brought in additional security staff and restricted visitors as they deal with a new rash of copycat threats.

For some families and educators it all has added to uneasiness in the wake of the deadliest school shooting since the 2012 attack at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn.

Jake Green, 34, of Los Alamos, N.M., was jolted when he saw a plainclothes police officer for the first time while walking his 7-year-old daughter into school Friday morning. He grew up in Colorado, not far from where two Columbine High School students shot and killed 12 classmates and a teacher in 1999. Green remembers attending memorials and candlelight vigils as a fifth-grader, but he's torn about whether having police at his daughter's school is best.

"In a way, I don't really feel any safer with police around," Green said. "Seeing the police there, it really made it seem like the worst possibility was even more possible today."

In El Paso, Texas, where a gunman killed 23 people in a 2019 attack that targeted Hispanics at a Walmart, schools are on edge. The El Paso Independent School District has already encountered some reported threats that turned out to be false. They were either "students joking or overly-sensitive parents," said Gustavo Reveles Acosta, a district spokesperson.

"Our community is still raw from that incident," Acosta said. "It hits us in a pretty emotional way."

The district, which has its own police department, has also stepped up patrolling at all 85 campuses. Officers have been pulled from monitoring traffic or other duties. Schools already have updated camera surveillance systems. Visitors are required to ring a doorbell and show identification before they can enter.

The district is making a point to look out for teachers' and students' mental health. A counseling team has been visiting every school to speak about the shooting in Uvalde.

Mia Baucom, a 15-year-old student at a Fort Worth, Texas, high school, said it was surreal to think the Uvalde killings happened in her home state. It also stirred memories of a

lockdown at her school two months ago that was prompted by a shooting.

"I'm a little more stressed out about it because just the fear of what if that happened at my school?" said Baucom, whose last day of school was Thursday. "Let's say we get more police officers. Most likely that's not going to stop people from going crazy and just shooting up schools."

Schools have ramped up police presence in a host of states, including Connecticut, Michigan and New York, after the shooting Tuesday that left 19 students and two teachers dead.

In Buffalo, N.Y., where a white gunman fatally shot 10 people in a racist attack in a supermarket on May 14, the largest school district announced new security rules effective immediately. Any visitors — parents, siblings, vendors — have to call ahead for approval. No exceptions will be made. They may be subjected to a search by a wand detector. Doors will be locked at all times.

Two people were arrested Thursday after a Denver high school locked down its campus. Police found a paintball gun but no other firearms. Classes were canceled anyway.

1 dead, 7 hurt in shooting at Okla. festival

Associated Press

TAFT, Okla. — Authorities said a 26-year-old man was in custody after one person was killed and seven people were injured in a shooting early Sunday at an outdoor festival in eastern Oklahoma, where witnesses described frantic people running for cover amid gunfire.

An arrest warrant was issued for Skyler Buckner and he turned himself in to the Muskogee County sheriff's office Sunday afternoon, the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation said in a statement. OSBI said that those shot at the Memorial Day event in Taft, located about 45 miles southeast of Tulsa, ranged in age from 9 to 56.

A 39-year-old woman was killed, OSBI said. The injuries of those wounded were considered non-life-threatening.

OSBI had earlier said two juveniles were injured in the shooting but said Sunday afternoon that only one juvenile was injured.

Witnesses said an argument preceded the gunfire just after midnight, the agency said.

"We heard a lot of shots and we thought it was firecrackers at first," said Sylvia Wilson, an owner of Taft's Boots Cafe, which was open

at the time to serve a surge of visitors to the small town for the gathering. "Then people start running and ducking. And we were yelling at everyone ... 'Get down! Get down!'"

About 1,500 people attended the event in Taft, which usually has a population of just a few hundred people.

Members of the Muskogee County Sheriff's Office were in attendance and immediately began rendering aid, OSBI said.

"Bullets were literally flying everywhere," Jasmayne Hill, who was working at a food truck during the event, told the Tulsa World.

Hill said she and Tiffany Walton, the owner of the food truck, dove to the truck's floor to avoid the bullets.

"We're thinking we're safe and the bullets are like going through the bottom of the food truck," Hill said. "They didn't hit us, thank God."

Walton, who lives in Taft, said for decades the town has held a multiday festival over Memorial Day weekend.

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt said on Twitter that he was grateful for the OSBI's "swift response to assist local police."

Buckner was being held Sunday in jail.

Pelosi's husband arrested in DUI case in California

Associated Press

NAPA, Calif. — Paul Pelosi, the husband of U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, was arrested this weekend on suspicion of DUI in Northern California, police records showed Sunday.

Paul Pelosi, 82, was taken into custody late Saturday in Napa County north of San Francisco, according to a sheriff's office online booking report. He could face charges including driving under the influence and driving with a blood alcohol content level of 0.08 or higher, the report said.

Pelosi's bail was set for \$5,000 for the two misdemeanors, records showed. No other details were immediately available.

Drew Hammill, spokesperson for Nancy Pelosi, said, "The Speaker will not be commenting on this private matter which occurred while she was on the East Coast."

Paul and Nancy Pelosi have been married since 1963.

2 Black Ga. candidates to vie for Senate

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ga. — Wayne Black was one of the few African Americans in the crowd as about 100 people gathered recently at the Republican Party headquarters near Columbus, Ga., to hear from U.S. Senate candidate and football legend Herschel Walker.

A member of the Muscogee County Republican Executive Committee, Black said he found a certain promise in Walker's candidacy, a GOP voice who could appeal to African Americans and others in Georgia who have traditionally voted Democratic.

"They identify with him from the standpoint of the American dream," Black said. "You can start from nothing and if you work hard, you can achieve the American dream."

But that optimism ran into headwinds about 100 miles to the north. As she left an Atlanta poll-

ing site, Wyvonia Carter said her choice in what might be the most competitive Senate race this year was not particularly complicated.

"You know I'm Black, right?" the 84-year-old said. "I'm a Democrat. That's it."

In this Deep South state where the painful history of slavery, segregation and racial injustice is ever-present, voters for the first time have selected two Black candidates to represent the major parties in a Senate race. After handily winning their respective primaries on Tuesday, Walker will take on Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock in a general election campaign that could help decide control of the Senate.

The race will test whether Democratic gains in 2020 were a blip or the start of a political realignment in a rapidly changing state. In November 2020, Joe Biden was the first Democratic

presidential candidate to carry the state in 28 years, and just two months later, Warnock and fellow Democrat Jon Ossoff flipped two longtime Republican Senate seats, handing their party a narrow majority in the Senate.

Black voters were crucial in helping Democrats secure those victories and will likely be decisive again this year.

The issue is less about whether Walker will break the bond that Black voters have had with Democratic candidates. It is more about whether Black voters, frustrated by a lack of progress on issues ranging from a policing overhaul to voting rights, simply sit this election out. In a close election, even a small change in voting patterns could be decisive.

Republicans hope Walker's candidacy can at least neutralize the issue of race in the campaign.

"In this race, Black Georgians

will not have to contend with the race issue," said Camilla Moore, chair of the Georgia Black Republican Council. "And I really do believe by culture, we're socially conservative. I think Herschel just has to be Herschel and tell his conservative message."

But in interviews in recent weeks, many Black voters said they would not give Walker a second look because of his race. They said they were driven by policy considerations, and Walker, who was backed by former President Donald Trump and is generally in line with GOP orthodoxy, does not address their needs.

Louis Harden, a 58-year-old Black voter in Atlanta, said he is backing Warnock because of the senator's support for Medicaid expansion.

"It doesn't matter about the color," he said. "It's just the issues, who's going to get the job done."

Vt. likely to elect its first female member of Congress

Associated Press

MONTPELIER, Vt. — With a rare opening this fall in its congressional delegation, Vermont appears poised to lose its distinction as the only state that has never been represented by a woman in Washington.

Three women, including Lt. Gov. Molly Gray and Senate President Pro Tempore Becca Balint, are among the Democrats competing in the Aug. 9 primary for the seat being vacated by the state's lone U.S. House member, Democrat Peter Welch, who is trying to move to the Senate. The two Republican candidates registered to run in the midterm elections are also women.

Given Vermont's liberal reputation, it might seem strange that it would be the last state to send a woman to Congress. But Vermont's tiny population makes it one of a handful of states with the smallest possible congressional delegation — two

senators and one House member. And like many states, Vermont has traditionally reelected its incumbents, who have happened to be white men who have ended up serving for extraordinarily long stretches. That includes Democrat Patrick Leahy, who was first elected in 1974 and is the fourth-longest-serving senator in history.

"It's a bottleneck of leadership," said Elaine Haney, the executive director of Emerge Vermont, an organization that works to prepare women to run for elective office. "And so when someone holds on to all this for a very long time, it shuts off opportunity for everybody else."

Last November, Leahy announced he would retire after eight terms in office. Within days, Welch said he would seek the Senate nomination, leaving the at-large House seat vacant for the first time since 2006, when Welch succeeded now-Sen. Bernie Sanders.

Haney, whose organization helped train some of the women running for the House on how to campaign, noted that women bring a different experience to elected office than do men. That matters, she said, on issues such as abortion rights, a subject highlighted by a leaked draft opinion from the U.S. Supreme Court that would overturn the 1973 landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion.

"I believe strongly — and I think a lot of other people believe strongly — that if women, Democratic women, were actually at the table, these kinds of threatening situations would not be occurring, because women's lived experiences would be at the center of the discussion and of the policy," she said.

The Democratic candidates support abortion rights. A referendum on the ballot in Vermont in November would enshrine reproductive rights in the state constitution, the first such

amendment in the country. The state also has a law protecting a woman's right to an abortion.

A third Democratic candidate, Sianay Chase Clifford, is a social worker from Essex who previously worked in Washington for Rep. Ayanna Pressley, D-Mass.

The GOP candidates registered to run for the House seat are accountant Ericka Redic, who lost a state Senate race in 2020, and Anya Tynio, who ran for the U.S. House in 2018 and lost.

Redic says she will focus on fighting inflation, illegal immigration, drug misuse and government overreach, particularly as it concerns vaccine mandates. Tynio said on her website that she is a supporter of the Second Amendment, a proponent of strong border security and supportive of implementing legislation that would reduce inflation, cut the national debt and balance the budget.

China misses Pacific deal, finds smaller wins

Associated Press

SUVA, Fiji — China fell short Monday on a bold plan to have 10 Pacific nations endorse a sweeping new agreement covering everything from security to fisheries as some in the region expressed deep concerns.

But there have been plenty of smaller wins for China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi as he continues an island-hopping tour of the region.

Wang was in Fiji to co-host a key meeting with the foreign ministers from the 10 island nations.

At an unusual news conference afterward, Wang and Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama spoke for about 30 minutes and then abruptly left the stage as reporters tried to shout out questions. That left many details of what transpired at the meeting undisclosed.

But it was clear the nations hadn't endorsed China's plan.

"As always, we put consensus first among our countries throughout any discussion on new regional agreements," Bainimarama said.

While there have been growing international concerns about Beijing's military and financial ambitions in the region, many Fijians see a benefit in foreign investment wherever it comes from, so long as it uplifts the people.

Georgina Matilda said that working for Chinese infrastructure company China Railway meant she could put food on the table for her children.

Another Fijian, Miliane Rokolita, said China's increased presence had benefited people.

"They bring us bigger houses. They bring money in Fiji. They're good people," Rokolita said.

Documents obtained by The Associated Press indicate Wang had hoped to get the 10 nations to endorse a pre-written agreement as part of a joint communique after the meeting. But Wang was unable to get the consensus he'd sought.

David Panuelo, president of the Federated States of Micronesia, told other Pacific leaders he wouldn't endorse the plan, warning them in a letter that it would needlessly heighten geopolitical tensions and threaten regional stability.

Panuelo called it "the single most game-changing proposed agreement in the Pacific in any of our lifetimes" and said it "threatens to bring a new Cold War era at best, and a World War at worst."

During the news conference Monday, Wang listed some areas where the countries had been able to find agreement and said

he'd keep working on others.

"After the meeting, China will release its own position paper on our own positions, propositions and cooperation proposals with Pacific Island countries," Wang said through an interpreter. "And going forward, we will continue to have ongoing and in-depth discussions and consultations to shape more consensus."

While China may have fallen short on its plans for a grand multilateral agreement, it has been signing smaller bilateral agreements with the Pacific nations every day during Wang's tour.

For instance, on Friday Wang visited Kiribati, where a key fishing ground the size of California is at stake. Kiribati's government said afterwards the two nations had signed 10 agreements ranging from cooperating on economic goals to building a specific bridge.

New Mexico wildfire burn scar worries forest officials

Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. — As more than 3,000 firefighters in northern New Mexico continued to battle the nation's largest active wildfire Sunday, federal forest officials worried about future flash floods, landslides and destructive ash from the burn scar.

The 7-week-old fire, the largest in New Mexico history, remained 50% contained after charring 492 square miles in rugged terrain east of Santa Fe.

Two planned burns merged to form the massive blaze at the southern tip of the Rocky Mountains in the Sangre de Cristo range.

One of the fires was previously traced to April 6, when a planned burn set by U.S. Forest Service firefighters to clear out small trees and brush was declared out of control.

Initial estimates show the fire

has destroyed at least 330 homes, but state officials expect the number of homes and other structures that have burned to rise to more than 1,000 as more assessments are done.

Elsewhere, 150 firefighters continued to battle a wind-driven fire that has burned more than 8½ square miles of grass, brush and salt cedar at the Arizona-California border.

The fire began Thursday on the Colorado River Indian Reservation 14 miles southwest of Parker, Ariz.

Wind gusts of up to 30 mph forced the evacuations of 15 homes on both sides of the river Saturday and pushed the 44% containment figure back to 34%.

Fire officials said, however, that the evacuees likely would be allowed to return home by Sunday evening. The cause of the wildfire remained under investigation.

Cake thrown at 'Mona Lisa'

Associated Press

PARIS — A 36-year-old man dressed like an old woman in a wheelchair threw a piece of cake at the glass protecting the "Mona Lisa" at the Louvre Museum and shouted at people to think of planet Earth.

The Paris prosecutor's office said Monday that the man was detained following Sunday's incident and sent to a police psychiatric unit, and that it had opened an investigation into the damage of cultural artifacts.

Videos posted on social media showed a young man in a wig and lipstick who had arrived in a wheelchair. The man, whose full identity or affiliations are unknown, was also seen throwing roses in the museum gallery to slack-jawed guests.

The cake attack left a conspicuous white creamy smear on the glass, but the famous work by Leonardo da Vinci wasn't damaged.

Security guards were filmed escorting the wig-wearing man

away as he called out to the surprised visitors in the gallery: "Think of the Earth. There are people who are destroying the Earth. Think about it. Artists tell you: think of the Earth. That's why I did this."

Guards were then filmed cleaning the cake from the glass. Officials at the Louvre weren't immediately available for comment.

The 16th-century Renaissance masterpiece has seen a lot in its 500-plus years of existence.

The painting was stolen in 1911 by a museum employee, an event which increased the painting's international fame.

It was also damaged in an acid attack perpetrated by a vandal in the 1950s, and has since been kept behind glass.

In 2009, a Russian woman who was angry at not being able to get French citizenship threw a ceramic cup at it, smashing the cup but not harming the glass or the painting.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Official: Boats crash on river; 2 dead, 3 missing

GA SAVANNAH — Two people have died and three others are missing after two motorboats collided Saturday on a river in coastal Georgia at the start of the long holiday weekend, authorities said.

At least four other passengers suffered minor injuries and one other person was reported airlifted by a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter for medical attention. The condition of that person wasn't immediately disclosed.

Authorities told The Savannah Morning News that one of the boats was carrying six people and the other had three aboard when they collided around 10:30 am on the Wilmington River.

A Chatham Emergency Services spokesperson who released details of the collision said a search was underway Saturday afternoon for the missing. Chatham County Police Department officials closed a stretch of the river to investigate and search for the missing.

The incident is the second involving a boat and serious injuries on the Wilmington River this month. A local businessman was killed May 5 when a boat he was aboard struck an unlit channel marker near the Savannah Yacht Club and he was struck on the head by an unknown object, authorities said.

Gallery owner allegedly peddled fake art pieces

FL ST. PETERSBURG — A Florida gallery owner has been arrested on federal charges for peddling fake art pieces, claiming the cheap reproductions were in fact originals by

Andy Warhol, Banksy, Roy Lichtenstein, Jean-Michel Basquiat and others, federal prosecutors said.

A complaint filed in South Florida federal court Thursday accuses Palm Beach art dealer Daniel Elie Bouaziz of mail fraud, wire fraud and money laundering in his alleged scheme to sell forged copies of high-end art.

Bouaziz, a French citizen of Algerian descent, was ordered released on \$500,000 bail after an initial hearing Friday. He has not yet entered a plea to the charges, according to court records. He could face many years in prison if convicted.

Bouaziz sold some of the forged art pieces for hundreds of thousands of dollars apiece, prosecutors said in a news release. An FBI criminal affidavit said undercover agents put \$22 million down for several of the fake pieces.

Going door-to-door with chainsaw leads to arrest

NE OMAHA — Police in Omaha have arrested a 20-year-old man who had been going door-to-door with a chainsaw after he caused a disturbance near a local school.

Omaha police said the man was about a quarter of a mile west of the Omaha VA Medical Center with the chainsaw Friday morning in what they called an attempt to "make money."

Police said a homeowner confronted the man. They argued, and the man threatened the homeowner. The homeowner then chased the man.

Police said they found several drug pipes on the man. He was arrested on suspicion of disorderly conduct and possessing

drug paraphernalia. The man's own home is less than two blocks west of the school.

Sheriff: Fire destroys lumber mill facing sale

MT TOWNSEND — A fire destroyed a closed lumber mill in Townsend less than a month before its buildings and equipment were to be sold at auction, Broadwater County Sheriff Wynn Meehan said Friday.

The fire was reported at 11:30 p.m. Thursday at the RY Timber mill and the building was fully engulfed when Meehan arrived about 30 minutes later, he said.

The cause of the fire will be determined by the state fire marshal and insurance investigators, Meehan told the Independent Record.

The mill has been closed since January 2019 and was being prepared for an auction in June, general manager Dan Richards said. Items up for auction include CAT tractors, mill equipment and three buildings, according to the auction listing.

Man accused of stealing timber faces charges

WI MADISON — A federal grand jury has indicted a Bayfield County man on charges that he stole timber from the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest.

The Wisconsin State Journal reported 40-year-old Jerod Hecimovich, of Mason, is charged in a three-count indictment with stealing, injuring and knowingly cutting and removing live oak timber from the forest in 2021.

According to the indictment, Hecimovich had a contract with

the U.S. Forest Service to harvest certain timber, but he harvested live oak in violation of his contract.

The indictment seeks a \$24,736 forfeiture. Hecimovich would face up to 11 years in prison if convicted on all three counts.

Revolutionary soldier's remains reinterred

VT WEYBRIDGE — The remains of a Revolutionary War soldier were moved this Memorial Day weekend to another resting place in Vermont because erosion threatened some of the graves at an old cemetery near a river bank.

Revolutionary War soldier Josiah Clark, who fought in the 1775 Battle of Bunker Hill in Massachusetts, was buried in the Stow cemetery in Weybridge in 1835. Erosion over the years left his grave perched on the edge of a steep eroding bank, so his bones were exhumed in 2019.

On Saturday morning, a horse-drawn wagon carried a flag-draped coffin containing Clark from the congregational church to another cemetery nearby for a reinterment ceremony, said Tom Giffin, president of the Vermont Old Cemetery Association, who has been working on the project for years. The procession was led by an Honor Guard from the Middlebury American Legion and a bagpiper with a flag display provided by veterans of the Vermont Patriot Guard Riders.

The rest of the roughly 20 graves will also be moved to the Old Weybridge Hill Cemetery eventually, including the remains of Revolutionary War soldier William Haven.

— From wire reports

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Ericsson gives Ganassi another Indy win

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Marcus Ericsson, once a Formula One backmarker, is now an IndyCar frontrunner.

And an Indianapolis 500 champion.

Ericsson became the second Swede to win the Indy 500 on Sunday when he held off some of the biggest names in North American auto racing in front of the largest crowd of his life.

“It’s the biggest race in the world,” said Ericsson, who called it his biggest victory “by a million miles.”

The 31-year-old showed up in IndyCar something of a mystery in 2019 following five unremarkable seasons in Formula One. He’d worked his entire life to make it to the top level of motorsports then washed out without a single podium finish in 97 starts.

He didn’t exactly dazzle in his first season in North America, either. Ericsson was cut loose from his first IndyCar team after just one year, then bought a seat at Chip Ganassi Racing — he made sure to note it when he said “winning the Indy 500, it’s not bad for a pay driver” — and has made steady strides in his 36 races with Ganassi since 2020.

“It’s been tough. I did five years in Formula One, almost a hundred grand prix, running for small teams, toward the back most of it. You don’t get a lot of credit running in the back. People think you are not very good,” Ericsson said. “I came over here, and people probably didn’t think much of that. I had to work my way here as well, learning American racing.

“Moved here, put my whole life into try-

ing to become an IndyCar and mainly Indianapolis 500 champion. It’s been not easy. It feels good to show that hard works pay off.”

Ericsson took control of the race late — largely because of teammate Scott Dixon’s speeding penalty — and had the win in reach until a crash by Ganassi teammate Jimmie Johnson with four laps remaining brought out a rare red-flag stoppage at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

IndyCar is among the purest forms of motorsports and rarely throws artificial cautions or issues stoppages that might change the outcome. But the crowd of more than 300,000 — only a few thousand shy of a sell-out and the largest sporting event since the start of the pandemic — roared when IndyCar called the cars to pit road.

The stoppage gave Pato O’Ward and the rest of the challengers almost 12 minutes on pit road to strategize how to pass Ericsson. Ericsson was agonizing his own plans.

“Those 10 minutes sitting there in the pit lane during that red flag was some of the hardest 10 minutes of my life,” he said, “thinking what to do, thinking that I’m leading the biggest race in the world, and I’m that close to win it.”

There were two laps remaining when the race resumed and Ericsson got the jump on O’Ward. The Mexican got one final look for the lead that Ericsson defended and O’Ward knew not to force the issue.

“Nah, he was going to put me in the wall if I had gone for it,” O’Ward said.

Sage Karam crashed and brought out another caution on the final lap, allowing Er-

icsson to coast to the victory podium under yellow. Karam was transported to a hospital for evaluation of muscular soreness.

“When that caution came out, I thought it was going to be another restart. I was like, ‘I can’t believe it, another one,’” Ericsson said. “First I was angry, then I just realized that won me the race. It’s an explosion of emotions from that point.”

It was Ericsson’s third IndyCar victory in 52 starts. But he arrived in Indianapolis convinced he could win the 500 based in part to the work he’d put into learning ovals and a third-place finish at Texas Motor Speedway in the warm-up for “The Greatest Spectacle in Racing.”

It is the fifth Indy 500 win for team owner Chip Ganassi, who caught a ride to the podium on the side of Ericsson’s car. Ericsson is the first Swede to win the Indy 500 since Kenny Brack in 1999 and just the second in 106 runnings of the race.

Ericsson poured his jug of milk all over his face, then handed the bottle to Ganassi so the boss could take his own swig. Ganassi had not won the 500 in 10 years and sent five legitimate contenders to Indy to end the drought.

The win seemed to belong to Dixon, the six-time IndyCar champion who went more than 234 mph in qualifying to win the pole. The New Zealander led 95 of the 200 laps, and his Honda was easily the fastest in the field — so fast that Dixon didn’t slow down enough on his final pit stop.

The penalty took Dixon out of contention for the win.

Hamlin withstands Busch in OT in Coca-Cola 600 win

Associated Press

CONCORD, N.C. — This was the one race Denny Hamlin has been dreaming about.

Hamlin finally got the win he has coveted for the last 17 years, holding off Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Kyle Busch in overtime Sunday night to win the longest — and perhaps wildest — Coca-Cola 600.

Hamlin won for the 48th time in the Cup Series, and for the time in a points race at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

“It is so special. That is the last big one that is not on my resume,” said Hamlin, who has won the Daytona 500 and the Southern 500 three times each and the All-Star Race. “We weren’t very good all day, but got ourselves in the right place at the right time.”

Car owner Joe Gibbs said he knew this

was an important win for Hamlin.

“With Denny to race that hard and that long and to be here and know how important this race is right here in our backyard, this is just a huge deal,” Gibbs said.

NASCAR’s longest and most grueling race lasted more than five hours and took 619 miles to complete. There were 18 caution flags and 16 drivers failed to finish. The race featured a 12-car wreck and a magnificent crash that sent Chris Buescher’s car flipping over five times before stopping upside down.

“This is the wildest and craziest 600 that has ever happened,” TV analyst Clint Bowyer said at one point on the Fox Sports broadcast.

Defending race champion Kyle Larson

had struggled with adversity all night, but he took the lead with 46 laps left.

But with two laps left, Chase Briscoe tried to pass Larson and crashed, bringing out the yellow caution flag and sending the race to overtime.

Larson had the inside lane on the restart in overtime, but Austin Dillon got a push from the second row and was soon running four-wide along with Larson, Hamlin and Ross Chastain.

But a crash ensued involving several cars with Larson nipping Dillon, sending both cars spinning.

It also set up Hamlin for the win.

On the next restart, Hamlin took the lead and held off Busch. Kevin Harvick finished third and Briscoe was fourth.

Celtics edge Heat in Game 7, return to finals

Associated Press

MIAMI — Not this time. After being thwarted on the doorstep of the NBA Finals three other times in the previous five seasons, the Boston Celtics have broken through.

The beasts of the East, again. And now a chance at an NBA title awaits.

Eastern Conference finals MVP Jayson Tatum led the way with 26 points, Jaylen Brown and Marcus Smart each added 24 and the Celtics beat the Miami Heat 100-96 on Sunday night to earn a berth in the NBA Finals against the Golden State Warriors.

“This is amazing,” Smart said. “We finally got over the hump.”

It was Boston’s first Game 7 win on another team’s home floor since topping Milwaukee for the 1974 NBA title. The Celtics were technically the “road” team when they beat Toronto in a Game 7 two years ago at the restart bubble, but that was at Walt Disney World.

Tatum — wearing a purple-and-gold armband bearing the number “24” of Los Angeles Lakers Hall of Famer Kobe Bryant, his favorite player — had lost two East finals in his young career. Brown and Smart

were part of Boston’s East finals losses in 2017, 2018 and 2020. And this one was slipping away, a frantic Miami run in the final moments casting what looked like a sure-fire Celtics win into serious doubt.

But they would hold on. Jimmy Butler — brilliant again for Miami — missed what would have been a go-ahead three-pointer with about 17 seconds left, and the Celtics never trailed.

On to San Francisco.

“To get over the hump with this group, it means everything,” Tatum said.

Butler, who willed Miami into Game 7 by scoring 47 points on Friday in Boston, led the Heat with 35 points in what became their season finale. Bam Adebayo added 25 for the Heat, who were down 11 with under 3 minutes to go before trying one last rally.

An 9-0 run, capped by a 3-pointer from Max Strus with 51 seconds left, got the Heat within 98-96. They got no closer. Boston would not be denied, and now is 2-0 in Game 7s in these playoffs after ousting defending champion Milwaukee in the East semis.

“It’s just one of those really tough moments,” Heat coach

Erik Spoelstra said. “You can’t prepare for it. ... It’s one of the worst feelings into the world to address your locker room after a game like this.”

Kyle Lowry scored 15 for the Heat. Grant Williams finished with 11 for the Celtics.

The notion of Boston being finals bound would have been considered an unlikely proposition two or three months ago.

Ime Udoka’s first season as coach of the Celtics was not without immense challenges. Boston got off to a 2-5 start, lost to Milwaukee on Christmas Day to fall below .500 and was still saddled with a losing record as recently as late January.

Through 50 games, the Celtics were 25-25. No team had that sort of record through 50 games and made the NBA Finals since 1981, when the Houston Rockets started 22-28 and wound up making the title series — where they fell to Boston.

Now the Celtics will look to do the Rockets one better. That Rockets team got into the playoffs at 40-42. This Celtics team roared to life down the stretch and is still roaring.

“Our focus is getting four more,” Udoka said.

They went 26-6 down the stretch of the regular season,

and had an uncanny ability to bounce back. Boston is now 13-1 after losses over the last four-plus months.

“The road that we took to get here, not a lot of people believed in us,” Tatum said. “We took the toughest route. It looked out.”

Miami ended the half on an 11-2 run, the burst sparked by three-pointers from Strus and Butler, then capped by four free throws from Lowry in the final 29 seconds. Butler was up to 24 points at the break and Miami had gotten within 55-49 going into the third.

Miami thought it had gotten within 56-54 when Strus rattled in a corner three-pointer early in the third. But the Celtics answered with a 9-1 run, which was even worse — the NBA replay center in Secaucus, N.J., decided that Strus had stepped out of bounds, his three-pointer came off the board while the game was going and a 56-54 game became 65-52.

“The Boston Celtics did what they came out here to do in this series,” Butler said.

And now, the Celtics are off to the finals.

“Today was the biggest test,” Brown said. “Not just of the year, but of our careers.”

They passed.

Burns’ playoff birdie beats No. 1 Scheffler at Colonial

Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — Sam Burns has a winning moment of his own at Colonial.

Just over two hours after finishing his round of 5-under 65 to get to 9 under, Burns came back out for a playoff and made a 38-foot birdie putt on the first extra hole Sunday to beat Scottie Scheffler, his best friend and the No. 1 player in the world.

“I can assure you, he wanted to beat me more than anybody else, and I wanted to beat him more than anybody else,” Burns said. “It’s going to be a fun story that we’ll get to have for the rest of our careers, and fortunately I got the better end of it this time. But hopefully we’re at the beginning

of these situations.”

After Burns had a birdie chance stop just inches short at No. 18 to finish his round, there were still eight groups left on the course. Scheffler was in the last of those, and at one point during that time was among five players tied at 10 under on the back nine.

The gusty wind changed all that. And Scheffler needed three clutch putts for a 72 just to get into the playoff between the 25-year-old standouts.

“I can assure you I did not envy them while they were out there playing,” Burns said. “Didn’t feel like it was blowing any less than we were out there, it was just one of those things when you finally finish,

you’re just ready to be done.”

The playoff began with drives into the fairway at No. 18, the same hole where just moments earlier Scheffler made a 6-foot par after his approach on his 72nd hole went into the bunker.

Scheffler got on the green with his approach in the playoff, but was 36 feet away. Burns hit just off the back edge of the green his put curled the last few feet into the cup. Scheffler made a good run with his putt, but didn’t have a birdie all day.

“With the gusts as high as they were, it was really difficult to putt them. But I gave myself a lot of looks. I just didn’t have it today,” Scheffler said. “Props to Sam. He played great.”

Late big hits rally Mets past Phils for sweep

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The latest huge hit in this plum season for the New York Mets came from a first-round draft pick who never had one before.

Nick Plummer launched a tying homer in the ninth inning for his first major league hit, Eduardo Escobar doubled home the winning run in the 10th and the Mets beat the Philadelphia Phillies 5-4 on Sunday night for a three-game sweep.

Nick Castellanos put Philadelphia ahead 4-3 with a three-run homer on an 0-2 pitch from reliever Adam Ottavino with two outs in the eighth.

But then Plummer, with his wife in the stands for his first big league start, drove the first pitch from closer Corey Knebel — a 96 mph fastball — into the second deck in right field leading off the bottom of the ninth.

Padres 4, Pirates 2 (10): Trent Grisham hit a two-run walk-off homer in the 10th inning and host San Diego, which has struggled offensively, beat Pittsburgh to take two of three.

Grisham drove a 2-0 pitch from Chris Stratton (2-2) off the right-field foul pole to bring in automatic runner Jorge Alfaro. It was the second career walk-off homer by Grisham.

Padres rookie lefty MacKenzie Gore pitched seven scoreless innings before the Pirates broke through against Nabil Crismatt to tie it at 2-2 in the eighth.

Blue Jays 11, Angels 10: Lourdes Gurriel Jr. doubled home the tiebreaking run in the eighth inning for his season-high fifth RBI, and visiting Toronto overcame two homers by Shohei Ohtani to complete a four-game sweep of Los Angeles.

Raimel Tapia added three RBIs and Bo Bichette hit a tying homer in the eighth for Toronto, which capped its first four-game sweep of the Angels in 30 years with its highest-scoring performance of the season.

Toronto blew a four-run lead and Los Angeles squandered a three-run lead in a wild game featuring 25 combined hits and highlighted early on by Ohtani's latest power display. Ohtani hit a solo homer in the first inning and a two-run shot in the third for his ninth career multi-homer game.

Braves 6, Marlins 3: Marcell Ozuna hit two home runs as part of Atlanta's barrage of extra-base hits in its win over Miami, giving the host Braves their first winning homestand of the season.

Of the Braves' 11 hits, nine were for extra bases, including six doubles. Ozuna's second homer of the game, his 10th of the season, traveled 458 feet into the upper left-field seats in the third.

Austin Riley had two hits, including a homer, and drove in two runs for Atlanta. Ozuna and Riley hit back-to-back homers off Elieser Hernández in the first inning. Ozzie Albies and William Contreras hit back-to-back doubles to produce a run in the second.

White Sox 5, Cubs 4 (12): Jake Burger atoned for a costly error with a game-ending RBI single in the 12th inning, and the banged-up host Chicago White Sox topped the Cubs in a wild finale to the season series between the crosstown rivals.

Danny Mendick opened the White Sox's 12th as the automatic runner and advanced on Andrew Vaughn's grounder to second against Robert Gsellman (0-2). Burger then drove Gsellman's next pitch into left for the winning hit.

Astros 2, Mariners 1: Ryan Pressly got Luis Torrens to ground into a game-ending double play with the bases loaded in the ninth inning, preserving visiting Houston's win over Seattle.

Yordan Álvarez broke an eighth-inning tie with a two-out bases-loaded single off Paul Sewald, who had relieved Marco

Gonzales (3-5).

Athletics 6, Rangers 5: Jed Lowrie hit a two-out RBI single off Brett Martin in the bottom of the ninth inning, lifting host Oakland past mistake-prone Texas. The Rangers tied their season-high with five errors in the game.

After closer Dany Jiménez blew a save opportunity in the top of the ninth, the A's came back and won in their final at-bat for the second time this season.

Dodgers 3, Diamondbacks 1: Tyler Anderson threw six effective innings, Will Smith added a solo homer and visiting Los Angeles swept a four-game series from Arizona.

Anderson (6-0) continued his streak of great pitching, giving the Dodgers' rotation a much-needed lift after injuries to Clayton Kershaw and Andrew Heaney. The veteran left-hander scattered five hits and has given up just two earned runs over his last 21 innings, spanning three starts that all ended in wins.

Red Sox 12, Orioles 2: Bobby Dalbec hit a two-run homer, one of Boston's season-high five longballs, and the host Red Sox coasted over Baltimore.

Rafael Devers, Kiké Hernández, Franchy Cordero and Christian Arroyo each hit a solo drive for the Red Sox, who posted their ninth win in 12 games.

Twins 7, Royals 3: Sonny Gray cruised before leaving in the seventh inning because of right pectoral soreness, and host Minnesota beat Kansas City behind Gio Urshela's three-run homer.

Gray (3-1) allowed two hits and retired 14 in a row before the seventh, and Nick Gordon and Trevor Larnach hit the Twins' first consecutive solo homers of the season in the fourth.

Giants 6, Reds 4: Evan Longoria hit his fourth home run in four games, a go-ahead, three-run drive in a six-run eighth inning, to lift visiting San Francis-

co over Cincinnati and avoid a three-game sweep.

Tyler Mahle took a no-hit bid into the seventh and Cincinnati led 2-0 in the eighth when Tommy La Stella doubled off Jeff Hoffman with one out, Wilmer Flores walked with two outs and Joc Pederson slapped a run-scoring single to right.

Nationals 6, Rockies 5: Juan Soto snapped a 15-game home run drought with a two-run shot, Tanner Rainey got the final five outs and host Washington held off Colorado.

Soto, who hadn't homered since May 12 against the Mets, added a double and a walk for the Nationals, who took three of four from the Rockies. Lane Thomas had a two-run homer.

Rockies starter Kyle Freeland (1-5) exited with an apparent left leg injury with two outs in the sixth inning.

Rays 4, Yankees 2: Taylor Walls and Ji-man Choi homered for Tampa Bay's only hits, and the host Rays scored two runs in the seventh inning on four walks and a hit batter in a 4-2 win over New York.

Walls, in a 1-for-34 slide, homered on a 3-1 fastball from Luis Severino (3-1) for a 2-1 lead in the fifth and then made an outstanding defensive play to end the eighth inning.

Tigers 2, Guardians 1: Harold Castro homered for the third time in three games and Jeimer Candelario also connected in host Detroit's win over Cleveland.

Detroit won despite getting just four hits. The Tigers beat Cleveland for the seventh time in their last 28 games at Comerica Park.

Brewers 8, Cardinals 0: Corbin Burnes tossed seven shutout innings and Jace Peterson hit a three-run homer to lead visiting Milwaukee over St. Louis.

Lorenzo Cain and Rowdy Tellez also homered for the Brewers, who have won four of six and stretched their road record to 13-10.