

Ukraine denies Russia's claim of Kremlin attack

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia claimed it foiled an attack by Ukrainian drones on the Kremlin early Wednesday, calling it an unsuccessful assassination attempt against President Vladimir Putin and promising retaliation for what it termed a “terrorist” act. The Ukrainian president denied it, saying: “We don’t attack Putin or Moscow.”

Putin wasn’t in the Kremlin at the time and was at his Novo-Ogaryovo residence outside Moscow, his spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russia’s state news agency RIA Novosti.

There was no independent verification of the purported attack, which Russia authorities said occurred overnight but presented no evidence to support it. Questions also arose as to why it took the Kremlin hours to report the incident and why videos of it also surfaced later in the day.

A video posted overnight on a local Moscow news Telegram channel, shot from across the

river from the Kremlin, appeared to show smoke rising over the buildings. It wasn’t possible to ascertain its veracity. According to text accompanying the footage, residents of a nearby apartment building reported hearing bangs and seeing smoke around 2:30 a.m.

Another video on social media, which looks to be taken from across Red Square, appears to show the moment a drone explodes in a flash of fire above the roof of the Senate Palace in the Kremlin, near a flagpole flying the Russian tricolor, with debris falling on the roof. It was also not possible to independently verify this footage.

The Kremlin said military and security forces had stopped the drones before they could strike. Nobody was hurt, it added. Its official website said debris from the drones fell on the Kremlin grounds without damage.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, on an unannounced visit to

Helsinki for talks with the leaders of five Nordic countries, denied any role.

“We don’t attack Putin or Moscow. We fight on our territory. We’re defending our villages and cities,” he said at a news conference.

Ukraine presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said the claims could provide a pretext for Russia “to justify massive strikes on Ukrainian cities, on the civilian population, on infrastructure facilities.”

The Pentagon is looking into the alleged attacks, according to a U.S. official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

American intelligence officials were also looking into the Russian claims but had not yet made a determination, according to a U.S. official familiar with the matter. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, speaking in Washington at a World Press Freedom

Day event, said he had seen the reports but “I can’t in any way validate them. We simply don’t know.”

He added: “I would take anything coming out of the Kremlin with a very large shaker of salt. So let’s see. We’ll see what the facts are, and it’s really hard to comment or speculate on this without really knowing what the facts are.”

Phillips O’Brien, professor of strategic studies at the University of St. Andrews, said, “It certainly wasn’t an attempt to assassinate Putin, because he doesn’t sleep in the roof and he probably never sleeps in the Kremlin.”

James Nixey, director of the Russia and Eurasia program at the Chatham House think-tank, said “the two most likely possibilities are a ‘warning shot across the bows’ by Kyiv or a false flag operation by Moscow designed to justify more intense attacks in Ukraine or more conscription.”

US 5th Fleet: Iranians swarm, seize another oil tanker

By J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

The United States accused Iran of seizing another oil tanker Wednesday in the waters of the Middle East, a move Navy officials said violates international law and destabilizes security in the region.

A dozen boats swarmed the oil tanker Niovi as it transited the Strait of Hormuz at 6:20 a.m. local time, U.S. 5th Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Tim Hawkins said in a statement Wednesday.

The seizure of the Panama-flagged oil tanker follows a similar incident last week when Iran’s navy boarded the Marshall Islands-flagged supertanker Advantage Sweet in the Gulf of Oman.

That was likely in retaliation for American actions to redirect a tanker attempting to ship

Iranian crude oil to China, U.S. officials said last week.

The fast-attack watercraft that swarmed the Niovi belong to Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps navy, the 5th Fleet statement said.

“Iran’s continued harassment of vessels and interference with navigational rights in regional waters are unwarranted, irresponsible and a present threat to maritime security and the global economy,” the Navy statement said.

The oil tanker had departed from Dubai and was transiting from the Persian Gulf toward the port of Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates, the statement said.

Niovi is the only ship owned by Grand Financing Co., which is registered in Liberia, the

International Maritime Organization shipping database said. The Greece-based Smart Tankers Inc., which operates the ship, did not immediately respond to a request for comment Wednesday.

The Niovi was forced to head toward Bandar Abbas, on the southern coast of Iran, the 5th Fleet said Wednesday.

The port at Bandar Abbas is where Advantage Tankers, which lists the Advantage Sweet as one of its 18 oil tankers, said its ship was being held.

Iran did not issue any official statements regarding the latest seizure as of early Wednesday afternoon. Iran’s semi-official Tasnim news agency reported Wednesday that the oil tanker had broken maritime rules, without specifying an infraction.

Navy commander reassigned after SEAL candidate's death

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The commander of the Naval Special Warfare Center who was reprimanded in connection with the death last year of a Navy SEAL candidate has been pulled out of his job about two months early, U.S. officials said Tuesday.

Navy Capt. Brian Drechsler is being moved to another job as Navy officials seek new leadership for the Center, more than a year after SEAL candidate Kyle Mullen collapsed and died of acute pneumonia just hours after completing the grueling Hell Week test.

Drechsler was one of three Navy officers who received administrative “non-punitive” letters as a result of Mullen’s death. They were not directly blamed for his death and Drechsler has not been formally relieved of duty, although such an investigation is likely a career-ender. His transfer is the first step in an ongoing review to determine if any additional punishment is warranted. Officials said Drechsler will be serving as a special assistant at Naval Special Warfare Command, and had been planning to retire.

Mullen’s death has shined a light on the

brutal Hell Week that pushes SEAL candidates to their limits. The five-and-a-half day test involves basic underwater demolition, survival and other combat tactics, and during the test sailors get to sleep just twice, for two-hour periods only. It tests physical, mental and psychological strength along with leadership skills, and is so grueling that at least 50% to 60% don’t finish it.

In a brief statement released Tuesday, the command announced the change in leadership, but made no mention of Mullen. It said Navy Capt. Mark Burke will take over command of the center. The decision was made by Rear Adm. Keith Davids, who took over as commander of Naval Special Warfare Command last August. Officials said the change was done to bring new leadership in to address the ongoing challenges and not due to poor performance or wrongdoing.

Two others got non-punitive letters: Capt. Brad Geary, commanding officer of Naval Special Warfare’s Basic Training Command, and an unnamed senior medical officer. The medical officer remains in his same job and Geary moved to a staff job, in a change that was planned before the death.

Troops’ overseas cost-of-living funds to decrease

By **MATTHEW ADAMS**

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Troops stationed outside the contiguous United States will see two periods of decreases in their overseas cost-of-living allowance beginning May 15, the Defense Department announced Tuesday.

The overseas cost-of-living allowance, or COLA, is a program for service members assigned to foreign countries or outside of the contiguous United States to offset overseas prices for goods and services such as groceries and clothing. This program does not address housing or utilities. More than 230,000 service members receive COLA, defense officials said.

When COLA rates started to fall in 2022, the department slowed the rate of decreases to help service members and their families, the officials said.

In December, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin put a 90-day pause on COLA decreases so Pentagon officials could determine the next steps. Congress imposed further restrictions on limiting the reduction of COLA rates to once every six months as part of the National Defense Authorization Act, an annual bill that lays out Pentagon priorities.

So, decreases will begin May 15 and take place again Nov. 15. Those will be reflected in service members’ pay June 1 and Dec. 1, defense officials said.

“We have been holding the decreases,” said a defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity. “That’s why when we talk about May 15, much of what we are doing are decreases. That is only because most of the increases have been implemented and members have already been benefiting from that.”

There might be some changes in military communities in Europe and Australia, but most of these initial decreases will be seen in places such as Hawaii, Guam, Japan and several others in the Indo-Pacific region. That is, in part, because the Defense Department took a pause on decreases in the region in the fall to address other places such as Germany, defense officials said.

“What we are seeing in the Indo-PACOM is a natural next step to making sure we are ensuring parity across all the theaters,” the defense official said.

US ship evacuates 300 from Sudan

By **DOUG G. WARE**

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The USNS Brunswick evacuated 300 people including at least some American citizens to Saudi Arabia from Sudan, where warring military factions continue a bloody struggle for control of the country, the Pentagon said Tuesday.

“The Brunswick has returned to Port Sudan to be available to transport any additional citizens,” Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon’s top spokesperson, told reporters.

The Brunswick, a fast-transport ship, is one of three Navy ships off the Sudanese coast positioned to evacuate Americans from Sudan across the Red Sea to Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. Also stationed off the coast are the USS Truxtun, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, and USS Lewis B. Puller, a

mobile-base ship. Ryder said all three vessels are there “to provide us with options, should we need that capability.”

The Pentagon has been working with the State Department for weeks to identify American citizens who are still in the battle-scarred northeastern African country and want to leave.

Military officials said last week that there were only a “relatively small number” of Americans in Sudan who were still trying to get out. The Pentagon also said the U.S. is focused on establishing multiple evacuation routes — mainly over land — to transportation hubs such as airports in Khartoum and ships in Port Sudan.

The Pentagon has not specified how many of the 300 evacuees aboard the Brunswick were American citizens or whether all were Americans.

US, Mexico agree to tighten policies

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. and Mexican officials have agreed on new immigration policies meant to deter illegal border crossings while also opening up other pathways ahead of an expected increase in migrants following the end of pandemic restrictions next week. Homeland Security adviser Liz Sherwood-Randall spent Tuesday meeting with Mexico President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and other top officials, emerging with a five-point plan, according to statements from both nations.

Under the agreement, Mexico will continue to accept migrants from Venezuela, Haiti, Cuba and Nicaragua who are turned away at the border, and up to 100,000 individuals from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador who have family in the United States will be eligible to live and work there.

Despite sharing a 1,951-mile border with the U.S., Mexico had been notably absent from the rollout last week of a fresh set of efforts, including the creation of hubs outside the U.S. where migrants could go to apply to legally settle in the U.S., Spain or Can-

ada. The first centers will open in Guatemala and Colombia.

The COVID-19 restrictions have allowed U.S. officials to turn away tens of thousands of migrants crossing the southern border, but those restrictions will lift May 11, and border officials are bracing for a surge. Even with the restrictions, the administration has seen record numbers of people crossing the border, and President Joe Biden has responded by cracking down on those who cross illegally and by creating new avenues meant as alternatives to a dangerous and often deadly journey.

Mexico's support is critical to any push by the U.S. to clamp down at the southern border, particularly as migrants from nations from as far away as Haiti are making the trek on foot up through Mexico, and are not easily returned back to their home countries.

With Mexico now behind the U.S., plus an announcement Tuesday that 1,500 active-duty U.S. troops are deploying south for administrative support, and other crackdown measures in place, border officials believe

they may be able to manage overcrowding and other possible issues that might arise once the COVID-19 restrictions end.

Biden, who announced his Democratic reelection campaign a week ago, is trying to signal his administration is making a serious effort to tamp down the number of illegal crossings, which has been a potent source of Republican attacks. He is also trying to send a message to potential border crossers not to attempt the journey.

But the effort also draws potentially unwelcome comparisons to Biden's Republican predecessor, Donald Trump, whose policies Biden frequently criticized. Congress, meanwhile, has refused to take any substantial immigration-related actions.

The U.S. will continue to turn away Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans who cross illegally. Mexico said Tuesday that it would continue to accept up to 30,000 migrants per month from the four countries that are making up a ballooning share of the overall illegal border crossings, with no easy way to quickly return migrants to their home countries.

Washington considers decriminalizing drugs

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Washington Gov. Jay Inslee is calling lawmakers back to work after they rejected a bill setting out a new statewide drug policy — a development that has put the state on the brink of decriminalizing possession of fentanyl and other drugs while also depriving it of much-needed investments in public health.

Lawmakers adjourned their regular session late last month after voting down a bill that would keep drug possession illegal and boost services for people struggling with addiction. Many liberal Democrats objected to criminalizing drugs, while conservative Democrats and Republicans insisted they must be to provide incentive for people to enter treatment.

Inslee has called that unac-

ceptable, and on Tuesday he set a special legislative session beginning May 16 to give them another chance.

“Cities and counties are eager to see a statewide policy that balances accountability and treatment, and I believe we can produce a bipartisan bill that does just that,” Inslee said.

A temporary law that makes possession of small amounts of drugs a misdemeanor expires July 1, so if lawmakers fail to pass a bill, Washington would become the second state — after neighboring Oregon — to decriminalize drug possession. Cities and counties would be free to adopt their own approaches to drug possession and paraphernalia, creating a patchwork of laws that could undermine efforts to treat addiction as a public health issue.

Trans lawmaker barred from returning to House

Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. — Rep. Zoey Zephyr, the transgender state lawmaker silenced after telling Republicans they would have blood on their hands for opposing gender-affirming health care for kids, was barred from returning to the Montana House floor in a Tuesday court ruling that came just hours before the Legislature wrapped up its biennial session.

District Court Judge Mike Menahan said it was outside his authority to overrule lawmakers who voted last week to exclude Zephyr from the House floor and debates. He cited the importance of preserving the Constitution's separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial branches.

“Plaintiffs’ requested relief

would require this Court to interfere with legislative authority in a manner that exceeds this Court's authority,” Menahan wrote in his ruling.

The ruling and lawmakers' decision to adjourn brought a sudden end to a political standoff that dominated the last days of the Legislature and put a national spotlight on transgender issues and the muffling of dissent in statehouses across the United States.

It leaves bitter feelings on both sides, with Democrats and the transgender community outraged over Zephyr's treatment, and Republicans indignant over the vehemence of the response.

Attorneys for the state of Montana had asked the judge to reject an emergency motion from Zephyr's lawyers challenging her ouster.

Suspected Texas gunman found, arrested

Associated Press

CLEVELAND, Texas — A man suspected of opening fire at his neighbor's home and killing five people was arrested Tuesday hiding underneath a pile of laundry after a four-day manhunt, authorities in Texas said.

The hunt for 38-year-old Francisco Oropeza began Friday after he fled from the scene of the deadly shooting in the rural town of Cleveland, about 45 miles north of Houston.

A woman identified as Oropeza's wife was arrested Wednesday, authorities said, for hindering the four-day manhunt.

Divimara Lamar Nava, 53, was in custody in connection with the shooting, according to Montgomery County Sheriff Rand Henderson.

Although Henderson identified Nava as Oropeza's wife, jail records list her as not being legally married. The two share a home address, according to the records.

Nava had previously denied knowledge of Oropeza's whereabouts, Henderson said, but authorities believe she hid him in the home near Conroe where he was arrested

Tuesday.

A four-day manhunt for Oropeza ended Tuesday when authorities, acting on a tip, said they found the suspect hiding underneath laundry in the closet of a house.

At a news conference Wednesday morning in Coldspring, Tim Kean, chief deputy with the San Jacinto County Sheriff's Office, said authorities spotted Oropeza, 38, on Monday afternoon in Montgomery County, prompting the lockdown of several schools.

"We did confirm that was him on foot, running but we lost track of him. That was not a false alarm. That was him," Kean said outside the county jail.

The Montgomery County Sheriff's Office had previously said reports of a possible sighting of Oropeza in the area was a false alarm.

Kean declined to comment on the tip that led authorities to the home where Oropeza was arrested as well as on when he had arrived or how he got to there. Kean said the home had not been previously checked by authorities.

Kean said there have been several other

arrests "but I can't go into the details on that."

Kean said Oropeza only mildly resisted arrest and was not injured.

Kean said the home where Oropeza was arrested has a personal connection to the suspect. He declined to provide more details, but said there was no indication Oropeza was about to leave.

"I believe he thought he was in a safe spot," Kean said.

Oropeza was expected to appear before a judge inside the San Jacinto County Jail on Wednesday and the judge would formally set his bond at \$5 million, Kean said.

The home is near the community of Conroe, north of Houston and about 20 miles from his home in the rural town of Cleveland. That's where authorities say he went next door and shot his neighbors with an AR-style rifle shortly before midnight Friday.

Oropeza had been shooting rounds on his property and attacked his neighbors after they asked him to go farther away because the gunfire was keeping a baby awake, according to police.

Woman tells court Trump fondled her on '70s flight

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A woman testified Tuesday that Donald Trump molested her with what seemed like "40 zillion hands" on an airline flight in the late 1970s — years before writer E. Jean Carroll says the former president sexually assaulted her at a Manhattan department store.

Meanwhile, Trump's lawyer said the former president has decided against testifying, answering the biggest outstanding question about the closely watched case. Trump has given sworn deposition testimony,

and excerpts could be played for the jury.

Jessica Leeds, 81, of Asheville, N.C., told jurors at a civil trial arising from Carroll's lawsuit that Trump grabbed her chest and ran his hand up her skirt as they sat side by side in first class on a New York City-bound jet. After a few seconds, she said, she wriggled free of Trump, told him "I don't need this" and stormed to the back of the plane.

"There was no conversation. It was like out of the blue. It was like a tussle," Leeds testified. "He was trying to kiss me, trying to

pull me towards him. He was grabbing my breasts. It was like he had 40 zillion hands. It was like a tussling match between the two of us."

Carroll's lawyers called Leeds to the witness stand in an attempt to show that Trump has a history of assaulting women and that Carroll's claims were part of a pattern, not a one-off incident. Another woman is expected to testify at the trial that she too was victimized by Trump.

Trump has repeatedly denied the women's claims.

Ex-FBI supervisory agent arrested on Jan. 6 charges

Associated Press

A former FBI supervisory agent has been arrested on charges that he joined a mob storming the U.S. Capitol, where he cheered on rioters attacking police officers, federal authorities said.

The former agent, Jared Wise, repeatedly shouted, "Kill 'em!" as he watched rioters assaulting officers outside the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, according to an FBI agent's affidavit.

Wise was arrested Monday in Oregon on misdemeanor charges including entering or remaining in a restricted building or grounds, court records show.

Wise, 50, worked as a special agent or supervisory special agent for the FBI from 2004 through 2017, according to the affidavit.

The FBI says security camera video captured Wise inside the Capitol on Jan. 6, when a mob of Donald Trump supporters disrupt-

ed the joint session of Congress for certifying President Joe Biden's 2020 electoral victory.

Wise clapped his hands and raised his arms "in triumph" after he entered the building through the Senate wing door, the affidavit says. He left the building about nine minutes after entering.

Nearly two hours later, police body camera footage showed Wise berating police officers outside the Capitol and repeatedly shouting, "Shame on you!"

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Teacher faces stalking charges over 600 texts

IN GREENSBURG — Prosecutors have charged an Indiana teacher with stalking after she allegedly sent a 15-year-old student more than 600 texts that included lewd jokes.

A 28-year-old South Decatur High School teacher was arrested Friday, WIXN-TV reported. She has been charged with felony stalking and felony misconduct along with misdemeanor battery.

According to the Decatur County Sheriff's Department, investigators began looking into the teacher's activities in early April after reports surfaced of inappropriate behavior between the teacher and the student.

In addition to the texts between February and April, the teacher also allegedly had sexual conversations with the student and another student in the classroom, according to court documents.

Man convicted of road rage killing after slur

MA BELMONT — A Massachusetts man was convicted of murder in the 2021 death of a Black man after a road rage encounter in which he yelled a racial slur, the Middlesex District Attorney's office said Monday.

Dean Kapsalis, of Hudson, was convicted by a jury of second-degree murder, violation of constitutional rights and other offenses in the killing of Henry Tapia, District Attorney Marian Ryan said at a news conference.

Kapsalis, 56, and Tapia, 34,

got into an argument Jan. 19, 2021. Investigators found that as the argument wound down, Kapsalis shouted the slur and then hit Tapia with his pickup. Tapia died at a hospital, prosecutors said.

Kapsalis argued at trial that Tapia's death was an accident.

University of Arizona lets police chief, provost go

AZ TUCSON — The University of Arizona is severing ties with its first female police chief as well as a provost after criticism of campus safety issues arose following a professor's shooting death.

Various Tucson media outlets reported that UA President Robert Robbins announced Monday in a memo that Chief Paula Balafas was departing effective immediately.

Senior Vice President and Provost Liesl Folks will step down at the end of the school year, Robbins said in the memo.

Balafas has been chief since February 2022. Chris Olson, a commander in the nearby Oro Valley Police Department, will take over in the interim.

Administrators came under heavy scrutiny in the wake of the October shooting death of Thomas Meixner, a hydrology professor who was gunned down by an expelled student.

Bride dies after golf cart hit by drunk driver

SC FOLLY BEACH — A bride leaving her wedding reception was killed when a woman driving under the influence and well over twice the speed limit slammed into the back of a golf cart on a

South Carolina beach road, authorities said.

Data retrieved from Jamie Lee Komoroski's rental car indicated she was driving 65 mph and only briefly hit the brakes before she hit the golf cart around 10 p.m. Friday on Folly Beach, investigators said. The speed limit on the island near Charleston is 25 mph.

Samantha Miller, 34, of Charlotte, N.C., died in the wreck, according to the Charleston County Coroner's Office.

Miller had gotten married hours earlier, Folly Beach Public Safety Department Director Andrew Gilreath said.

Three others in the golf cart including the groom were injured. Gilreath said the golf cart had lights and was legal to drive at night.

Pot consulting gig paid secretary of state \$10K

OR SALEM — Oregon Secretary of State Shemia Fagan apologized Monday for taking a job as a consultant for a marijuana company — part of an industry that her office just audited — that paid far more than her state salary.

After previously refusing to disclose the terms of her contract, Fagan had her office email reporters a copy on Monday. It showed the consultancy paid \$10,000 per month, with bonuses three times that amount if she helped the company get licensed in other states.

Fagan, a Democrat who is the state's second-highest ranking official, indicated she aims to hold onto her elected position despite Republican calls for her to resign. Gov. Tina Kotek, a Democrat, requested investiga-

tions by the Oregon Government Ethics Commission and the Oregon Department of Justice into the matter Friday.

"I am sorry for harming the trust that I and so many others have worked so hard to build with you over the last few years," Fagan said during a Zoom conference she held Monday. "I will begin working to build that trust back today."

State Senate votes to ban safe injection sites

PA HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania's state Senate on Monday approved legislation to ban so-called safe injection sites, after Philadelphia became the center of a legal battle over opening safe havens where opioid users could legally inject heroin and other drugs under supervision as a way to reduce overdoses.

The bill passed, 41-9, with every Republican in favor of it and nine of 22 Democrats against it.

The bill's sponsor, Sen. Christine Tartaglione, D-Philadelphia, said she supports recovery and harm-reduction efforts, such as needle exchanges and mobile methadone units, but not what she called "programs that perpetuate addiction without a path to recovery."

Sen. Nikil Saval, D-Philadelphia, said efforts to ban the centers are based on misconceptions that they provide drugs or contribute to crime.

Rather, the centers are sanitary and staffed by professionals who save lives by connecting addicts to treatment and services that can help them and reduce pressure on police and emergency responders, Saval said.

— From wire reports



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76ers' Embiid claims NBA MVP award

Associated Press

Joel Embiid began the long process toward NBA MVP as a towering soccer prospect in Africa who never picked up a basketball until he was a teenager.

Once he changed sports for good, Embiid became a generational — albeit often-injured — talent. And, the affable center quickly became the face of the Philadelphia 76ers' rebuilding effort more commonly known as The Process.

He embraced the nickname and is introduced before every home game as Joel "The Process" Embiid.

Embiid can now add MVP.

The All-Star center and two-time league scoring champion, Embiid, who had long lobbied for the award, earned his first NBA MVP trophy Tuesday night, topping two-time winner Nikola Jokic of the Denver Nuggets.

The 29-year-old from Yaoundé, Cameroon, averaged 33.1 points to win his second straight scoring title, averaged

10.2 rebounds and tied a career high with 4.2 assists per game. Embiid has been sidelined with a sprained right knee that cost him one game of the playoff sweep against Brooklyn and the opening game of the Eastern Conference semifinals against Boston, which was won by Philadelphia on Monday night.

Jokic finished runner-up in the MVP voting, and Giannis Antetokounmpo of the Milwaukee Bucks was third. Embiid received 73 first-place votes. Jokic received 15 first-place votes, and Antetokounmpo got 12.

"It's been a long time coming," Embiid said. "A lot of hard work. I've been through a lot. I'm not just talking about basketball. I'm talking about my life. My story. Where I come from. How I got here and what it took for me to be here."

The 76ers watched on TV in Boston and erupted in applause and started chanting "MVP! MVP!" as the big man buried his head in his hands as he sat in a chair in the team hotel.

Embiid was in tears as teammates James Harden, Tobias Harris and Tyrese Maxey mobbed him in celebration.

Embiid then vowed "I'll be back" for the playoff series against the Celtics.

But as for Game 2 on Wednesday night?

"We shall see," Embiid said.

Play or not, there will be raucous celebration for Embiid once the 76ers return home Friday night for Game 3.

Embiid has been determined to win — and campaigned for — the MVP trophy for years. The third overall pick of the 2014 draft, Embiid missed his first two full seasons with injuries before settling in as one of the top big men of his generation. He was at his best this season when he totaled three 50-point games, including a career-high 59 against Utah in November. He had 13 total 40-point games.

When Embiid totaled 52 points and 13 rebounds in a win against the Celtics in April, coach Doc Rivers boldly de-

clared, "The MVP race is over."

Embiid certainly didn't argue that night with his coach or Sixers teammates who stumped on his behalf.

"They're probably right," Embiid said. "But we have bigger goals in mind."

His durability played a factor in the vote. Embiid played in 66 games, the second-highest total of his career, even though he has again been hit with injuries in the playoffs.

Embiid is the first 76er to win league MVP since Allen Iverson in 2001. Julius Erving in 1981, Moses Malone in 1983 and Wilt Chamberlain from 1966-1968 are other 76ers to win NBA MVP awards.

Embiid's injury, though, could be the deciding factor in the 76ers' chase for the NBA championship. The Sixers are trying to win their first NBA title since 1983 and advance past the second round for the first time since 2001 — which was the last time a Sixer won the MVP award.

Davis, James deliver as Lakers win series opener

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — LeBron James no longer has to do it all against Stephen Curry on the big stage, not even close. Anthony Davis plugs the middle and takes away the easy chances inside. Dennis Schröder has the energy to help chase No. 30 all over the court. D'Angelo Russell can hit a big shot with a hand in his face.

That's the thing about these new-look Lakers — they take so much pressure off the game's all-time scoring leader and LeBron believes in them, even with the defending champions on a 14-0 run with their home crowd rocking.

Davis had 30 points, 23 rebounds, five assists and four blocked shots, James added 22 points and 11 rebounds dueling

with Stephen Curry in their latest postseason showdown, and Los Angeles held off a late flurry by the Golden State Warriors to win an entertaining Game 1 in the Western Conference semifinals 117-112 on Tuesday night.

"We've been playing playoff basketball for about 2 ½ months now just to punch our clock to be able to play right now in the postseason," James said. "We were very resilient tonight. ... We know how great they are on their home floor, so to withstand that, it's another good step for our ball club."

James' 23 points were his third-fewest in 23 playoff games against the Warriors. His last low in a win was 27 in Game 7 of 2016 Finals.

Jordan Poole missed a three-

pointer to tie it with 9.7 seconds left as the Warriors' rally in the closing minutes fell short. Curry's three with 1:38 left tied the game, then Russell answered right back before Davis blocked a shot by Curry moments later. James missed the first of two free throws with 1:05 to go.

Poole's three with 2:48 remaining cut the Lakers' lead to 112-109, and James was called for traveling with 1:53 left.

For all-time scoring leader James and Curry — who has the most three-pointers ever and is reigning NBA Finals MVP — this is a new chapter in the long rivalry between the superstars after they faced off in four straight NBA Finals from 2015-18 while James played for Cleveland.

Curry scored 27 points, Splash Brother Klay Thompson had 25 and Kevon Looney grabbed a career-high 23 rebounds for his fourth game of this postseason with 20 or more. He also had 10 points and five assists. Thompson made a three with 5:19 to go that cut the Lakers' lead to 112-104.

The defending champion Warriors will try to even the series in Game 2 on Thursday night back on their home floor at Chase Center, where LA fans could be heard chanting "Let's go Lakers!" after the final buzzer.

Davis dominated from the opening tip, making 9 of his first 10 shots, while Russell scored 19 points and dished out six assists against his former team.

Brunson, Randle help Knicks even series

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jalen Brunson took the blame when the Knicks dropped the opener of the Eastern Conference semifinals and insisted he needed to be better in Game 2.

Halfway through, it appeared he wasn't.

Struggling again with his shot and this time a sore right ankle as well, Brunson told himself he needed to fight through it.

"Just kind of had to find a way to be mentally tough," he said. "Go out there and do it."

He did, getting New York back to even in the series.

Brunson scored 30 points

Tuesday night and keyed the run the Knicks needed just in time for a 111-105 victory over a Miami Heat team playing without Jimmy Butler.

Julius Randle returned from a sprained left ankle that sidelined him in Game 1 with 25 points, 12 rebounds and eight assists, and RJ Barrett scored 16 of his 24 points in the first quarter for the No. 5-seeded Knicks. Josh Hart finished with 14 points, 11 rebounds and nine assists.

"I thought Julius gutted it out, played tough. I thought Jalen was fantastic," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said. "RJ big,

big start to the game for us, so we had a number of guys step up to get it done."

But it was Brunson, who was 0 for 7 from three-point range in the opener, who made the biggest plays after going just 1 for 6 for seven points in the first half.

"It's who he is," Thibodeau said. "Great leader, great toughness. He never disappoints you. Sometimes you can fall short, but there's no quit in him."

Caleb Martin scored 22 points in place of Butler for the Heat, who host Game 3 on Saturday afternoon. They will hope to have Butler, the leading scor-

er in the playoffs who sat out after spraining his right ankle late in their 108-101 victory in the opener.

Butler is averaging 35.5 points in the postseason, finishing off the top-seeded Bucks in the first round with 56 and 42 points in the last two games. He had 25 points and 11 points in the opener of this series and almost watched his teammates pull this one out without him.

"Obviously we feel a certain way right now that we weren't able to find a way to get this win, but we'll get over it and we'll get ready for Saturday," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said.

Ramírez homers as Rays top Pirates in matchup of top teams

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Harold Ramírez homered and drove in two runs to lead the Tampa Bay Rays over the Pittsburgh Pirates 4-1 on Tuesday night in a matchup of teams with the top two records in the major leagues.

Ramírez drove in the game's first run with an RBI single in the fourth and boosted the lead to 4-1 with a solo homer in the sixth against Roansy Contreras (3-2). The Rays, who drew just 10,325 to Tropicana Field, lead the big leagues with 62 home runs and have outscored opponents 199-93.

"Don't matter who we play, we just have to play good baseball," Ramírez said. "We're just here to win."

Tampa Bay is the 15th team since 1901 to win at least 24 of its first 30 games and the first since the 2016 World Series champion Chicago Cubs started 24-6.

Pittsburgh (20-10), in first place at the end of April for the first time since 1992, lost back-to-back games for the first time since the last two games of its opening series at Cincinnati. The Pirates lost for the third time in the last 13 games.

Orioles 11, Royals 7: Ryan Mountcastle hit two-run homers in consecutive innings and finished with five RBIs, Adley Rutschman had four hits and drove in a run, and visiting Baltimore earned its 16th win in the past 20 games.

Tyler Wells (2-1) allowed just three hits over six innings but they were all home runs: Bobby Witt Jr.'s leadoff rocket, a two-run homer by MJ Melendez and a solo shot by Salvador Perez. Wells also walked three and

struck out four.

Braves 6, Marlins 0: Bryce Elder out-pitched NL Cy Young Award winner Sandy Alcantara by throwing seven innings of three-hit ball and visiting Atlanta shut out Miami.

Ozzie Albies homered and doubled, while Ronald Acuña Jr. doubled, drove in a run and stole his NL-leading 14th base for the Braves. Elder (3-0) struck out six and induced 10 groundouts.

Rockies 3, Brewers 2: Elías Díaz homered and drove in the go-ahead run with an eighth-inning single, and host Colorado won its past two home games after dropping seven straight at Coors Field.

Rookie shortstop Ezequiel Tovar hit his first major league home run for Colorado.

Rangers 6, Diamondbacks 4: Ezequiel Duran hit a go-ahead, two-run homer in the sixth inning, and host Texas matched its longest winning streak of the season at four games.

Marcus Semien and Travis Jankowski cut the deficit to 4-3 with RBI singles in the fifth off Arizona's Zac Gallen, who entered the game with a 28-inning scoreless streak, the longest in the big leagues.

Red Sox 7, Blue Jays 6: Connor Wong hit two homers, including a tiebreaking solo shot in the eighth, to help host Boston rally past Toronto.

Masataka Yoshida and Christian Arroyo also homered for Boston and the Red Sox tied a season-high for hits with 14, including four by Wong.

White Sox 3, Twins 2 (10): Andrew Benin-

tendi robbed Minnesota's Carlos Correa of a homer and hit a game-ending single in the 10th inning, and host Chicago earned its second straight win after a 10-game losing streak.

Dodgers 13, Phillies 1: Bryce Harper went 0-for-4 with three strikeouts in his return to the Phillies just 160 days after Tommy John surgery, and Philadelphia lost to host Los Angeles as Julio Urías allowed one hit and struck out 10 in seven innings.

Giants 2, Astros 0: Anthony DeSclafani pitched eight scoreless innings and Camilo Doval completed the three-hitter to lead visiting San Francisco over Houston.

Reds 2, Padres 1 (10): Jonathan India singled in the go-ahead run on Luis Garcia's first pitch of the 10th inning and visiting Cincinnati snapped San Diego's three-game winning streak.

Angels 5, Cardinals 1: Taylor Ward capped a four-run first inning with a three-run homer, Patrick Sandoval combined with three relievers on a four-hitter and visiting Los Angeles beat St. Louis to extend the Cardinals' losing streak to four.

Nationals 4, Cubs 1: Alex Call hit a two-run double during a three-run seventh inning, and host Washington beat Chicago.

Yankees 4, Guardians 2: Willie Calhoun snapped a seventh-inning tie with his first home run for host New York, which beat Cleveland to stop a four-game slide.

Mariners 2, Athletics 1: AJ Pollock homered to break up a combined no-hit bid with one out in the eighth inning and Jarred Kelenic added an RBI double as visiting Seattle rallied past Oakland.

Gourde gets OT goal, Kraken beat Stars

Associated Press

DALLAS — Yannick Gourde scored 12:17 into overtime with a quick shot after regathering a loose puck and the Seattle Kraken beat Dallas 5-4 in Game 1 of their second-round series Tuesday night, even as Joe Pavelski scored all four Stars goals in his return to their lineup.

Gourde was on the edge of the circle to the left of the Dallas net when he appeared to try to send a pass to a teammate on the blue line to reset. The puck instead ricocheted off Evgenii Dadonov, and Gourde quickly whipped around for a shot that went into a small gap to the left of goalie Jake Oettinger for the game-winner.

“Got a retrieval, stayed on the puck, and then I was just fortunate,” Gourde said. “I turned around and I found the back of the net.”

Pavelski, at 38 years and 295 days old, became the oldest player ever with a four-goal game in the NHL playoffs. It

came in in his 170th postseason game — he is one of only five players with that many without winning a Stanley Cup — and after he had missed the last five games in the first round while in concussion protocol.

“Epic. Epic. Ashamed we wasted it and didn’t win,” Stars coach Pete DeBoer said. “That’s on our group because, you know, he more than did his part. He tried to drag us to a win.”

The second-year Kraken got goals from five different players after 15 different players scored in their seven-game series win over defending Stanley Cup champion Colorado.

Jaden Schwartz, Justin Schultz, Oliver Bjorkstrand and Jordan Eberle also had goals for Seattle, all in the first period.

“Every win, especially right now, you need everyone going, everyone chipping in and everyone elevating their game,” Schwartz said. “We rely on everybody. We need to and we like our depth and we’ve done a good

job.”

Pavelski scored twice in the first period. His first goal on his first shot was a 25-foot wrister only 2½ minutes in.

About 10 minutes later, after Seattle had gotten even, Pavelski scored again from about the same distance with a redirect of Thomas Harley’s shot. The Kraken then scored three goals in a 68-second span to take a 4-2 lead.

But Oettinger then stopped 33 consecutive shots before Gourde got the game-winner right around midnight.

Seattle has now won three consecutive road games in the playoffs. The Stars, just like in the first round against Minnesota, lost the series opener — they lost that one 3-2 in double overtime before going on to beat the Wild in six games.

Game 2 of the best-of-seven series is Thursday night.

Pavelski’s fourth goal of the night with 6½ minutes left in the third period tied the game at 4,

when he swatted a puck in the net out of mid-air after Jani Hakanpää’s shot ricocheted off the stick of Adam Larsson into the air toward the crease. He had notched his second career postseason hat trick midway through the third period when he knocked in a rebound after captain Jamie Benn’s shot.

“As soon as they got the third goal, the momentum swings, and they came in waves, the building’s rocking,” Seattle coach Dave Hakstol said. “But to be able to get through to the overtime, the intermission, settled down a little bit and just get back to our game. We didn’t do anything spectacular out of the ordinary in overtime.”

Philipp Grubauer had 31 saves for the Kraken, one into his chest with 22 seconds left in regulation on a shot by rookie Wyatt Johnston, who was also wide of the net with another in the final minute. It was Grubauer’s fifth game this postseason with at least 30 saves.

Panthers keep rolling, edge Maple Leafs in Game 1

Associated Press

TORONTO — Florida coach Paul Maurice says the Panthers play their best hockey when faced with the most difficulty.

That was true Tuesday night, as the Panthers had less than 48 hours to recover from their first-round series win over Boston and opened the second round in Toronto.

“If we’re a little fatigued because that [Bruins] series was heavy, it’s kind of our normal day,” Maurice said. “When you look at our schedule at the end of January, it was brutal. And that’s when we started to play our best hockey.”

“So being in the mud, as we would say, we’re kind of used to it.”

Sergei Bobrovsky made 34 saves, Matthew Tkachuk had three assists and the Panthers

survived a squandered two-goal lead to defeat the Maple Leafs 4-2 in the opening game of their second-round playoff series.

“He was unbelievable, he’s been great in every game that he’s come in,” Sam Bennett said of the netminder. “It has been awesome to see. That’s what we need out of him and he’s stepped up.”

Bennett had a goal and an assist and Carter Verhaeghe and Nick Cousins also scored for Florida.

Matthew Knies had his first NHL goal and Michael Bunting also scored for Toronto. Ilya Samsonov stopped 24 shots.

“They force you to make mistakes,” Toronto coach Sheldon Keefe said. “But I thought we made some mistakes that we didn’t necessarily make in the last series.”

Game 2 of the best-of-seven series is Thursday.

The Panthers had roared back from a 3-1 deficit to stun the record-setting Boston Bruins with three straight victories and take that first-round series in seven games.

The Maple Leafs ended a generation of misery Saturday when John Tavares scored in overtime of Game 6 against the Tampa Bay Lightning as Toronto advanced in the postseason for the first time since 2004.

“They played well,” Toronto defenseman Luke Schenn said. “But a lot of the goals that were scored were self-inflicted. We still have a lot more to give.”

Tied at 2 late in the second period with the Maple Leafs pushing, the Panthers silenced the towel-waving crowd at Scotiabank Arena.

Verhaeghe, who scored the dramatic winner in Game 7 against Boston on Sunday, took a pass from Anthony Duclair and gave Florida the lead for good when he beat Samsonov on a breakaway at 17:47 for his fourth goal of the playoffs.

“Instead of going in [to intermission] tied, you go up a goal, so it’s huge,” Verhaeghe said. “It kind of settled us down after the period. You take a deep breath. It was a good goal.”

Toronto had a couple of opportunities to tie it in the third, but never really threatened Bobrovsky before Montour blasted a one-timer on a delayed penalty at 12:24.

Bobrovsky then denied William Nylander on a terrific toe stop with just over a minute left in regulation on Toronto’s best chance to close within one.