

Wagner boss threatens to pull out from Bakhmut

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The owner of Russia's Wagner military contractor threatened Friday to withdraw his troops next week from the protracted battle for the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, accusing Moscow's military command of starving his forces of ammunition and causing them heavy losses.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, a wealthy entrepreneur with longtime links to Russian President Vladimir Putin, claimed that Wagner had planned to capture Bakhmut by May 9, Russia's major Victory Day holiday celebrating the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II.

It is not the first time Prigozhin has raged about ammunition shortages and blamed Russia's military, with which he has long been in conflict. Known for his bluster, he has previously made unverifiable claims and threats he hasn't carried out.

Prigozhin's spokespeople also published a video of him Friday standing in front of about 30 uniformed bodies lying on the ground and saying they are Wagner fighters who died on Thursday alone. He angrily demands ammunition from Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov.

"These are someone's fathers and someone's sons," Prigozhin says, pointing at the bodies and swearing. "The scum that doesn't give us ammunition will eat their guts in hell."

Wagner has spearheaded the struggle for control of Bakhmut, the longest — and likely bloodiest — battle of the war. More than eight months of fighting there is believed to have cost thousands of lives. A pullout by Wagner would be a huge blow to the Russian campaign.

For the Ukrainian side, Bakhmut has become an important symbol of resistance to Russia's invasion. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says its loss could begin building international support for a deal that could require Ukraine to make unacceptable compromises.

Prigozhin's spat with the Russian military leadership dates back to Wagner's creation less than 10 years ago. During the war in Ukraine, he has chastised Russia's top military officials, publicly accusing them of incompetence — behavior that is highly unusual in Russia's tightly controlled political system.

One general Prigozhin actively criticized was fired, but other top officials he has lashed out at appear to have retained the Kremlin's trust. In January, Putin put Gerasimov in charge of the Russian forces in Ukraine, a move some observers also interpreted as an attempt to cut Prigozhin down to size.

Prigozhin alleged Friday that Russia's regular army was supposed to protect the flanks as Wagner troops pushed forward but is "barely holding on to them," deploying "tens and rarely hundreds" of troops.

Russia's Defense Ministry did not immediately comment on the claims, and it was not possible to independently verify them.

"Wagner ran out of resources to advance in early April, but we're advancing despite the fact that the enemy's resources outnumber ours fivefold," Prigozhin's statement said. "Because of the lack of ammunition, our losses are growing exponentially every day."

Ukrainian officials were skeptical about Prigozhin's claims of ammunition shortages. Ukraine's military intelligence representative, Andrii Cherniak, told The Associated Press that Wagner's forces had clearly failed in their goal of taking Bakhmut by May 9 and Prigozhin had made the statement to "justify their unsuccessful actions."

Prigozhin has toured Russian prisons to recruit fighters, promising inmates pardons if they survive a half-year tour of front-line duty with Wagner. Western countries and United Nations experts have accused Wagner mercenaries of committing numerous human rights abuses throughout Africa, including in the Central African Republic, Libya and Mali.

WHO: COVID no longer qualifies as emergency

Associated Press

GENEVA — The World Health Organization said Friday that COVID-19 no longer qualifies as a global emergency, marking a symbolic end to the devastating coronavirus pandemic that triggered once-unthinkable lockdowns, upended economies and killed at least 7 million people worldwide.

WHO first declared COVID-19 to be an emergency more than three years ago. The U.N. health agency's officials said that even though the emergency phase was over, the pandemic hasn't come to an end, noting recent spikes in cases in Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

WHO says that thousands of people are dying from the virus every week, and millions of others report that they are still suffering from debilitating, long-term effects from the disease.

"It's with great hope that I declare COVID-19 over as a global health emergency," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

"That does not mean COVID-19 is over as a global health threat," he said, adding he wouldn't hesitate to reconvene experts to reassess the situation should COVID-19 "put our world in peril."

Tedros said the pandemic had been on a downward trend for more than a year, acknowledging that most countries have already returned to life before COVID-19.

He bemoaned the damage that COVID-19 had done to the global community, saying the pandemic had shattered businesses, exacerbated political divisions, led to the spread of misinformation and plunged millions into poverty. Tedros also noted that there were likely at least 20 million COVID-19 deaths, far more than the officially reported 7 million.

"COVID has changed our world and it has changed us," he said, warning that the risk of new variants still remained.

When the U.N. health agency first declared the coronavirus to be an international crisis on Jan. 30, 2020, it hadn't yet been named COVID-19 and there were no major outbreaks beyond China.

Air Force head to be picked for Joint Chiefs

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Gen. Charles “CQ” Brown Jr., the Air Force’s current top officer, is expected to soon be nominated by the White House to serve as the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, according to multiple reports.

Brown would replace Gen. Mark Milley, who is slated to retire this summer after serving as the top military adviser to the president for the past four years.

The appointment would mark the first time that the Pentagon’s two top positions will be held by Black men, with Brown joining Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

He also would be the second Black officer appointed chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Army Gen. Colin Powell served in that capacity during the presidencies of George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

Brown would step into the role having already broken down racial barriers as the first Black officer to lead one of the military’s service branches.

President Joe Biden also was considering Gen. David Berger, commandant of the Marine Corps, for the position. However, Politico and The Wall Street Journal reported Thursday that Biden ultimately decided on Brown.

It’s not clear when Biden will formally announce his nomination.

Before serving as Chief of Staff of the

Air Force, Brown commanded the Air Force in the Pacific, which gives him experience grappling with the challenge posed by China.

Brown has given blunt assessments of what is in store from Beijing. In 2021, he told reporters that the world is experiencing changes to the “rules-based international order” not seen since World War II.

“To put the gravity of our pacing challenge in perspective, at the height of the Cold War, the USSR’s GDP was 57% of the U.S.’s,” Brown said.

“China’s economy will likely exceed the U.S.’s in dollar terms as the largest economy in the world in the next 10 years ... I really believe, without change, we are at risk of losing.”

He also held senior positions for the Air Force in Europe and the Middle East.

In military circles, Brown is regarded as a low-key leader not inclined to seek out the spotlight. But in 2020, he garnered national attention when he weighed in on the racial unrest roiling the country in connection with the Minneapolis police killing of George Floyd, a Black man who was choked to death by an arresting officer.

In an emotional 5-minute video, Brown spoke of “living in two worlds” and the racial divide that many Black Americans feel.

He talked about the challenges of rising through the ranks as a Black pilot, a rarity

in the service when he was a young officer.

“I’m thinking about wearing the same flight suit with the same wings on my chest as my peers, and then being questioned by another military member, ‘Are you a pilot?’” he said at the time.

While Brown’s job as chairman would revolve around advising Biden on top security concerns like countering Russia and China, he also will likely have to contend with the ongoing culture wars in the United States.

In recent years, the military has found itself caught in the middle on so-called “woke” issues such as transgender rights, drag queen performances on bases and books in military school libraries related to gender identity.

Such matters are likely to come up during Brown’s nomination process.

Last week, he got a sampling of such questions during a congressional hearing about an Air Force Academy diversity training initiative that suggested cadets consider favoring words such as “parents” or “guardians” instead of “moms and dads.”

“Part of leadership is understanding the people you are privileged to lead,” he said. “And as you have that opportunity, you get to know them. Now, every one of us grows up differently and has different experiences and different backgrounds, and we can’t assume who we engage with.”

USS Gerald R. Ford leaves for deployment to Europe

The Virginian-Pilot

NORFOLK, Va. — The USS Gerald R. Ford and the strike group bearing its name departed Tuesday from Naval Station Norfolk on its way to European waters.

In early April, the Ford completed a monthlong training exercise off the East Coast, making it a certified combat-deployable warship. The Navy wasted no time deploying its newest and most technologically advanced aircraft carrier. Dozens of families gathered at Naval Station Norfolk as the Ford pushed off from Pier 11.

The carrier and strike group are scheduled to operate in the U.S. Naval Forces Europe Africa, U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations. Rear Adm. Gregory Huffman, commander of the strike group, said its operations will include maritime security, freedom of navigation and reinforcing strategic relationships with NATO allies.

“Now more than ever, it is increasingly important for the United States Navy to strengthen our relationships with our allies and partners as we continue to promote a peaceful,

stable and conflict-free Atlantic region,” Huffman said.

While declining to pinpoint the warship’s return date, he said it will be in line with standard deployment times. Those can be anywhere from six to 10 months.

The deployment is years in the making. The Ford’s keel was laid in November 2009. It was not commissioned into the Navy until 2017.

The 1,106-foot carrier’s new electromagnetic-powered aircraft launch system, and its advanced arresting gear, are two of the much-touted technolo-

gies unique to Ford-class carriers. EMALS uses stored kinetic energy and solid-state electrical power conversion to propel an aircraft along a track and off the carrier, while the arresting gear is a turbo-electric system designed for more controlled deceleration of aircraft.

The technologies, the Navy said, allow the air-wing to get into the air — and return to the battle after rearming and refueling — faster than with the traditional steam-and-hydraulics systems that have been the mainstay for decades.

US adds solid 253K jobs despite Fed's rate hikes

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — America's employers added a healthy 253,000 jobs in April, evidence of a labor market that still shows surprising resilience despite rising interest rates, chronically high inflation and a banking crisis that could weaken the economy.

The unemployment rate dipped to 3.4%, matching a 54-year low, the Labor Department said Friday. The jobless rate fell in part, though, because 43,000 people left the labor force, the first drop since November, and were no longer counted as unemployed.

In its report Friday, the government noted that while hiring was solid in April, it was much weaker in February and March than it had previously estimated. Job gains for those months was downgraded by a combined 149,000. And hourly wages rose last month at the fastest pace since July, which may alarm the inflation fighters at the Federal Reserve.

April's hiring gain compares with 165,000 in March and 248,000 in February and is still at a level considered vigorous by historical standards. The job market has re-

mained durable despite the Fed's aggressive campaign of interest rate hikes over the past year to fight inflation. Layoffs are still relatively low, job openings comparatively high.

Job growth was particularly strong last month among health care companies, restaurants and bars and a broad category that includes managers, administrators and technical support workers.

In one sign of the benefits of a consistently tight job market, Black unemployment dipped in April to 4.7% — the lowest such level in government records dating to 1972.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell himself sounded somewhat mystified this week by the job market's durability. He and other Fed officials have expressed concern that a robust job market exerts upward pressure on wages and prices. They hope to achieve a so-called soft landing — cooling the economy and the labor market just enough to tame inflation yet not so much as to trigger a recession. Most economists doubt that the Fed will succeed and expect a recession to begin sometime this year.

Clarence Thomas allowed GOP donor to pay kid's tuition

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Republican megadonor paid two years of private school tuition for a child raised by Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, who did not disclose the payments, a lawyer who has represented Thomas and his wife acknowledged Thursday.

The revelation of tuition payments made by Dallas billionaire Harlan Crow is the latest example of Crow's generosity to Thomas and his family that has raised questions about Thomas' ethics and disclosure requirements more generally. The payments, along with the earlier examples of Crow's financial ties to Thomas, were first reported by the nonprofit investigative journalism site ProPublica.

ProPublica reported Thursday that Crow paid tuition for Thomas' great-nephew Mark Martin. Thomas and his wife, Virginia, raised Martin from the age of 6.

Over the past month, ProPublica has reported in other stories about luxury vacations paid for by Crow that the conservative justice took as well as Crow's purchase of property from the Thomas family, neither of which were disclosed. Democrats have used the revelations to call for stronger ethics rules for the Supreme Court, and the Democrat-controlled Senate held a hearing on ethics issues this week.

According to the ProPublica story, Crow paid tuition for Martin at a military boarding school in Virginia, Randolph-Macon Academy, as well as Hidden Lake Academy in Georgia.

Crow's office responded in a statement to questions but did not address a question about how much he paid in total for Martin's tuition. He did say that Thomas had not requested the support for either school, ProPublica reported.

On Twitter, lawyer Mark Paoletta defended Thomas in an extended statement. Paoletta, a longtime friend of Thomas, called the story "another attempt to manufacture a scandal about Justice Thomas."

Paoletta said in his statement that Crow had recommended that Thomas consider Randolph-Macon Academy, which Crow had attended, and had offered to pay for Martin's first year there in 2006, a payment that went directly to the school. When the school recommended Martin spend a year at Hidden Lake Academy, Crow offered again to pay for that year, Paoletta said.

Jury finds Ed Sheeran didn't copy Marvin Gaye classic 'Let's Get It On'

Associated Press

NEW YORK — British singer Ed Sheeran didn't steal key components of Marvin Gaye's classic 1970s tune "Let's Get It On" to create his hit song "Thinking Out Loud," a jury said with a trial verdict Thursday, prompting Sheeran to joke later that he won't have to follow through on his threat to quit music.

The emotions of an epic copyright fight that stretched across most of the last decade spilled out as soon as the seven-person jury revealed its verdict after over two hours of deliberations.

Sheeran, 32, briefly dropped his face into his hands in relief before standing to hug his attorney, Ilene Farkas.

He also approached plaintiff Kathryn Townsend Griffin, the daughter of Ed Townsend, who co-created the 1973 soul classic with Gaye and had testified. They spoke about 10 minutes, hugging and smil-

ing and, at one point, clasping their hands together.

Sheeran later addressed reporters outside the courthouse, revisiting his claim made during the trial that he would consider quitting songwriting if he lost the case.

"I am obviously very happy with the outcome of this case, and it looks like I'm not going to have to retire from my day job, after all. But at the same time, I am unbelievably frustrated that baseless claims like this are allowed to go to court at all," the singer said, reading from a prepared statement.

Inside the courthouse after the verdict, Griffin said she was relieved.

"I'm just glad it's over," she said of the trial. "We can be friends."

She said her copyright lawsuit wasn't personal but she wanted to follow through on a promise to her father to protect his intellectual property.

COVID: 4th leading cause of US deaths

Associated Press

NEW YORK — U.S. deaths fell last year, and COVID-19 dropped to the nation's No. 4 cause, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported Thursday.

COVID-19 deaths trailed those caused by heart disease, cancer and injuries such as drug overdoses, motor vehicle fatalities and shootings. In 2020 and 2021, only heart disease and cancer were ahead of the coronavirus.

U.S. deaths usually rise year-to-year, in part because the nation's population has been growing. The pandemic accelerated that trend, making 2021 the deadliest in U.S. histo-

ry, with more than 3.4 million deaths. But 2022 saw the first drop in deaths since 2009.

The 2022 tally was about 3.3 million — a 5% decline from 2021 but still much higher than in the years before the pandemic. The CDC cautioned that last year's numbers are preliminary and may change a little after further analysis.

Coronavirus-associated death rates fell for nearly all Americans. The virus was deemed the underlying cause of about 187,000 U.S. deaths last year, accounting for about 6% of deaths. The highest COVID-19 death rates were in the South and in an adjacent region that stretches west to Texas, Oklahoma and

New Mexico, the CDC said.

The death rates for heart disease and cancer increased during the pandemic, the CDC said. The cancer death rate had been falling for 20 years before COVID-19 hit.

The CDC report indicated a slight decline in the number of injury deaths last year, falling to about 218,000 from about 219,500 the year before. That would be a surprise, given recent trends in rising drug overdose and gun deaths.

CDC officials noted that number could rise. Death certificate data for injury deaths tends to take longer because many involve police investigations.

NC lawmakers approve 12-week abortion ban; governor vows veto

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — North Carolina lawmakers on Thursday approved and sent to the governor a ban on nearly all abortions after 12 weeks of pregnancy, down from the current 20 weeks, in response to last year's overturning of *Roe v. Wade* at the U.S. Supreme Court.

The ban is one of the least onerous of a slew of bills Republican-led assemblies have pushed through in recent months since the high court stripped away constitutional protections for abortion. Other states have banned the procedure almost completely or throughout pregnancy.

Nonetheless, the 29-20 party-line vote by the Senate was met with loud cries of "Abortion rights now!" from about 100 observers who had crowded into the gallery to watch the debate. Police quickly cleared the area, but protesters could still be heard shouting "Shame!" from outside the closed doors. The House passed the measure Wednesday night on a similar party-line vote.

While perhaps less stringent, North Carolina's bill has far-reaching consequences. Before its passage, many women from nearby states with more restrictive laws had traveled to the state for abortions in later stages of pregnancy.

Abortion-rights supporter Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper has pledged to veto the bill, calling it "an egregious, unacceptable attack on the women of our state," but GOP seat margins and assurances from chamber leaders indicate a veto will likely be overridden.

Democrats unsuccessfully attempted

several parliamentary maneuvers to get the measure sent back to committee during an hourslong debate. Senate Minority Leader Dan Blue of Wake County said it was unprecedented that all 20 members of the chamber's Democratic caucus spoke on the floor about the bill. He called the abortion vote "one of the most consequential things we have done in this chamber."

State law currently bans nearly all abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy. Starting July 1, the restriction would be tightened to 12 weeks. It also would place limits on new exceptions, capping abortions at 20 weeks in cases of rape or incest and 24 weeks for "life-limiting" fetal anomalies, including certain physical or genetic disorders that can be diagnosed prenatally. An existing exception for when the life of the pregnant woman is in danger would remain.

The 46-page bill, which was revealed just this week after months of private negotiations by Republican legislators, also includes more medical and paperwork requirements for patients and physicians and licensing requirements for abortion clinics.

GOP lawmakers also are promoting at least \$160 million for such services as maternal health, adoption care, contraceptive services and paid leave for teachers and state employees after the birth of a child.

Sen. Joyce Krawiec, a Forsyth County Republican who helped negotiate the measure, said during Thursday's debate that "many of us who have worked for decades to save unborn babies for the sanctity of human life, we saw it as an opportunity to put forth a very pro-life, pro-woman legislation."

Man killed three people, then self in Georgia town

Associated Press

A man recorded by a security camera fatally shooting his manager Thursday at a fast food restaurant in rural south Georgia is also suspected of killing his mother and grandmother at their nearby homes before taking his own life, authorities said.

Security video from a McDonald's in Moultrie showed Kentavious White, 26, shoot the store manager after getting her to come to the door Thursday morning, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation said. The footage then showed White step inside the restaurant and shoot himself.

Police found the manager, identified as Amia Smith, 41, and White both dead when they arrived, the GBI said in a news release Thursday evening. They also found two women related to White had been shot at neighboring homes less than 2 miles away. Both women died — one after being taken to a hospital, the GBI said.

All three of the slain women appeared to have been shot multiple times, Colquitt County Coroner C. Verlyn Brock told The Associated Press.

"I can't for the life of me figure out what provoked him in that way," Brock said in a phone interview.

Brock said the slain women were the gunman's 50-year-old mother and 74-year-old grandmother, who lived next door to each other. Their names were not immediately released.

The state law enforcement agency said its investigation is ongoing.

Suspect arrested in Serbia mass shooting

Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia — A gunman apparently firing at random killed eight people and wounded 14 in two villages in Serbia, authorities said, shaking a nation still in the throes of grief over a mass shooting a day earlier. Police arrested a suspect Friday after an all-night manhunt.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic called the shootings late Thursday an attack on the whole nation — and said the person arrested wore a T-shirt with a pro-Nazi slogan on it but did not shed light on the motive.

The slayings came a day after a 13-year-old boy used his father's guns to kill eight fellow students and a guard at a school in Belgrade, the capital.

The back-to-back bloodshed sent shockwaves through a Balkan nation scarred by wars, but unused to mass murders. Though Serbia is awash with weapons left over from the conflicts of the 1990s, the last mass shooting before this week was in 2013, when a war

veteran killed 13 people in a central Serbian village.

Public figures, politicians and experts appeared successively on TV on Friday, desperately seeking to explain the tragedies. The first made the country numb with grief, while the second heightened anxiety over what might come next — and set off soul-searching in a deeply divided nation where convicted war criminals are frequently glorified and violence against minority groups often goes unpunished.

“This is a moment when a nation decides whether it will go along a healing path,” actor Srdjan Timarov said on N1 television. “The only other way is to declare capitulation.”

As a nationwide period of mourning began, TV screens were filled with people wearing black and music was banned from the airwaves as well as in cafés and restaurants. People lined up in Belgrade to donate blood, responding to an appeal for supplies needed to treat the wounded.

The assailant in Thursday's attack shot people in two villages near Mladenovac, a municipality located about 30 miles south of the capital, police said. Vucic said the gunman targeted people “wherever they were.”

In the village of Dubona, blood stained a schoolyard where some of the shots were fired and also a piece of ground by a bench where residents often sit to share a beer and chat.

“I heard some tak-tak-tak sounds,” recalled Milan Prokic, a Dubona resident. Prokic said he first thought people were shooting to celebrate a birth, as is tradition in Serbia.

“But it wasn't that. Shame, great shame,” Prokic added.

Police said a suspect, identified by the initials U.B., was arrested in Vinjiste, a village 90 miles south of Belgrade. Officers searching a relative's home found a large stash of illegal weapons and ammunition, state broadcaster RTS reported.

Jill Biden in UK for coronation of King Charles

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Jill Biden has celebrated the athletic grit of wounded service members with Prince Harry, discussed the value of early childhood education with Princess Kate and sipped tea poured by Queen Elizabeth II.

Now the first lady is back in London for another royal engagement. President Joe Biden has dispatched his wife to represent the United States at Saturday's coronation of King Charles III, the late queen's eldest son. No American president has ever attended a British coronation.

While in London, she's engaging in a bit of soft diplomacy before the big event. Her first stop in Friday's drizzle was a familiar place: No. 10 Downing St., for her first meeting with Akshata Murty, the wife of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

Murty greeted Biden with an embrace and a kiss on each cheek. “Welcome, welcome!” she said, before turning to shake hands with

Finnegan Biden, one of the first lady's granddaughters.

Afterward, Jill Biden and Murty met at the Downing Street residence with military veterans and their families participating in a health and wellness program.

The sun had come out by the time the pair arrived at the cafeteria at Charles Dickens Primary School in the Borough area of London to meet with students who were wearing golden paper crowns as they participated in coronation-related activities. She told them to “have fun tomorrow.”

The first lady will also visit the U.S. Embassy to greet staff before ending her day at a reception the king is hosting at Buckingham Palace.

On Saturday, Jill Biden will represent the United States at the coronation at Westminster Abbey, seated among several hundred heads of state, royals from other nations and other guests who were invited to watch Charles and his wife, Camilla, be crowned

king and queen. Afterward, she will attend a reception hosted by U.S. Ambassador Jane Hartley.

Jill Biden will also mingle at a luncheon Sunday hosted by Sunak and Murty at their Downing Street residence before her flight back to Washington.

President Biden has received some criticism for skipping the coronation, though the White House cites the precedent of a U.S. president never attending for his decision.

But the president and Charles are hardly strangers. They have chatted each other up at global climate events since Biden took office, and during the queen's funeral last year. They also spoke in April when Biden called to say he was sending the first lady to the coronation, and the president expressed interest in meeting with the king in the United Kingdom at a future date, the White House said at the time.

First ladies often stand in for presidents when they can't be present.

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Warriors adjust to beat Lakers 127-100

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — After yet another big basket, Klay Thompson scurried toward the fans sitting courtside opposite the Warriors bench and raised his arms in the air to ignite an entire arena behind him. It didn't take much the way his shots were falling.

He has been waiting his entire life to shine against his father's Los Angeles Lakers on the big stage.

Thompson scored 30 points with eight 3-pointers, Golden State limited Anthony Davis while allowing LeBron James 23 points, and the defending champion Warriors evened their Western Conference semifinal with the Lakers at one game apiece with a 127-100 win Thursday night.

"I was just trying to get the crowd going," Thompson said. "It's always fun when you shoot the ball well, it's even better when you couple that with a win."

Stephen Curry added 20 points and 12 assists as Splash Brother Thompson got hot to help Golden State make 21 more 3-pointers — giving the Warriors an NBA record for most in the first two games of a playoff series at 42. James' Cavaliers hit 40 against Atlanta in the 2016 second round.

"They made their adjustments. We knew they were going to do that, that's what a championship team does," James said. "They held serve on their home court to-night."

Coach Steve Kerr switched things up and inserted JaMychal Green into the starting lineup for Kevon Looney, who had a career-high 23 rebounds in Game 1 but has been dealing with an illness. Kerr aimed to give a different look with scoring options and more free-throw chances by going hard with a physical presence against Davis in the paint — where Golden State got thoroughly outplayed in a 117-112 loss in the opener.

Thompson's basket with 7:48 left in the third gave Golden State its biggest lead at 82-64 and the Warriors rolled from there.

"Klay got it going and our defense was kind of fueling our offense," Kerr said.

The Warriors had more fast-break points and points in the paint. JaMychal Green matched his playoff career high with 15 points, while Draymond Green contributed 11 points, 11 rebounds and nine assists after insisting he had to get more aggressive.

"I've been waiting on this moment, just wanted to show that I could help," JaMychal Green said. "They always tell me to stay ready, my time will come."

The best-of-seven series shifts to Los Angeles for Game 3 on Saturday. Back home in Southern California, Thompson said he would play in the memory of "my biggest inspiration" Kobe Bryant and daughter, Gigi.

"I have so much respect for just the opportunity ahead for me," Thompson said.

James shot 6 for 8 in the first with a pair of 3s for 14 points as the Lakers led 33-26. He retrieved a loose ball and let it fly for a pretty 3 with 7:47 before halftime but the Warriors were too much.

Davis followed up his brilliant Game 1 performance — 30 points, 23 rebounds, five assists and four blocked shots and 11-for-19 shooting — with 11 points while shooting 5 for 11, seven rebounds, four assists and three blocks.

"We played with more force," Draymond Green said.

Golden State outscored the Lakers 84-47 over the second and third quarters — recording two 40-point quarters in the same playoff game for the first time in franchise history.

"It was hard for us to guard four shooters," Lakers forward Rui Hachimura said. "Defensively, they were more aggressive, I feel like. They had all the loose balls and the rebounds and everything."

Looney received huge roars as he came off the bench for his first action with 3:41 left in the first. He grabbed eight rebounds and scored six points playing just less than 12 minutes — and the Warriors still outboarded the Lakers 55-40 without its best rebounder.

"We're capable of playing a lot of different ways, I'm capable of playing a lot of different ways," Curry said.

Bucks fire Budenholzer as coach after playoff exit

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — The Milwaukee Bucks have fired coach Mike Budenholzer just over a week after their stunning first-round playoff loss to the Miami Heat spoiled a season in which they owned the NBA's best record.

Budenholzer's ouster comes just two years after he directed the Bucks to their first NBA title in half a century. The move also comes three weeks after the NBA finalized Cleveland Browns owner Jimmy Haslam's purchase of a 25% stake in the team.

"The decision to make this change was very difficult," Bucks general manager Jon Horst said Thursday in a statement announcing the move. "Bud helped lead our team for five incredible seasons, to the Bucks' first title in 50 years, and into an era of sustained success. We are grateful for the culture of winning and leadership that Bud helped create in Milwaukee.

"This is an opportunity for us to refocus and re-energize our efforts as we continue building toward our next championship season."

The Bucks posted the most combined regular-season and playoff wins of any team during Budenholzer's tenure and had the league's best regular-season record in three of his five seasons on the job. He posted a 271-120 regular-season record and 39-26 playoff mark in Milwaukee.

With a roster featuring two-time MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo, Budenholzer's Bucks soared to heights the franchise hadn't reached since Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was wearing a Milwaukee uniform in the early 1970s.

But with the notable exception of that 2021 championship season, the Bucks couldn't match their regular-season success in the postseason.

The Bucks didn't reach the NBA Finals

during any of the three seasons in which they had the league's No. 1 playoff seed. They had a 2-0 lead over Toronto in the 2019 Eastern Conference finals before losing four straight. They lost 4-1 in the second round to the Miami Heat in the 2020 East semifinals at the Walt Disney World playoff bubble.

This year's playoff exit was particularly devastating.

The Bucks suffered fourth-quarter collapses in each of their last two games and lost 4-1 to the eighth-seeded Heat. They were just the sixth No. 1 seed to lose to a No. 8 seed in the opening round, and the only No. 1 seed that failed to win more than one playoff game.

"There's a ton of disappointment when your season ends, no matter how it happens," Budenholzer said afterward. "It's a hard feeling. It's a disappointing feeling."

Panthers beat Maple Leafs, lead 2-0

Associated Press

TORONTO — The Florida Panthers took advantage of crucial mistakes by the Toronto Maple Leafs, and now lead their second-round playoff series 2-0.

Sergei Bobrovsky made 35 saves and the Panthers defeated the Maple Leafs 3-2 on Thursday night.

“Disappointing, baffling,” Toronto coach Sheldon Keefe said. “We didn’t make those mistakes one time in the last series.”

Anton Lundell had a goal and an assist, and Aleksander Barkov and Gustav Forsling also scored for Florida.

Ryan O’Reilly and Alexander Kerfoot scored for Toronto, which blew an early 2-0 lead. Ilya Samsonov stopped 26 shots.

“(Go) back home, look in the mirror,” Samsonov added. “And ask, what I need to do more? This is what we need to do — everybody.”

The best-of-seven series goes to Florida Sunday for Game 3. Game 4 is Wednesday.

The Panthers are in the midst of an impressive run, taking a two-game lead in the series after eliminating the Presidents’ Trophy-winning Boston Bruins in seven games, including three times on the road.

“It’s perspective,” Panthers head coach Paul Maurice said. “That’s five games in nine nights of as intense, emotional pressure as you can put on a hockey team. We’ve

been on an airplane for a while. We didn’t think we had much in our legs.

“It was just about character and it was just about fighting through it and battling.”

Toronto led 2-1 following a spirited, chip-psy first period. Trouble found the Maple Leafs in the second.

Barkov tied the game 19 seconds into the period on a long shot for his second goal of the postseason. Less than a minute later, there was some sloppy play by Toronto in the defensive zone when Mitch Marner flipped an ill-advised pass to Auston Matthews, who couldn’t get it out of the zone.

Florida quickly countered as Forsling finished off a setup by Matthew Tkachuk — his fourth of the series — for his second and a 3-2 lead.

“We’re not just running around like animals,” Panthers winger Matthew Tkachuk said. “We’re just trying to play our identity.”

The Maple Leafs took a while to recover before Nylander hit the post with a shot that also hit Bobrovsky in the back and stayed out. Florida defenseman Brandon Montour then hit the post at the other end.

Toronto captain John Tavares had a great chance in front before Josh Mahura took a Nylander shot off the visor that left a trail of blood on the ice as he exited for the locker room. The Panthers defenseman returned for the third period.

Toronto came out for the third with plenty of urgency, but couldn’t solve Bobrovsky, who has started to rediscover his Vezina Trophy-winning form in these playoffs after losing the starting job late in the regular season to third-stringer Alex Lyon.

Tavares was stopped on a one-on-one and Nylander hit another post. The Maple Leafs winger was also denied on a close-range shot with five minutes left in regulation.

Toronto continued to press with Samsonov on the bench for an extra attacker, but couldn’t beat Bobrovsky.

“Not an ideal spot,” Tavares said of his team’s predicament. “A chance to regroup here and look forward to getting on the road. Going to be a tough test, but one we’ve got to raise our level.”

Toronto dropped the series opener 4-2 at Scotiabank Arena, but got off to a fast start Thursday when Kerfoot scored on the rebound of a Luke Schenn point shot for his second at 2:20 of the first.

Unable to connect on two early power plays in Game 1, the Maple Leafs made it 2-0 on a man advantage at 5:10 when Marner found O’Reilly, who scored his third on a one-timer.

The Panthers, who beat the record-setting Boston Bruins in seven games to make the second round, started to push back as the period wore on.

Pavelski scores again, Stars top Kraken to even series

Associated Press

DALLAS — Joe Pavelski wasn’t alone scoring in his second game back, and the Dallas Stars got even in their first-round series against Seattle.

“Everybody was good,” coach Pete DeBoer said. “In Game 1, Joe Pavelski was great. Tonight, we didn’t have any passengers.”

Pavelski scored his fifth goal in two games since returning from concussion protocol, getting an assist from Wyatt Johnston, his 19-year-old rookie housemate who also scored a goal. Evgenii Dadonov added a nifty wraparound goal and Tyler Seguin also scored and had an assist for the Stars in their 4-2 win over the Kraken on Thursday night.

“It’s been a weird few weeks at the Pavelski household,” Johnston said. “I’m just trying to do my best to learn off of Joe. I mean, just kind of seeing what he’s done in these

these two games. It’s pretty unbelievable.”

In the Stars’ 5-4 overtime loss in Game 1, Pavelski scored all four of their goals. That was the 38-year-old forward’s first game since banging his head hard on the ice after a big hit in the opener of the Minnesota series April 17.

But just as they did in the first round against Minnesota — this time with Pavelski — the Stars bounced back from an overtime loss at home in the series opener and got even before hitting the road.

Game 3 is Sunday night in Seattle.

“We didn’t get to our game long enough tonight at any point in time,” Kraken coach Dave Hakstol said. “We had a couple of spurts. We were fine in the first period, you knew the first couple of shifts were going to be a momentum push by them. ... We didn’t generate a whole lot.”

Jake Oettinger had 25 saves for the Stars. Philipp Grubauer stopped 33 shots.

Before Pavelski’s latest goal, Tye Kartye got the Kraken within 2-1 on a break when he took a long pass off the boards from Vince Dunn and got the shot around defenseman Miro Heiskanen to score.

Jordan Eberle also scored for the Kraken.

Johnston, who has lived with Pavelski’s family this season, set up his mentor’s power-play goal when he initially whiffed at the puck before whipping around and sending it into the laid-out stick of Grubauer. Pavelski was there for the rebound and put the Stars up 3-1 with 3:03 left in the middle period.

“It was pretty cool to be able to have an assist on his goal,” Johnston said. “Just a cool moment.”

Johnston’s second career playoff goal came right after the end of a power play earlier in the second period for 1-0 lead. His 24 goals in the regular season tied for the NHL rookie lead.

Rays off to best start since '84 Tigers

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Zach Eflin pitched seven scoreless innings, Randy Arozarena hit one of three Rays homers and Tampa Bay beat the Pittsburgh Pirates 3-2 on Thursday to finish a three-game sweep of small-budget teams that are off to outstanding starts.

Taylor Walls and Yandy Díaz also homered for Tampa Bay (26-6), which is off to the best start through 32 games since the 1984 World Series champion Detroit Tigers went 27-5.

Eflin (4-0) scattered three hits and struck out 10. The right-hander allowed only one baserunner to reach scoring position, when Carlos Santana hit a two-out double in the seventh. Jason Adam gave up Santana's two-run, two-out double in the ninth before getting his second save and completing a four-hitter.

The Rays have scored a major league-best 210 runs and allowed an MLB-fewest 96. Tampa Bay also tops the big leagues with 67 homers, while allowing the fewest with 20.

Vince Velasquez (4-3) left after just three innings and 54 pitches due to elbow discomfort for the NL Central-leading Pirates (20-12), who have lost a season-high four straight.

Tigers 2, Mets 0: Justin Verlander gave up back-to-back home runs in his New York debut and Eduardo Rodriguez threw eight scoreless innings as host Detroit completed a three-game sweep.

Riley Greene and Javier Baez hit solo homers off Verlander in the first inning.

Rodriguez (3-2) gave up just two hits and one walk while striking out nine. Alex Lange pitched the ninth for his fifth save.

Verlander (0-1) settled in after his rough start. The 40-year-old right-hander gave up two runs and five hits and a walk while striking out five in his 79-pitch outing. He started the season on the injured list with a muscle strain in his upper back.

Red Sox 11, Blue Jays 5: Masataka Yoshida and Rafael Devers homered to help host Boston complete a four-game sweep.

Boston won its sixth straight overall to jump over Toronto for third place in the AL East. It's the first time the Sox have swept the Jays in a four-game series since 2002.

Brayan Bello (1-1) picked up his first win of the season after allowing four runs — two earned — and six hits in five innings. He struck out five and walked one.

Vladimir Guerrero Jr. homered and

drove in two runs for Toronto, which has lost five straight. Kevin Gausman (2-3) allowed eight runs and 10 hits in 3⅓ innings. His ERA soared from 2.33 to 3.86.

Nationals 4, Cubs 3: Alex Call hit a game-ending homer leading off the ninth inning, and host Washington recovered after blowing a 3-0 lead to take three of four from skidding Chicago.

Call lofted the only pitch from Brad Boxberger (1-1) just inside the left-field foul pole and was greeted at the plate by exuberant teammates, who dumped a bucket of blue Gatorade on his head.

Lane Thomas hit a three-run homer for Washington, which got seven near-flawless innings by starter Patrick Corbin. The veteran left-hander had given up only one hit — a popup by Cody Bellinger that shortstop CJ Abrams lost in the sun — before allowing back-to-back singles to start the eighth. Manager Dave Martinez pulled him for Hunter Harvey, who quickly allowed the Cubs to tie it.

Kyle Finnegan (1-1) gave up a walk and a double to start the ninth, but retired the next three batters.

Angels 11, Cardinals 7: Luis Rengifo homered, drove in four runs and finished a triple shy of the cycle as visiting Los Angeles beat St. Louis to complete a three-game sweep.

The Angels won for the fourth straight time to improve to four games above .500. The Cardinals lost their sixth in a row and have dropped nine of their last 10.

Griffin Canning (2-0) gave up five runs in five innings to earn his second-straight decision for the Angels. Canning allowed six hits, struck out three and walked three.

Tommy Edman hit a three-run homer in the fourth and Paul Goldschmidt added a two-run double in the sixth for St. Louis, which at 10-22 is off to its worst start since the 1973 squad opened the season 8-23.

Cardinals starter Jack Flaherty (2-4) gave up a career-high 10 runs in just 2⅓ innings. The Angels went 7 for 10 with two strikes against Flaherty, who left after getting hit by a Rengifo comebacker.

Braves 6, Marlins 3: Marcell Ozuna homered for third time in two games, Ronald Acuña Jr. stole his league-leading 15th base, and visiting Atlanta beat Miami to complete a three-game sweep.

Acuña went down in the sixth after fouling a ball off his left knee. He remained on the ground and grabbed at his leg for several minutes, but finished the at-bat and re-

turned to right field in the bottom of the inning. He was eventually removed out of precaution.

Matt Olson also homered for the Braves, who have won five of their past six.

Dylan Dodd (2-1) allowed eight hits, three runs, walked three and struck out one in six innings. A.J. Minter struck out two in the ninth for his seventh save of the season.

Jorge Soler, who finished a triple shy of the cycle, gave Miami a 2-1 lead in the first with his sixth home run.

Orioles 13, Royals 10: Ramon Urias hit a go-ahead, two-run single in the eighth, then added a two-run double in the ninth, helping Baltimore overcome a blown seven-run lead in a victory over host Kansas City.

Gunnar Henderson and Anthony Santander hit homers, and Cedric Mullins also drove in three for the Orioles, who led 8-1 before their bullpen allowed Kansas City to come back.

Yennier Cano (1-0) pitched two scoreless innings for Baltimore.

Twins 7, White Sox 3 (12): Carlos Correa drove in a run during a five-run 12th, and he and Byron Buxton homered as visiting Minnesota beat Chicago to avoid a three-game sweep.

The AL Central-leading Twins had lost three of four. Correa spurred Minnesota to victory hours after downplaying remarks from Chicago reliever Keynan Middleton, who called Correa "a cheater."

Eloy Jiménez homered for the White Sox, whose three-game winning streak ended.

Rockies 9, Brewers 6: Charlie Blackmon had two hits and two RBIs, and Colorado used a five-run eighth inning to earn a come-from-behind victory against visiting Milwaukee.

The Rockies extended their season-best winning streak to four games and won for the sixth time in their past nine games after starting the season 6-17.

Brad Hand (1-1) threw one shutout inning to earn the win for Colorado.

Mariners 5, Athletics 3: Taylor Trammell homered for the second time in five days since coming off the injured list and drove in three runs as visiting Seattle beat Oakland to extend its winning streak to four games and complete a series sweep.

George Kirby (3-2) pitched seven mostly strong innings for Seattle. Kolten Wong added two hits and two RBIs.

The A's lost for the eighth time in nine games and fell to 6-26 (.188), the lowest winning percentage in the majors.