

Why are Navy subs popping up more often?

Bloomberg

A U.S. nuclear-armed submarine will make a publicly announced visit to South Korea within months, prompting debate about the wisdom of a heightened public role for what's long been known as the Navy's "silent service."

Pentagon officials confirmed that one of the Navy's 14 Ohio-class vessels will visit, as President Joe Biden signaled in announcing a "Nuclear Consultative Group" during last month's White House visit by South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol.

The submarines, nicknamed Boomers, gained the silent service description because they are designed to glide undetected, and their port calls have seldom been disclosed — much less trumpeted — by their usually taciturn commanders. Each of the subs carries up to 20 D-5 Trident ballistic mis-

siles.

The U.S. has occasionally showcased its submarines in the past, but the pace picked up in the past year with publicized port visits by nuclear-armed Ohio-class submarines as well as Los Angeles-class subs carrying conventional Tomahawk cruise missiles.

The Biden administration's Nuclear Posture Review endorsed such demonstrations last year.

On April 18, days before the U.S.-South Korea proclamation, the U.S. Navy announced that the Ohio-class USS Maine made an on-surface logistics stop in Guam.

Ronald O'Rourke, chief naval forces analyst for the Congressional Research Service, cited "unusual Navy actions late last year to publicize the presence" of nuclear-armed vessels "in the Arabian Sea, at Diego Garcia, at Gibraltar and in the Atlantic." He

said it's not clear whether the upcoming South Korea visit is part of such a new "public signaling strategy" or a one-time decision.

Ohio-class submarines are the U.S. Navy's largest ever. At 560 feet long and displacing 18,750 tons when submerged, they dwarf the cruisers and destroyers used in World War II surface combat. Their Trident missiles can be configured to hold as many as 14 nuclear warheads, each capable of being guided to a different target, and boast a range of 4,000 nautical miles, according to the Navy.

Most of the Navy's subs "still hide in the oceans, but from time to time they have made port calls, and soon they will add South Korea to the growing list," said Hans Kristensen, director of the Federation of American Scientists Nuclear Information Project.

It's part of a new assignment

"that contradicts their core mission of staying undetected," he said. "But nuclear signaling is now considered so important because of competition with Russia and China that even the 'silent service' will occasionally show itself."

Increased visibility could have its downside, especially the South Korea visit, said Brent Sadler, The Heritage Foundation's senior research fellow for naval warfare and a Navy veteran with numerous submarine tours.

The visit would expose the vessel to North Korean or Chinese monitoring and they "could use the knowledge to hold our submarines on deterrent patrols far away at risk," Sadler said. The strategic messaging of support for South Korea "would be minimal" for the U.S. "to take some significant risks to send such a boat that far forward," he said.

Air Force's Brown likely pick for Joint Chiefs of Staff

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 Army 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 re-

garded 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 also 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.

New DOD policy to expand mental health care access

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Service members who desire mental health care will now have greater access to help and an evaluation through their chain of command, according to a Pentagon policy announced Friday.

“Our greatest strength is our people,” said Gilbert Cisneros, undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. “This policy is an important step in ensuring that our service members are able to seek mental health treatment when and how they need it.”

The policy implements the Brandon Act, which improves the process for service members to seek mental health support as part of an effort to strengthen suicide prevention throughout the military.

The Defense Department in recent years has aimed to improve mental health care access for its troops, amid increases in suicide rates and outcry from members of Congress and others. The department has also spent millions of dollars on several efforts to attempt to know what causes service members to harm or kill themselves. Defense officials have taken some steps to increase troops’ access to mental health professionals and combat the long-standing stigma that seeking help was a sign of weakness.

The Brandon Act is named after Petty Officer 3rd Class Brandon Caserta who died by suicide in 2018 at Naval Station Norfolk, Va. A command investigation into Caserta’s death revealed belligerent and brash leaders contributed to the sailor killing himself. He felt alone, stuck and afraid of retaliation, his parents said.

The Pentagon policy directs the military services to establish their own policies, assign responsibilities and provide procedures for service members to request a referral for a mental health evaluation through a commanding officer or supervisor. The process allows service members to seek help confidentially for any reason, at any time and in any environment, thereby reducing the stigma associated with seeking mental health care, Cisneros said.

Service members will continue to have the option to contact their local health care provider directly for a mental health evaluation.

Implementation of the policy will occur in two phases. First, the military services will establish procedures within 45 days to implement the policy for service members on active duty. Secondly, the services will establish procedures to implement the policy for other troops.

Drag queen sailor aiding recruiting draws GOP anger

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy’s appointment of an active-duty drag queen to boost recruitment is drawing backlash from some Republican senators who contend the sailor promoted the use of Chinese-owned social media and inappropriately represented the service.

Joshua Kelley, a 2nd class petty officer who also performs as the drag queen “Happy Daniels,” served as one of five ambassadors in the Navy’s Digital Ambassador Pilot Program from the fall until March. The program was launched to diversify and expand the Navy’s candidate pool amid a recruiting crisis across the military.

Kelley identifies as nonbinary and self-describes as an advocate for the LGBTQ community in the military. In announcing the ambassadorship, Kelley said it would be an opportunity to share personal experiences in the Navy with the sailor’s social media followers, including on the popular TikTok video sharing app.

The Republican senators have zeroed in on Kelley’s use of the app, which lawmakers have argued China uses to push misinformation and endanger national security.

“Given China’s compromise of the personal information of 21 million federal employees, the [Chinese Communist Party] could even use the same micro-targeting techniques used in recruiting to target the cleared [Navy] workforce, their families and close contacts,” a group of Republican senators wrote in a letter this week to Navy Secretary Carols Del Toro.

The senators are also asking Del Toro to justify why the Navy partnered with a social media influencer who posts “behaviors and activities many Americans deem inappropriate.”

“This begs the question whether the Navy endorses the personal posts of its influencers and ‘ambassadors.’ If so, does the Navy endorse drag shows? Where does the Navy draw the line on promotion of the personal activities of its influencers? Would the Navy enlist burlesque dancers or exotic dancers to reach possible recruits?” the senators wrote. “Such activity is not appropriate for promotion in a professional workplace or the United States military.”

Navy commissions USS Cooperstown; honors war veteran baseball players

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The U.S. Navy on Saturday commissioned the USS Cooperstown in honor of 70 Major League Baseball Hall of Fame players who served in the military during wartime.

The littoral combat ship is named after the village in New York state where the Hall is located.

Hall of Famers Joe Torre and Johnny Bench took part in the ceremony, with Torre delivering remarks and Bench presenting a long glass, a nautical telescope.

“It is critical that we honor the legacy of these Hall of Famers,” Torre said, “not just for what they did on the field, but for what

they sacrificed and what they accomplished off the field. Their legacy lives on with the USS Cooperstown and with the sailors here today and in the years to come.”

The 70 players honored served during conflicts from the Civil War through the Korean War and include some of the sport’s biggest names, such as Ty Cobb (Army, WWI); Joe DiMaggio and Jackie Robinson (Army, WWII); Ted Williams (Marines, WWII and Korea); and Willie Mays (Army, Korea).

The ship’s motto is “America’s Away Team.”

From New York City, the ship will sail to its base in Mayport, Fla.

At least 8 killed in Texas outlet mall shooting

Associated Press

ALLEN, Texas — Hundreds of terrified shoppers fled in panic after a gunman stepped out of a silver sedan and opened fire at a Dallas-area outlet mall, killing eight and wounding seven before being killed by a police officer who happened to be nearby, authorities said.

The shooting in Allen, Texas, on Saturday was the latest eruption of what has been an unprecedented pace of mass killings in the United States. Barely a week before, authorities said, a man fatally shot five people in Cleveland, Texas, after a neighbor asked him to stop firing his weapon while a baby slept.

Police did not immediately provide details about the victims at Allen Premium Outlets, a sprawling outdoor shopping center, but

witnesses reported seeing children among them. Some said they also saw what appeared to be a police officer and a mall security guard unconscious on the ground.

A 16-year-old pretzel stand employee, Maxwell Gum, described a virtual stampede of shoppers. He and others sheltered in a storage room.

“We started running. Kids were getting trampled,” Gum said. “My co-worker picked up a 4-year-old girl and gave her to her parents.”

Dashcam video circulating online showed the gunman getting out of a car and shooting at people on the sidewalk. More than three dozen shots could be heard as the vehicle that was recording the video drove off.

Allen Fire Chief Jonathan Boyd said seven people including

the shooter died at the scene. Nine victims were taken to area hospitals, but two of them died.

Three of the wounded were in critical condition in the evening, Boyd said, and four were stable.

An Allen Police Department officer was in the area on an unrelated call when he heard shots at 3:36 p.m., the department wrote on Facebook.

“The officer engaged the suspect and neutralized the threat. He then called for emergency personnel,” the post said.

Mass killings are happening with staggering frequency in the U.S. this year: an average of about one per week, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University.

President Joe Biden was

briefed on the shooting in Allen and the administration offered support to local officials, the White House said. Republican Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who has signed laws easing firearms restrictions following past mass shootings, called the mall shooting an “unspeakable tragedy.”

A live aerial broadcast from a news station showed armored trucks and other law enforcement vehicles outside the mall. More than 30 police cruisers with lights flashing blocked an entrance, with multiple ambulances on the scene in the city of roughly 105,000 residents about 25 miles north of downtown Dallas.

Video shared on social media showed people running through a parking lot amid the sound of gunshots.

Biden looks to strong job market for economy help

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — For President Joe Biden, the past few days have raised hopes that the U.S. economy can stick a soft landing — possibly avoiding a recession as the 2024 election nears.

Most U.S. adults have downbeat feelings about Biden’s economic leadership, as high inflation has overshadowed a strong jobs market. It’s long been economic orthodoxy that efforts to beat back inflation by the Federal Reserve would result in unemployment rising and the country sinking into recession.

But to the president and some economists, the April jobs report issued Friday challenged that theory with its 3.4% unemployment rate and 253,000 more jobs.

The strong jobs report came after a Wednesday Fed meeting suggesting the U.S. central bank might pause on its rate hikes, the primary tool for cutting inflation from its still high 5% to something closer to 2%. Talks are also start-

ing over the need to raise the debt limit — with Biden inviting congressional leaders to the White House for a Tuesday meeting in hopes of ultimately getting a commitment to avoid a default.

For a president seeking a second term, Biden struck a confident tone Friday when meeting with aides even as he pushed GOP lawmakers for a clean increase on the debt cap.

“We’re trending in the right direction and I think we’re making real progress,” he said about the overall economy, telling Republican lawmakers to not “undo all this progress” with the debt limit standoff.

The economy could still stumble. Several economists forecast a recession this year, considering the wild cards of the war in Ukraine, global tensions and the debt limit fight. But the steady job gains have suggested to some policymakers and economists that it’s possible to curb inflation without layoffs.

California reparations panel approves apology, payments

AP/Report for America

OAKLAND, Calif. — California’s reparations task force voted Saturday to approve recommendations for how the state may compensate and apologize to Black residents for generations of harm caused by discriminatory policies.

The nine-member committee, which first convened nearly two years ago, gave final approval at a meeting in Oakland to a hefty list of proposals that will then go to state lawmakers to consider for reparations legislation.

Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif., who is cosponsoring a bill in Congress to study restitution proposals for African Americans, at the meeting called on states and the federal government to pass reparations legislation.

“Reparations are not only morally justifiable, but they have the potential to address long-standing racial disparities

and inequalities,” Lee said.

The panel’s first vote approved a detailed account of historical discrimination against Black Californians in areas such as voting, housing, education, disproportionate policing and incarceration and others.

Other recommendations on the table ranged from the creation of a new agency to provide services to descendants of enslaved people to calculations on what the state owes them in compensation.

“An apology and an admission of wrongdoing just by itself is not going to be satisfactory,” said Chris Lodgson, an organizer with the Coalition for a Just and Equitable California, a reparations advocacy group.

The panel also approved a section of the draft report saying reparations should include “cash or its equivalent” for eligible residents.

Ukraine: Temper counterattack hopes

The Washington Post

KYIV, Ukraine — The Ukrainian military has spent nearly 15 months exceeding the world's expectations. Now, senior leaders are trying to lower those hopes, fearing that the outcome of an imminent counteroffensive aimed at turning the tide of the war may not live up to the hype.

"The expectation from our counteroffensive campaign is overestimated in the world," Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said in an interview this past week. "Most people are ... waiting for something huge," he added, which he fears may lead to "emotional disappointment."

The planned counterattack — made possible by donated Western weapons and training — could mark the most consequential phase of the war, as Ukraine seeks to snatch back significant territory and prove it is worthy of continued support.

Offensive military operations typically require overwhelming advantage, and with Russian forces dug into heavily fortified defenses all across the 900-mile-long front, it

is hard to gauge how far Ukraine will get.

The buildup ahead of the assault — the details of which remain secret — has left Ukrainian officials grappling with a difficult question: What outcome will be enough to impress the West, especially Washington?

Some fear that if the Ukrainians fall short, Kyiv may lose international military assistance or face new pressure to engage with Moscow at a negotiating table — not on the battlefield. Such talks would almost certainly involve Russian demands for a negotiated surrender of sovereign territory, which Ukraine has called unacceptable.

"I believe that the more victories we have on the battlefield, frankly, the more people will believe in us, which means we will get more help," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in an interview with *The Washington Post* on May 1, in his heavily fortified headquarters building.

Kyiv is eager to make a rapid breakthrough in what has essentially slowed to a grinding artillery war in the country's east

and south, with neither side making significant territorial gains. Experts say it will be difficult, if not impossible, to push the Russians back to their positions before the invasion started on Feb. 24, 2022, when Moscow held parts of Luhansk and Donetsk and the illegally annexed Crimean Peninsula.

The pressure comes in part from Ukraine's past battlefield wins — first repelling Russia's attempt to capture Kyiv and later dislodging the invaders from strongholds in surprise attacks in the Kharkiv and Kherson regions.

"[W]e inspired everywhere because the perception was that we will fall during 72 hours," Reznikov said. But the track record means Ukraine's partners now have a "joint expectation that it would be successful again," he said.

Western partners have told him, he said, that they now need a "next example of a success because we need to show it to our people. ... But I cannot tell you what the scale of this success would be. Ten kilometers, 30 kilometers, 100 kilometers, 200 kilometers?"

Sudan envoys begin talks as pressure mounts

Associated Press

ASWAN, Egypt — Sudan's warring sides began talks Saturday that aim to firm up a shaky cease-fire after three weeks of fierce fighting that has killed hundreds and pushed the African country to the brink of collapse, the United States and Saudi Arabia said.

The negotiations, the first between the Sudanese military and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, or RSF, since the

fighting broke out on April 15, were underway in Saudi Arabia's coastal city of Jeddah, on the Red Sea, according to a joint Saudi-American statement.

The talks are part of a diplomatic initiative proposed by the kingdom and the U.S. that aims to stop the fighting, which has turned Sudan's capital, Khartoum, and other urban areas into battlefields and pushed hundreds of thousands from their homes.

In their joint statement, Saudi Arabia and

the U.S. urged both parties to "actively engage in the talks towards a cease-fire and end to the conflict, which will spare the Sudanese people's suffering."

The statement did not offer a timeframe for the talks, though it was expected the initial session could last two to three days.

The talks come after concerted efforts by Riyadh and other international powers to pressure the warring sides in Sudan to the negotiating table.

King Charles III crowned with some cheers, shrugs

Associated Press

LONDON — King Charles III was crowned Saturday at Westminster Abbey, in a ceremony steeped in ancient ritual and brimming with bling at a time when the monarchy is striving to remain relevant in a fractured modern Britain.

At a coronation with displays of royal power straight out of the Middle Ages, Charles was given an orb, a sword and scepter and

had the solid gold, bejeweled St. Edward's Crown placed atop his head as he sat upon a 700-year-old oak chair.

In front of world leaders, foreign royals, dignitaries and a smattering of stars, the monarch declared, "I come not to be served but to serve," and was presented as Britain's "undoubted king."

To the crowds gathered under rainy skies — thousands of

whom had camped overnight — it was a chance to be part of a historic event.

Julie Newman, a 77-year-old visitor from Canada, said the royal procession had been "absolutely fabulous. Couldn't ask for anything better."

"But we're ready to go back home and watch it all on the television," she added.

But to millions more, the day was greeted with a shrug, the

awe and reverence the ceremony was designed to evoke largely gone.

And to a few, it was reason to protest. Hundreds who want to see Britain become a republic gathered to holler "Not my king." They see the monarchy as an institution that stands for privilege and inequality, in a country of deepening poverty and fraying social ties. A handful were arrested.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

State law to require porn sites to verify user ages

UT SALT LAKE CITY — You may soon be required to prove you're older than 18 to watch porn in Utah, if adult websites comply with a law that recently took effect.

A new state law requires adult websites to verify the ages of their users, making the state at least the second to enact an age verification law to shield kids from sexually explicit materials.

"It's part of our job as society — and maybe a subset of my job as a lawmaker — to try to protect children," state Sen. Todd Weiler, the measure's Republican sponsor, said. "I'm not gonna blame all of society's ills on pornography, but I don't think it's helpful when a kid is forming their impressions of sex and gender to have all of this filth and lewd depictions on their mind."

It's currently illegal to show children pornography under federal law, however it's rarely enforced. The law is Utah's latest move to crack down on access to pornography and dovetails with lawmakers' other efforts to restrict how kids use the internet, including social media sites.

Pornhub, among the most widely viewed adult websites, blocked access to its content to protest the law.

Lawmakers push back on library book bans

IL CHICAGO — Illinois lawmakers greenlighted a bill that said libraries in the state must adopt an anti-book banning policy to receive state funding.

The measure, spearheaded by Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias, represents a counter-movement to growing efforts to restrict books on topics such as race, gender and sexuality in schools and libraries across the United States.

The legislation has passed both chambers and now heads to the desk of Gov. J.B. Pritzker, who said he looks forward to signing it.

"This landmark legislation is a triumph for our democracy, a win for First Amendment rights, and most importantly, a great victory for future generations to come," said Giannoulias in a news conference.

Commercial king salmon season may be canceled

WA SEATTLE — A ruling from a U.S. judge in Seattle could effectively shut down commercial king salmon trolling in Southeast Alaska — a valuable industry that supports some 1,500 fishermen — after a conservation group challenged the harvest as a threat to endangered killer whales that eat the fish.

Wild Fish Conservancy, the organization that brought the lawsuit, heralded the decision as the most significant government action in decades to provide more food for starving orcas. The group said it would also help recover struggling king salmon populations along the West Coast, as most of the salmon caught in Southeast Alaska spawn in rivers to the south.

But fishing organizations condemned the ruling, saying it threatens the region with economic disaster and would do little or nothing to benefit orcas. The state of Alaska quickly an-

nounced an appeal.

U.S. District Judge Richard Jones in Seattle ordered the National Marine Fisheries Service to redo a biological opinion that's required for the fishery to take place. The decision threatens to prevent the important summer and winter king salmon seasons.

University football player accused of raping woman

IA AMES — An Iowa State football player has been arrested on charges alleging that he raped a woman while she lay immobile after he shoved her so hard into stairs in his home that it fractured her spine.

Aidan Ralph, a 20-year-old linebacker and redshirt sophomore from Chicago, was arrested on Story County felony sexual assault and misdemeanor domestic violence charges in the alleged attack at his Ames home, court records showed.

According to a police affidavit, Ralph accused the woman of cheating and shoved her several times, including once into the stairs. The resulting injury caused the woman to lose mobility and she pleaded with Ralph to call an ambulance, police wrote. He refused and instead lay on top of her and raped her as she cried and begged him to stop, according to the affidavit.

Tesla driver fatally shot in fight at charging station

CO DENVER — A fight at an electric vehicle charging station in suburban Denver escalated into a fatal shooting that killed a Tesla driver and put another man in custody, authorities said.

The second man later called 911 to report he was involved in

the shooting and was detained, said Jenny Fulton, a spokesperson for the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office.

Two shots were fired, Fulton said, and the 33-year-old man who died had been hospitalized with a single gunshot wound. His name wasn't released. It wasn't immediately clear if both shots were fired by the man who turned himself in, or if he was also an EV driver.

Investigators haven't said what sparked the fight, which broke out in a parking lot outside a food hall in Edgewater.

Mayor apologizes for fiery abortion clinic post

WY CHEYENNE — A new abortion clinic in deeply conservative Wyoming is stirring strong emotions, with the mayor of the state's second-biggest city apologizing for a Facebook post some said evoked an arson attack that delayed the clinic's opening by almost a year.

The post was intended to suggest hellfire, not violence, Casper Mayor Bruce Knell said in a statement in which he apologized to the city's residents.

"In poor taste, I made a comment that I feel was misinterpreted. I did not put a picture of a burning building. I didn't do that. I put a picture of a guy dancing in a fire because in my religious beliefs: When you sin against God, you get to go to hell unless you repent," Knell said.

Last May, a woman broke into the Wellspring Health Access clinic in Casper and lit gasoline around the facility as it was being prepared to open, according to police.

— From wire reports



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Mage wins star-crossed Kentucky Derby

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — After seven deaths raised questions about the future of horse racing, Mage earned a surprising Kentucky Derby victory on Saturday, capping a nerve-rattling day that included two more fatalities ahead of the 149th edition of the world's most famous race.

Mage, a 15-1 shot, had only one win in his career, giving little indication that he could triumph against 17 rivals in a race that is not kind to the inexperienced.

Still, he made a gutsy stretch run, overtaking Two Phil's to his inside and winning by a length. Mage, who didn't race as a 2-year-old, ran 1¼ miles in 2:01.57.

Mage joined Justify (2018), Big Brown (2008) and Regret (2015) as Derby winners with just three previous starts.

"He proved today that it didn't matter," assistant trainer and co-owner Gustavo Delgado Jr. said.

The colt was in the skilled

hands of Javier Castellano, a Hall of Fame jockey who hasn't been as in-demand lately. The 45-year-old Castellano snapped an 0-for-15 skid in the Derby.

"I never give up," Castellano said. "I always try hard to do the right thing. It took me a little while to get there. I finally got it."

Castellano and Delgado are from Venezuela. Mage joined Canonero II as Derby winners with Venezuelan ties. Canonero II won the Derby and Preakness in 1971.

Going into the backstretch, Mage was ahead of just three horses. Castellano and Mage began picking off the competition and on the far turn launched their run.

"Turning for home, he had a lot of heart," Castellano said. "He's a little horse with a big heart."

Two Phil's stormed to the lead at the top of the stretch. Mage swung to the outside and took aim on the leader. Mage passed him at the eighth pole and went on to victory.

"Everything went according to plan," Delgado said. "This is the dream I have, a year-and-a-half ago, I wrote a note: 'We're going to win the Derby next year.'"

Forte, the early favorite, was scratched in the morning with a bruised foot, one of five horses that dropped out in the run-up to the race.

Mage paid \$32.42, \$14.58 and \$9.08. The colt earned \$1,860,000 for the biggest win of his brief career.

Two Phil's returned \$10.44 and \$6.52.

"Man, he tried so hard and ran his heart out," said Larry Rivelli, who trains Two Phil's.

Angel of Empire, the 4-1 favorite, was another half-length back in third in front of a crowd of 150,335 on a warm and partly cloudy day at Churchill Downs. He paid \$4.70 to show.

Earlier in the day, Chloe's Dream, a 3-year-old gelding, and Freezing Point, a 3-year-old colt, were euthanized after being injured in their races, be-

coming the sixth and seventh horses to have died at the track in recent days.

"It's a very difficult subject to touch upon," said Ramiro Restrepo, part of Mage's ownership and a blood stock agent. "I'm sure there's going to be some investigations done as to the reason behind that, and hopefully that provides a few more answers."

The string of horse deaths was on the mind of some Derby goers.

"It's concerning, and I hope they're quickly trying the best they can to correct whatever's going on," said Michael Freeze, who along with his friend dressed up as jockeys. "They need to do whatever is best for the horses, and the sport in general."

Chloe's Dream injured his right front knee, trainer Jeff Hiles told The Associated Press.

Freezing Point suffered a left ankle injury in the Pat Day Mile, trainer Joe Lejzerowicz told the AP.

Sterling's win at UFC 288 may retire Cejudo again

Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. — Aljamain Sterling landed enough stiff knees and elbows in a split-decision victory against a battered Henry Cejudo that the punishment may push the former UFC two-division champion back into retirement.

Moments after winning his ninth straight bout and surviving his latest 135-pound championship title defense in the main event of UFC 288, Sterling's fight night was only heating up.

Bantamweight challenger Sean O'Malley stepped inside the cage, stripped off his jacket and stood nose-to-nose with Sterling (23-3) as the two fighters launched into profanity-laced tirades against each other

and eventually needed to be separated.

"Get this (expletive) out of my cage," Sterling shouted Saturday night at the Prudential Center.

Cejudo's comeback after a three-year retirement might have been a bad idea. Cejudo, the only person to win an Olympic gold medal and a UFC title, held the bantamweight crown when he abruptly retired in May 2020 after he successfully defended the title against Dominick Cruz.

The 33-year-old Sterling won 48-47, 48-47 on two scorecards and Cejudo won 48-47 on the third.

"I hate losing but it's also been three years," Cejudo said.

Sterling, a Long Island, N.Y.,

native, successfully defended the bantamweight championship for a record third time.

At 21, Cejudo (16-3) became the youngest American to capture an Olympic wrestling gold medal when he won the freestyle 55-kilogram division in 2008. At 36, Cejudo may finally call it quits instead of continuing to chase another UFC championship.

Belal Muhammad (23-3, 1 NC) landed enough stiff kicks to Gilbert Burns' upper body to earn a unanimous decision in the 170-pound, five-round fight.

UFC fighter Conor McGregor bashed the fight on Twitter.

He wasn't alone in his biting critique of a bland fight that earned plenty of boos from the New Jersey crowd.

Muhammad and Burns exchanged a few kicks in the third and the crowd let the fighters have it at the end of another round on the card that suffered from a deficiency of sustained action. Burns appeared to hurt his left shoulder on a failed take-down attempt and couldn't muster much offense, one reason for the methodical pace.

Muhammad was booed when he was announced as the 50-45, 49-46, 49-46 winner and then told the crowd, "New Jersey, you suck."

It's no surprise Burns (22-6) ended the bout in rough physical shape. The Brazilian already won a fight at UFC 283 in January and he retired Jorge Masvidal in a win at UFC 287 on April 8.

Lakers take series lead after routing Warriors

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — LeBron James didn't take a shot in the first quarter of Game 3 for the first time in his NBA-record 275 playoff appearances, and the Los Angeles Lakers' home crowd rumbled with mild uncertainty each time he passed the ball instead.

Turns out James and his Lakers were just taking a while to warm up before they steamrolled the Golden State Warriors.

Anthony Davis had 25 points and 13 rebounds, a slow-starting James finished with 21 points, eight assists and eight rebounds, and the Lakers took a 2-1 lead in their second-round playoff series with a 127-97 victory Saturday night.

D'Angelo Russell hit five three-pointers while scoring 21 points for the seventh-seeded Lakers, who remained unbeaten at home in the postseason with a strong defensive effort against the reigning NBA

champions. Los Angeles seized control in the middle quarters, outscoring the Warriors 63-38 to turn Game 3 into a laugh.

"We're one of the best defensive teams in the league, if not the best," James said. "For us to reach our potential, we have to defend at a high level. Not one team in this league tests you more in that than Golden State, so we have to be alert for a test on every single possession."

James curiously didn't shoot the ball until well into the second quarter, yet he led the way while Los Angeles pulled away. The 38-year-old also mixed in a handful of plays that defied his age and 20 years of NBA experience, making a deft spin move and blocking a shot on the other end shortly after he leaped the front row of fans and ran well up into the stands following a deflection.

"That's just how the game was going," James said of his unusual start. "I didn't want to

force it. Just let the game come to me and make my imprint when needed."

Stephen Curry scored 23 points and Andrew Wiggins had 16 in a collective stinker for the Warriors, who committed 19 turnovers and never mounted a response to the Lakers on either end in the second half. Golden State went 13-for-44 on three-pointers — making just 10 while the game was still competitive — after hitting 21 in each of the series' first two games in San Francisco.

Game 4 is Monday night in Los Angeles.

Davis had an impressive bounce-back game under both baskets, blocking four shots and leading the Lakers' latest strong defensive effort. Los Angeles has built its 16-5 run since March 17 on defense, and the Warriors were unable to hit enough shots from the perimeter to counteract their notable disadvantages in both size and

athleticism.

"After that first quarter, guys just really turned it up," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said. "They dialed up their competitiveness, and their communication was great. ... We were just playing a really physical, forceful downhill game."

Klay Thompson had 15 points and seven rebounds for the Warriors, but the rest of the roster beyond their top three scorers struggled mightily, combining for just 18 points before coach Steve Kerr pulled his starters with 9:11 to play. Draymond Green had two points in 23 minutes while playing with foul trouble.

"As ugly as this was tonight, we have an opportunity to respond on Monday, so there's no point in dwelling on it and hanging our head and getting discouraged," Thompson said. "We know how to respond. We've done it in our existence for 10 years here."

Butler scores 28, Heat top Knicks for 2-1 series lead

Associated Press

MIAMI — It was one of the worst shooting games of the season for the Miami Heat, by far: 39% from the field, 22% from three-point range, barely 50% on usually easy shots at the rim.

It didn't matter.

Defense — still the Heat staple, even in these high-scoring NBA days — came through, and moved Miami two wins away from another trip to the Eastern Conference finals.

Jimmy Butler returned from his sprained right ankle to score 28 points, Max Strus added 19 and the Heat topped the New York Knicks 105-86 on Saturday to take a 2-1 lead in their East semifinal series.

"It's about figuring out how to compete at a really high level," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "What's necessary for that game

to be able to win."

For as poorly as the Heat shot, the Knicks were worse — 34% from the field, 20% from three-point range, 46% from the restricted area around the rim.

And that was the story.

"You've got to win games different ways," Heat guard Kyle Lowry said. "In the playoffs, like I've said many a time and for many years now, every game is seriously different. And this is one of those games where we held them down. ... To win by half a point, one point, two points, 20 points, it's about winning the game however it happens."

Jalen Brunson scored 20 for New York, which got 15 from Josh Hart, 14 from RJ Barrett and 12 from Immanuel Quickley — who left midway through the fourth quarter after spraining

an ankle that will be evaluated again Sunday. Julius Randle added 10 points and 14 rebounds for the Knicks.

Game 4 is Monday.

"We couldn't get stops early so we couldn't get any easy buckets," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said. "So we paid the price."

Bam Adebayo had 17 points and 12 rebounds for Miami and Lowry added 14 points as the Heat never trailed. Duncan Robinson opened the second quarter with a three-pointer, giving Miami an 11-point lead — and the lead remained double digits the rest of the way.

"Hopefully we can get back on the right track and find a way to make some shots next game and come out with a win," Randle said.

There was even a Heat-

Knicks dustup under a basket, just like the good ol' days of the teams' playoff rivalry.

This one, such as it was, happened with 14.7 seconds left in the third, after a basket by Quickley got the Knicks within 87-70.

Randle and Cody Zeller got tangled as they fought for rebounding position. Randle ended up getting shoved to the floor, Isaiah Hartenstein took offense and shoved Zeller, Caleb Martin took offense and shoved Hartenstein, and it took about five minutes to sort out a mess that lasted for about five seconds.

The final tally: offsetting technicals on Zeller and Hartenstein, plus a technical on Martin. Randle missed the free throw. And right after it happened, Butler was dancing a bit, enjoying the aftermath of the show.

McDavid, Draisaitl draw Oilers even

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Asked whether an extra day off on the road could hurt his Edmonton Oilers, after a schedule change moved Game 2 of the Western Conference semifinal series from Friday to Saturday, coach Jay Woodcroft chuckled and answered with confidence.

“Whether we’re home, away, or in Hudson Bay, it doesn’t matter to us where we play — we are one of the top road teams in the National Hockey League,” Woodcroft said before the game.

Then the Oilers proved it.

Leon Draisaitl and Connor McDavid each scored twice and Edmonton tied its series at one game apiece with a 5-1 victory over the Vegas Golden Knights.

“I liked our start. I thought we did some things that we wanted to do, we asserted ourselves right off the bat and played the game at the pace that we wanted to play,” Woodcroft

said after the game. “Part of that was how we managed pucks, and part of it was the way the game played itself out.”

It was a vast difference from Game 1 on Wednesday, when Vegas dictated the pace and showed resiliency in matching the Oilers goal for goal before pulling away for a 6-4 victory.

Game 3 will be Monday in Edmonton, where the Oilers were 23-12-6 during the regular season.

“We played a lot faster, I thought we were more connected, I thought we were a little bit more aggressive, you know, all the things that we’ve been building towards,” said McDavid, who is on a seven-game point streak, with five goals and 10 assists.

Draisaitl, who scored four goals in the first game, has now tallied at least one point in the first eight games of the postseason, posting 17 points (13 goals, 4 assists).

Evan Bouchard also scored for the Oilers,

while rookie goaltender Stuart Skinner stopped 30 shots.

“Our emphasis on that (defensive) side of things showed up, and when called upon tonight, Stuart answered admirably,” Woodcroft added. “He was excellent when called upon.”

Ivan Barbashev ruined Skinner’s bid for a shutout less than two minutes into the third period by scoring his third goal of the series, the lone goal for the Golden Knights.

Vegas goaltender Laurent Brossoit stopped 27 of the 32 shots he faced before being pulled after two periods. Brossoit came into the game 5-0 in his previous five appearances dating to Game 2 of the opening round. Adin Hill finished the game and made four saves in the third period.

Edmonton got an early power-play opportunity, and after Brossoit made three incredible saves, Draisaitl scored his 12th goal of the postseason to put Edmonton up early, 1-0.

8-game losing streak longest in 16 years for Cards

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — The St. Louis Cardinals extended a losing streak to eight for the first time in 16 years, losing to the Detroit Tigers 6-5 on Saturday in Adam Wainwright’s return from the injured list as Akil Baddoo hit a go-ahead double in the 10th inning.

“I really wanted to end that,” Wainwright said. “It’s not all on my shoulders, I know, but when a starter goes out and puts up zeros then a team can really rally behind that. We had a lead twice to do it and let them get back into it both times.”

The skid is the longest since the Cardinals lost nine straight from Sept. 7-15, 2007. At a National League-worst 10-24, St. Louis is 14 games under .500 for the first time since ending the 1997 season at 73-89.

Wainwright, starting his 19th and what he said will be his final major league season, allowed four runs and eight hits in five-plus innings, struck out five and walked none. His 31 fastballs averaged 87.6 mph.

Red Sox 7, Phillies 4: Bryce

Harper homered for the first time since Tommy John surgery on Nov. 23, a fifth-inning drive off Boston’s Corey Kluber (2-4), but host Philadelphia lost its sixth straight and dropped to 15-19. Harper is 6 for 16 since his return.

Yankees 3, Rays 2: New York’s Harrison Bader flared a two-run single off Tampa Bay’s Kevin Kelly (3-1) in a three-run eighth after DJ LeMahieu hit an RBI double.

Dodgers 2, Padres 1: Chris Taylor hit a two-run home run and Dustin May kept host San Diego in check for six scoreless innings as NL West-leading Los Angeles held off the Padres for their seventh win in eight games.

Rockies 5, Mets 2: Rookie Ezequiel Tovar had three hits, including a two-run homer, and Austin Gomber (3-4) won his third straight outing, allowing two runs and five hits over six innings as visiting Colorado beat New York.

Cubs 4, Marlins 2: Nick Madrigal hit a two-run single in the eighth off Miami’s A.J. Puk (3-1)

and pinch-hitter Miguel Amaya followed with an RBI single for his first big league hit for host Chicago.

Diamondbacks 8, Nationals 7: Lourdes Gurriel Jr. had four hits, including a tying homer in the ninth, and pinch-hitter Pavin Smith walked with the bases loaded to force in the winning run as host Arizona beat Washington.

Guardians 4, Twins 3: Steven Kwan connected against Minnesota’s Jorge Alcala (0-1) for his first home run since last season to break a 3-3, a seventh-inning tie for host Cleveland.

Blue Jays 8, Pirates 2: Brandon Belt hit a two-run double in a four-run first against Johan Oviedo (2-3), and visiting Toronto extended Pittsburgh’s losing streak to a season-high six games after a 20-8 start.

Reds 5, White Sox 3: TJ Friedl hit a three-run homer off Chicago’s Mike Clevinger (2-3) in the fifth and added an RBI triple in the seventh for host Cincinnati.

Giants 4, Brewers 1: Willie Mays was on hand to celebrate

his 92nd birthday, and San Francisco’s Alex Cobb (2-1) allowed five hits in seven scoreless innings, stretching visiting Milwaukee’s losing streak to six.

Braves 5, Orioles 4: Atlanta’s Kevin Pillar hit a pinch-hit two-run home run off Danny Coulombe (1-1) in the eighth, dropping visiting Baltimore to just its fifth loss in 21 games.

Athletics 5, Royals 4: Visiting Oakland won consecutive games for the first time this season as Ryan Noda had a triple and double, reaching base four times against Kansas City in a game between teams tied for the worst record in the major leagues at 8-26.

Mariners 7, Astros 5: J.P. Crawford’s two-out, three-run double pulled host Seattle even with Houston, Jose Caballero followed two batters later with a two-run double, and the Mariners scored seven times in the eighth inning.

Rangers 10, Angels 1: Nathan Eovaldi threw eight scoreless innings and visiting Texas beat Los Angeles.