

Navy details water contamination failures

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

A cascade of errors and lapses in judgment along with poor communication resulted in contaminated drinking water aboard two aircraft carriers last fall that sickened at least 11 sailors on one of the ships, Navy investigators have found.

In separate reports released Monday, the Navy pointed the finger at bilge water as the source of jet fuel contamination on USS Nimitz and bacteria found aboard USS Abraham Lincoln on Sept. 16 and Sept. 21 of last year, respectively.

Bilge water may contain chemicals, oil, sewage leaks, seawater, sludge and other runoff that collects in the lower areas of a ship.

In the case of Nimitz, liquid contaminated with JP-5 fuel leaked into a potable water tank through a failed gasket, according to a report dated Oct. 26, 2022.

The ship moored at Naval Air Station North Island in San Diego for just over two weeks, while its potable water system was flushed with a million gallons of clean water.

At least 11 sailors reported skin rashes, headaches and diarrhea, symptoms that may have resulted from ingesting jet fuel.

All 11 sailors were cleared for duty by Oct. 5, the Navy said in a statement Monday.

Aboard Lincoln, corrosion caused a hole in a potable tank's vent piping, which allowed bilge water to seep in, investigators said in a report dated Nov. 10, 2022.

E. coli was found in three of the ship's potable water tanks, but no related illnesses were confirmed, Stars and Stripes reported in October.

The detailed reports released by the Navy months after their completion also show that personnel aboard both ships failed to effectively communicate concerns, ignored warning signs and didn't follow procedures to ensure drinking water was safe.

For example, contamination of Nimitz's water system came after crew members used a potable water pump to flush a tank that hadn't been in service since at least 2020.

Investigators said the ship's plan, which included emptying as many as six other

tanks, didn't ensure the pipes were properly flushed, effective and clean, according to the report.

But investigators pointed out that while Navy manuals showed how to address bacterial contamination, foul taste and murky water, they didn't say what to do about correcting jet fuel or chemical contamination.

The Nimitz report also revealed that a previous crew didn't formally document that the tank in question was contaminated with seawater and, as it turned out, jet fuel, sometime between June 2020 and March 2021.

Although an informal tracking sheet indicated the tank was out of service due to seawater infiltration, the follow-on crew "did not know or consider the possibility that the tank might contain contaminants other than seawater," investigators said.

Aboard Lincoln, investigators found the tank's vent piping wasn't being monitored closely enough. That report also found four missed opportunities by sailors to identify and address drinking water contamination before it spread throughout the ship.

Kyiv thwarts 'exceptional' air attack by Russia

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian air defenses, bolstered by sophisticated Western-supplied systems, thwarted an intense Russian air attack on Kyiv early Tuesday, shooting down all 18 missiles aimed at the capital, officials said.

The bombardment included six Russian "Kinzhals" aero-ballistic hypersonic missiles — the most fired in a single attack in the war so far — according to air force spokesman Yuriy Ihnat.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly touted the "Kinzhals" as a key strategic competitive advantage of Russia, difficult to detect and intercept because of their hypersonic speed and other characteristics. If confirmed, Ukraine's ability to shoot down all six fired on Tuesday appeared to mark another blow to his war efforts and shows the increasing effectiveness of Kyiv's air defenses.

Ihnat said Russia fired the "Kinzhals" from MiG-31K warplanes, along with nine cruise missiles from ships in the Black Sea and three S-400 cruise missiles launched from the ground.

Loud explosions boomed over Kyiv in the nighttime attack aimed at overwhelming Ukraine's air defenses. Kyiv's mayor reported three people were wounded.

The barrage came as European leaders sought new ways to punish Russia for the war and a Chinese envoy sought traction for Beijing's peace proposal, which so far appears to have made little impression on the warring sides. It also came as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy returned home from a whirlwind European tour to seek more military aid.

The overnight attack on Kyiv was "exceptional in its density — the maximum number of attacking missiles in the shortest period of time," said Serhii Popko,

the head of the Kyiv military administration.

Valentyna Myronets, a 64-year-old Kyiv resident, said she felt "pain, fear, nervousness, restlessness" amid the assaults. "God, we are waiting for victory and when all this is over," she said.

U.K. Ambassador Melinda Simmons tweeted that the barrage was "pretty intense."

"Bangs and shaking walls are not an easy night," she wrote.

It was the eighth time this month that Russian air raids had targeted the capital, a clear escalation after weeks of lull and ahead of a much-anticipated Ukrainian counteroffensive using newly supplied advanced Western weapons.

After the first onslaught, Russia also launched Iranian-made Shahed attack drones and conducted aerial reconnaissance, Ihnat said.

DOD accused of slow toxic cleanup at bases

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon's efforts to clean up contamination of toxic PFAS — so-called forever chemicals — at hundreds of military bases nationwide is moving too slowly and could linger for 50 years without an influx of funds, environmental advocates said Monday.

The Defense Department has failed to keep pace with the rising costs of PFAS cleanup at its current and former bases, where chemicals — mostly from foam used for decades to fight fires — have leached into groundwater, the Environmental Working Group said in a new report.

The estimated cost to mitigate PFAS contamination across the Defense Department has grown by billions of dollars in recent years, but the department's annual budget requests to address contamination have not kept

pace, the group said.

"We're calling the escalating backlog a ticking time bomb because based on current trajectories, DOD's cleanup challenge will become increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to overcome without substantial increases in funding," said Jared Hayes, a senior policy analyst at EWG, a nonprofit group based in Washington that specializes in research and advocacy in agricultural subsidies, toxic chemicals, drinking water pollutants and corporate accountability. "Current cleanup funding cannot possibly catch up to rising cleanup obligations."

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, are known as forever chemicals because they build up in human bodies and never break down in the environment. The national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

states human health effects are uncertain, but some research has linked the chemicals to increased risks for cancer, reproductive and immune system harm, among other diseases.

The Pentagon in March requested about \$1.5 billion in funding for contamination cleanup at its current and former bases, some \$700 million less for those efforts than Congress provided the Defense Department for fiscal 2023. The EWG on Monday recommended lawmakers give the Pentagon \$2.75 billion for contamination cleanup in fiscal 2024, which starts Oct. 1.

John Reeder, the EWG's vice president for federal affairs, blasted the budget request, saying the problem will continue to get worse without immediate intervention. He said even as the Pentagon sought fewer funds for cleanup next year, its own esti-

mates for long term cleanup costs grew by billions of dollars in recent years.

"The costs are going up because DOD waited too long to look into the PFAS contamination, which they knew was there decades ago," Reeder told reporters Monday. "As that contamination is confirmed, and they start to engineer solutions, the costs are going to escalate extraordinarily quickly in the next few years."

Pentagon officials did not immediately respond Monday to questions about EWG's report.

The Pentagon has said it will cost at least \$31 billion to address PFAS at known contamination sites. Officials have confirmed PFAS contamination at 397 current or former DOD locations, including at least one in all 50 states. More than 300 additional locations are suspected of PFAS contamination, according to EWG.

NORAD: US fighter jets intercept Russian aircraft near Alaska

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — U.S. fighter jets intercepted six Russian aircraft last week operating in international airspace near Alaska, military officials announced Monday.

F-16 and F-22 fighter jets on Thursday intercepted Russian aircraft that included TU-95 bombers, IL-78 tankers and SU-35 fighter jets, according to officials with the North American Aerospace Defense Command, or NORAD. The Russian planes remained in international airspace and did not enter U.S. or Canadian territory.

The flights occurred during several large-scale U.S. military training exercises that are ongoing in Alaska.

NORAD described the incident as "routine," saying this

happens six or seven times a year in the Alaska Air Defense Identification Zone, a stretch of mostly international airspace some 200 nautical miles off the Alaskan coast.

"This Russian activity in the North American ADIZ occurs regularly and is not seen as a threat," NORAD said in a statement. "NORAD tracks and positively identifies all military aircraft that enter the ADIZ, routinely monitors aircraft movements and, as necessary, escorts them from the ADIZ."

The U.S. aircraft involved in the incident also included KC-135 Stratotankers and E-3 AWACS, according to the statement.

Thursday's intercept was at least the third one in 2023. The previous incidents happened on consecutive days in February.

Anti-US protester with possible bomb is arrested on Okinawa

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Japanese police this week arrested a protester opposed to the U.S. military presence on the island with a suspected pipe bomb outside the U.S. Consulate.

The same protester, Akino Miyagi, 44, of Higashi village, reportedly attempted to take a rifle from a U.S. Marine whose squad wandered into the village from the Jungle Warfare Training Center at Camp Gonsalves in December.

Okinawa prefectural police took Miyagi into custody at 10:22 a.m. Monday, a police spokesman told Stars and Stripes by phone Tuesday. Police said Miyagi brandished a metal pipe and threatened to throw it.

She was wearing a T-shirt that

read, "A present to America, made with gunpowder from U.S. military waste in the World Heritage site in Yanbaru," Japanese public broadcaster NHK reported Tuesday.

No one was hurt in the incident, according to Beatrice Camp, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Consulate General Naha.

Miyagi, a writer and self-described "butterfly scientist," was still in custody Tuesday and could face a charge of obstructing police in performance of their public duties, the police spokesman said.

A bomb squad seized and analyzed the pipe, which was hollow and filled with unused bullets collected from former U.S. training areas, Okinawa Times reported Tuesday.

The device did not contain a detonator, according to NHK.

Heads of banks questioned on risk, pay

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Executives from two large U.S. banks that failed dramatically in March appeared in front of the Senate Banking Committee on Tuesday to respond to questions about why their banks went under and what regulators could have done to avoid the calamities.

Along with questions about how these banks failed, senators used the hearing to also address executive pay and whether senior executives in the U.S. are being rewarded more for short-term gains — like rising stock prices — than for ensuring their companies' long-term health.

Executives at Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank were paid millions of dollars over their tenures up until their banks failed, the bulk of the compensation coming in the form of company stock. That stock is now largely worthless but the CEOs still pocketed millions from the planned sales of their shares before the banks' collapse.

Sen. Sherrod Brown, the

Democratic chair of the Senate Banking Committee, took aim at executive compensation to open the hearing.

"You were paying out bonuses until literally hours before regulators seized your assets. To people in Ohio and around the country, this feels sickeningly familiar," Brown said. "To most Americans, a lack of Wall Street accountability tracks with their entire experience with our economy. Workers face consequences; executives ride off into the sunset."

Silicon Valley Bank's former CEO Greg Becker received compensation valued at roughly \$9.9 million in 2022, and also sold stock in the company only a few weeks before it failed. Joseph DePaolo, CEO of Signature Bank, also sold stock in the company in the years leading up to its collapse.

DePaolo did not appear in front of the Senate on Tuesday due to health concerns; instead Scott Shay, Signature's co-founder and former chairman, and Eric Howell, the bank's president, agreed to testify.

Becker used his testimony and answers to senators' questions to say that Silicon Valley Bank was a victim of a confluence of factors, including a social media-driven bank run. His arguments seemed to make little headway with politicians on both sides of the aisle, who focused their questions on failures by the bank's management to understand how rising interest rates could negatively impact their balance sheet.

"You say you took risk management seriously. I find it hard to believe that comment," said Sen. Tim Scott, the ranking Republican on the committee.

Sen. John Kennedy, R-Louisiana, called the bank's interest rate management "bone deep, to the marrow, stupid."

The anger over CEO pay echoes that of roughly 15 years ago, when the 2008 financial crisis led to taxpayer-funded bailouts of major banks. The CEOs and high-level bankers still received millions in pay and bonuses, most notably at nearly failed insurance conglomerate American International Group.

"The recent bank failures prove yet again that banker compensation is at the core of causing banks to take too much risk, act irresponsibly if not recklessly, and blow themselves up," said Dennis Kelleher, co-founder of Better Markets, which was founded after the Great Recession focused on financial industry reform.

Clawing back CEO pay has gained bipartisan attention despite the fierce divisions between the two political parties.

Four senators — two Democrats and two Republicans — have introduced legislation that would give the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. authority to claw back any pay made to executives in the five years leading up to a bank's failure.

The bill is sponsored by Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass.; Josh Hawley, R-Mo.; Catherine Cortez Masto, D-Nev.; and Mike Braun, R-Ind. The White House, while not endorsing the specific bill, has called on Congress to pass laws to reform how bank CEOs are paid in the event of a failure.

ChatGPT's chief testifies amid AI risk concern

Associated Press

The head of the artificial intelligence company that makes ChatGPT told Congress on Tuesday that government intervention "will be critical to mitigate the risks of increasingly powerful" AI systems.

"As this technology advances, we understand that people are anxious about how it could change the way we live. We are too," OpenAI CEO Sam Altman testified at a Senate hearing Tuesday.

His San Francisco-based startup rocketed to public attention after it released ChatGPT late last year. ChatGPT is a free chatbot tool that answers questions with convincingly human-like responses.

What started out as a panic among educators about ChatGPT's use to cheat on homework assignments has expanded to broader concerns about the ability of the latest crop of "generative AI" tools to mislead people, spread falsehoods, violate copyright protec-

tions and upend some jobs.

And while there's no immediate sign that Congress will craft sweeping new AI rules, as European lawmakers are doing, the societal concerns brought Altman and other tech CEOs to the White House earlier this month and have led U.S. agencies to promise to crack down on harmful AI products that break existing civil rights and consumer protection laws.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, the Connecticut Democrat who chairs the Senate Judiciary Committee's subcommittee on privacy, technology and the law, opened the hearing with a recorded speech that sounded like the senator, but was actually a voice clone trained on Blumenthal's floor speeches and reciting a speech written by ChatGPT after he asked the chatbot, "How I would open this hearing?"

The result was impressive, said Blumenthal, but he added, "What if I had asked it,

and what if it had provided, an endorsement of Ukraine surrendering or (Russian President) Vladimir Putin's leadership?"

Blumenthal said AI companies ought to be required to test their systems and disclose known risks before releasing them.

Founded in 2015, OpenAI is also known for other AI products including the image-maker DALL-E.

Microsoft has invested billions of dollars into the startup and has integrated its technology into its own products, including its search engine Bing.

Also testifying will be IBM's chief privacy and trust officer, Christina Montgomery, and Gary Marcus, a professor emeritus at New York University who was among a group of AI experts who called on OpenAI and other tech firms to pause their development of more powerful AI models for six months to give society more time to consider the risks.

Report: FBI rushed into probe of Trump, Russia

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A special prosecutor found that the FBI rushed into its investigation of ties between Russia and Donald Trump's 2016 campaign and relied too much on raw and unconfirmed intelligence as he concluded a four-year probe that fell far short of the former president's prediction that the "crime of the century" would be uncovered.

The report Monday from special counsel John Durham represents the long-awaited culmination of an investigation that Trump and allies had claimed would expose massive wrongdoing by law enforcement and intelligence officials. Instead, Durham's investigation delivered underwhelming results, with prosecutors securing a guilty plea from a little-known FBI employee but losing the only two criminal cases they took to trial.

The roughly 300-page report catalogs what Durham has said were a series of missteps by the FBI and Justice Department as investigators undertook a politically explosive probe in the heat of the 2016 election into whether the Trump campaign was colluding with Russia to tip the outcome. It criticized the FBI for opening a full-fledged investigation based on "raw, unanalyzed and uncorroborated intelligence," saying the speed at which it did so was a departure from the norm. And it said investigators repeatedly relied on "confirmation bias," ignoring or rationalizing away evidence that

undercut their premise of a Trump-Russia conspiracy as they pushed the probe forward.

"Based on the review of Crossfire Hurricane and related intelligence activities, we conclude that the Department and the FBI failed to uphold their important mission of strict fidelity to the law in connection with certain events and activities described in this report," the document states.

The impact of Durham's report, though harshly critical of the FBI, is likely blunted by Durham's spotty prosecution record and by the fact that many of the episodes it cites were already examined in depth by the Justice Department's inspector general. The FBI has also long since announced dozens of corrective actions. The bureau outlined those changes in a letter to Durham on Monday, including steps meant to ensure the accuracy of secretive surveillance applications to eavesdrop on suspected terrorists and spies.

"Had those reforms been in place in 2016, the missteps identified in the report could have been prevented. This report reinforces the importance of ensuring the FBI continues to do its work with the rigor, objectivity and professionalism the American people deserve and rightly expect," the FBI said in a statement. It also stressed that the report focused on the FBI's prior leadership, before current Director Christopher Wray took the job in 2017.

Wash. lawmakers seek to avoid drug decriminalization

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Washington lawmakers are considering a major new drug policy in a special session that begins Tuesday, a day after reaching a compromise that Democratic and Republican leaders have said strikes a balance between public order and compassion for those with substance abuse issues.

The bipartisan agreement would avoid making the state the second in the United States to decriminalize the possession of controlled substances. Gov. Jay Inslee called lawmakers back to the Washington Statehouse for a special session after they failed to pass one before adjourning late last month.

Under a tentative deal, intentional possession or public use of small amounts of illegal drugs would be a gross misdemeanor, punishable by up to six months in jail for the first two offenses and up to a year after that.

But police and prosecutors would be encouraged to divert cases for treatment or other services, and the measure provides millions of dollars for diversion programs and to provide short-term housing.

A temporary, 2-year-old law that makes intentional drug possession illegal is due to expire July 1. So unless the compromise passes, drug possession — even of fentanyl and other dangerous opiates — will become decriminalized under state law. The only other state that's tried decriminalizing drug possession is neighboring Oregon, where the experiment is off to a rocky start.

Lawmakers on both sides said the agreement strikes a balance between compassion and accountability for those struggling with substance abuse disorder. Rep. Roger Goodman, D-Kirkland, called it "a fair compromise that addresses urgent concerns about public disorder but follows evidence-based practices in helping people in need."

Both Goodman and Republican Rep. Peter Abbarno, of Centralia, said much work will remain even if the compromise is approved, because even with additional funding, the state doesn't yet have the treatment or diversion program capacity it needs.

"The state of Washington is a decade behind in having treatment providers and having adequate bed space and treatment facilities," Abbarno said. "Even when we pass this policy, we're still not going to see an immediate drop in crime or substance abuse, because we don't have the workforce development and infrastructure to deal with the off-ramps that this bill creates."

Colorado driver tries switching places with his dog to avoid DUI

New York Daily News

A DUI suspect in Colorado tried unsuccessfully to pin the rap on his dog, according to police in eastern Colorado.

Police in Springfield, Colo., wrote on Facebook that the attempted switcheroo happened around 11:30 p.m. Saturday when officers pulled over a vehicle driving 52 mph in a 30 mph zone.

"The driver attempted to switch places with his dog who was in the passenger seat, as the SPD officer approached and watched the entire process," law enforcement officials said Sunday. "The male party then exit-

ed the passenger side of the vehicle and claimed he was not driving."

When police asked the suspect if he'd consumed alcohol, he ran away, abandoning both vehicle and pooch. He was caught about 60 feet from where the incident began.

Charges against the unidentified driver, who allegedly had outstanding warrants, include suspicion of DUI and resisting arrest.

"The dog was given to an acquaintance of the driver to take care of while the party was in jail," police said. "The dog does not face any charges and was let go with just a warning."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Officer shoots, wounds sword-wielding man

MA OXFORD — A Massachusetts police officer shot and wounded a man who was moving toward the officer armed with a sword, authorities said.

The man was shot in Oxford and was treated at a hospital, the Worcester district attorney's office said in a statement. It didn't provide the man's condition, say whether he faces charges or say what led to the encounter.

The officer, who wasn't hurt, was placed on paid administrative leave per department protocol when an officer shoots someone, said the district attorney's office, which didn't disclose the names of the officer or the suspect.

State and local police are investigating the shooting.

State bill outlining school pronoun policies advances

LA BATON ROUGE — As the culture war over pronouns plays out in statehouses across the country, Republican lawmakers in the Louisiana House chamber advanced a bill to the Senate that would require teachers to use a student's name and pronouns that align with their sex assigned at birth.

Republican Rep. Raymond Crews authored and pitched the bill as a "parental rights" piece of legislation, noting that a student can receive parental permission to use pronouns that do not correlate with their sex assigned at birth. However, teachers can reject the parent's choice if it is contrary to the educator's "religious or moral con-

victions."

Democrats and some independents called the bill "discriminatory" to the LGBTQ+ community, fearing that it will cause increased harm to an already vulnerable group and arguing that conservative lawmakers are prioritizing religious beliefs over the wants and needs of a parent and transgender children.

"This is not a parental rights bill, unless the parents believe the same thing as Rep. Crews," state Rep. Joseph Marino III, an independent who voted against the bill, said. "It's an anti-transgender bill. It's a 'We don't like seeing people that are different' (bill)."

Teacher threatened kids who drew swastikas

WI GRAFTON — A Jewish middle school teacher in Wisconsin was arrested for making terrorist threats toward students who drew swastikas on a paper in his classroom, police said.

The Grafton Police Department, north of Milwaukee, has not identified the seventh grade teacher they said told the students that he had 17 guns in his basement and that he wasn't afraid to use them.

The John Long Middle School teacher, who police said is Jewish, was angered by the drawings and also threatened to send his daughter to students' homes with a baseball bat, WTMJ-TV reported.

"At first he kind of just acted normal, he just put it on his desk like, 'I'm going to tell the office about this,'" seventh grader Ethan Poulos told the television station. "But then he picked up

the piece of paper and went on a ramble about how that's bad and that's a disgrace to his people. He started mentioning the N-word and how that was worse than writing the N-word on the wall."

3 killed when truck firing at other vehicle crashes

NC SHELBY — Three people have died in a truck that fired at someone in a different vehicle in South Carolina and then crashed into a North Carolina house while trying to get away from law enforcement, authorities said.

The chase started in Blacksburg, S.C., and ended with the pickup, which had turned off its headlights, slamming into a house in Shelby, N.C., causing significant damage, investigators in both states said.

Three people in the truck between the ages of 15 and 20 died, while three others in the vehicle survived the crash, Shelby police told news outlets.

No one in the vehicle that was shot at was injured, Cleveland County, N.C., Sheriff Alan Norman said in a statement.

"Given the relentlessness with which these suspects pursued and shot at the victims, it is a miracle," Norman said.

Striking teachers, school district reach agreement

CA OAKLAND — Students in the Oakland Unified School District returned to full classroom instruction Tuesday after the district and striking teachers announced a tentative deal that includes a reparations task force for Black students and more say from parents and teachers in school decisions.

Monday's announcement ends a strike that had kept 34,000 students out of school for more than a week. The last day of school for the district east of San Francisco is May 25.

The union representing 3,000 educators, counselors and other workers walked out May 4 in a bid for traditional demands such as higher salaries. But bargainers with the Oakland Education Association also pushed for "common good" changes, such as reparations and resources for students who are homeless.

At a news conference Monday, Oakland schools Superintendent Kyla Johnson-Trammell described the compensation package as historic. Teachers and other union members will receive a 10% raise and a \$5,000 one-time stipend for full-time employees, she said.

Pilot escapes small plane crash unharmed

WY ALBANY — The pilot escaped unharmed from a small single-engine plane crash Sunday in Albany County, Wyoming Highway Patrol Troopers said.

Troopers were called to the site of the crash about 2:40 p.m. at milepost 324 on Interstate 80, the highway patrol said in a statement.

The pilot, who was only identified by the highway patrol as a woman, was the only person in the plane.

The aircraft was flying from British Columbia to Florida, the highway patrol said.

The Federal Aviation Administration will investigate the crash, the highway patrol said.

— From wire reports



STARS AND STRIPES

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

**Reporting
World, National
and Military News**

NBA coaches lament lack of job security

Associated Press

Miami's Erik Spoelstra and Denver's Michael Malone are two of the four NBA coaches to have spent at least eight years with their current team.

They know how rare that is.

Spoelstra and Malone both spoke out Monday following the recent dismissals of three coaches who aren't far removed from great success — 2019 NBA champion Nick Nurse, 2021 champion Mike Budenholzer and most recently 2021 Western Conference champion and 2022 coach of the year Monty Williams. Nurse was fired by Toronto, Budenholzer by Milwaukee and Williams by Phoenix.

On Tuesday, Philadelphia parted ways with Doc Rivers after the 76ers were eliminated from the playoffs in the second round for the third straight season. Rivers led the 76ers to their second straight 50-win season but failed to get them to the Eastern Conference finals for the first time since 2001.

"I've been thinking more about the great, proven, experienced coaches that have lost their jobs already," Spoelstra said as the Heat prepared for another trip to the Eastern Con-

ference finals and a matchup against Boston that starts Wednesday. "It just doesn't make sense to me."

Spoelstra has the NBA's second-longest current tenure with one team. San Antonio's Gregg Popovich has coached the Spurs since 1996, Spoelstra took over the Heat in 2008, Steve Kerr became coach in Golden State in 2014 and Malone became coach in Denver in 2015.

"I understand this business," said Malone, who led Denver into the Western Conference finals Tuesday against the Los Angeles Lakers. "You look around the coaching landscape, if you want a secure profession, coaching is not the one to get into. I should have been a TV reporter."

Of the last nine coaches to take a team to the NBA Finals, only two — Kerr and Spoelstra — are still with the franchise that they went to the title round with.

Three of the last four championship-winning coaches — Budenholzer in 2021, the Los Angeles Lakers' Frank Vogel in 2020 and Nurse in 2019 — have since been fired by those clubs.

Also fired for various reasons after recent runs to the Finals: Ime Udoka in Boston, Cleveland's David Blatt and then Tyrone Lue as well, and now Williams by the Suns.

Budenholzer's dismissal left Kerr upset, as he revealed earlier this month — but noted that all coaches understand how vulnerable they are.

"My first response is not necessarily shock, it's more disappointment because Bud is a fantastic coach," Kerr said. "He just won a championship and has been wildly successful in his coaching career. But this is the business we're in. ... Expectations every year for every team are so high, and only one team can win. It's sad news for the coaching profession."

At least five teams will have new coaches next season — Phoenix, Milwaukee, Toronto and Detroit are looking, and Houston has already hired Udoka as the replacement for Stephen Silas. Brooklyn's Jacques Vaughn was hired by the Nets in November, and Atlanta's Quin Snyder was hired by the Hawks in February.

And, at minimum, 12 of the NBA's 30 teams will open next

season with a coach who has been in place for no more than one season.

Spoelstra has long said part of Miami's strength is consistency. Managing general partner Micky Arison, CEO Nick Arison, team president Pat Riley, general manager Andy Elisburg and others have been with the Heat for decades — and from the very beginning, in Elisburg's case, since he's been with the franchise for all 35 of its seasons.

Spoelstra has been with the organization for more than half his life as well; he was 24 when he started in the video room, and now he's 52.

"It takes so much time and energy to restart something," Spoelstra said. "And I think that's part of the reason why we've been able to reboot so many times, over and over and over. We're not reinventing a new culture and then trying to teach everybody and then all of a sudden, two years later, it's going to be somebody else doing the exact same thing. But particularly to have proven veteran guys (fired), it's just been stunning. It really has been disturbing."

76ers fire Rivers after 3rd straight second-round exit

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Doc Rivers' penchant for playoff collapses and second-round exits cost him his coaching job with the Philadelphia 76ers.

The 76ers fired Rivers on Tuesday following a third straight exit in the second round of the playoffs, and the second time over that span he lost a series lead and a Game 7.

Rivers led the 76ers to their second straight 50-win season behind NBA MVP Joel Embiid but again failed to lead them to the Eastern Conference finals for the first time since 2001. The Sixers have not won an NBA

championship since 1983.

"We're grateful for all he did in his three seasons here and thank him for the important impact he made on our franchise," team president Daryl Morey said in a statement. "After having the chance to reflect upon our season, we decided that certain changes are necessary to further our goals of competing for a championship."

Morey was scheduled to address the decision at a news conference Wednesday.

The 76ers held a 3-2 semifinals series lead against Boston before dropping Game 6 at home and were crushed in Game 7 on

the road.

Rivers fell to 6-10 in Game 7s. The 10 defeats are five more than any other NBA coach.

Rivers and the 76ers also lost a decisive Game 7 at home in the second round to Atlanta in 2021 as a No. 1 seed. Embiid endorsed Rivers' return following Sunday's loss but James Harden was noncommittal about wanting Rivers back.

Rivers had two years left on his contract and was 154-82 in three years with the Sixers. He won the 2008 NBA title as coach of the Boston Celtics.

Asked after the 112-88 thumping in Boston if he expected to be

back next year, Rivers said: "Yeah. I think I got two years left. No one is safe in our business and I get that."

He's just the latest big-name coach fired already during the postseason and the 76ers are sure to have their pick among the best in the game. Nick Nurse (Toronto) and Mike Budenholzer (Milwaukee) have been fired after both won championships since 2019, and former Sixers assistant Monty Williams (who coached Phoenix in the 2021 NBA Finals) is also available.

Rivers is 1,097-763 over a career that dates to the 1999-2000 season.

Stars beat Kraken to advance to West final

Associated Press

DALLAS — Wyatt Johnston is no longer a teenager, not that he's played like one at all during his rookie season with a Dallas Stars team that is headed to the Western Conference final.

A day after his 20th birthday, Johnston scored a crucial goal for the Stars off a hard ricochet in their 2-1 victory over the Seattle Kraken in Game 7 in the second-round series Monday night.

"It's a world-class play by one of the youngest players in the league," Stars coach Pete DeBoer said. "He's been fantastic all year. He's a big part of our group. It feels like the deeper we get, the more we rely on him, the more responsibility he wants."

Roope Hintz also scored for the Stars and 24-year-old goalie Jake Oettinger had 22 saves while again bouncing back after

a loss.

Dallas moves on to play first-year Stars coach DeBoer's former team, the Vegas Golden Knights. Game 1 of the West final is Friday night in Las Vegas.

DeBoer improved to 7-0 in Game 7s, this being the fourth team he led to a win in the finale of a best-of-seven series that went the distance. Darryl Sutter and Scott Bowman are the only other coaches to do that.

It was the fourth time in five seasons the Stars got a Game 7 — the others were all away from home. They hadn't won a Game 7 at home since 2000, when they made the Stanley Cup Final for the second season in a row, a year after their only title.

In the only other Game 7 they hosted at American Airlines Center, the Stars lost 6-1 to St. Louis in a second-round series in 2016.

Johnston made it 2-0 with 7:12 left, when he gathered a puck that ricocheted off the back boards to the left of the Seattle net. The kid who has played in every game this season, and is living with veteran Joe Pavelski's family, then sent a shot that went off the shoulder and mask of goalie Phillip Grubauer before going into the net.

Grubauer stopped 26 shots, two weeks after his 33 saves when Seattle won at Colorado 2-1 in another Game 7 to knock out last year's Stanley Cup champion.

Hintz's ninth goal of the playoffs was credited as an unassisted tally and came with 4:01 left in the second period, the deepest in this series any game got before a score.

Oliver Bjorkstrand scored with 17.6 seconds left, preventing the second shutout this post-

season season for Oettinger. Bjorkstrand had both goals against the Avalanche in that Game 7 last month.

This series finale came exactly one year after Oettinger's 64-save performance in another Game 7 — a 3-2 loss at Calgary after Johnny Gaudreau's OT goal ended the first-round series.

Oettinger improved to 5-0 after losses this postseason. He allowed four goals on 18 shots during Game 6 in Seattle on Saturday, when he was pulled 4 1/2 minutes into the second period.

"Yeah, that's playoff hockey. I don't think had my best series of my career, but it shows how good of a team we are," Oettinger said. "It's ups and downs and, you know, you think might be out of it, and the next thing you know you're going to the conference final."

Oak Hill changes make PGA return feel brand new

Associated Press

Major golf championships are nothing new at Oak Hill. The Donald Ross gem in upstate New York has already hosted three U.S. Opens, three PGA Championships and the Ryder Cup. And yet the PGA Championship's return to Oak Hill feels like a debut.

Part of that is because of the fabled East Course.

Oak Hill kept getting so far away from its Ross roots — the club dates to 1901 — that it finally took on a restoration project so thorough that it's a wonder any of the 32 players who have played it in the last two PGA Championships will recognize the place.

Three holes were not there when the PGA Championship was last at Oak Hill in 2013. Trees were removed, creating more vistas and recovery options. The bunkers are steep and penal, similar to what Ross had in mind.

And part of the newness to this PGA Championship is the calendar.

The PGA of America announced in 2017 that it would be moving its premier championship to May, a decision that would eliminate northern courses from future consideration. Oak Hill, however, was already locked in for 2023, the last hurdle before a lineup of courses in warmer climates.

Imagine a major in May on a course located about an hour east of Buffalo.

Kerry Haigh, the PGA's chief championships officer, has recently started most conversations with the Oak Hill staff by asking a question on everyone's mind: How's the weather?

"The last six weeks there have been more conversations with the superintendent than normal — to your point, checking on the weather, checking on what's growing and what's not," Haigh said, noting the Rochester area had some 45 inches of snow this winter.

Mother Nature, always the unknown factor in golf, appears to have cooperated.

There was a week of unseasonable warmth along with weeks of rain, a combination that led to enough grass on the ground and leaves in the trees. Temperatures are expected to be in the 60s when the 105th PGA Championship starts Thursday. It should be pleasant enough for players not to have to bundle up in pursuit of the Wanamaker Trophy.

What hasn't changed is the nature of the field.

The PGA Championship is known for having the strongest field of the four majors, and

this year was no exception with 99 of the top 100 players from the world ranking expected at Oak Hill. The exception is Will Zalatoris, out for the season after back surgery.

Also missing is Tiger Woods, who had surgery on his ankle last month and is likely to miss the other two majors this year.

The 156-man field includes 17 players who are part of the Saudi-funded LIV Golf League — down one from the 18 who played in the 89-man field at the Masters last month.

One question going into the year was how LIV Golf players would fare against more than just a 48-man field and stronger competition from top to bottom. If the Masters was any indication, that's no longer a concern.

Brooks Koepka, a four-time major champion, had the 54-hole lead at Augusta National until Jon Rahm tracked him down in the final round. Koepka was a runner-up with 52-year-old Phil Mickelson, who only two years ago became golf's oldest major winner in the PGA Championship at Kiawah Island. Patrick Reed tied for fourth.

Was that the familiarity of Augusta National for Mickelson, a three-time Masters champ? Oak Hill might be the place to validate that.

Ohtani reaches 5 times as Angels top 0's

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Shohei Ohtani turned a shaky start on the mound into another night of historic excellence.

Ohtani became the first starting pitcher since 1964 to reach base five times in a game as the Los Angeles Angels beat the Baltimore Orioles 9-5 on Monday night. Ohtani had four hits and a walk, making up for his pitching struggles with a stellar performance at the plate. He hit a titanic three-run homer and finished a double shy of the cycle on a night the Orioles hit three home runs off him.

"I'm sure all those records come because the sample size is so small, so I don't really look too deeply into it," Ohtani said through a translator.

The sample size — of players who can hit and pitch like this — is indeed small. That is, of course, part of what makes Ohtani such a marvel. The last person to reach base five times in a game he started on the mound was Mel Stottlemyre of the New York Yankees, on Sept. 26, 1964, against Washington.

Ohtani (5-1) allowed five runs on four hits in seven innings, but he did plenty of damage with a bat in his hands. In addition to his 456-foot drive in the fourth which gave the Angels a 7-4 lead, he had a walk, two singles

and a triple.

"He's a once-in-a-generation player. Once in a lifetime, really," Orioles infielder Adam Frazier said. "Special guy, and I'm glad to say I can compete against him, because it's fun. He brings out the best in everyone."

Dodgers 9, Twins 8 (12): Chris Taylor scored on a bases-loaded walk in the 12th inning, Max Muncy homered twice to retake the major league lead and host Los Angeles won its sixth straight.

Trayce Thompson drew a walk on a full count with the bases loaded off Jorge López (1-1) to give Los Angeles the victory.

Minnesota's Trevor Larnach hit a game-tying home run in the eighth inning. Jorge Polanco had three hits, including a solo shot. Christian Vázquez also had three hits for the AL Central-leading Twins, who have dropped 11 straight to the Dodgers.

Yankees 7, Blue Jays 4: Aaron Judge homered twice, including a 462-foot drive over the center field fence three pitches after manager Aaron Boone was ejected for arguing a called strike to the slugger, and visiting New York beat Toronto.

Judge hit two solo homers, putting the Yankees ahead in the first inning with an opposite-field shot to right against Alek

Manoah (1-4) and extending New York's lead to seven in the eighth. Judge had three RBIs and reached base five times.

Padres 4, Royals 0: Michael Wacha took a no-hitter into the eighth inning before allowing Michael Massey's leadoff single and struck out a career-high 11 as host San Diego snapped a four-game skid with a win over Kansas City.

Massey's hit came on Wacha's 103rd pitch, and the right-hander was immediately lifted from the game. Nick Martinez came on and retired the side and then finished the combined two-hitter.

Diamondbacks 5, Athletics 2: Geraldo Perdomo hit a two-run homer in the second inning and Lourdes Gurriel Jr. added a two-run shot in the third to back Merrill Kelly's third straight winning decision in visiting Arizona's win over Oakland.

The A's drew an announced crowd of 2,064, their smallest for a home game fans were allowed to attend since drawing 1,037 against Texas on Sept. 19, 1979.

Mariners 10, Red Sox 1: Cal Raleigh became the first catcher to homer from both sides of the plate at Fenway Park, and George Kirby pitched visiting Seattle past Boston.

Cardinals 18, Brewers 1: No-

lan Arenado homered in his fourth straight game and Nolan Gorman had a career-high five RBIs to lead host St. Louis over Milwaukee for its season-best fourth straight win.

Nationals 10, Mets 3: Joey Meneses had four hits and drove in four runs, CJ Abrams homered and host Washington beat New York to split a four-game series.

Braves 12, Rangers 0: Kevin Pillar and Ronald Acuña Jr. each hit a two-run homer in the second inning, spoiling Cody Bradford's big league debut, as visiting Atlanta routed Texas in an interleague matchup of division leaders.

Astros 6, Cubs 4: Alex Bregman hit a tiebreaking two-run homer in the seventh inning, helping host Houston over Chicago.

Rockies 9, Reds 8: Rookie Brenton Doyle had his first multi-homer game and Harold Castro had a tiebreaking, two-run double with two outs in the seventh inning that lifted host Colorado over Cincinnati for the Rockies' 10th win in 14 games.

Giants 6, Phillies 3: Michael Conforto hit his fourth homer in the past six games as part of a six-run second inning and host San Francisco beat Philadelphia to end a three-game skid.

Ex-UFC heavyweight champion Ngannou signs with PFL

Associated Press

Francis Ngannou's reign as one of the top heavyweights in MMA will continue in the Professional Fighters League following the former champion's contentious split with UFC.

Ngannou was still UFC heavyweight champion when contract talks collapsed once the African fighter said his demands for health insurance and personal sponsorships were rejected. UFC President Dana White stripped Ngannou of the belt in January.

The 36-year-old Ngannou will fight exclusively for PFL in its pay-per-view super

fight division. Ngannou, who defeated Stipe Miocic in 2021 to win the UFC crown, will also serve as chairman and equity owner in PFL Africa.

Terms of the deal were not announced. "I believe in the PFL's 'fighter first' culture and global vision including developing the sport in Africa," Ngannou said Tuesday in a statement. "With that, I am also proud to announce that I will serve as Chairman of PFL Africa which will be the leading MMA organization on the continent providing great African fighters the opportunity to compete on a global platform."

PFL CEO Peter Murray told The Associ-

ated Press that Ngannou's first scheduled fight will be in early 2024.

Murray said talks with Ngannou began when "he was no longer encumbered" and the fighter was expected to play a pivotal role in the company's planned global expansion. Ngannou also wants to box, and the PFL will not stand in his way.

"We're supportive of Francis taking on boxing," Murray said.

Ngannou (17-3) will also serve in a leadership role on the PFL global advisory board, making him the first active fighter to serve on the board and represent fighters' interests.