

Camp Lejeune water linked to Parkinson's

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

Marines who served at Camp Lejeune, N.C., in the 1970s and 1980s have developed Parkinson's disease at a much higher rate than those who served at Camp Pendleton, Calif., a study published Monday in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found.

Medical researchers looking at the link between trichloroethylene, a widely spread toxic chemical known as TCE, and Parkinson's disease found Marines and Navy sailors who served at Camp Lejeune between 1975 and 1985 were 70% more likely to develop Parkinson's than those who served at the California base, according to the study. Though Camp Lejeune's water supply was known to be contaminated at that time with TCE among other toxic chemicals, Camp Pendleton's water supply was clean, the researchers wrote.

The study is the latest to spotlight the toxic water supply at Camp Lejeune from the 1950s into the late 1980s that exposed as many as 1 million service members and civilians to contaminants linked to neurological disorders, including Parkinson's, cancers, reproductive issues and other health defects.

Researchers analyzed medical records for more than 340,000 troops in the study, which

were provided by the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, or ATSDR. They wrote that they looked at data for those who served between 1975 and 1985 because it was the period when the water at Camp Lejeune was the most contaminated — with median levels of TCE in base water more than 70-fold higher than considered safe by the federal government.

TCE is a solvent used for dry cleaning clothes, degreasing metals and decaffeinating coffee. It has been linked to neurological disorders since the 1960s, according to the American Medical Association. TCE has been banned in New York and Minnesota and parts of Europe. The study describes it as an "ubiquitous environmental contaminant" that could have exposed millions of people worldwide to elevated Parkinson's risk and could have contributed to a global rise in the disease, which causes uncontrollable movements such as shaking and stumbling.

Camp Lejeune veterans who have developed Parkinson's after serving at least 30 days at the base can be compensated by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Civilian Pentagon employees and military family members, however, must file a lawsuit against the government to receive compensa-

tion through the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act, or PACT Act, passed last year.

The study published Monday did not look at civilian data.

The VA and the Defense Department were listed as providing funding for the new study, but those departments did not participate in the research, according to the study.

The VA has encouraged veterans who served at least 30 days at Camp Lejeune between Aug. 1, 1953, and Dec. 31, 1987, and their family members to apply for care and benefits at www.VA.gov/CampLejeune.

Briana De Miranda, an assistant professor of neurology and pharmacology and toxicology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, told the *Journal of the American Medical Association* that the new study was "really, really valuable" and could help family members and civilians connected to Camp Lejeune who have or do develop Parkinson's. She said she suspected disease rates among those linked to the base would continue to rise in the coming years.

"I suspect there is probably more Parkinson's disease [connected to Camp Lejeune]," she said. "And I think there's a lot more to come."

Austin warns on standoffs over budgets, debt ceiling

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Tuesday that the United States will soon provide Taiwan with "significant" military aid from its own inventories and urged lawmakers to resist calls for spending cuts amid increasing competition from China.

Austin confirmed the pending Taiwan aid and defined the Pentagon's \$842 billion budget request for fiscal 2024 to the Senate Appropriations Committee as congressional leaders held new talks with President Joe Biden over a looming government debt default.

House Republicans are pushing for a return to 2022 federal budget levels in exchange for raising the nation's borrowing limit, but Austin said such reductions would

hurt the military's ability to keep up with China's growing power.

"Reducing funding to [fiscal year] 2022 levels across the government would hamstring our ability to compete, even if the Defense Department is exempted from cuts," he said. "We succeed as a team, and our Department of Defense succeeds when our interagency partners succeed."

That assessment was echoed by Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., the panel's chairwoman.

"Let's be clear: China isn't debating whether to pay its debts or wreck its economy. China isn't debating whether to invest in its future or cut and cap the investments that keep it competitive," she said.

Austin warned Congress' unpredictable government funding process, including its yearslong inability to pass annual spending bills on time, will undermine the edge the

U.S. still maintains over China. It will delay the ability of the U.S. to obtain munitions such as guided rocket systems and submarine torpedoes for itself as well as its allies, he said.

The coming aid to Taiwan is part of a \$1 billion effort to transfer weapons to the island nation in preparation for a possible invasion by China.

Austin told appropriators the Pentagon will "absolutely" need Congress to eventually provide more funds to replace the equipment sent to Taiwan from the military's own stocks.

"This is part of our long-standing commitment to upholding our obligations under the Taiwan Relations Act and other U.S. policies and to doing our part to maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait," he said. "We need to remain a reliable partner."

F-15D falls into Ore. canal after landing

By **SETH ROBSON**
Stars and Stripes

An F-15D Eagle that left the runway while landing Monday at a West Coast air base ended up in an irrigation channel, according to the 173rd Fighter Wing.

A photograph provided by the wing the day after the mishap shows the tactical jet partially submerged with its nose embedded in the channel bank at Kingsley Field, an Air National Guard base in Klamath Falls, Ore.

“The aircraft was returning to base following a routine training mission,” the wing said in a statement Tuesday.

The fighter landed at approximately 3:15 p.m., left the paved

surface and came to a stop in a Bureau of Reclamation irrigation canal at the south side of the runway, according to the statement.

“We don’t believe the aircraft is leaking any petroleum products based on our initial assessment of the water in the canal,” Col. Micah Lambert, the wing’s vice commander, said in the statement. “Minimizing the environmental impact is one of our main priorities; we have taken precautionary measures and placed absorbent booms around the aircraft to prevent the flow of fuel, or other substances, downstream in the event there is a leakage.”

The unit will continue tests to

detect if there is fuel in the water, Lambert said.

The instructor pilot aboard the aircraft exited safely with minor injuries and was evaluated as a precaution at Sky Lakes Medical Center. He has since been released, according to the statement.

“We are so grateful that our pilot was able to walk away from this mishap,” Lambert said. “Our Team Kingsley responders acted quickly and with professionalism thanks to the extensive training and safety mindset of our team.”

The wing is working with local authorities and federal agencies, including the Bureau of Reclamation, to ensure the air-

craft is safely removed from the canal, Lambert said.

A board of officers has been assigned to investigate the mishap landing, according to the wing’s statement.

The 173rd’s mission involves training F-15 pilots under Air Education and Training Command, according to the unit’s official website.

A number of F-15C/D fighters from Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, were sent to Kingsley Field starting in December, according to a news release by the 173rd that month. Two F-15 squadrons at Kadena — nearly 50 fighters — are being phased out over two years and replaced by rotational fighters.

2 troops hurt in Apache crash during training in Wash. state

By **DOUG G. WARE**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — An Army AH-64 Apache helicopter crashed during a training exercise in Washington state over the weekend and investigators are still trying to determine what went wrong, service officials said Tuesday.

The helicopter was carrying two soldiers from the 16th Combat Aviation Brigade from Joint Base Lewis-McChord when it went down near the Yakima Training Center on Saturday, the service said. It was the second Army helicopter to crash in less than three weeks.

The crash took place during training, the base said, and both soldiers were rushed to a hospital. One was released early Sunday, and the other remains in the hospital, an Army statement said. That soldier’s condition was not disclosed.

“Our No. 1 priority at this time is ensuring our pilots receive the medical care they need, while si-

multaneously caring for their families,” said Army Col. Derek Smith, commander of the 16th Combat Aviation Brigade.

Joint Base Lewis-McChord is home to several Army and Air Force units and the Yakima Training Center—a 327,000-acre complex that has 25 ranges and a “shoot house” that allows service members to train individually or in groups, according to its website.

The AH-64 Apache is one of the Army’s most widely used attack helicopters since it entered service in the mid-1980s; Saturday’s crash was the second involving an AH-64 Apache in just 16 days.

Two Apache helicopters collided in midflight and crashed in east-central Alaska on April 27 while returning to Fort Wainwright from a training mission, killing all three aboard.

That accident came just weeks after another deadly collision in Kentucky between two Army Black Hawk helicopters that killed nine.

Military aims for October to drain Red Hill tanks

Associated Press

HONOLULU — The U.S. military on Tuesday proposed an October start date for a plan to drain a World War II-era fuel tank facility that poisoned 6,000 people when it leaked jet fuel into Pearl Harbor’s drinking water 18 months ago.

Fuel from the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility leaked into a U.S. Navy drinking water well supplying water to 93,000 people in 2021. The episode poisoned about 6,000 people — mostly military personnel and their families — on and around the Hawaii naval base. It also prompted Honolulu’s water utility to shut down nearby wells that provided about 20% of the city’s water supply.

After the spill, the state of Hawaii ordered the military to drain and close the tanks. Last year, the military said it expected to remove fuel in July 2024 after it finished repairs to prevent leaks.

The military said in a news release that it would begin remov-

ing 104 million gallons of fuel from the facility on Oct. 16 and finish by Jan. 19. But that won’t remove all the fuel. The military said it’s likely that 100,000 to 400,000 gallons would remain. It said it will propose additional plans to remove the final gallons.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Hawaii Department of Health must sign off on the military’s new plan.

Kathleen Ho, Hawaii’s deputy director of environmental health, said she was encouraged by the new proposal.

“We will carefully review this submission to ensure that the updated timeline and plan can be executed safely without any further risk to the environment,” Ho said in a statement.

The tanks can hold 250 million gallons of fuel but are at less than half capacity now. Thirteen of the 20 tanks have fuel in them.

A Navy investigation has yet to announce disciplinary action in response to the spill.

Top negotiators named as debt talks advance

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Debt-limit talks shifted into an encouraging new phase Tuesday as President Joe Biden and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy named top emissaries to negotiate a deal to avert an unprecedented national default. Biden cut short an upcoming overseas trip in hopes of closing an agreement before a June 1 deadline.

The fresh set of negotiators means discussions are now largely narrowed to what the White House and McCarthy will accept in order to allow lawmakers to raise the debt limit in the coming days. The speaker said after a meeting with Biden and congressional leaders that a deal was “possible” by week’s end, even as — in McCarthy’s view — the two sides remained far apart for the moment.

Biden was publicly upbeat after a roughly hourlong meeting in the Oval Office, despite having to cancel the Australia and Papua New Guinea portions of his overseas trip that begins Wednesday. Biden will participate in a Group of Seven summit in Hiroshima, Japan, but then return to

Washington on Sunday.

“There’s still work to do,” Biden said. “But I made it clear to the speaker and others that we’ll speak regularly over the next several days and staff’s going to continue meeting daily to make sure we do not default.”

Senior White House officials, as well as top aides to the four congressional leaders — McCarthy, R-Calif., Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y. — have been meeting daily.

But now, Steve Ricchetti, counselor to the president, Office of Management and Budget Director Shalanda Young and legislative affairs director Louisa Terrell will take the lead in negotiations for the Democratic side, while Rep. Garret Graves, R-La., a key McCarthy ally who has been a point person for the speaker on debt and budget issues, will represent Republicans.

“Now we have a format, a structure,” McCarthy said as he returned to the Capitol.

Biden honors 9 with Medal of Valor including 2 cops killed on 911 call

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Two New York Police Department officers ambushed and killed after responding to a 911 call and the rookie cop who took down the gunman were honored Wednesday, along with six others, by President Joe Biden with the Medal of Valor, the nation’s highest honor for bravery by a public safety officer.

The three NYPD officers, a Houston police officer, Colorado police official, Ohio sheriff’s deputy and three FDNY firefighters all received medals in a White House ceremony before Biden departs for Japan and the Group of Seven summit.

“I don’t know all of you, but I do know you,” Biden said. “From small towns to big cities, you’re cut from the same cloth. You run into danger when everyone else runs away from danger.”

Biden told the crowd the award was given for “actions above and beyond the

call of duty,” singling out the families of the officers to thank them.

NYPD officer Wilbert Mora and his police partner Jason Rivera were shot Jan. 21, 2022, while responding to a call about a family dispute in a Harlem apartment. Officer Sumit Sulan shot and killed the gunman, ending the deadly encounter moments after it began and keeping the civilians safe. Rivera died that night, Mora was pronounced dead four days later. The families of the two officers accepted their awards.

Attorney General Merrick Garland said the recipients showed “extraordinary valor” above and beyond the call of duty.

“At the end of every shift, you are there,” he said to the families. “It is your care and encouragement that makes it possible for our public safety officers to do their jobs. We are so grateful to you.”

NC Republicans override veto on banning abortion

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Legislation banning most abortions after 12 weeks of pregnancy will become law in North Carolina after the state’s Republican-controlled General Assembly successfully overrode the Democratic governor’s veto late Tuesday.

The House completed the second and final part of the override vote after a similar three-fifths majority — the fraction necessary — voted for the override earlier Tuesday in the Senate. The party-line outcomes represent a major victory for Republican legislative leaders who needed every GOP member on board to enact the law over Gov. Roy Cooper’s opposition.

Cooper vetoed the measure over the weekend after spending last week traveling around the state to persuade at least one Republican to side with him on the override, which would be enough to uphold his veto. But in the end, the four Republicans targeted by Cooper — including one who recently switched from the Democratic Party — voted to override.

Republicans pitched the measure as a middle-ground change to state law, which currently bans nearly all abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy, without exceptions for rape or incest.

The votes came as abortion rights in the U.S. faced another tectonic shift with lawmakers in South Carolina and Nebraska also considering new abortion limits. North Carolina and South Carolina have been two of the few remaining Southern states with relatively easy access.

Such restrictions are possible because the U.S. Supreme Court last year struck down the landmark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling, which established a nationwide right to abortion.

Under the bill that had been up for a vote Tuesday in the South Carolina House, abortion access would be almost entirely banned after about six weeks of pregnancy — before women often know they’re pregnant. The South Carolina state Senate previously rejected a proposal to nearly outlaw abortions.

However, a final vote would have to wait until later Wednesday after the South Carolina House moved to reconvene at 10 a.m. while the computer system rebooted.

Nationally, bans on abortion throughout pregnancy are in effect in 14 states.

Russia to extend Ukraine grain deal

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — Russia agreed to extend a deal that has allowed Ukraine to ship grain through the Black Sea to parts of the world struggling with hunger, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced Wednesday, a boost to global food security after the war launched more than a year ago drove up prices.

“I want to give a good news,” Erdogan said. “With the efforts of our country, the support of our Russian friends and the contribution of our Ukrainian friends, the Black Sea Grain Initiative has been extended by another two months.”

The breakthrough accord that the United Nations and Turkey brokered with the warring sides last summer came with a separate agreement to facilitate shipments of Russian food and fertilizer that Moscow insists hasn’t been applied.

Russia had set a Thursday deadline for its concerns to be ironed out or had threatened to bow out.

Such brinkmanship isn’t new: With a similar extension in the balance in March, Russia unilaterally decided to renew the deal for just 60 days instead of the 120 days outlined in the agreement.

Extending the Black Sea Grain Initiative is a win for countries in Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia that rely on Ukrainian wheat, barley, vegetable oil and other affordable food products, especially as drought takes a toll.

The deal helped lower prices of food commodities like wheat over the last year, but that relief has not reached kitchen tables.

In talks last week in Istanbul, Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov said the grain deal “should be extended for a longer period of time and expanded” to

“give predictability and confidence” to markets.

Moscow has said it opposed such an expansion, then opted for another shorter extension.

Russia, meanwhile, is rapidly shipping a bumper harvest of its wheat through other ports.

Critics say that suggests Moscow is posturing or trying to wrest concessions in other areas — such as on Western sanctions — and claim it’s dragged its heels on joint inspections of ships by Russian, Ukrainian, U.N. and Turkish officials.

Average daily inspections — meant to ensure vessels carry only food and not weapons that could aid either side — have steadily dropped from a peak of 10.6 in October to 3.2 last month. Shipments of Ukrainian grain also have declined in recent weeks.

Russia denies slowing the work.

Russia welcomes Chinese shipping to Vladivostok

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

Russia has opened the home port of its Pacific naval fleet to Chinese commercial shipping, a sign of deepening ties between the two nations amid the Russia-Ukraine war.

The Russian port of Vladivostok opens to China on June 1 for “cross-border transport of domestic goods,” according to China’s state-run Global Times newspaper on Monday, which cited the General Administrations of Customs China, the nation’s customs ministry.

China’s trade with Russia reached a record \$190 billion last year, even as Russian imports from European countries fell due to sanctions imposed following the invasion of

Ukraine, Reuters reported Jan. 13.

Vladivostok, formerly known as Haishenwai, was part of China before it was ceded to the Russian Empire in 1860 under the Convention of Peking.

The convention, signed at the end of the Second Opium War, also ceded Hong Kong to the United Kingdom.

Since then, northern Chinese provinces have moved goods hundreds of miles overland to Dalian and other Chinese ports in the south, according to a Tuesday report on the Think China website.

Vladivostok is the largest Russian port in the Far East with 2,300 workers, 15 berths and 45 cranes.

It accommodates 2,000 vessels annually and handled more than 13 million tons of

cargo last year, according to the port’s website.

The arrangement for Chinese access should be viewed in the context of deepening defense ties between China and Russia in recent years, according to Grant Newsham, a senior researcher with the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies in Tokyo.

Russian forces operating out of Vladivostok already absorb American attention, he said in an email Wednesday.

“Should Chinese forces have access to Vladivostok that expands PLA (China’s People’s Liberation Army) operational options a bit — and also gives Japanese and US [and South Korean] forces one more thing to worry about and to devote resources to covering,” he said.

G-7 leaders to focus on Ukraine war, Asia tensions

Associated Press

HIROSHIMA, Japan — The symbolism will be palpable when leaders of the world’s rich democracies sit down in Hiroshima, a city whose name evokes the tragedy of war, to tackle a host of challenges including Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and rising tensions in

Asia.

The attention on the war in Europe comes just days after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy completed a whirlwind trip to meet many of the Group of Seven leaders now heading to Japan for the summit starting Friday. That tour was aimed at adding to his country’s

weapons stockpile and building political support ahead of a widely anticipated counteroffensive to reclaim lands occupied by Moscow’s forces.

“Ukraine has driven this sense of common purpose” for the G-7, said Matthew P. Goodman, senior vice president for economics at the Center for

Strategic and International Studies.

He said the new commitments Zelenskyy received just ahead of the summit could push members of the bloc to step up their support even further. “There’s a kind of peer pressure that develops in forums like this,” he explained.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man dies after becoming stuck in paper machine

WI WHITING — A 40-year-old man died after he became stuck in machinery at a central Wisconsin paper mill, authorities said.

The Portage County Sheriff's Office said deputies and first responders were called Sunday afternoon to the Mativ Inc. Paper Mill in Whiting, about 65 miles west of Green Bay. The man, who was a plant employee, died as a result of his injuries despite lifesaving measures.

Officials said the man died after he became stuck in a paper machine at the mill, WSAW-TV reported. His name has not been released.

220,000 SUVs recalled worldwide due to fire risk

MI DETROIT — Stellantis is telling owners of nearly 220,000 Jeep Cherokee SUVs worldwide to park them outdoors and away from other vehicles because the power liftgates can catch fire even when the engines are off.

The company is recalling certain Cherokees from the 2014 through 2016 model years. Water can get into the liftgate control computer, causing an electrical short that can touch off a fire.

The company says it hasn't developed a fix yet. Owners will get notification letters starting June 30. Stellantis says the problem was caught in a routine review of customer data.

It's not clear how many of the small SUVs have caught fire. Stellantis says in documents posted Tuesday by the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety

Administration that it has 50 customer assistance records, 23 warranty claims and 21 field reports due to the issue. The company says it's not aware of any injuries.

Hunter accused of killing protected grizzly bear

WY CHEYENNE — A Wyoming hunter faces up to a year in jail and a \$10,000 fine if convicted of killing a protected grizzly bear he allegedly claims he mistook for a legal-to-hunt black bear outside Yellowstone National Park.

The male grizzly weighing about 530 pounds drew a lot of attention from drivers after its death May 1 near U.S. 14-16-20, the eastern approach into Yellowstone.

Patrick M. Gogerty, of Cody, turned himself in early the next morning, Wyoming Game and Fish Department game warden Travis Crane wrote in an affidavit filed in Park County Circuit Court.

Grizzlies in the Yellowstone region of southern Montana, eastern Idaho and northwestern Wyoming are a federally protected species. Killing one without a good reason, such as self-defense, can bring tough penalties under state and federal law.

Nominee regrets signing letter supporting Barrett

CT HARTFORD — A nominee to Connecticut's highest court told state lawmakers Monday that she would not have signed a 2017 letter supporting Amy Coney Barrett for a federal appeals court position if she knew Barrett would later vote to overturn Roe v. Wade abortion protec-

tions as a member of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Sandra Slack Glover, a federal prosecutor nominated by Democratic Gov. Ned Lamont, made the comment during her confirmation hearing before the legislature's Judiciary Committee, as several members of the Democratic majority expressed concerns about her support of Barrett. The committee held off voting on Glover's nomination Monday evening, citing the late hour. No date for a vote was immediately set.

Glover had said she wasn't "going to demonize" Barrett, "but when I look at that letter now ... I'm no longer comfortable with some of those statements.

"But I also believed, clearly naively at this point, I thought there were guardrails," she said, referring to judges' respect for legal precedents. "And I thought the lower court judges were constrained. I thought the Supreme Court was constrained. And I was wrong. And looking back and knowing what I now know, I shouldn't have signed it."

Detectives charged with stealing Champagne

NY NEW YORK — Two New York City police detectives have been charged with swiping pricey Champagne while on duty at an electronic music festival, and a third detective did nothing to stop them, prosecutors said Monday in announcing indictments of all three officers.

Detectives Wojciech Czech and Warren Golden were arraigned Monday and suspended from their jobs. Czech pleaded

not guilty to felony charges of grand larceny and criminal possession of stolen property; Golden pleaded not guilty to official misconduct, a misdemeanor. Both were released without bail.

A third detective, Jonathan Gonzalez, is due to be arraigned on all three charges later in the week.

Court sides with inmate who seeks nitrogen death

AL MONTGOMERY — The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday sided with an Alabama death row inmate, who had his lethal injection called off at the last minute in November, and argues he should be put to death by nitrogen hypoxia when he is ultimately executed.

Justices without comment rejected the Alabama attorney general's request to review an 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decision regarding inmate Kenneth Eugene Smith. The state argued the decision disregarded Supreme Court precedent that an inmate challenging an execution method must show that an alternative method is readily available, not just feasible.

Smith was scheduled to be put to death by lethal injection on Nov. 17, 2022, for the 1988 murder-for-hire slaying of a preacher's wife.

On the day of the execution, a divided 11th Circuit panel stayed the execution after Smith raised concerns about previous lethal injections in the state and suggested nitrogen hypoxia as an available alternative method.

— From wire reports

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Spurs win sweepstakes for Wembanyama

Associated Press

The NBA's oldest coach. The NBA's newest superstar.

In an instant, the fortunes of the San Antonio Spurs changed in a big way. Victor Wembanyama is on his way to the NBA, and the coaching wins leader in Gregg Popovich will be waiting for him.

The right combination of ping-pong balls — 14, 5, 8 and 2 were the winning ones — gave the Spurs victory in the draft lottery Tuesday night, meaning they'll have the No. 1 pick June 22. That means they've won the Wembanyama sweepstakes, and that four years of losing in a way that had never before happened under Popovich has actually paid off.

Pop and Wemby. A 74-year-old wine connoisseur who is one of the best basketball coaches in the world, and a 19-year-old supertalent who hails from the land where some of the best wines are made.

The NBA has a new dynamic duo.

"When you talk about generational talents, it's often times beyond just your ability to make a shot or your ability to jump or your ability to put the ball on the floor," Spurs general manager Brian Wright said. "It's all of the little details that go into being great, becoming great. And as we've studied Victor, he is very in-depth with everything that he does, whether it's on the court, whether it's training, or things that he's into off the court."

If the 7-foot-3 Wembanyama brings his current warm-up routine to the NBA, it'll be like none other. He's barefoot on the court for probably a good 15 or 20 minutes, stretching and doing various other things to get his feet ready. There's also some very specific ballhandling and passing things that he likes to do. It's not just a few shots, a few dunks, a few three-pointers

and go play. There's a plan and a reason for everything.

Popovich will love that. He knows Wembanyama has been taught the right way; the kid spent last year playing for Spurs icon Tony Parker's franchise in France, and is spending this season getting coached by Vincent Collet. That's someone Popovich coached against with the U.S. at the 2019 World Cup and the Tokyo Olympics. Popovich raves about Collet, not hiding his respect level for him at all.

They'll talk before long about Wembanyama. Pop will immerse himself into knowing everything that makes the kid tick, just so he knows how he'll react to every situation he'll face with the Spurs next season and beyond.

"His ability to connect and spend time and bounce between the really detailed development of basketball players and the bigger picture of developing people is just so impressive,"

Spurs managing partner Peter J. Holt said. "I think no matter what Pop does, he's going to find a way to do that because that's in his heart. And I'm excited to see whatever the next phase is in that journey."

Charlotte will pick second, Portland third, and Houston fourth. Detroit had the worst record in the NBA and was one of the three teams with the best odds of winning the draft lottery. The Pistons wound up falling to fifth, the worst of their possible outcomes.

This is an embarrassment of lottery riches for the Spurs. Let's be clear: They're not giving this back. But winning the lottery in 1987 and landing David Robinson was big, then winning the lottery again in 1997 and landing Tim Duncan was bigger, and now comes Wembanyama.

It's big. How big, well, that story will get told in the coming years.

Jokic triple-double helps Nuggets put away Lakers

Associated Press

DENVER — Denver Nuggets guard Kentavious Caldwell-Pope was playing for the Los Angeles Lakers the last time these teams met in the Western Conference finals in the 2020 NBA bubble.

So, what similarities does he see between LeBron James and Nikola Jokic?

"I feel like the only difference is Bron can jump higher than Jokic," Caldwell-Pope declared after Jokic's monster performance fueled the Nuggets' 132-126 win in Game 1 on Tuesday night.

"That's really offensive," Jokic replied in faux indignation about his athletic abilities. "I'm joking. I mean, to be compared to one of the best ever — or THE best ever — I think is really cool."

Jokic doesn't really see many

similarities in their play: "We affect the game in different ways," Jokic said. "But he's a really good player."

Nobody was better than Jokic on Tuesday night.

Jokic recorded his sixth triple-double of these playoffs with 34 points, 21 rebounds and 14 assists, powering the Nuggets to a 1-0 lead in the series.

Behind Jokic's sizzling start and strong finish, and Jamal Murray's 31 points while battling an ear infection, Denver beat the Lakers in the opener of the West finals for the first time ever.

After a slow start, Anthony Davis had 40 points and 10 rebounds, and James finished with 26 points, 12 rebounds and nine assists. Austin Reaves scored 23 and fueled L.A.'s desperate fourth-quarter run that nearly erased Denver's 14-point

cushion after three.

Caldwell-Pope scored 21 points against his former team. Michael Porter Jr. had 15 points and 10 rebounds and Bruce Brown added 16 points.

The Nuggets led by as many as 21 but the Lakers pulled within three points twice in the fourth quarter, once on Reaves' three-pointer at 124-121 and again on James' two free throws that made it 129-126 with 1:12 remaining.

"Yeah, it took us a half to get into the game," James said, "and that was pretty much the ballgame right there. They punched us in the mouth to start. ... I know the game is won in 48 minutes, but they set the tone in 24 minutes and we were playing catch-up for the next 24."

In the fourth quarter, Rui Hachimura guarded Jokic, allowing Davis to crowd the paint and

make things harder for the Nuggets' big man to dominate the paint. But it wasn't enough.

After Jokic sank two free throws with 26 seconds left to give Denver a 131-126 lead, Murray poked the ball from James as he was about to take it to the hoop and Jokic gathered the loose ball before being fouled with 10.9 seconds left. He sank one of two and James misfired from three as the seconds ticked off.

"I'd rather clean things up after a win in the Western Conference finals than after a loss, so I will take it," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said. "But much work to do."

Game 2 is Thursday night at Ball Arena, where the top-seeded Nuggets are 7-0 in the playoffs and 41-7 overall, the best home record in the league this season.

Morant takes blame for latest gun video

Associated Press

Ja Morant spoke out Tuesday night about his latest troubles, three days after the Memphis guard apparently held a firearm again while being broadcast on social media and was suspended by the Grizzlies from all team activities.

He's also being investigated by the NBA for his actions, two months after the league suspended him for essentially the same thing — displaying a gun on social media.

"I know I've disappointed a lot of people who have supported me," Morant said in a statement released Tuesday night by his representatives. "This is a journey and I recognize there is more work to do. My words may not mean much right now, but I take full accountability for my actions. I'm committed to

continuing to work on myself."

His comments came a few hours after NBA Commissioner Adam Silver expressed disappointment over the situation. Silver handed down an eight-game suspension in March; there is no way of knowing yet what penalties Morant might face this time.

"Honestly, I was shocked when I saw, this weekend, that video," Silver said in a televised interview with ESPN before the draft lottery in Chicago. "We're in the process of investigating it and we'll figure out exactly what happened as best as we can. The video's a bit grainy and all that, but I'm assuming the worst. We'll figure out exactly what happened there."

The first video, which cost Morant about \$669,000 in for-

feited salary, came out in March. The second was captured Saturday night and widely shared online. It was streamed on the Instagram account of Morant associate Davonte Pack, a person familiar with the situation told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of anonymity because the Grizzlies have not commented on the specifics of the latest video.

The video streamed by Pack shows Morant briefly appearing to display a handgun. At the very brief moment — maybe less than a second — when Morant is shown holding what appears to be a weapon as he sits in the passenger seat of a vehicle, the livestream had 111 viewers.

"He could have injured, maimed, killed himself, some-

one else, with an act like that," Silver said. "And also the acknowledgement that he's a star. He has an incredibly huge following. And my concern — and I thought he shared with me — that millions if not tens of millions of kids globally would see him as having done something that was celebrating in a way that act of using a firearm in that fashion."

Morant said in March that he needed to work on himself, and when the season ended a couple weeks ago, he offered similar thoughts.

"Being disciplined on both sides, off the court making better decisions and on the court being locked in even more," Morant said. "Being a leader of this team, it pretty much starts with me. ... I've got to be better in that area."

For Panthers coach Maurice, Florida run is no ordinary tale

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Paul Maurice never considered himself retired. He was good.

Here's what that means: When Maurice stepped down as coach of the Winnipeg Jets in December 2021, it wasn't clear if he would take another job. Some teams called. He'd listen, then hang up the phone still convinced his time would be better spent continuing to fish for walleye on Lake of the Woods, where he has a little spot.

And then the Florida Panthers called.

"Pardon the pun," Maurice said. "I was hooked."

This is no wild fisherman's tale anymore. The Panthers are in the NHL's final four for the first time in 27 years, set to take on the Carolina Hurricanes in the Eastern Conference finals starting Thursday. They're eight wins away from their first Stanley Cup. So is their coach, someone with the sixth-most regular-season wins in NHL history but who has yet to hoist the grandest silver chalice in all of sports over his head.

"I think he's got a phenomenal feel for what we have in our locker room and what he needs to do to push our buttons to make us play at our best," Panthers forward Eric Staal said. "I wouldn't be the first guy to say I think he's a phenomenal coach. He's our leader and we're really happy to play for

him and play for each other. For sure, he has a great pulse on what we have. And we want to continue to just keep building this thing as the playoffs can move on."

If any player can speak with authority on the trajectory of Maurice's career, or his effectiveness, it's Staal. Maurice was his first coach — ironically, with Carolina in 2003. He's played for nine other coaches, and is now reunited with Maurice with the Panthers, with the Hurricanes waiting for them in a matchup to decide which club will represent the East in the Stanley Cup Final.

Can Maurice be a yeller and screamer? Of course.

Can he also be a comedian? Oh, absolutely.

Maurice's viral rant on the bench in late March during a Florida game at Toronto is one of the biggest moments of the Panthers' season. He shredded his team, a profane rant the likes of which he rarely if ever doles out publicly. "A nice opportunity to share my feelings," he called it.

The Panthers won that night, kick-starting their push to the playoffs and they haven't stopped kicking since.

"He's coached probably over 2,000 games in the NHL," Panthers captain Aleksander Barkov said, coming close but

slightly overshooting Maurice's total of 1,871 games including playoffs. "He literally knows every situation, how to handle it. He's the guy we trust, the guy we believe and love playing for. He knows what to do and he tells us the right thing."

The screaming moments are rare. The funny ones happen with far more regularity. Maurice isn't a control freak; the locker room belongs to the players, with a bit of guidance from the coaches' office when needed. He famously says he doesn't even coach Sergei Bobrovsky. ("I know nothing about goaltending," Maurice says, and he's not kidding.)

He drew hysterical laughter in a post-game interview when chiding the media for not believing in the Panthers (and with a few choice profanity drops in there as well). He knows when to be serious and sarcastic, doesn't mind taking a few minutes to tell a story and cringes when anyone tries to give him the credit for Florida's success.

"Fit," Florida general manager Bill Zito said. "This was about fit. He was the right fit."

Fishing can wait for a few more weeks. There might be a Cup to catch first.

"I knew this was going to be hard," Maurice said. "But this is the stuff that makes you excited."

Judge HR breaks sign, sends Yanks past Jays

Associated Press

TORONTO — Accused by the Toronto Blue Jays of cheating, Aaron Judge not only responded with a tiebreaking, two-run homer, he actually broke a maple leaf.

Judge's eighth-inning homer, which chipped the corner off a sign attached to a wall in the Rogers Centre's center field party deck, lifted the New York Yankees to a contentious 6-3 victory over Toronto on Tuesday night after pitcher Domingo Germán was ejected for sticky stuff.

Judge was booed while striking out in his first two at-bats following allegations of sign stealing Monday, when he hit two solo homers in a 7-4 win. The second, a 462-foot drive in the eighth inning off Jay Jackson, came after Judge glanced into the Yankees dugout. Toronto's broadcasters speculated he was looking for some kind of signal, and Toronto manager John Schneider called Judge's look "kind of odd."

With the score 3-3 Tuesday, Judge stared ahead at Erik Swanson (2-2), eyes never moving. His 448-foot drive broke part of a white maple leaf sign — Canada's national symbol. It's the logo for Canada's West Jet airline, sponsor of the center field bar area.

"I haven't seen that yet," Judge said. "I had a text message about that, so we'll have to take a look at that."

Twins 5, Dodgers 1: Bailey Ober allowed one run in six innings, Kyle Farmer homered and drove in three runs, and visiting Minnesota defeated Los Angeles as Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw took the mound three days after the death of his mother.

Kershaw (6-3) struck out seven in four innings, but faced constant traffic on the bases. The left-hander allowed seven hits, one walk and hit a batter.

Ober (3-0) allowed one run on six hits and struck out six. Willi Castro had two hits, including an RBI single, and two stolen bases for the AL Central-leading Twins, who have won five of seven.

Giants 4, Phillies 3: Joey Bart's routine pop fly turned into a tiebreaking RBI double, and host San Francisco dealt Philadelphia its third straight loss.

With a runner on first and two outs in the fourth inning, Zack Wheeler got Bart to pop up just behind first base. Phillies first baseman Kody Clemens lost track of the ball and a sliding attempt at a catch by second baseman Bryson Stott was unsuccessful, allowing Casey Schmitt to score. LaMonte Wade Jr. fol-

lowed with an RBI single to give the Giants a 4-2 lead.

Marlins 5, Nationals 4: Jorge Soler hit a two-run, walk-off homer as host Miami rallied to beat Washington.

Red Sox 9, Mariners 4: Masataka Yoshida doubled, tripled and drove in three runs while scoring on a wild pitch, and host Boston ended a four-game losing streak with a win over Seattle.

Rays 8, Mets 5: Isaac Paredes homered twice and drove in five runs, ruining Justin Verlander's home debut for New York, as Tampa Bay rolled to the win.

Rangers 7, Braves 4: Adolis García extended his MLB-leading RBIs total to 44 with a two-run homer, Dane Dunning was solid while filling the rotation spot of injured ace Jacob deGrom and host Texas beat Atlanta in an interleague matchup of division leaders to win for the eighth time in 10 games.

Athletics 9, Diamondbacks 8 (12): Ryan Noda hit a tying grand slam in the seventh inning, Esteury Ruiz drove in the winning run with an infield single that bounced off shortstop Nick Ahmed in the 12th and host Oakland beat the Diamondbacks.

Orioles 7, Angels 3: Ryan Mountcastle hit a two-run homer and doubled after entering

the game as a pinch-hitter, and host Baltimore defeated Los Angeles.

Tigers 4, Pirates 0: Michael Lorenzen had a season-high seven strikeouts in six innings, Spencer Torkelson doubled twice and host Detroit beat slumping Pittsburgh.

White Sox 8, Guardians 3: Luis Robert Jr. homered for the fourth straight game, and Gavin Sheets and Jake Burger went deep off Shane Bieber in host Chicago's six-run fifth inning in a victory over Cleveland.

Astros 7, Cubs 3: Yordan Alvarez had two hits and drove in two runs and Chas McCormick added two hits and made a nifty grab in host Houston's win over Chicago.

Royals 5, Padres 4: Salvador Perez hit a two-run double in Kansas City's five-run second, Brady Singer pitched six solid innings and visiting Kansas City snapped a four-game skid with a victory over San Diego.

Reds 3, Rockies 1: Nick Senzel hit a go-ahead two-run homer in the seventh inning, helping visiting Cincinnati past Colorado.

Brewers 3, Cardinals 2: Nolan Arenado homered for the fifth straight game for St. Louis in a loss to visiting Milwaukee, which got homers from Joey Wiemer and Brian Anderson.

After Masters win, Rahm faces big test at PGA Championship

Associated Press

PITTSFORD, N.Y. — Jon Rahm watched video of the last PGA Championship at Oak Hill, which would not seem to be of much value considering the restoration work on the East Course, the rain-soaked week in 2013 and the fact that it was in August.

Rahm picked up a few details that could serve him or anyone well, particularly the discipline Jason Dufner showed when he got in trouble off the tee and how he relied on his wedge game.

More than a student of the

game, the 28-year-old Spaniard is simply a golfer who recently described himself as "beyond addicted to the game."

"I do it pretty much for every major," Rahm said Tuesday of his film study. "I just like it. Even if it's not major season, I'm doing it at home. I've seen on social media about every Sunday round you can find about Augusta and most majors. It's not research. I just like it. It's just fun."

So is winning, and Rahm is having the time of his life.

The Masters was his fourth

victory of the year, and he is among the favorites in the PGA Championship at an Oak Hill course that appears suited to his game — bullish strength, clean contact and great wedge play. Rahm is bold.

He is not interested in a Grand Slam. As the Masters champion, he is the only one with a chance at the feat that has never been accomplished since the Masters began in 1934. He is not interested in the career Grand Slam — he is halfway there with the Masters and his U.S. Open title from Tor-

rey Pines.

Rahm cares about all majors, running the tally as high as he can.

"Winning two majors is not easy, and picking which ones you win is a little ludicrous to think about," Rahm said. "Without sounding too conceited or arrogant, I'd rather focus on the number of majors you win than having the Grand Slam. Obviously it would be amazing. But the more you put yourself in the position to be able to win majors, the more likely you might get it done."