

Navy probe condemns conditions at shipyards

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Navy investigation prompted by a spate of suicides is recommending widespread improvements in housing, food, parking and internet for sailors as well as changes to mental health and other personnel programs. The much-anticipated report lays out a sweeping condemnation of living and working conditions at naval shipyards that had languished for years but were brought to light by the deaths.

“We let our people down.” Navy leaders said in response to the findings.

The inquiry concluded that several suicides at the Newport News shipyard in Virginia last year were not connected or caused by any one issue. But the deaths underscored pervasive problems and poor living conditions, particularly among young enlisted sailors doing long-term ship maintenance at that base and others around the United States.

“The focus on the maintenance mission has degraded our ability to take care of our most junior and at-risk sailors,” said the investigating officer, Rear Adm. Bradley Dunham, in his findings released Thursday. “This was not one seminal event, decision or individual’s action, this was a series of actions and decisions shared by many that resulted in the wholly unnecessary conditions and challenges our sailors face.”

Navy leaders said they have taken a number of steps already to improve conditions at Newport News. Additional planned changes are broader and call for similar moves at other shipyards where the same problems exist. Recommended increases in sailor pay, housing benefits, food, health care, job choices and counseling would affect service members across the board.

In a memo accompanying the report, Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro and Adm. Mike Gilday, chief of naval operations, concluded that “collectively, Navy senior leadership, officer and civilian, let our standards slip — and in doing so we let our people down.” They blamed it on “organiza-

tional drift” and a slow erosion of conditions over time that became unacceptable.

The investigation began last year after seven service members assigned to the aircraft carrier USS George Washington died over a 12-month period ending April 2022, including three in one week. The carrier was docked for overhaul at Newport News shipyard.

Of the seven deaths, three were health-related or accidental, but four were suicides, including the three during the week of April 9-15. A Navy investigation released last December found that the suicides were not connected, but that poor quality of life onboard the ship was a “contributing factor” in one of the deaths.

As that investigation was going on, four more sailors died by suicide between last Oct. 30 and Nov. 26 at the Mid-Atlantic Regional Maintenance Center in Norfolk, Va., setting off a second examination. All four sailors had been assigned to limited duty jobs there due to injuries, health or other issues. A review concluded that those deaths were unconnected, but cited factors such as family, finance and career issues, alcohol use and access to personally owned firearms.

That review recommended improvements to the system that puts sailors into limited duty slots when they are unable to perform their regular jobs due to issues ranging from injuries and pregnancy to mental health and other problems. It also called for expanded mental health care and increased staffing, which are similar quality of work and life concerns reflected in the shipyard report. In their memo, Del Toro and Gilday outlined needed changes in limited duty assignments as part of the broader effort to improve sailors’ quality of service.

“Every sailor unable to perform normally assigned duties deserves full, direct support,” said Del Toro and Gilday, adding that sailors must be assigned “in the right numbers, to the right commands, with access to the right resources.”

Biden endorses F-16 training for Ukrainians

Associated Press

HIROSHIMA, Japan — President Joe Biden told allies Friday he was approving plans to train Ukrainian pilots on U.S.-made F-16 fighter jets, according to two people familiar with the matter, as leaders of the world’s most powerful democracies worked to toughen punishments on Russia for its 15-month invasion of Ukraine.

The Group of Seven leaders are meeting in Hiroshima, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy set to take part in their summit on Sunday.

The green light on F-16s is the latest shift by the Biden administration as it moves to arm Ukraine with more advanced and lethal weaponry, following earlier decisions to send rocket launcher systems and Abrams tanks. The U.S. has insisted that it is sending weapons to Ukraine to defend itself and has discouraged attacks by Ukraine into Russian territory.

The G7 leaders also used their summit to roll out a new wave of global sanctions on Moscow as well as plans to enhance the effectiveness of existing financial penalties meant to constrain President Vladimir Putin’s war effort.

“Our support for Ukraine will not waver,” the G7 leaders said in a statement released after closed-door meetings. They vowed “to stand together against Russia’s illegal, unjustifiable and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine.”

“Russia started this war and can end this war,” they said.

Zelenskyy has consistently called for the supply of Western fighter jets to bolster his country’s defenses against Russia’s invasion, but has until now faced skepticism from the U.S. that they would turn the tide in the war.

Now, as Ukraine has improved its air defenses with a host of Western-supplied anti-aircraft systems and prepares to launch a counteroffensive against Russia, officials believe the jets could become useful in the battle and essential to the country’s long-term security.

Commanders transit Strait of Hormuz

Associated Press

ABOARD THE USS PAUL HAMILTON — The Mideast-based commanders of the U.S., British and French navies transited the Strait of Hormuz on Friday aboard an American warship, a sign of their unified approach to keep the crucial waterway open after Iran seized two oil tankers.

Tensions in the Persian Gulf have been volatile since Iran's nuclear deal with world powers collapsed, following the U.S.' unilateral withdrawal five years ago. The incredibly rare, joint trip by the three navy chiefs aboard the USS Paul Hamilton, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, saw three fast boats of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard ap-

proach the vessel at one point.

Guardsmen stood by uncovered machine guns on their decks, while sailors aboard the Paul Hamilton similarly stood by loaded machine guns as others shot photographs and video of the vessels. An Associated Press journalist also accompanied the allied naval commanders.

While the Guard kept its distance from both the Paul Hamilton and the passing British frigate HMS Lancaster, their presence showed just how tense passage for vessels can be in the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of global oil supplies passes.

"Iran has seized or attacked 15 ships in

the last two years. Eight seizures and seven attacks," Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, who oversees the U.S. Navy's Mideast-based 5th Fleet, told the AP. "So the shipping industry is mindful of what the security posture looks like in the region. We have the ability to positively impact that influence and that's what we're doing now."

Cooper said Iran's Guard ships came within 1,000 yards of the Paul Hamilton.

The U.S. has viewed securing the Middle East's waterways, particularly the Strait of Hormuz, as key since then-President Jimmy Carter's 1980 speech vowing to use military force to protect American interests in the Persian Gulf.

Feinstein's office details complications from shingles

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein's office said Thursday that she is suffering from Ramsay Hunt syndrome, a complication from the shingles virus that can paralyze part of the face, and that she contracted encephalitis while recovering from the virus earlier this year.

Feinstein, 89, had not previously disclosed those medical details, though she said in a statement last week that she had suffered complications from the virus. The longtime California senator returned from a

more than two-month absence on May 10 after weeks of questions about her declining health and whether she would be back in the Senate at all.

Adam Russell, a spokesman for Feinstein, said that the encephalitis, or inflammation of the brain, "resolved itself shortly after she was released from the hospital in March." Feinstein continues to have complications from the Ramsay Hunt syndrome, he said.

Russell confirmed the two complications after the New York Times first reported

them, raising questions about whether she had been hiding the extent of her illnesses. Upon her return last week, Feinstein was using a wheelchair and noticeably thinner, and has appeared confused at times when speaking to reporters.

Feinstein's face has appeared partially paralyzed since she returned to the Senate, stirring some speculation about whether she had had a stroke. Ramsay Hunt syndrome is a complication that occurs when the shingles virus reaches a facial nerve near the ears. It can also cause hearing loss.

Ex-FBI employees testify on GOP politicization claims

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former FBI employees accused the bureau of politicization in congressional testimony Thursday, a day after the agency disclosed that two of the men had seen their security clearances revoked over concerns about how their views of the Capitol attack on Jan. 6, 2021, affected their work.

The three men alleged overreach and retaliation by the FBI in testimony to a special House committee investigating what Republicans assert is the "weaponization" of the federal government against conservatives.

"If you're not politically correct ... you're not in line with what they think to be the political position or the proper position, you're

the target," said Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio, the Republican chairman of the committee.

Former FBI employees Marcus Allen and Steve Friend testified to the panel just hours after the FBI informed Jordan in a letter Wednesday — obtained by The Associated Press — that both men had been stripped of security clearances after either attending the Capitol riot in 2021 or espousing alternate theories about the attack.

A mob of pro-Trump rioters, some armed with pipes, bats and bear spray, charged into the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, quickly overwhelming police officers trying to keep them back. More than 100 officers were injured, many beaten, bloodied and bruised.

"My colleagues have brought in these for-

mer agents, men who lost their security clearances because they were a threat to our national security," said Rep. Stacey Plaskett, the top Democrat on the committee. "People who out of malice or ignorance or both have put partisan agenda above the oath they swore to serve this country and protect its national security."

Jordan and other Republicans on the committee hailed the former FBI employees as rank-and-file patriots who were facing retribution for speaking out against government abuse. Allen, Friend and Garrett O'Boyle, a former field agent, told the committee that their decision to come forward has resulted in suspensions and dismissals for their posts.

Videos show NM gunman saying 'kill me' to officers

Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. — Videos released Thursday of this week's deadly rampage in northwest New Mexico recorded a voice said to be the shooter urging police to "kill me" and officers rushing toward the 18-year-old gunman before fatally shooting him outside a church.

"He is yelling on the Ring footage, 'Come kill me,'" Farmington Police Chief Steve Hebbe said of Beau Wilson, the high school senior who authorities say killed three older women during the attack.

"He's making a stand, he has opportunities to run off, he does not use those opportunities," Hebbe said. "So yes it's my belief that ultimately in his head, he has made the decision that he is going to stand and fight it out until he is killed."

Three older women were killed Monday by the shooter, including a mother and daughter who happened to be driving through the neighborhood. The victims were identified as longtime Farmington residents Gwendolyn Dean Schofield, 97, her 73-year-old daughter, Melody Ivie, and 79-year-old Shirley Voita.

At least six other people were wounded in the shootings, which sent waves of grief rippling through the community of 50,000 people. They included two police officers, who have been released from medical care as they recover.

Hebbe's comments mirrored an account from witness Candi Brammell, who lives

next to the church and told The Associated Press in an interview Tuesday that the gunman seemed to be egging police on, saying: "Come on!"

Brammell said she couldn't believe what she was seeing as Wilson opened fire. Within an instant, he was exchanging shots with the police and then was down in the grass.

Wilson lived with his father in a home that contained an arsenal of weapons and ammunition, apparently legally owned, according to law enforcement authorities. He bought an assault-style rifle last year after he turned 18.

Relatives of the three slain women said each left an indelible mark that will continue to shape the lives of others.

"In immeasurable ways, this heart-wrenching incident has impacted not only our family, but those of the Voita and Wilson families," the Schofield and Ivie family said Thursday in a statement. "We have a shared grief and ask for continued prayers and privacy as we embody the faith, grace and love of our mother and grandmother and embark on a path of healing and forgiveness."

Police have been probing for motivations behind Monday's rampage, which took place the day before Wilson was due to graduate from high school, amid some indications from relatives of prior mental health issues.

Efforts were underway by authorities to access medical and school records that might shed light on his mental history.

Officer charged with lying about leaks to leader of Proud Boys

Associated Press

A police officer was arrested Friday on charges he lied about leaking confidential information to a leader of the far-right Proud Boys extremist group and obstructed an investigation after group members destroyed a Black Lives Matter banner in the nation's capital.

An indictment alleges that Metropolitan Police Department Lt. Shane Lamond, 47, of Stafford, Va., warned former Proud Boys national chairman Enrique Tarrío that law enforcement had an arrest warrant for Tarrío related to the banner's destruction.

Tarrío was arrested in Washington two days before Proud Boys members joined a mob in storming the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. Earlier this month, Tarrío and three other members of the group were convicted of seditious conspiracy charges for what prosecutors said was a plot to keep then-President Donald Trump in the White House after he lost the 2020 election.

A federal grand jury in Washington indicted Lamond on one count of obstruction of justice and three counts of making false statements. He was scheduled to make his initial court appearance on Friday.

Jurors who convicted Tarrío heard testimony that Lamond frequently provided the Proud Boys leader with internal information about law enforcement operations in the weeks before other members of his group stormed the Capitol.

FDA advisers back RSV vaccine for pregnant women

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A first-of-its-kind RSV vaccine for pregnant women guards their newborns against the scary respiratory virus — and federal health advisers on Thursday backed Pfizer's shot despite some lingering questions.

Respiratory Syncytial Virus fills hospitals with wheezing babies each fall and winter, and the virus struck earlier than usual and especially hard in the U.S. this past year.

If the vaccine pans out, "many infants and their parents will breathe easier in the coming years," said Dr. Jay Portnoy, a member of the Food and Drug Administration advisory

panel from Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Mo.

The idea: Give women a single injection late in pregnancy, between 24 weeks and 36 weeks, so they develop RSV-fighting antibodies that pass through the placenta — just like they pass protection against other bugs to their babies.

In Pfizer's international study of nearly 7,400 pregnant women, maternal vaccination proved 82% effective at preventing severe RSV during babies' most vulnerable first three months of life. At age 6 months, it still was proving 69% protective against severe illness.

Pfizer said there were no signs of safety

problems but the FDA did ask its scientific advisers to consider whether a slight difference in premature birth between vaccinated moms and those given a dummy shot was of concern. Debate over whether that was really a hint of trouble or just due to chance dominated the panel's daylong meeting.

Vaccines always get close safety scrutiny but regulators are especially mindful of a major setback in the 1960s when an experimental RSV shot worsened infections in children. Eventually scientists figured out the problem and the RSV vaccines in the pipeline today are made with safer, modern methods — yet still were tested first in older adults.

TikTok content creators sue over Montana's ban

Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. — Five TikTok content creators have filed a lawsuit seeking to overturn Montana's first-in-the-nation ban on the video sharing app, arguing the law is an unconstitutional violation of free speech rights.

The Montana residents also argued in the complaint, filed in federal court late Wednesday without public notice, that the state doesn't have any authority over matters of national security. Republican Gov. Greg Gianforte signed the bill into law Wednesday and said it would protect Montana residents' private data and personal information from being harvested by the Chinese government.

The ban is scheduled to take effect on Jan. 1, 2024.

"The law takes the broadest possible approach to its objectives, restricting and banning the protected speech of all TikTok users in Montana to prevent the speculative and unsubstantiated possibility that the Chinese government might direct TikTok Inc., or its parent, to spy on some Montana users," the complaint states.

"We expected a legal challenge and are fully prepared to defend the law," said Emily Flower, spokeswoman for the Montana Department of Justice.

TikTok has argued the law infringes on people's First Amendment rights.

However, spokesperson Brooke Ober-

wetter declined to comment on the lawsuit Thursday. She also declined to say whether the company helped coordinate the complaint.

The plaintiffs are Montana residents who use the video-sharing app for things like promoting a business, connecting with military veterans, sharing outdoor adventures or expressing their sense of humor. Two of them have more than 200,000 followers.

One content creator, Carly Ann Goddard, shares videos about living on a ranch, parenting, recipes and home decor. Her account has 97,000 followers and has allowed her to roughly triple her family's household income, the complaint states. TikTok creators can make money in several ways, including by being paid to advertise products to their followers.

The lawsuit — filed just hours after Gianforte signed the measure into law — states the ban would "immediately and permanently deprive Plaintiffs of their ability to express themselves and communicate with others."

"Montana can no more ban its residents from viewing or posting to TikTok than it could ban the Wall Street Journal because of who owns it or the ideas it publishes," the plaintiffs' attorneys wrote.

The case could serve as a testing ground for the TikTok-free America many national lawmakers have envisioned. Cybersecurity experts say it could be difficult to enforce.

7.7 magnitude quake causes small tsunami

Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — A 7.7 magnitude earthquake caused a small tsunami to wash ashore on South Pacific islands Friday. No damage has been reported, and the threat passed in a few hours.

Waves 2 feet above tide level were measured off Lenakel, a port town in Vanuatu, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said. Smaller waves were measured by coastal or deep-ocean gauges elsewhere off Vanuatu and off New Caledonia and New Zealand.

Vanuatu's National Disaster Management Office advised people to evacuate from coastal areas to higher grounds. The office said people should listen to their radios for updates and take other precautions.

New Zealand's National Emergency Management Agency said it expected coastal areas would experience strong and unusual currents, with unpredictable surges at the shoreline. The PTWC said small waves of 8 inches above tides were measured at North Cape, New Zealand.

The tsunami danger passed within a few hours, though the center said small sea level changes may continue.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the quake's epicenter was near the Loyalty Islands, a province in the French territory of New Caledonia. The quake was 23 miles deep.

The area is southwest of Fiji, north of New Zealand and east of Australia where the Coral Sea meets the Pacific.

Australian police use Taser on 95-year-old woman

Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia — Police shocked a 95-year-old woman with a stun gun as she approached them using a walker and carrying a steak knife in an Australian nursing home, sending her to the hospital in critical condition after her head hit the floor.

The extraordinary police takedown of Clare Nowland, who has dementia, on Wednesday prompted a high-level police internal investigation.

It also has sparked debate about how New South Wales state police use stun guns, which are widely known as Tasers after a major manufacturer. They are a less lethal option than firearms but have occasionally

proved more dangerous than other policing options.

Police said Nowland received her injuries from striking her head on the floor, rather than directly from the stun gun's debilitating electric shock.

Two police officers went to Yallambee Lodge, a nursing home in the town of Cooma that specializes in residents with higher care needs including dementia, after staff reported that Nowland had taken a serrated steak knife from the kitchen.

Police Assistant Commissioner Peter Cotter declined to say whether he thought a police officer with 12 years' experience used excessive force by firing a stun gun at

Nowland, who is 5 feet, 2 inches tall and weighs 95 pounds.

Cotter said police engaged in "negotiations" with Nowland for several minutes and used the stun gun when she approached the doorway where the officers were standing.

"At the time she was tasered, she was approaching police. But it is fair to say at a slow pace. She had a walking frame. But she had a knife. I can't take it any further as to what was going through anyone's mind," Cotter told reporters.

Nicole Lee, president of the advocacy group People with Disability Australia, said she was shocked by the police response.

Why Ukraine's offensive hasn't begun

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — For months, Western allies have shipped billions of dollars worth of weapons systems and ammunition to Ukraine with an urgency to get the supplies to Kyiv in time for an anticipated spring counteroffensive.

Now summer is just weeks away. While Russia and Ukraine are focused on an intense battle for Bakhmut, the Ukrainian spring offensive has yet to begin.

Last week Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said it's been delayed because his country lacks enough Western weapons to succeed without suffering too many casualties. Weather and training are playing a role too, officials and defense experts say.

Officials insist the counteroffensive is coming. Preliminary moves by Ukraine to set the conditions it wants for an attack have already begun, a U.S. official said on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

A look at the factors delaying the counteroffensive and the preparations both sides are making in anticipation of it starting soon:

Weather

A big part of the delay is the weather. It's taken longer than expected for Ukraine's frozen ground to thaw and dry, due to an extended, wet, cold spring, which has made it difficult to transition into an offensive.

Instead, the ground has retained a deep mud that makes it more difficult for non-tracked

vehicles to operate.

The mud is like a soup, the official said. "You just sort of sink in it."

Training

In the past few months, tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers have been trained by the U.S. and allies for the fight. But the final Ukrainian battalion the U.S. is currently training is just finishing its course now.

This final class brings the total number of Ukrainians the U.S. has trained for this fight to more than 10,700.

Those forces have learned not only field and medical skills but advanced combined arms tactics with the Stryker and Bradley armored fighting vehicles and Paladin self-propelled howitzers.

It also includes highly skilled forces who were trained to operate the Patriot missile defense system.

According to U.S. Army Europe-Africa, as many as 11,000 additional Ukrainian troops a day are in other training programs run by more than 30 partner nations.

Soon a new phase will begin: The U.S. will start training Ukrainians on Abrams tanks at the Grafenwoehr Training Area in Germany.

But the Ukrainians won't wait for the tank training to be finished before they launch their counteroffensive, Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov told reporters in late April.

Weapons arrivals

In just the past five months

alone, the U.S. has announced it would send more than \$14 billion in weapons and ammunition to Kyiv, most of which is being pulled from existing stockpiles in order to get the supplies to Ukraine faster.

NATO and other Western allies have responded too, pledging billions in tanks, armored vehicles and air defense systems.

But a lot of that gear still hasn't arrived, said Ben Barry, a former British intelligence official who is now the senior land warfare fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

For example, of the approximately 300 tank systems pledged — such as the Leopard 2 tanks promised by countries including Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain and Germany — only about 100 have arrived. Of the 700 or so pledged fighting vehicles, such as British Marauders and U.S. Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, only about 300 have arrived, he said.

Ukraine will also need enough ammunition on hand to sustain a higher tempo fight once the counteroffensive begins.

When it comes to the ammunition needed, Ukraine's chief military logistician will also have a strong say in when the army is ready to launch, Barry said.

In just one munition — the 155mm howitzer round — Ukraine is firing between 6,000 and 8,000 rounds per day, Ukrainian parliamentary member Oleksandra Ustinova told re-

porters in April.

Counteroffensive clues

Both Russia and Ukraine are taking steps in anticipation of the counteroffensive.

Russia has approximately 200,000 troops along a 620-mile battle line, dug in using the same type of trench warfare tactics used in World War I, a Western official said on the condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters.

These troops are not as highly trained as Russia's initial invading force, which sustained heavy casualties.

But they are defended by ditches, minefields and dragon's teeth — above ground triangle-shaped concrete barriers that make it difficult for tanks to move.

Meanwhile, Ukraine has begun shaping operations, such as targeting Russia's forward lines with long-range artillery fire.

That may indicate that Ukraine is about to push forward on that location — or it could be a decoy to draw Russia's attention from its actual planned first strike, the official said.

When Ukraine does try to punch through those lines — whether in a limited area or a complex campaign carried out in multiple locations — that will be the likely indicator the offensive has begun, both Barry and the Western official said.

Barry said when Ukrainian brigades start crossing into Russian-held territories and try to attack the first line of Russian defenses, "that's going to be a dead giveaway I think."

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Nuggets take 2-0 lead in West finals

Associated Press

DENVER — After Nikola Jokic's monster game in the opener, his pick-and-roll partner Jamal Murray took the spotlight in the Western Conference finals Thursday night.

Murray scored 23 of his 37 points in the fourth quarter, propelling the Denver Nuggets to a 108-103 come-from-behind win over the Los Angeles Lakers for a 2-0 lead in the series.

"He was special," Jokic said. "He won us the game basically."

Murray missed 12 of his 17 shots through three quarters but found his touch in the fourth, going 6 for 7, including four 3-pointers, and fueling a 15-1 run that gave Denver a 96-84 lead.

"He made shots at the end of the clock," LeBron James lamented. "We guard for 24 seconds and he made two big-time shots, one over (Anthony Davis) and one over me. He had his 3-point shot going in the fourth. It's no surprise to me; he's done it before. Sometimes it's a nev-

er-miss league."

In all, Denver sank seven 3s in the fourth quarter after hitting only seven all night up to that point.

"It would have been a lot easier if I had made them in the first half," said Murray, who is still playing through an earache he hasn't been able to shake since Round 2.

Jokic added 23 points, 17 rebounds and a dozen assists a day after ESPN sideline reporter Lisa Salters handed the Nuggets the no-respect card by acknowledging that she'd never seen the two-time MVP play before Game 1, when he had 34 points, 21 boards and 14 assists.

"For those that don't know him, he's got 13 playoff triple-doubles now," Malone sneered after Game 2. "It's just incredible what he continues to do on a nightly basis on the biggest stage in the world."

As for Jokic, he brushed off the slights, saying, "It's nothing new for us."

Malone was miffed by the

Lakers getting all the publicity.

"You win Game 1 and all everybody talked about was the Lakers," Malone said. "Let's be honest, the national narrative was, 'Hey, the Lakers are fine. They're down 1-0, but they figured something out.' No one talked about how Nikola just had a historic performance. He's got 13 (playoff) triple-doubles now, third all-time. What he's doing is just incredible."

"But their narrative wasn't about the Nuggets. The narrative wasn't about Nikola. The narrative was about the Lakers and their adjustments. So you know, you put that in your pipe and you smoke it, you come back and you know what, we're gonna go up 2-0."

The Nuggets have never been this close to reaching the NBA Finals in their history. Game 3 is Saturday night at Crypto.com Arena, where James and the Lakers are 8-0 in the playoffs.

Malone said he reminded Murray heading into the fourth quarter not to fret over his

shooting woes but to focus on contributing in other ways. He heeded that advice, grabbing three big boards on defense and stealing the ball twice besides hitting 4-of-5 from deep and 7-of-8 from the stripe.

"Three-point line is what killed us in the fourth," James said.

Malone knew that when Murray finally found the net, many more buckets would follow.

"We all know ... he just has to see one go in," Malone said, and when that happened, "he kind of looked up to the heavens and that's all he needs. And after that he's shooting into a hula hoop."

Just like in Game 1, the Lakers didn't go down easily. They pulled to three points on Austin Reaves' jumper before Murray sank two free throws with 12 seconds left and Bruce Brown stole the ball from James, then dribbled out the final 8 seconds.

The Nuggets improved to 41-8 at home, best in the NBA, including 8-0 in the playoffs.

Eastern finals features intriguing coaching matchup

Associated Press

BOSTON — The latest Eastern Conference finals pairing between the Heat and Celtics will be a matchup that ultimately turns on the play of stars like Jimmy Butler and Jayson Tatum.

But Miami's 123-116 Game 1 victory also showed how the tactical battle between rookie coach Joe Mazzulla and veteran counterpart Erik Spoelstra will also play a big factor.

The Celtics dominated the first two quarters on Wednesday before being outscored 46-25 in the third period — the most points they've allowed in any playoff quarter over the past 25 years. It put Boston into 103-91 hole it never overcame.

The game-changing onslaught also included a 13-1 run

by the Heat to help tie the game in which Mazzulla made the decision not to call a timeout, something that has become a recurring theme for him this season because of his preference to let the Celtics play through rough patches.

"I don't think it's a challenge in the postseason, I think it's human nature," Mazzulla said Thursday when asked about his team's tendencies to surrender leads this season. "So how are you able to get out of that and win that and just understanding your environment, understanding your opponent? It's hard to do, but what we're trying to do is really hard."

After back-to-back series in which Boston has fallen into 0-1 holes, it's cast the spotlight back on the 34-year-old, who was

thrust into his dream job in the preseason and is now trying to find new ways to motivate a team with championship expectations.

Miami's Spoelstra knows well what it's like to be in that position.

The 52-year-old Spoelstra grew up in the Heat organization, rising from video coordinator to assistant to head coach at 38, and then successfully balanced the pressure of turning a team led by All-Stars LeBron James, Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh into back-to-back NBA champions.

Spoelstra acknowledged that he doubted himself initially, recalling how he was heckled in his first game in New York by Knicks fans who asked, "if I was up past my bedtime."

"I was beating myself up quite a bit," Spoelstra said of his first season.

Likewise, Mazzulla has made no secret that he has learned something with every game he has coached.

That includes the playoffs. During the last series, Mazzulla listened to pleas from the Celtics' veteran leaders to reinsert Robert Williams III into the starting lineup. He also apologized to the team for not calling a timeout prior to its final possession in a Game 4 overtime loss to Philadelphia.

"He trusts us. At the end of the day, Joe trusts us," Celtics guard Malcolm Brogdon said.

That humility is why Spoelstra respects what Mazzulla has done to this point, through the challenges of an NBA season.

Cardinals slug 7 HRs at home in win

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Willson Contreras hit two three-run homers, Nolan Gorman also homered twice and the St. Louis Cardinals went deep seven times in a home game for the first time in 83 years, beating the Los Angeles Dodgers 16-8 in a slugfest Thursday night.

Nolan Arenado added a two-run homer, and Juan Yezpez and Paul DeJong each hit solo homers for St. Louis.

The Cardinals, who have homered in a season-high seven games in a row, hit seven in a home game for the first time since May 7, 1940, when they did it against the Brooklyn Dodgers. Yezpez, Gorman and DeJong hit consecutive homers in the sixth inning.

Freddie Freeman hit a grand slam and Max Muncy added a solo homer for the Dodgers. It was the fourth grand slam for Freeman and his 300th career homer. Los Angeles leads the majors this season with five grand slams and rank second with 74 homers.

The teams' nine combined home runs set a record for Busch Stadium.

Adam Wainwright (1-0) allowed five runs — two earned — and five hits in 5½ innings for the win in his third start this season.

Dodgers starter Julio Urias (5-4) made his first career start against the Cardinals and it

didn't go well. He gave up six runs in three innings.

Angels 6, Orioles 5: Shohei Ohtani homered in the first inning and hit a tiebreaking infield single in the eighth, and Hunter Renfroe's terrific defensive play in the ninth helped visiting Los Angeles hold on for a victory over Baltimore.

Mike Trout also went deep for the Angels, and Anthony Santander and Adley Rutschman homered for Baltimore. Rutschman's two-run shot in the seventh gave Baltimore a 5-4 lead, but it was short-lived.

Bryan Baker (3-1) was charged with the loss. Chris Devenski (1-0) got the win, and Carlos Estévez pitched the ninth for his 10th save in 10 chances.

With one out in the ninth, Adam Frazier hit a line drive to right, but Renfroe played the ball beautifully off the wall and made a great throw to second to catch Frazier trying for a double.

Mets 3, Rays 2: Pete Alonso homered again and the Mets earned consecutive wins for the first time in a month.

The game was tied at 2 before Tommy Pham legged out a bouncer to third with one out in the sixth inning, driving in Jeff McNeil with the infield hit against Zack Littell (0-1).

Taylor Megill (5-2) worked six innings of two-run ball for the win. David Robertson allowed

Randy Arozarena's one-out double in the ninth before finishing his eighth save.

The Mets won consecutive games for the first time since April 20-21 in San Francisco. They won a series for the first time since taking two of three at the Los Angeles Dodgers from April 17-19.

Josh Lowe homered for Tampa Bay, which has dropped four of six.

Guardians 3, White Sox 1: Cam Gallagher hit an RBI single during Cleveland's two-run seventh inning, and the visiting Guardians beat Dylan Cease and the White Sox.

Gabriel Arias homered as Cleveland salvaged the finale of the three-game series. Nick Sandlin (2-1) got four outs for the win, and Emmanuel Clase worked the ninth for his 15th save.

Cleveland's catchers were 0 for 44 with 26 strikeouts in May before Gallagher's hit.

Luis Robert Jr. had two hits for Chicago, including a double. Seby Zavala hit an RBI single in the fourth.

Cease (2-3) was charged with three runs and five hits in 6½ innings.

Marlins 5, Nationals 3: Eury Pérez pitched five solid innings for host Miami, earning his first major league win in his second start.

Bryan De La Cruz homered for Miami in the second, extend-

ing his hitting streak to a career-high 12 games. Nick Fortes had two hits, including an RBI single in the eighth.

The Marlins stretched their win streak to four games.

The 20-year-old Pérez (1-0) allowed one run and three hits. He struck out six and walked one.

Dylan Floro pitched a scoreless ninth for his fourth save of the season.

Jeimer Candelario homered for Washington. Trevor Williams (1-2) was charged with three runs and five hits in six innings.

Yankees 4, Blue Jays 2: Aaron Judge hit a two-run homer and New York beat host Toronto to win for the 11th time in 16 games.

Nestor Cortes (4-2) allowed two runs and five hits in six-plus innings to snap a four-start winless streak. He struck out six and walked one.

Anthony Volpe also homered for the Yankees, who took three of four from Toronto. Ron Marinnaccio finished for his first career save.

Bo Bichette homered as Toronto lost its first home series of the season after winning five straight. José Berríos (3-4) allowed three runs and six hits in 6½ innings, losing for the first time since April 19 at Houston. He walked one and struck out eight.

DeChambeau resurfaces, leads PGA Championship

Associated Press

PITTSFORD, N.Y. — So much talk about this PGA Championship has been the restoration project of Oak Hill. Equally astonishing Thursday is the restoration of Bryson DeChambeau.

That incredible bulk who won the U.S. Open at Winged Foot in 2020? DeChambeau has shed some 40 pounds by cutting out food to which he was allergic.

"I took a Zoomer peptide test, which essentially tells you what inflames your blood when you eat it," he said. "Pretty much everything I liked, I couldn't eat."

The guy who tried to smash it as far as he could and have wedges into the green? Now he's happier finding fairways, and he was happy to share what led to the improved accuracy.

"It's being more ... how do I

explain this easy? I'm just in a place where I'm more ulnar," he said, leaving everyone to wonder what would have been the more complicated explanation.

The place that matters is his name high on the leaderboard. DeChambeau still lashed away with speed and strength, off the tee and out of the rough. That carried him to a 4-under 66 and the lead among those who fin-

ished an opening round delayed nearly two hours by frost.

Thirty players didn't finish because of darkness and were to return Friday morning. That included Eric Cole, the 34-year-old PGA Tour rookie who was 5 under with four holes left.

DeChambeau matched his low score at the PGA Championship and led by one over Scottie Scheffler, Dustin Johnson and Corey Connors.

Panthers outlast Hurricanes in 4th OT

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Back and forth they went, the Florida Panthers and Carolina Hurricanes playing a game that seemed destined to have no end while leaving legs growing wobbly with each passing minute.

Then, just as the teams appeared headed for yet another extra period, Matthew Tkachuk pounced on his chance to finish off yet another overtime and road victory for the Panthers in these playoffs.

Tkachuk beat Frederik Andersen in the final seconds of the fourth overtime to give the Panthers a 3-2 victory over the Hurricanes early Friday in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference final.

Tkachuk took a feed from Sam Bennett after Florida won a battle for the puck as Carolina tried to clear it from the zone, then whipped a shot from the right circle past Andersen with 12.7 seconds left.

That sent Tkachuk racing toward center ice to celebrate with teammates in what turned into the longest game in either franchise's history, as well as the sixth-longest game in NHL history.

"Definitely tired, but I think

you're less tired when you win," Tkachuk said, adding: "I hope you guys and everybody else enjoyed that game, because what I'm seeing is two really good teams fighting it out for every inch."

Florida won its seventh straight road game in these playoffs and improved to 5-0 in overtime. Game 2 is Saturday night in Raleigh, less than 48 hours after the teams played more than two full games' worth of hockey.

This one ended roughly six hours after the puck drop.

"We didn't even know what overtime we were in," Panthers forward Ryan Lomberg said.

Aleksander Barkov and Carter Verhaeghe scored in regulation for the Panthers, and Sergei Bobrovsky made 63 saves in what turned into a goaltender battle as the game got more ragged and players racked up the ice time.

Andersen finished with 57 saves for Carolina, which got power-play goals from Seth Jarvis and Stefan Noesen.

"It was a good goalie battle," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It was unfortunate we just couldn't find one."

Tkachuk finally ended a game that had multiple wild se-

quences in critical late moments.

Most notably, there was Lomberg appearing to have the winning goal in his return to Florida's lineup from injury, beating Jalen Chatfield in a battle and then whipping the puck by Andersen 2½ minutes into the first OT.

But Carolina successfully challenged the play for goaltender interference. Replays showed Florida's Colin White — while being bumped by Carolina's Jack Drury — making skate-to-skate contact with Andersen, then bumping him as Andersen ended up on all fours on the other side of the crease before Lomberg's shot found the net.

Later in that first OT, Jarvis — who had the game's first goal on a power-play blast from the slot — nearly ended it on a loose rebound but rang the crossbar.

It turned out, the game was nowhere near its epic finish.

Florida hadn't been to an Eastern Conference final since 1996, before a large chunk of its roster had even been born. But these Panthers had turned a late surge to qualify for the final wild-card spot into a post-season-shaking moment by taking down Boston following the

Bruins' record-setting 65 wins and 135 points, followed by beating a Toronto team buzzing off its first series win in nearly two decades.

Now the Panthers have handed the Hurricanes — who had the league's second-best regular-season record — their first series deficit of the postseason.

Carolina is in the Eastern final for the second time in five years. The last time, it was a feel-good surprise for a young core that had just ended a nine-year postseason drought. They had since accomplished the goal of building a consistent winner and Cup contender, though second-round exits the past two seasons on home ice had cast a damper on some of that sustained success.

This time, Carolina beat the New York Islanders in six games and then the New Jersey Devils in five to make it back. But on a night when both teams had plenty of chances to end this one in any of the OTs, Carolina ended up losing its ninth straight game in the conference-final round dating to 2009 in brutal fashion.

"It was kind of really who was going to make the last mistake," Carolina captain Jordan Staal said. "Unfortunately, it was us."

First Mission scratched from Preakness by vets

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Brad Cox-trained First Mission has been scratched from the Preakness on the advice of veterinarians, taking one of the top contenders out of the Triple Crown race 36 hours before post time.

Godolphin, which owns the horse, announced the scratch early Friday, saying vets identified a left hind issue.

"We are obviously very disappointed, but the welfare of the horse is our utmost concern, and we are going to take the necessary steps to determine the

best course of action to get him back on the track," Godolphin bloodstock director Michael Banahan said.

Godolphin said First Mission will receive further evaluation in Kentucky at Rood and Riddle hospital with Dr. Larry Bramlage.

The removal of First Mission leaves seven horses in the field for the \$1.65 million race. He was the early second choice at odds of 5-2 behind only 8-5 favorite Mage, who won the Kentucky Derby.

Five horses were scratched in

the days and hours leading up to the Derby, including favorite Forte, when Kentucky racing officials expressed concern about a bruised right front foot. Forte landed on the state's vet list, grounding him from racing for at least 14 days and trainer Todd Pletcher was suspended 10 days for Forte failing a post-race drug test in New York in September.

Racing officials who own and operate tracks in Maryland have increased testing and veterinary review procedures for horses running in the Preakness

and other top stakes races this weekend at Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore as preventative measures to limit injuries. That includes multiple independent doctors examining horses, with each one needing to be cleared before racing.

Seven horses died at Churchill Downs in the days leading up and on Derby day, and an eighth died the following week, putting the sport in a familiar negative spotlight when a cluster of fatalities happens, especially during Triple Crown season.