

Warthogs patrol Middle East waters

By J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

A U.S. attack aircraft known for close air support in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is seeing action in maritime patrols amid recent tensions between the U.S. and Iran, according to the Navy.

A-10 Thunderbolt II “Warthog” jets are part of an increased rotation of U.S. aircraft and ships in the Strait of Hormuz, off Iran’s coast, U.S. 5th Fleet said this week.

Navy destroyers, Coast Guard fast response cutters, P-8 maritime patrol aircraft and unmanned systems are also part of the patrols, 5th Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Tim Hawkins said Monday.

“Our ramped-up defensive posture is in response to Iran’s unwarranted and unlawful behavior of late,” Hawkins said.

The U.S. accused Iran of seizing a commercial oil tanker in late April and another one in early May, as part of a series of 15 incidents in which the U.S. says Iran interfered with ships in the Middle East. The Iranian government says its recent sei-

zures of oil tankers were due to ship violations or legal disputes.

The A-10s are part of a detachment sent in late March to Al Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates. Since their arrival, they have trained on firing on targets at sea.

In late April, the A-10s simulated a live-fire attack on sea targets during training that included the Air Force, the Marines and the Coast Guard, a statement by the Marines on May 2 said.

The goal of the exercise was to train on coordinating aircraft and ships against surface threats, a video posted on Twitter by the Air Force after the exercise states.

The A-10, which was designed to destroy Soviet tanks during the Cold War, has seen combat mostly in land wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But it occasionally has been used in a maritime role. A-10s attacked small boats in Libya in 2011 and patrolled over the South China Sea in 2016, according to the military blog War is Boring.

And an exercise in 2017 saw the plane flying mock attack runs against small boats

that looked very much like the type of fast vessels used by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps navy, the online publication The Drive reported at the time.

The jets may be used in other experimental roles, U.S. military officials have said.

For example, the Air Force may try to shoot down aerial drones with them, as the Warthog’s slower flight speed could be an advantage there, Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynke-wich, 9th Air Force commander, told Defense One in April.

The service has tried for a long time to retire the A-10 over concerns that it didn’t have a role in modern combat and that it was vulnerable to Russian air defenses. Congress has blocked those attempts.

But in early April, the Air Force announced it had sent an A-10 to the boneyard. That plane was the first of 21 slated to be decommissioned by the end of September.

The service intends to mothball the rest of the fleet by 2029, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr. said in March.

COLA cuts will affect Pacific-based Marines after all

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

A strong dollar means a lower cost-of-living allowance for Marines stationed in Japan and South Korea, the Marine Corps said in a Facebook post recently.

The Defense Department on May 2 announced lower allowances for service members based on a drop in the actual costs to consumers of things like groceries and clothing.

Subsequently, Marine Corps Installations Pacific erroneously posted on Facebook that the COLA dip would not affect Marines on Okinawa, at the Combined Arms Training Center Camp Fuji, south of Tokyo, and at Camp Mujuk in South Korea. On Saturday, the command corrected itself.

“While Okinawa, CATC Fuji and Camp Mujuk OCOLA will not fluctuate due to cost-of-living changes, it is

changing due to currency fluctuation. We did not account for that in our initial post,” the command announced on Facebook.

“We apologize for any confusion this may have caused,” the post said. “We will confirm the expected changes for all MCIPAC installations and share updated examples and financial management resources in the very near future.”

On Tuesday, a dollar bought 138.75 Japanese yen and 1,312.59 South Korean won, up from 127.86 yen 1,239.51 won in mid-January.

COLA offsets prices for goods and services for service members assigned to foreign countries or outside of the contiguous United States.

More than 230,000 troops receive an overseas COLA, defense officials said when announcing the changes.

In December, Defense Secretary

Lloyd Austin paused the allowance decrease for 90 days while the Pentagon addressed complaints that some service members in places like Hawaii were put into financial distress.

Congress had already limited allowance decreases to once every six months as part of the National Defense Authorization Act.

Decreases began May 15, with another cut scheduled for Nov. 15. Those will be reflected in service members’ pay June 1 and Dec. 1, according to the DOD announcement. For example, a DOD cost-of-living calculator shows the allowance paid to a sergeant on Okinawa with six years’ service and two dependents is dropping from \$172.08 to \$73.42.

A captain on Okinawa with the same family size and length of service is dropping from \$230 to \$98.13, according to the calculator.

Navy fires leader of new arrival destroyer

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The commander of a destroyer that only recently arrived in Japan has been relieved due to a “loss of confidence,” according to the Navy.

The head of the U.S. 7th Fleet, Vice Adm. Karl Thomas, removed Cmdr. Angela Gonzales from her job aboard the USS John Finn due to “a loss of confidence in her ability to fulfill her responsibilities in leading the ship,” 7th Fleet said in a news release.

Thomas made the decision fol-

lowing an investigation, 7th Fleet spokeswoman Cmdr. Hayley Sims told Stars and Stripes by email Tuesday. She declined to comment further on the investigation.

“The U.S. Navy holds its leaders to very high standards and will hold leaders accountable when those standards are not met,” Simms wrote.

Thomas administratively re-assigned Gonzales to U.S. Pacific Fleet’s Naval Surface Force and named Cmdr. Matthew Hays as John Finn’s interim commander, according to the release.

“These leaders are entrusted with significant responsibilities to their Sailors and their ships. They are expected to maintain the Navy’s high standards for leadership, demonstrating competence in their duties at all times,” the release states.

The John Finn is one of the newest additions to Destroyer Squadron 15 and Task Force 71. It arrived at Yokosuka on March 4 from Naval Base San Diego, its former homeport, which it departed Feb. 16.

The John Finn will replace the guided-missile cruiser USS Shi-

loh, which is due to be decommissioned at Naval Base Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, Task Force 70 spokesman. Lt. Cmdr. Joe Keiley said in March. Keiley, citing operational security, declined to comment on the schedule for the Shiloh’s retirement.

Gonzales is at least the third ship commander fired over “loss of confidence” this year. Cmdr. Alexa Jenkins of the Florida-based destroyer USS Carney and Capt. Michael Nordeen of the Virginia-based amphibious transport dock USS Mesa Verde were relieved in January.

12 Marines are honored for Sudan Embassy evacuation

By DOUG G. WARE
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Twelve Marines received decorations for their efforts during last month’s evacuation of American workers from the U.S. Embassy in Sudan, just days after a bloody military power struggle broke out in the northeastern African country.

“I came here today to look you in the eye and say, ‘Thank you,’” Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro told the group from the Marine Security Guard detachment in Sudan that carried out the evacuation on April 23.

The Sudanese military junta has been locked in a power struggle for weeks with the Rapid Support Forces, which it considers a rebel paramilitary group that’s seeking full integration into the government structure and a power-sharing agreement. The factions together mounted a coup in 2021 that overthrew Sudan’s transitional democratic leadership.

The fighting began in mid-April when the Rapid Support Forces attacked several targets in Sudan, including the capital city of Khartoum and its airport. A

few days later, President Joe Biden ordered the Marine detachment in Khartoum to get all embassy personnel out.

Pentagon officials said the operation was risky due to the unpredictable nature of the fighting, but it took less than an hour for the Marines to get all embassy personnel out without a shot fired.

“The example that you have set protecting the life of the ambassador and the lives of all the people who were at the embassy has been nothing short of extraordinary,” Del Toro told the group Friday during a recognition ceremony at Marine Corps Embassy Security Group Head quarters in Quantico, Va.

Eleven Marines received the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal. Staff Sgt. Derek Ferrari, who led the detachment, received the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal.

“It’s a humble feeling,” Ferrari said. “I continue to be impressed with my Marines’ ability to remain engaged and take care of one another the same way they did in Khartoum.”

USS Ronald Reagan starts likely last Yokosuka patrol

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Strong winds and rough seas greeted the USS Ronald Reagan as it left the home of the U.S. 7th Fleet for what could be its last deployment out of Japan before a carrier swap next year.

Despite the foul weather, around 40 people gathered alongside Yokosuka’s northern shoreline to watch the aircraft carrier steam into Tokyo Bay. Wrapped in raincoats and braced against the wind, they gave the ship a quiet farewell.

The weather was no deterrent for Crystal Cohee, who said sending her husband, operations officer Lt. Cmdr. Justin Cohee, off to sea is a privilege.

“It’s nice to still see it head out, regardless of the weather,” she said along the shoreline Tuesday. “It’s such an amazing ship.”

The Ronald Reagan typically returns to Yokosuka after several months, usually halfway through its six-month patrol of the Indo-Pacific region, but

Tuesday’s departure marked what is likely the carrier’s final deployment before it relocates for maintenance at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Wash.

The Navy on April 28 announced the aircraft carrier USS George Washington will replace the Ronald Reagan as the centerpiece of the 7th Fleet’s carrier strike group sometime next year, although it did not report an exact date.

The George Washington over the past six years has been undergoing its midlife nuclear refueling and maintenance at Huntington Ingalls’ Newport News Shipbuilding in Virginia.

The aircraft carrier served as the 7th Fleet’s lead ship from 2008 to 2015, before the Ronald Reagan took its place.

The ship departed just one day after Naval Forces Japan confirmed to Stars and Stripes that the Naval Criminal Investigative Service is investigating an undisclosed number of sailors assigned to the Ronald Reagan for “alleged drug use, possession and distribution.”

Study finds extremist views low among military veterans

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Military veterans express support for extremism at low rates and are less likely to back far left movements or white supremacist groups than the general U.S. population, according to a new survey.

“We found no evidence to support the notion that the veteran community, as a whole, exhibits higher rates of support for violent extremist groups or extremist beliefs than the American public,” said Todd Helmus, lead author of the Rand Corp. survey released Tuesday.

The findings come at a time of heightened concern about radicalism both inside the ranks and among veterans. Questions about political extremists potentially flourishing among veterans also intensified in the aftermath of the Jan. 6, 2021, attacks on Capitol Hill, which included veterans who later faced an array of charges for fomenting violence.

“Given the anecdotal information about extremist group recruitment preferences and their active targeting of veterans, we would have assumed that these reported prevalence rates would be higher,” Helmus said. But Rand’s survey found the views of veterans mostly to be in line with other Americans.

About 5.5% of veterans expressed support for the far-left antifa, an umbrella description of decentralized groups with a “militant opposition to

fascism and other forms of extreme right-wing ideology,” according to Rand Corp., a nonpartisan research group.

Adherents frequently blend communist and anarchist views and have resorted to vandalism and violence when targeting far-right rallies, the nonpartisan Center for Strategic and International Studies wrote in a 2020 analysis.

Veteran support for antifa was considerably lower than the U.S. population rate of 10%, Rand said. Veterans also expressed much lower support for white supremacists than the general U.S. population — 0.7%, compared to 7%.

The far-right Proud Boys group had the support of 4.2% of vets, compared to 9% among the general public.

Support for Black nationalist groups stood at 5.3% for veterans, but there is no national data to compare against that figure, Rand said.

Still, despite those “encouraging findings,” 17.7% of veterans saw a necessity for political violence, compared to 19% for Americans who had no military experience. Also, about 28.8% of veterans supported the idea of the “Great Replacement,” which involves a view that left-wing “elites” are conspiring to undermine or eliminate Western European-centric traditions via immigration and higher birth rates.

Still, that percentage was markedly lower than the U.S. general population rate of 34% who believe it, Rand said.

Guam tells residents to evacuate in anticipation of typhoon

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The governor of Guam ordered residents in low-lying areas to evacuate Tuesday and President Joe Biden approved an emergency declaration as Super Typhoon Mawar barreled toward the island.

Islanders were advised by emergency authorities to seek immediate shelter, with damage expected overnight Tuesday and peak typhoon winds expected Wednesday.

“Super Typhoon Mawar is expected to make a direct hit or very near passage for Guam,” the island’s Joint Information Center said in a 6:30 p.m. bulletin. “There is a potential of a catastrophic and devastating event for Guam. Typhoon force winds are expected Wednesday morning, with peak conditions around midday.”

Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero and Joint Region Marianas, the military installation management command on Guam, set Condition of Readiness 1 around 2:30 p.m. Tuesday.

The storm is predicted to pass almost directly over the capital, Hagatna, and Naval Base Guam, 15 miles southwest of Andersen Air Force Base, between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. Wednesday.

“This is a very serious situation with steadily deteriorating conditions,” the bulletin said.

Mawar was upgraded to a super typhoon around 5 p.m. Tuesday with sustained winds of 155 mph and 195 mph gusts, according to the Joint Typhoon Warning System. The island is braced for 161 mph sustained winds with 196 mph gusts early Wednesday morning.

Canberra to be 1st US warship commissioned in an allied country

The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — The San Diego-based littoral combat ship Canberra will travel to Australia this summer where it will become the first American warship to be commissioned in an allied country, according to the Navy.

The commissioning will occur on July 22 at the Royal Australian Navy Fleet Base East in Sydney.

It will mark the moment when the Canberra becomes an active member of the American fleet.

The ceremony also represents the outgrowth of a long, fruitful and deepening relationship between the two countries that goes back decades.

During World War II, Australia served as a forward operating base for U.S. forces in the Pacific.

The assets included a newly-built American cruiser that was named after Canberra, the capital of Australia. Canberra helped win many fights during the war, including the Battle of the Philippine Sea.

The cruiser was taken out of service late in the war but was later recommissioned and became one of the American ships that was sent to blockade Cuba in 1962 after a spy plane revealed that the Soviet Union had placed nuclear missiles on the island.

Later in the 1960s, Canberra deployed to Vietnam five times from its homeport in San Diego.

The ship was decommissioned for a second and final time in 1970.

Russia says it beat alleged Ukraine raid

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian troops and security forces Tuesday quashed an alleged cross-border raid from Ukraine, claiming to have killed more than 70 attackers in a battle that lasted around 24 hours, a senior Moscow official said.

It was not possible to independently confirm claims about the armed incursion into Russian territory that began Monday. Nor was it possible to say with any certainty who was behind the attack or what its aims were.

Disinformation has been one of the biggest weapons of the almost 15-month war.

Moscow blamed the raid on Ukrainian military saboteurs. Kyiv portrayed the incident as an uprising against the Kremlin by Russian partisans. It wasn't immediately possible to reconcile the two versions.

The battle took place in the Belgorod region, about 45 miles north of the city of Kharkiv, in eastern Ukraine.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov claimed the armed attackers were routed by local troop units, air strikes and artillery fire.

"The remnants of the nationalists were driven back to the territory of Ukraine, where they continued to be hit by fire until they were completely eliminated," Konashenkov said, without providing evidence. He did not mention any Russian casualties.

Four armored combat vehicles and five pickup trucks used by the attackers were destroyed, he said. Local officials alleged drones and artillery were also used in the assault.

The governor of the Belgorod region, Vyacheslav Gladkov, said the raid targeted the rural area around the town of Graivoron, a town about 3 miles from the border. Twelve civilians were wounded in the attack, he said, and an older woman died during the evacuation.

Earlier Tuesday, Gladkov urged residents who had evacuated to stay put and not return home until they received official instructions to do so. He said a "counterterrorism operation" was underway.

While it wasn't the first time Russia has alleged an incursion by Ukrainian saboteurs, it was the first time the operation to counter the raid continued for a second day, highlighting the struggles Moscow is facing amid its bogged-down invasion of Ukraine and embarrassing the Kremlin.

Russian territory and Russia-occupied areas of Ukraine have also been hit by drones and explosions that have derailed trains, though Kyiv officials have brushed off accusations of orchestrating them.

Ukraine said Russian citizens belonging to murky groups calling themselves the Russian Volunteer Corps and the "Freedom of Russia" Legion were behind the assault.

Suspect silent in killings of 4 Idaho college students

Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — The suspect in the stabbing deaths of four University of Idaho students opted Monday to "stand silent" to murder charges, prompting the judge to enter not guilty pleas on his behalf ahead of a trial in which he could face the death penalty.

The Nov. 13, 2022, killings stunned the rural community of Moscow, Idaho, and prompted many students to leave campus early, switching to remote learning for the remainder of the semester.

Bryan Kohberger, 28, was arrested late last year and charged with burglary and four counts of first-degree murder in connection with the slayings of Madison Mogen, Kaylee Goncalves, Xana Kernodle and Ethan Chapin at a rental home near the University of Idaho campus.

Kohberger declined to enter pleas in Latah County District Court, with his defense attorney Anne Taylor telling the judge that they were going to "stand si-

lent" at this time. In response, 2nd District Judge John Judge entered not guilty pleas on Kohberger's behalf.

It's uncommon but not unheard of for defendants to "stand silent" in criminal cases. Sometimes it is done because defendants and their attorneys feel they need more time to weigh the ramifications of entering a plea of guilty or not guilty; other times it can be part of a broader legal strategy or simply a defendant's personal choice.

Kohberger declined to waive his right to a speedy trial, so the judge scheduled it to begin Oct. 2. It's still possible that the trial could be delayed or moved to a different location.

Kohberger was a graduate student studying criminology at nearby Washington State University when the University of Idaho students were killed, but prosecutors have not released any information about how they believe he may have chosen the victims.

Biden, McCarthy keep hopes up as debt deal still elusive

Bloomberg News

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy told Republicans on Tuesday that debt-limit talks still have some distance to go, and pleaded with them to stay united on the party's demands for spending cuts to avert a U.S. default.

McCarthy's comments at a closed-door meeting for all House Republicans suggested urgency and uncertainty as Washington's stand-off over a potential U.S. default enters the endgame.

Republican Rep. Ralph Norman, who was in the meeting, said McCarthy told them the two sides are "not anywhere near close" to a deal. Another person who was in the room confirmed McCarthy's comments.

Negotiators for McCarthy and President Joe Biden were set to resume talks at 11 a.m. Tuesday at the Capitol, with the two sides still short of an agreement and a catastrophic U.S. default drawing closer.

Before the talks, McCarthy

told reporters Democrats "still want to spend more money this year than they did last year."

"That's the red line," he said. But, he added, he believes a deal can be reached by June 1.

Both McCarthy and Biden signaled optimism after a meeting at the White House Monday evening that lasted more than an hour. Earlier, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned it's "highly likely" her department would run out of sufficient cash in early June, and that default could come as soon as June 1.

Tuesday morning, the S&P 500 index of equities declined 0.3%. The yield on two-year Treasuries climbed for an eight straight day and reached 4.37%, the highest since March 10. The dollar was little changed against a basket of major currencies.

The current standoff over the debt ceiling has the potential to put more strain on the U.S. economy, which is already vulnerable to a recession after a series of interest-rate increases by the Federal Reserve, according to Bloomberg Economics.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman arrested after boyfriend fatally run over

AZ CASA GRANDE — A woman has been arrested in connection with the death of her boyfriend, who was run over by a car after a domestic dispute, according to police in Arizona.

Shelly Shears, 51, was booked on suspicion of second-degree murder, Casa Grande police said.

Officers responded to a motor vehicle versus pedestrian collision and found Billy Stephens, 59, lying near a roadway in serious condition with “significant trauma,” police said. Stephens was flown to a Phoenix hospital where he later died from his injuries.

“Detectives discovered significant evidence to determine Shears and Stephens were in a verbal argument prior to her striking him with her vehicle,” police said in a statement.

Grenade found among relative’s items; 1 killed

IN LAKES OF THE FOUR SEASONS — A hand grenade found as a family went through an older relative’s belongings exploded, killing an Indiana man and injuring his two teenage children, police said.

The explosion fatally injured the 47-year-old man at the home in the community of Lakes of the Four Seasons in northwestern Indiana, according to the Lake County Sheriff’s Department. His two children, a 14-year-old boy and 18-year-old girl, were taken to a hospital with shrapnel wounds.

Sheriff Oscar Martinez said

investigators were trying to determine what caused the grenade to explode in the home about 30 miles southeast of Chicago.

Authorities didn’t immediately release any additional information about the grenade or why the relative had it.

Mom charged after baby abandoned 4 years ago

GA CUMMING — A Georgia woman accused of leaving her newborn daughter in the woods nearly four years ago has been identified, arrested and charged with attempted murder.

Karima Jiwani, 40, was arrested and was being held in the Forsyth County Jail after a judge denied bond, jail records showed. Hospital staff nicknamed the newborn girl Baby India after she was found in a wooded area in Cumming, about 35 miles north of Atlanta, on June 6, 2019.

The girl is now “happy and healthy,” said Forsyth County Sheriff Ron Freeman. He declined to say more, citing the need to protect the girl’s privacy.

About 10 months ago, the sheriff’s office identified the child’s father using DNA, Freeman said. Then authorities again used DNA to identify Jiwani.

Widower sues driver, bars after crash killed bride

SC COLUMBIA — The alleged drunken driver who police said slammed into newlyweds riding along a South Carolina beach road now faces a wrongful death lawsuit alongside several establish-

ments accused of overserving her on the night of the crash, which killed the bride.

Four bars gave “copious amounts of alcohol” to a “visibly intoxicated” woman, identified as Jamie Lee Komoroski, last month before she drove 40 miles per hour over the speed limit into a golf cart carrying the couple away from their wedding reception, according to a new lawsuit filed.

The April 28 wreck killed Samantha Miller, 34, and injured the groom, Aric Hutchinson, and two other passengers. A toxicology report showed Komoroski, 25, had a blood alcohol level of 0.261 — over three times the legal limit.

The complaint alleges that Komoroski “slurred and staggered her way through” El Gallo Bar & Grill, Snapper Jacks, the Drop In Bar & Dali and the Crab Shack — all of which either allowed her to become intoxicated or continued serving her alcohol when they should have recognized her inebriated state.

School district votes to extend school day

AR LITTLE ROCK — The Little Rock School District has voted to extend the school day beginning in the fall for the 2023-24 school year.

The Little Rock School Board’s 9-0 decision means elementary students will start earlier and end later while middle and high school students’ day will end later, officials said.

The board agreed with Superintendent Jermall Wright who said the changes were necessary to provide more time for direct instruction of science and

social studies in the elementary grades and provide enough time for buses to pick up and drop off elementary students before making second runs for the older students, the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette reported.

Under the change, the elementary day will go from 7:40 a.m. to 2:55 p.m., a change from the current 7:50 a.m. to 2:35 p.m. in place for most schools. Class for middle and high school students will start at 8:45 a.m. and go 15 minutes longer — to 4 p.m. — next year.

Sharks bite 2 fishermen in separate incidents

FL SUMMERLAND KEY — Two fishermen have been bitten by sharks in separate incidents less than 36 hours apart in the Florida Keys, officials said.

A 20-year-old Miami-Dade County man was bitten in the leg while spearfishing with two other people off Marathon, the Monroe County Sheriff’s Office said in a news release.

A medical helicopter landed on the Seven Mile Bridge to pick up the man, who was brought to shore by a private boat, the report said. He was taken to Jackson South Medical Center in Miami, and his condition was not available.

Another shark bit a 35-year-old fisherman on the foot after he had reeled it in while fishing off a dock in Summerland Key. The shark was on the dock when it bit the man, the release said.

The man was also taken to by a trauma helicopter to a hospital in Miami. His condition was not known, the statement said.

— From wire reports

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Jokic, Nuggets sweep into NBA Finals

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Nikola Jokic is a player unlike almost anything the NBA has ever seen, and now he's taking his Denver Nuggets somewhere they've never been.

Jokic had 30 points, 14 rebounds and 13 assists, and the Nuggets advanced to the NBA Finals for the first time in team history Monday night, sweeping the Western Conference finals with a 113-111 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers.

Jamal Murray scored 25 points for the top-seeded Nuggets, who overcame LeBron James' 31-point first half and a 15-point halftime deficit with a tenacious finish in Game 4 to earn their first conference title in their 47 NBA seasons.

"It's incredible," Murray said. "It's a lot of fun. It's surreal. We're going to keep making history, that's the thing. We're going to keep that mindset."

Jokic earned his eighth triple-double of the playoffs by the

third quarter, breaking Wilt Chamberlain's 1967 NBA record for triple-doubles in a single postseason. The bulky Serbian center with a point guard's grace also led the Nuggets' gritty defensive effort despite picking up his fifth foul midway through the fourth quarter.

Jokic didn't leave the floor for the final 33 minutes of Game 4 — and when Denver needed a big basket, Jokic delivered that as well. He muscled past Anthony Davis for the game's final points on a layup with 51 seconds to play.

"I think that's why playoffs are so nice and so interesting, because you don't care about how tired you are," Jokic said. "You don't care about minutes, fouls, shots, percentage. You just want to win a game. Some plays today we weren't playing good defense sometimes, (but) you can win it in every kind of possible way."

James finished with 40 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists after the highest-scoring

postseason half of his career, but even the top scorer in NBA history couldn't keep the deep, dynamic Nuggets from their sixth consecutive victory overall.

James missed two tying shots in the final seconds, with Aaron Gordon getting official credit for blocking his tying try at the buzzer.

The Nuggets will cap their superb season by playing for their first NBA championship. Denver both eliminated the Lakers for the first time in eight playoff meetings and swept a playoff series for the first time, likely earning several days off before the Finals.

Unless the Boston Celtics make basketball history by rallying from their 3-0 deficit in the East finals, Denver will host the eighth-seeded Miami Heat to open the NBA Finals, beginning June 1.

"Me and AD were just talking in the locker room (and) we came to the consensus this is one of the best teams, if not the

best team, we've played together for all four years," James said of the Nuggets. "Just well-orchestrated, well put together. They have scoring. They have shooting. They have playmaking. They have smarts. They have length. They have depth. And one thing about their team, when you have a guy like Jokic, who is as big as he is but also as cerebral as he is, you can't really make many mistakes versus a guy like that."

The Lakers erased a seven-point deficit and tied it with five minutes to play, but Jokic hit a 25-foot fallaway three-pointer — the kind of ridiculously impressive shot for a big man that Jokic makes routinely. After Davis hit two free throws to tie it with 1:13 left, Jokic put the Nuggets ahead again.

James then badly missed a strange fallaway jumper with 26 seconds left. Murray missed a turnaround to give the Lakers one last chance, but James' drive at the buzzer was thwarted by Murray and Gordon.

James mulls retirement after Lakers eliminated

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — LeBron James questioned retirement after his Lakers were swept by the Denver Nuggets despite the highest-scoring postseason half of James' matchless NBA career.

James set a personal record with 31 points in the first half of Game 4 of the Western Conference finals on Monday night, but he missed two potential tying shots in the final minute as the Nuggets ended the Lakers' season with a 113-111 victory.

The 38-year-old James finished with 40 points, 10 rebounds, nine assists and immense frustration after Los Angeles' remarkable late-season surge ended with four con-

secutive defeats. Although the top scorer in NBA history spoke about himself as part of the Lakers next season, James also said he hasn't made up his mind on retirement.

"We'll see what happens going forward," James said in the final answer of his postgame news conference. "I don't know. I don't know. I've got a lot to think about, to be honest. Just for me personally going forward with the game of basketball, I've got a lot to think about."

James is under contract for \$46.9 million next season with the Lakers, but he is in charge of his future after surpassing Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's career scoring record earlier this year. He hasn't previously sug-

gested much personal conflict about finishing his contract alongside Anthony Davis, and his play hasn't significantly declined after two decades in the NBA — although his health has grown less sturdy, particularly in his balky feet and ankles.

"It's all about availability for me and keeping my mind sharp, and things of that nature," James said. "Being present on the floor, being present in the locker room and bus rides and plane rides, things of that nature. It's challenging, for sure. It was a very challenging season for me, for our ballclub, and obviously we know whatever went on early on (in the Lakers' 2-10 start to the season). It was cool, a pretty cool ride."

James missed a month of the regular season with a foot injury down the stretch, but he returned with a series of stellar playoff performances while the Lakers knocked off second-seeded Memphis and eliminated defending champion Golden State. That didn't matter much to James, whose frustration broke through at several points after Game 4.

"I don't like to say it's a successful year, because I don't play for anything besides winning championships at this point in my career," James said. "You know, I don't get a kick out of making a conference (finals) appearance. I've done it a lot, and it's not fun to me to not be able to be a part of getting to the (NBA) Finals."

Panthers blank Hurricanes, take 3-0 lead

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — The chants of fans in Florida drowned out the public-address announcer at the end of the game Monday night, making it impossible to hear his call of the first star of the game.

Then again, they already knew who it was going to be.

“Bobby!”

“Bobby!”

“Bobby!”

Sergei Bobrovsky earned those cries from the 20,000 or so who chanted in unison, after leaving no doubt in Game 3 of the Eastern Conference finals — and putting the Panthers on the brink of their first trip to the Stanley Cup Final in 27 years. Bobrovsky stopped 32 shots for his first playoff shutout, and the Panthers blanked the Carolina Hurricanes 1-0 on Monday night.

“No matter what the score is, we’re just trying to make it as easy as possible for him,” said Panthers forward Sam Rein-

hart, who got the game’s lone goal on the power play midway through the second period.

He’s rewarded their work, and then some. Bobrovsky is now 10-1 in his last 11 appearances and has been almost perfect in the last eight games. Going back to Game 1 of Round 2 against Toronto, Bobrovsky has not allowed more than two goals in any contest, with 296 saves on 309 shots — a .958 save percentage.

And if that doesn’t sound absurd enough, try this one: Out of the last 110 shots he’s faced, Bobrovsky has stopped 109 — starting in the third period of the four-OT win in Game 1.

“We’re happy with the ‘W,’ we’re happy with the win, but the next game is going to be a big game,” Bobrovsky said.

It could be Florida’s biggest since 1996. That was the last year in which the Panthers played for the Stanley Cup, but they can clinch a trip to the title round with a win in Game 4 on

Wednesday.

This marks the 205th time that a team has taken a 3-0 series lead in NHL playoff history. Of the first 204, 200 went on to win the series. The Panthers are 2-0 when taking the first three games of a series; the Hurricanes are 0-5 when dropping the first three.

“We can’t do much more,” Hurricanes coach Rod Brind’Amour said. “We like how we’re playing, clearly. It’s just, we’ve got to find a way to put one in.”

Matthew Tkachuk and Sam Bennett had the assists on Reinhart’s goal for Florida. It wasn’t a perfect night for Florida, however: Captain Aleksander Barkov left with about 7 minutes left in the first period with a lower-body injury and did not return, even though the team listed him as questionable. Panthers coach Paul Maurice did not have an update on Barkov’s condition after the game.

Frederik Andersen stopped 16 shots for Carolina. The Hur-

ricanes pulled him with 3:22 left, desperate for the tying goal, but barely even managed to test Bobrovsky the rest of the way. And when it was over, the Hurricanes’ Jesperi Kotkaniemi was seen smashing his stick on the way to the locker room, the frustration so obvious.

That’s what a night of facing Bobrovsky does right now.

“He’s been incredible, all playoffs long,” Bennett said.

The 3-0 lead matches the one that the eighth-seeded Miami Heat have in their Eastern Conference final against the Boston Celtics, with a chance for South Florida’s other storybook team right now to clinch an NBA Finals trip and a matchup with the Denver Nuggets on Tuesday night. Monday’s contest was the first East final game in the Panthers’ current arena — the franchise’s only other time going this deep into the playoffs was 1996, when it played in Miami at a building that was demolished long ago.

NFL approves limited flexing for Thursday games

Associated Press

EAGAN, Minn. — Thursday nights in the NFL have long been the most drastic feature of its made-for-TV schedule, a prime-time slot that raised concerns about player safety and produced plenty of competitive duds.

Now the league will have the power, albeit limited, to change the matchups.

NFL owners approved Monday a flexible scheduling policy for Thursday night games on Amazon Prime Video, for Weeks 13-17 only and with at least 28 days’ notice given to the affected teams. The league could push a Thursday night matchup in that range to Sunday afternoon if there’s a more desirable game, a mechanism currently in place for Sunday night and Monday night games.

No team would be required to play more than twice on Thursday night in a season. The rule is just for 2023, for now. Any game could be selected for the move to Thursday, but the league said the bar for such a shuffle would be high.

“We’re incredibly judicious and incredibly sensitive to flexing a game and all the dynamics that go into that,” said Hans Schroeder, executive vice president and chief operating officer of NFL Media. “We’re also trying to balance how we get the best games in the best windows for our fans.”

In addition to the prime-time allowances for flexing games, the NFL now puts the entire Week 18 schedule up for grabs until the week of so it can show two games with playoff implications on Saturday.

New York Giants owner John Mara, a critic of the proposal for its negative impact on fans, said after the vote that he was disappointed but not surprised.

Also approved Monday was a rule that allows teams to play an emergency quarterback from the inactive list if the first two are injured during a game, a decision that stems from San Francisco’s depth-chart challenge in the NFC championship game.

The 49ers’ Brock Purdy injured his el-

bow but was forced to return to the game when Josh Johnson suffered a concussion. Purdy was unable to throw the ball more than 10 yards.

The third quarterback designation will not count against the limit of active players that is determined 90 minutes before kickoff.

The emergency activation can only occur after injury or disqualification. If either of the first two quarterbacks are cleared by the team’s medical staff to return to play, the third must be removed from the game and can only return as a quarterback if an injury scenario arises again.

The league also awarded two major events for the 2025 season. The Green Bay Packers were given the NFL Draft, and San Francisco got Super Bowl 60.

Owners were also updated on the pending sale of the Washington Commanders from Dan Snyder’s family to Josh Harris’ group. No vote on the record \$6.05 billion transaction will occur this week.

Rays hit 3 more HRs in win over Blue Jays

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — After hitting 139 homers last season, the Tampa Bay Rays could blow past that total before this year's All-Star break.

Jose Siri, Randy Arozarena and Luke Raley homered, and the major league-leading Rays beat the sliding Toronto Blue Jays 6-4 on Monday night.

Tampa Bay (35-14) leads the major leagues with 94 home runs. The Rays opened a three-game lead over Baltimore in the AL East.

"The team that we have, we have a team that can run, that can field, that can hit," Siri said through a translator. "It doesn't matter what pitcher is up there, we feel confident in our ability to hit."

After opener Trevor Kelley pitched two scoreless innings, Josh Fleming (1-0) allowed two runs and five hits over the next six as the Rays improved to 22-4 at home.

Tampa Bay is the ninth team since 1901 to win 22 of its first 26 home games.

The announced crowd at Tropicana Field was a season-low 8,857. Tampa Bay started the day averaging 18,045, 10th in the American League.

Toronto's Chris Bassitt (5-3) pitched 28 consecutive scoreless innings before the Rays scored three times in the second. He allowed six runs — two earned — and seven hits in 6 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings.

Whit Merrifield and Daulton Varsho homered for the Blue Jays (25-23), who have lost seven of eight and dropped 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ games behind Tampa Bay.

Dodgers 8, Braves 6: Freddie Freeman's three-run homer in the fifth inning gave visiting Los Angeles the lead, J.D. Martinez had four hits, including two homers, and the Dodgers rallied to beat Atlanta.

The Dodgers, who trailed 4-0 in the first, won the opener of a three-game series between the top two teams in the National League. Freeman, a longtime Braves star, made the most of his second Atlanta homecoming with three hits to join Martinez in leading the comeback.

Dodgers rookie Gavin Stone allowed five runs on five hits and five walks in four innings in his second start for Los Angeles.

Angels 2, Red Sox 1: Mickey Moniak homered in the eighth inning and host Los Angeles won for the fourth time in five games.

Moniak drove a changeup from Kutter Crawford (1-2) over

the wall in the right field to lead off the eighth.

Masataka Yoshida had two hits and an RBI for the Red Sox, who have dropped two straight after winning four in a row.

Pirates 6, Rangers 4: Tucupita Marcano hit his first career grand slam, rookie Luis Ortiz pitched into the eighth inning and earned his first major league victory and host Pittsburgh beat AL West-leading Texas.

Ortiz (1-2) allowed two runs and five hits in 7 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings for the win in his eighth career start. The 24-year-old right-hander struck out four and walked two in a 93-pitch effort.

Guardians 3, White Sox 0: Rookie Hunter Gaddis pitched six strong innings for his first major league win and struggling catcher Mike Zunino connected for a two-run homer in a win for host Cleveland.

Gaddis (1-1) was recalled from Triple-A Columbus and gave the Guardians a badly needed quality start after they were swept over the weekend in New York. He gave up just two hits, combining with four relievers on a three-hitter.

Reds 6, Cardinals 5 (10): Nick Senzel hit a sacrifice fly in

the 10th and host Cincinnati snapped a four-game losing streak.

Tigers 8, Royals 5 (10): Javier Báez hit a bases-clearing double in the 10th inning for his third hit of the night to lift visiting Detroit.

Diamondbacks 6, Phillies 3: Lourdes Gurriel Jr. extended the longest active hitting streak in the majors to 15 games with a homer, double and two RBIs to lead visiting Arizona.

Rockies 5, Marlins 3: Elías Díaz homered and doubled to drive in two runs, and Jurickson Profar doubled twice to extend his on-base streak to 30 games and drive in another pair to lead host Colorado.

Giants 4, Twins 1: Michael Conforto hit a three-run homer and the first four San Francisco batters scored en route to the sixth win in seven games for the visiting Giants.

Mariners 11, Athletics 2: Jarred Kelenic hit his 10th homer of the season and Luis Castillo pitched six scoreless innings for host Seattle.

Astros 12, Brewers 2: Yordan Alvarez had a grand slam among his two homers, and visiting Houston won its eighth straight.

Wilson fractures back in Indy 500 practice accident

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Stefan Wilson fractured his back during a heavy crash with Katherine Legge in practice for the Indianapolis 500 on Monday, and the British driver will not be allowed back into his car for the 107th running of "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing."

The two drivers were going through Turns 1 and 2 about an hour into the two-hour session when the entire field appeared to slow down. Legge closed fast on Wilson and hit the rear of his car, sending both skidding into the wall. Legge hit with a glancing blow to the rear of her car, but Wilson was pointed nearly head-on when he made contact with the SAFER barrier.

The safety crew spent about 10 minutes

carefully extricating Wilson from his car. He was placed on a stretcher, immobilized and wearing a neck brace, gave a quick thumbs-up before he was loaded into an ambulance and taken to the hospital.

Dreyer & Reinbold Racing said Wilson fractured his 12th thoracic vertebra and would remain hospitalized for observation.

"I can tell you that he's doing well," said Dr. Julia Vaizer, chief medical director for IndyCar and Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Graham Rahal was picked Tuesday to replace Wilson in the Dreyer & Reinbold car, allowing him to keep his Indianapolis 500 start streak intact after failing to qualify for the race with his own team.

Wilson qualified 25th in the 33-car field, ahead of all three Rahal Letterman Lanigan

entries. But the driver change means Rahal will start last, alongside his usual teammate Jack Harvey, who had bumped him in the final seconds of qualifying.

Legge is the only female driver in this year's field, and she was the only driver on struggling Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing that made the 33-car grid on the first day of qualifying.

Legge's team said it would attempt to repair her car in time for Carb Day on Friday, when teams get one last chance on the track before the race. It was already removing shattered pieces from the chassis by the time Monday's session ended.

"I know it's another blow to the team," Legge said. "After yesterday, those guys don't deserve it. It's not right."