

Powerful typhoon barrels into Guam

Staff and wire reports

HAGATNA, Guam — Super Typhoon Ma-war barreled into Guam as a powerful Category 4 storm Wednesday, pummeling the U.S. Pacific territory with high winds, heavy rains and a dangerous storm surge that swamped low-lying areas as residents hunkered down in homes and shelters.

The typhoon's center passed over the northern tip of Guam on Wednesday evening, the National Weather Service said. It is the strongest storm to hit the territory of over 150,000 people in decades.

Meteorologists suspect the storm clipped the far northern part of the island, but otherwise it was in the channel between Guam and its neighbor to the north, Rota, warning coordination meteorologist Landon Aydlett said by telephone. Peak winds at the weather service office in Guam reached 105 mph, but it later lost its wind sensors, he said. The building was vibrating, with a "constant, low rumbling," and doors and windows were shaking, he said.

"We have the peak conditions going on for a couple more hours. I think thrashing is the word I would use," Aydlett said. "There are

trees everywhere at this point. Daylight tomorrow is really going to be a shock to a lot of people."

The U.S. Navy has ordered the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier strike group to head to Guam to assist in the recovery effort and three ships were already underway as the scope of the devastation became clear, a U.S. official said.

The Nimitz, along with the cruiser USS Bunker Hill and the destroyer USS Wayne E. Meyer were south of Japan and already moving toward the tiny island, the official said. It will take three to four days for the strike group to arrive.

Lightning had become an increasing threat as conditions continued to deteriorate into the evening, the weather service reported. And an extreme wind warning and flash flood warning were in effect for northern Guam.

The storm's center hit Guam around 9 p.m. Wednesday.

At Andersen Air Force Base, on the northern edge of Guam, heavy winds knocked down trees by 9:30 a.m. Wednesday and portions of the base were without power by 2

p.m., several base residents told Stars and Stripes by Facebook Messenger.

"We're feeling pretty fortunate to live in a concrete box," said Kimberly Jones, referring to the concrete homes that constitute Andersen's base housing.

Photos and videos of the storm's impact submitted by members of the Guam Military Spouses Facebook group to Stars and Stripes showed fierce winds, heavy rain and fallen trees throughout the island, including at Andersen, Naval Base Guam, and elsewhere.

Staci Hutto, another Andersen resident, reported water leaking through the bottom of her front door.

Rota, an island in the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, was also under a typhoon warning. Tinian and Saipan, in the Northern Marianas, were under tropical storm warnings. Some people in those areas are still in temporary shelters or tents after Category 5 Super Typhoon Yutu in 2018.

Mawar, a Malaysian word that means "rose," is forecast to continue moving north-northwest and may threaten Taiwan next week.

GAO: Pentagon can't keep track of F-35 spare parts

BY DOUG G. WARE

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon isn't keeping track of tens of thousands of spare parts for F-35 fighter jets worth millions of dollars because it was unclear who is responsible for doing it, according to a congressional audit released Tuesday.

The U.S. military and many nations such as Israel and Japan have been flying the F-35 Lightning II for several years, which creates a need for various parts to be kept at locations in many countries around the globe. The Pentagon maintains a global pool of spare parts that ally countries can tap into when needed. However, there is no Defense Department system to monitor those inventories and keep track of the parts, according to the Government Accountability Office report.

The main reason that no accountability

system exists for spare parts in the global pool is because it was never expected the U.S. military would own parts for F-35s purchased by other countries.

"[Defense Department] initially did not intend to own the F-35 assets, which include the global spares pool and support equipment, special tooling and special test equipment," the 35-page GAO report states. "Because DOD did not develop a plan to address this ... the prime contractors continued to maintain accountability."

The prime contractors are the F-35's manufacturer, Lockheed Martin, and the company that produces its engines, Pratt & Whitney.

Over time, the inventory process became murkier because the spare parts in the global pool ended up in different inventory systems at Lockheed Martin and

Pratt & Whitney — and were stored at dozens of locations that were not owned by the U.S. government or either company, according to the report.

The result is a cloudy picture of how many spare parts are in the pool, how many have been lost or misplaced, what was paid for them and how much they're worth, the report states.

"The F-35 Joint Program Office was unable to provide the cost, total quantity and locations of spare parts in the global spares pool, and continues to rely on the prime contractors' records for this information," according to the GAO report.

The Joint Program Office, which manages all aspects of the F-35 program, has been working on the problem. It has spent \$12 million in the past three years on efforts to inventory the global pool. That effort was still ongoing in December.

Wagner says 20K of its troops died in Bakhmut

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The head of the Russian private army Wagner says his force lost more than 20,000 men in the drawn-out battle for Bakhmut, with about half of those who died in the eastern Ukrainian city being Russian convicts recruited to fight in the 15-month-old war.

The figure stood in stark contrast to the widely disputed claims from Moscow that just over 6,000 of its troops were killed throughout the war as of January. By comparison, official Soviet troop losses in the 1979-89 Afghanistan war were 15,000.

Ukraine hasn't said how many of its soldiers have died since Russia's full-scale invasion began in February 2022.

Analysts believe the nine-month fight for Bakhmut alone has killed tens of thousands of soldiers, among them Russian convicts who reportedly received little training before being sent to the front.

Russia's invasion goal of "demilitarizing" Ukraine has backfired because Kyiv's military has become stronger with the supply of weapons and training by its Western allies, Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin said in an interview published late Tuesday with Konstantin Dolgov, a pro-Kremlin political strategist.

Prigozhin also said the Kremlin's forces have killed civilians during the war, something Moscow has repeatedly and vehemently denied.

Prigozhin, a wealthy businessman with longtime links to Russian President Vladimir Putin, is known for his bluster — often spiced with obscenities — and has previously made unverifiable claims, some of which he later backtracked on.

Earlier this month, his spokespeople published a video of him shouting, swearing and pointing at about 30 uniformed bodies lying on the ground, saying they were Wagner fighters who died

in a single day. He claimed the Russian Defense Ministry had starved his men of ammunition and threatened to give up the fight for Bakhmut.

He also said in Tuesday's interview it was possible that Kyiv's anticipated counteroffensive in coming weeks, given continued Western support, might push Russian forces out of southern and eastern Ukraine as well as annexed Crimea.

"A pessimistic scenario: the Ukrainians are given missiles, they prepare troops, of course, they will continue their offensive, try to counterattack," he said. "They will attack Crimea, they will try to blow up the Crimean bridge (to the Russian mainland), cut off (our) supply lines. Therefore, we need to prepare for a hard war."

The Ukrainian General Staff said Wednesday that "heavy fighting" is continuing inside Bakhmut, days after Russia said that it completely captured the

devastated city.

Bakhmut lies in Donetsk province, one of four provinces Russia illegally annexed last fall and only partially controls.

The head of Ukraine's ground forces, Oleksandr Syrskiy, said that Kyiv's forces "are continuing their defensive operation" in Bakhmut, and have attained unspecified "successes" on the city's outskirts. He gave no further details.

Ukrainian officials have insisted the battle for Bakhmut isn't over.

A Ukrainian commander in Bakhmut told The Associated Press on Tuesday that the Ukrainians have a plan to push the Russians out of all occupied territory.

"But now we don't need to fight in Bakhmut, we need to surround it from flanks and block it," Yevhen Mezhevikin said. "Then we should 'sweep' it. This is more appropriate, and that's what we are doing now."

Russian fighter jets intercept UK-bound B-1s over Baltic Sea

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
AND KYLE ALVAREZ
Stars and Stripes

A Russian fighter jet intercepted two B-1B Lancers from Texas over the Baltic Sea on Tuesday as the bombers began a deployment in the European theater.

The Lancers from Dyess Air Force Base's 7th Bomb Wing conducted a NATO mission with allies and partners in the Baltic Sea region on their way to a routine deployment at RAF Fairford in the U.K., U.S. Air Forces in Europe-Air Forces Africa officials said in a statement Tuesday announcing the bombers' arrival.

The Defense Department downplayed the intercept, calling it a safe and professional interaction.

"Nothing significant to report on that front," Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, a Pentagon spokesman, told reporters Tuesday.

The Lancers remained in international airspace, a spokesman for U.S. European Command said Wednesday. Two more B-1Bs are expected to arrive Thursday, USAFE said.

The Kremlin scrambled a Su-27 fighter to intercept the bombers as they approached the Russian border, Russian news agency Tass reported Tuesday, quoting a Russian National Defense Operations Center statement. U.S. military officials in Europe did not specify where the encounter occurred. However, the Russians said their border wasn't violated, according to Tass.

USS Gerald R. Ford arrives in Norway for Arctic drills

Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — A U.S. aircraft carrier arrived Wednesday in Oslo with the Norwegian armed forces saying it gives them "a unique opportunity to further develop cooperation and work more closely with our most important ally, the United States."

The nuclear-powered ship USS Gerald R. Ford entered the Oslo fjord escorted by a rapid dinghy-type boat with armed personnel on board. The Norwegian armed forces has said any boats must stay a half-mile away from the aircraft carrier and a no-fly zone was created over the area where the aircraft carrier was.

Described as the largest air-

craft carrier in the world, the vessel will stay in the Norwegian capital until Tuesday. It is then expected to take part in drills with the Norwegian armed forces, reportedly in the Arctic.

The ship's first foreign call was broadcast live on Norwegian public television.

Onlooker Laila Wilhelmsen, who stood along the route in Droe-bak, said that she grew up in the small town about halfway through the fjord during the Cold War in the 1950s and "there were warships here all the time."

"I don't know, but now we have teased (Russian President Vladimir) Putin even more. It's scary, I think," she told Norwegian broadcaster NRK.

Suit: Firm ignores Do Not Call Registry

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Attorneys general across the U.S. joined in a lawsuit against a telecommunications company accused of making more than 7.5 billion robocalls to people on the national Do Not Call Registry.

The 141-page lawsuit was filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Phoenix against Avid Telecom, its owner Michael D. Lansky and company vice president Stacey S. Reeves. It seeks a jury trial to determine damages.

The lawsuit arises from the nationwide, bipartisan Anti-Robocall Multistate Litigation Task Force of 51 attorneys general and the District of Columbia. It was formed last year to investigate and take legal action against telecommunications firms routing volumes of robocall traffic.

Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes said nearly 197 million of the robocalls were made to Arizona phone numbers between December 2018 and January 2023.

“Every day, countless Arizona consumers are harassed and annoyed by a relentless barrage of unwanted robocalls — and in

some instances these illegal calls threaten consumers with lawsuits and arrest,” Mayes said in a statement. “More disturbingly, many of these calls are scams designed to pressure frightened consumers, often senior citizens, into handing over their hard-earned money.”

The lawsuit said Avid Telecom used spoofed or invalid caller ID numbers, including more than 8.4 million calls that appeared to be coming from government and law enforcement agencies as well as private companies.

The company also allegedly transmitted scam calls about the Social Security Administration, Medicare, Amazon and DirecTV, as well as auto warranties, employment and credit card interest rate reductions.

“Americans are sick and tired of their phones ringing off the hook with fraudulent robocalls,” New York Attorney General Letitia James said in a statement. “Seniors and vulnerable consumers have been scammed out of millions because of these illegal robocalls.”

The lawsuit alleges Lansky and Reeves violated the Telephone Consumer Protection Act, the Telemarketing Sales Rule and other federal and state laws.

“Contrary to the allegations in the complaint, Avid Telecom operates in a manner that is compliant with all applicable state and federal laws and regulations,” said Neil Ende, the company’s outside legal counsel. “The company has never been found by any court or regulatory authority to have transmitted unlawful traffic and it is prepared to meet with the attorneys general, as it has on many occasions in the past, to further demonstrate its good faith and lawful conduct.

“In this context, the company is disappointed that the attorneys general chose not to communicate their concerns directly before filing the lawsuit,” Ende added. “While the company always prefers to work with regulators and law enforcement to address issues of concern, as necessary, the company will defend itself vigorously and vindicate its rights and reputation through the legal process.”

SC ready to renew ban on abortions around 6 weeks

AP/Report for America

COLUMBIA, S.C. — Abortion will soon be severely restricted in one of the last bastions for legal access in the U.S. South.

The South Carolina Senate approved a bill Tuesday that would ban most abortions after around six weeks of pregnancy — before most people know they are pregnant — and sent it to the Republican governor who has promised to sign the bill into law as soon as possible.

The proposal restores a 2021 ban that took effect when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* last year. The ban was overturned by the state’s highest court because it violated the state Constitution’s right to privacy.

South Carolina reported increasing numbers of abortions following that decision, which left abortion legal through 22 weeks of pregnancy, while oth-

er Southern states enacted stricter laws.

Abortion is banned or severely restricted in much of the South, including bans throughout pregnancy in Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia. In Georgia, it’s allowed only in the first six weeks.

Most abortions after 12 weeks of pregnancy will be banned in North Carolina beginning July 1 after the state’s Republican-controlled Legislature successfully overrode the Democratic governor’s veto last week.

A legal fight is widely expected in South Carolina. Vicki Ringer, the director of public affairs for Planned Parenthood South Atlantic, said Tuesday evening that her organization would file a request for a temporary restraining order after Republican Gov. Henry McMaster signs the measure.

Trump appears on video in NY case, trial set for March

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Donald Trump threw up his hands in frustration Tuesday as a judge scheduled his criminal trial for March 25, putting the former president and current candidate in a Manhattan courtroom in the heat of next year’s presidential primary season.

Trump, appearing by video conference at a pretrial hearing in the hush-money case, glowered at the camera as Judge Juan Manuel Merchan advised him to cancel all other obligations for the duration of the trial, which could last several weeks.

Trump, wearing a blue suit against a backdrop of American flags at his Florida estate, then turned to a lawyer by his side — their brief discussion inaudible on the video feed — before sitting with his arms folded for the remainder of the hearing.

Trump said little during the hearing, but lashed out after-

ward on social media, writing: “Just had New York County Supreme Court hearing where I believe my First Amendment Rights, ‘Freedom of Speech,’ have been violated, and they forced upon us a trial date of March 25th, right in the middle of Primary season.”

“Very unfair, but this is exactly what the Radical Left Democrats wanted,” Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. “It’s called ELECTION INTERFERENCE, and nothing like this has ever happened in our Country before!!!”

Trump pleaded not guilty last month to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records related to hush-money payments made during the 2016 campaign to bury allegations that he had extramarital sexual encounters.

Merchan said he arrived at the March 25 trial date after discussions with Trump’s lawyers and prosecutors.

Texas sues Biden, looks to throw out asylum rule

Associated Press

The state of Texas is suing the Biden administration in an attempt to have a newly-introduced asylum rule thrown out, saying a phone app used by migrants to set up appointments at the border to seek entry into the United States is encouraging illegal immigration.

The lawsuit filed Tuesday is the latest legal salvo attacking various aspects of the administration's plan to manage migration in the aftermath of the end of a key pandemic-era immigration regulation called Title 42.

In the lawsuit, Texas argues that the asylum rule encourages the use of a cellphone app — called CBP One — for migrants who don't have proper documentation to make an appointments to come to a port of entry and seek entry into the U.S.

Texas argues the Biden administration is essentially encouraging people to come to the U.S. even though they don't have legal basis to stay.

"The Biden Administration deliberately conceived of this phone app with the goal of illegally pre-approving more foreign aliens to enter the country and go where they please once they arrive," said Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton in a news release.

The complaint was filed in the Western District of Texas.

While the lawsuit focuses on the phone app, it seeks to throw out the entire asylum rule, called the Circumvention of Lawful Pathways. The rule went into effect when Title 42 expired May 11. The rule makes it extremely difficult for migrants who travel to the southern border to get asylum if they don't first seek protection in a country they passed through before reaching the U.S. or if they don't apply online through the app.

Use of the app is a core part of the administration's plans to create a more orderly system at the border where migrants set up appointments ahead of time. When the app was rolled out in January, however, it was criticized for technological problems and because demand has far outstripped available spaces. Migrants can make appointments for specific ports of entry — five of which are in Texas.

Texas argues that according to federal law, people entering the country illegally — with rare exceptions — should be expelled, but that the app doesn't verify whether the migrants seeking appointments would qualify for exceptions. Therefore, the state argues, the Biden administration's use of the app essentially encourages people to come to the U.S. even if they don't qualify. Texas also argues that it has to pay the financial burden of migrants coming to the U.S. through things like health care or education.

Target pulls some LGBTQ items from its store shelves

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Target is removing some items from its stores and making other changes to its LGBTQ+ merchandise nationwide ahead of Pride month after intense backlash from some customers who confronted workers and tipped over displays.

"Since introducing this year's collection, we've experienced threats impacting our team members' sense of safety and well-being while at work," Target said in a statement Tuesday. "Given these volatile circumstances, we are making adjustments to our plans, including removing items that have been at the center of the most significant confrontational behavior."

Target said that customers knocked down Pride displays at some stores, angrily approached workers and posted threatening videos on social media from inside the stores.

Target declined to say which items it was removing, but among the ones that garnered the most attention were "tuck friendly" women's swimsuits that allow trans women who have not had gender-affirming operations to conceal their private parts.

Designs by Abprallen, a London-based company that designs and sells occult- and satanic-themed LGBTQ+ clothing and accessories, have also created backlash. The Pride merchandise has been on sale since early May.

Target's Pride month collection has also been the subject of several misleading videos in recent weeks, with social media users falsely claiming the retailer is selling "tuck-friendly" bathing suits designed for kids or in kids' sizes.

Iran's nuke chief says it will work with inspectors on 'new activities'

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The head of Iran's nuclear program insisted Wednesday that his government would cooperate with international inspectors on any "new activities." His statement followed an exclusive Associated Press report about Tehran's new underground tunnel system near a nuclear enrichment facility.

The AP outlined this week how deep inside a mountain, the new tunnels near the Natanz facility are likely beyond the range of a last-ditch U.S. weapon designed to destroy such sites.

The report sparked wider conversation across the Middle East about the construction, with Israel's national security adviser saying Tuesday that the site would not be immune from attack even if its

depth put it out of range of American airstrikes.

Speaking to journalists Wednesday, Mohammad Eslami of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran sought to describe the interest in the site as a case of Israel feeling pressured.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran is working under the IAEA safeguards, and whenever it wants to start new activities, it will coordinate with the IAEA, and acts accordingly," Eslami said, using an acronym for the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The IAEA did not respond to questions from the AP about the construction at Natanz, about 140 miles south of Tehran. Natanz has been a point of international concern since its existence became known two decades ago.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Family of man killed by police gets \$19 million

CO DENVER — The parents of a 22-year-old Colorado man killed by a sheriff's deputy while suffering a mental health crisis will get \$19 million from government state and local agencies and changes to how officers are trained, under a settlement announced Tuesday.

The shooting of Christian Glass after his SUV became stuck in the mountain town of Silver Plume last year drew national attention and prompted calls to reform how authorities respond to people with mental health problems.

As part of the settlement, Sally and Simon Glass also negotiated for changes they hope will prevent another family from suffering a loss like theirs. Clear Creek County will establish a crisis response team and its sheriff's office will train and certify all deputies in crisis intervention, according to documents released by their attorneys.

Foam contaminates public water for about 9K

ME WATERVILLE — Firefighting foam used in battling a fatal fire in an apartment building entered the public water system, prompting the water district to order thousands of residents not to drink the water.

The do-not-drink order went into effect Monday for about 9,000 Kennebec Water District customers in Waterville, Winslow, Benton, Fairfield and Vassalboro. Testing was being conducted to determine whether the water is safe to drink.

Firefighting foam entered the public water distribution system as firefighters battled a blaze in an apartment building for seniors. One person was killed and several others were injured Monday.

Sheriff: Millionaire's jail escape plan foiled

FL VERO BEACH — Authorities in Florida say they foiled an elaborate jail escape plan by a 78-year-old businessman who had previously fled to France following his 2014 arrest on child pornography charges before being arrested in another country and returned to the U.S.

A tip from outside the jail sparked a two-month investigation into the actions of John Manchec, some of his employees and others who he befriended in jail, Indian River County Sheriff Eric Flowers said Monday during a news conference. Manchec is a citizen of both the United States and France.

The plan called for Manchec's employees to have a plane — which the sheriff said the man owns — ready in nearby Fort Pierce, so he could escape.

Manchec, who the sheriff described as a multimillionaire, was originally arrested on 49 child pornography charges.

Father, son sentenced for lottery fraud scheme

MA BOSTON — A father and son from Massachusetts have both been sent to prison for running an elaborate lottery fraud scheme designed to enrich themselves and help prize winners avoid paying taxes on their windfall, prosecutors said.

Ali Jaafar, 63, and Yousef Jaafar, 29, both of Watertown, cashed in 14,000 winning lottery tickets over a roughly 10-year period, laundered more than \$20 million in proceeds, and then lied on their tax returns to cheat the IRS out of about \$6 million, the U.S. attorney's office in Boston announced Monday.

The Jaafars purchased winning lottery tickets at a discount from people who wanted to avoid identification by the state lottery commission, which withholds taxes and outstanding child support payments from payouts.

After purchasing the tickets, using the stores that sold them as go-betweens, the Jaafars claimed the full prize amount. Although they reported the winnings on their tax returns, they also claimed equivalent fake gambling losses as an offset to avoid federal income taxes, prosecutors said.

Girl skips graduation after dress dispute

MS JACKSON — A transgender girl in Mississippi did not participate in her high school graduation ceremony because school officials told her to dress like a boy and a federal judge did not block the officials' decision, an attorney for the girl's family said Saturday.

Linda Morris, staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union's Women's Rights Project, said the ruling handed down late Friday by U.S. District Judge Taylor McNeel in Gulfport, Miss., "is as disappointing as it is absurd."

"Our client is being shamed and humiliated for explicitly

discriminatory reasons, and her family is being denied a once-in-a-lifetime milestone in their daughter's life," Morris said. "No one should be forced to miss their graduation because of their gender."

The ACLU confirmed that the 17-year-old girl — listed in court papers only by her initials L.B. — would skip the Saturday ceremony for Harrison Central High School in Gulfport, about 160 miles south of Jackson.

Man loses arm after gator attack behind bar

FL PORT CHARLOTTE — A man in Florida lost his arm after being attacked by an alligator behind a bar, according to wildlife authorities.

The 23-year-old man was attacked early Sunday behind a bar in Port Charlotte, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The man had been a patron at Banditos Bar, which is located next to a pond. Another bar patron, Manny Hidalgo, told The Daily Sun that he heard the man screaming from the pond area and went outside looking for him in the early morning darkness.

"He was yelling and swimming toward the shoreline," Hidalgo said. "I ran and dragged him up onto the sand. I was scared to get close to the water because it was dark out."

The man was taken by helicopter to Gulf Coast Hospital in Fort Myers, where his arm was amputated, said Todd Dunn, a spokesman for Charlotte County Fire and EMS.

A nuisance alligator trapper removed the 10.5-foot alligator from the property, according to wildlife officials.

— From wire reports



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Panthers following leader in Tkachuk

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — It may as well be called the official celebration of Matthew Tkachuk. He scores an overtime goal to win a playoff game, jumps around for a couple of seconds, then quickly points to the rink door and takes off for the locker room.

And the Florida Panthers all follow him.

Makes sense. The Panthers would follow Tkachuk anywhere right about now. One more win, and they'll be following him to the Stanley Cup Final as well.

After a couple of dramatic finishes in Raleigh, N.C., Tkachuk and the Panthers returned home and won Game 3 of the Eastern Conference finals against the Carolina Hurricanes to take a 3-0 lead in the series. Florida — which was down 3-1 in the first round to Boston and on the brink — won the first two games against Carolina after Tkachuk became the 12th player in NHL history with overtime goals in consecutive playoff games.

"He's been everything, and even more, than what we had

expected," Panthers captain Aleksander Barkov said.

Here's some of what Tkachuk has managed in his first year with the Panthers:

■ One of four players in NHL history to have three overtime game winners in a postseason.

■ Finished the regular season with 109 points and 123 penalty minutes, the first player to have that many of each since Eric Lindros in 1995-96 and the first since Sidney Crosby in 2005-06 to have at least 100 in both categories.

■ MVP of the All-Star Game, on the Panthers' home ice.

■ Finalist for the Hart Trophy, hockey's MVP, for the first time.

Oh, and Florida is up 3-0 in the East finals. There's still ice on the floor of FLA Live Arena into the last week of May; that's never needed to happen in the quarter-century of the Panthers calling that building (which has had five different names) their home.

"He's an exceptional guy and even over the course of the year, he's kind of matured," Panthers coach Paul Maurice

said. "He wasn't immature. But he's just grown into that leadership role and he's one of those guys that can touch everybody in the room, whether it's the fourth-line guy or the extra guy. He plays a gritty game. He also plays a very highly skilled game so he can connect with everybody in the room."

This is how big a star Tkachuk has become in his first postseason run with the Panthers: Jimmy Butler, who's a bit busy right now leading the eighth-seeded Miami Heat as they — like eighth-seeded Florida — chase an improbable NBA championship, let the world see he was wearing a Tkachuk jersey for an off-day shooting workout last week.

"I don't really know if it has sunk in or if we're allowing ourselves to let it sink in," Tkachuk said. "We're just kind of riding the wave right now. I guess, it's just 'Let good times roll.' It's just fun to come to the rink every day and it's fun to be at the rink every day. We're still standing."

It's not just because of Tkachuk. The Panthers have a lot of heroes right now.

Barkov pulled off an all-time goal in Game 2 at Carolina. Carter Verhaeghe has three game-winning goals in the playoffs for Florida. Brandon Montour has six goals to lead all NHL defensemen in the playoffs. And goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky has been absolutely unflappable, going 10-1 in his last 11 games.

They're just 3-3 at home in the playoffs, but 8-1 on the road — with five of those road wins in OT.

"We're a confident group no matter where we're playing," Florida forward Sam Bennett said after Saturday's 2-1 OT win at Carolina in Game 2 — the eighth consecutive win on the road for the Panthers in these playoffs, the second-longest such run in NHL history.

Tkachuk changed everything.

"Before he got here, he was one of those players you hated to play against," Barkov said. "He plays a hard game, is in your face all the time, he is not afraid of pretty much anything. And then he gets here and he's the one of the nicest guys you'll ever meet."

Vegas shuts out Dallas, moves 1 win from Cup Final

Associated Press

DALLAS — The Vegas Golden Knights kept their composure and got the best payback after an ugly hit early against their captain.

They have a 3-0 series lead in the Western Conference finals and are now just one more win away from making it to another Stanley Cup Final.

Ivan Barbashev scored a power-play goal after Dallas Stars captain Jamie Benn was ejected because of his hit on Mark Stone less than two minutes into the game. That was the second of three goals the Golden Knights had in the first 7½ minutes, lead-

ing to an early exit for goalie Jake Oettinger as they won 4-0 in Game 3 on Tuesday night.

"You keep your composure," said Alex Pietrangolo, who added a goal midway through the second period.

After the two captains collided near the blue line and Stone fell to the ice, Benn lunged forward with both hands on his stick and made contact near Stone's neck as he was sliding over the center line.

"We're upset when we see that, he's our captain," coach Bruce Cassidy said. "But at the end of the day, they make a call that gives us a chance to make

them pay for the penalty. And we did with one goal anyway, so we've doubled our lead. ... Do it the right way. That's been our mindset all along."

While Oettinger had the shortest start of his career, Vegas goalie Adin Hill stopped 34 shots in his first career postseason shutout. Hill also became the second Knights goaltender with a five-game winning streak this postseason — Laurent Brossoit won five in a row before an injury.

After four consecutive comeback victories in these playoffs, including two overtime wins at home to start the best-of-seven

series, the Golden Knights were in control all of the way in this one.

Game 4 is Thursday night, when Vegas will have the opportunity to advance to its second Stanley Cup Final in the franchise's six seasons.

The Golden Knights were Western Conference champions during their inaugural 2017-18 season, then lost the Cup Final in five games after winning the opener against the Washington Capitals. Vegas missed the playoffs for the only time last season, before coach Pete DeBoer was fired and became the Stars' coach.

Tatum, Celtics stave off elimination

Associated Press

MIAMI — Down nine early in the third quarter, down 3-0 in the series, the Boston Celtics knew their season was completely on the brink.

Three minutes later, everything looked different.

Jayson Tatum had 33 points and 11 rebounds, Jaylen Brown added 17 points and the Celtics staved off elimination in the Eastern Conference finals by running away in the second half to beat the Miami Heat 116-99 in Game 4 on Tuesday night.

“We were just trying to save our season,” Tatum said.

They most definitely found a way to do that. The two big differences: a 30-point edge for the Celtics on three-pointers, and an 18-0 run in that three-minute, third-quarter spurt that changed the game and — they hope — might end up changing the series.

“We can’t relax,” Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said. “We have to keep the same level of

intensity, the same mindset, the same focus in the next game.”

Derrick White scored 16 points, Grant Williams had 14, Al Horford added 12 and Marcus Smart scored 11 for the Celtics, who still trail the series 3-1 — but sent it back to Boston for a Game 5 on Thursday.

Jimmy Butler scored 29 for Miami, which was outscored 48-22 in a 14-minute stretch that turned the game — and perhaps the series — completely around. Boston would also have Game 7 on its floor as well if it can keep extending this series.

“Tonight we played with pace, purpose,” Tatum said. “We were getting stops. We were getting out in transition. You see layups and free throws go in, the jump shots start to feel a lot easier.”

Gabe Vincent scored 17 for Miami, Caleb Martin had 16 and Bam Adebayo added 10. The Heat shot 8-for-32 on three-pointers, while Boston was 18-for-45.

No team in NBA history has ever successfully rallied from a 3-0 deficit in a best-of-seven series; 150 have tried, 150 have failed.

But the Celtics gave themselves hope.

“We don’t really have a choice,” Mazzulla said. “It’s do-or-die. Got to stick together.”

The Heat led by as many as nine points in the opening quarter, kept the lead for the majority of the first half and were up by nine again when Max Strus connected on a three-pointer early in the third quarter.

That was the moment where Boston’s season was at stake.

And the Celtics responded — most emphatically.

The 18-0 run took Boston from down nine to up nine, a huge turnaround that took 3 minutes, 3 seconds. The Celtics were 6-for-7 from the floor during the run, 4-for-4 from three-point range, Tatum had nine of the 18 points and just like that the defending East champions

— who won three playoff games on Miami’s home floor in last year’s playoffs — were rolling again.

“We always say the last one to get is the hardest one to get,” Adebayo said. “I knew they would be desperate.”

Miami got within four late in the third, only to see another lightning-fast spurt by the Celtics — this time, seven unanswered points in 40 seconds. Boston’s edge was 88-79 going into the fourth, after winning the third quarter 38-23, with 21 of those points coming on three-pointers.

The Celtics kept the lead the rest of the way.

“They got us tonight,” Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. “You have to give them credit for that. There’s no doubt about it. There’s no questioning it. We’re not wondering about that. They deserved to win tonight. We have to regroup and get ready for a great opportunity in Boston.”

Fewer kickoff returns expected with fair catch rule

Associated Press

EAGAN, Minn. — The NFL has pushed the kickoff return further toward irrelevance with a priority on player safety.

The existence of the kickoff itself remains under careful review.

League owners voted Tuesday for a one-year trial of an enhanced touchback rule that will give the receiving team the ball at its own 25 with a fair catch of a kickoff anywhere behind that yard line.

“There’ll be a lot more work to be done about how we can continue to evolve going forward,” Commissioner Roger Goodell said. “Can we continue to keep this play in an exciting way, but more importantly in a safe way? There’s a lot of work that’s going to need to be done.”

The proposal passed despite strong pushback from coaches and players who argued the rule change will create uglier plays with squib and corner kicks that make fair catches impossible.

“I’ve been in this for a long time. I’ve seen these type of health and safety discussions,” said Atlanta Falcons chief executive officer Rich McKay, who is chairman of the competition committee. “We tend to get ourselves to the right place, but it’s never that comfortable.”

The NFL said its statistical models predict the return rate for kickoffs in 2023, under the new rule, will drop from 38% to 31% and that the rate of concussions on the sport’s most dangerous play will be reduced by 15%. Concussions on kickoffs occur more than twice as often

as on plays from scrimmage, McKay said.

One reason for the recent increase in head injuries? The improved skill of kickers to be able to strategically hang the ball longer and higher in front of the goal line, allowing the coverage more time to make a tackle and keep the opponent’s drive starting deeper than the 25 for an end-zone touchback.

“We understand that there’s going to be some injuries involved in professional football and football at all levels. We’re just trying to mitigate those risks,” said Tennessee coach Mike Vrabel, who sits on the competition committee that recommended the rule for approval.

“Not to say that there won’t be some unintended consequenc-

es, but sitting still and continuing to do nothing was unacceptable,” said Jeff Miller, the NFL’s executive vice president of communications, public affairs and policy. “There may be more to come, because both the kickoff and punt continue to have higher rates of injuries than run or pass plays.”

McKay acknowledged there’s no guarantee that the kickoff will forever be a part of the sport. The NFL will continue to examine alternatives.

“You don’t want this play out of the game, because special teams has been a really good part of our game and it’s been a really good part of a lot of players’ and coaches’ careers,” McKay said. “People like it. We’ve just got to find ways to make the plays safer.”

Guerrero, Blue Jays overpower MLB-best Rays

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — The Toronto Blue Jays dugout got a laugh when slugger Vladimir Guerrero Jr. struck out against a position player. Given a second chance against Luke Raley, Guerrero hit his fourth career grand slam.

Guerrero had six RBIs and the Blue Jays stopped a five-game losing streak with a 20-1 rout of the Tampa Bay Rays on Tuesday night, scoring their last 10 runs off position players.

Guerrero put Toronto ahead with an RBI single off Taj Bradley (3-1) in the first, had a run-scoring single in the fifth that opened a 10-0 lead and hit a 423-foot grand slam in a nine-run ninth against Raley.

“We were all kind of laughing,” Blue Jays manager John Schneider said of Guerrero’s strikeout on a 50 mph pitch. “It’s hard to do against a dude throwing 40, whatever. You kind of take it for what it’s worth. The fact that he was laughing, I loved it.”

“But, you don’t get Vladdy twice on a position player,” Schneider added. “He’s going to get you.”

All 12 Toronto batters in the game had hits, and the Blue Jays finished with 27 hits — their most since getting 29 against Boston in a 28-5 win last July 22.

Tampa Bay entered with the

second-fewest runs allowed in the majors at 170 and gave up its most since a 20-8 loss at Boston on Aug. 11, 2021.

“In fairness, it got a little ugly.” Rays manager Kevin Cash said.

Yankees 6, Orioles 5 (10): Aaron Judge hit a tying homer in the ninth inning and rookie Anthony Volpe drove in the winning run with a sacrifice fly in the 10th against Bryan Baker (3-2) as streaking New York rallied past Baltimore.

Harrison Bader homered to begin the host Yankees’ comeback from an early 4-0 deficit, and Judge took Gerrit Cole off the hook for his first loss in 11 starts this season.

Cedric Mullins and Gunnar Henderson homered off Cole for Baltimore, which was coming off a three-game sweep at Toronto.

Dodgers 8, Braves 1: Bobby Miller allowed one run over five innings in his big league debut and visiting Los Angeles beat Atlanta.

J.D. Martinez and Jason Heyward homered for the Dodgers, who also got three RBIs from Will Smith.

Miller (1-0) surrendered four hits, walked one and struck out five while consistently reaching 100 mph with his fastball.

Rangers 6, Pirates 1: Visiting Texas’ Nathan Eovaldi pitched a complete game for the second

time in five starts after throwing just two in the first 226 of his major league career.

Eovaldi (6-2) allowed six hits, struck out five and walked one, his fifth straight start of at least seven innings.

Josh Jung hit his 11th home run of his first full season in the majors to give the Rangers a five-run lead in the eighth.

Padres 7, Nationals 4: Juan Soto hit his ninth homer and had three hits to begin a three-game visit to his former team as visiting San Diego beat Washington.

Jake Cronenworth followed Soto’s seventh-inning solo shot with a two-run homer two batters later as the Padres scored four times off Nationals reliever Erasmo Ramirez (2-2).

Diamondbacks 4, Phillies 3: Corbin Carroll singled in the go-ahead run in the eighth inning for his third hit and visiting Arizona beat Philadelphia for its ninth victory in 11 games.

Giants 4, Twins 3: Michael Conforto doubled to spark a sixth-inning rally and hit the go-ahead two-run homer in the seventh as visiting San Francisco rallied past Minnesota.

Angels 4, Red Sox 0: Mike Trout hit a two-run homer and Griffin Canning allowed two hits in seven innings as host Los Angeles beat Boston.

Rockies 5, Marlins 4: Charlie Blackmon doubled in a four-run

fifth inning, Jurickson Profar extended his on-base streak to 31 games and host Colorado spoiled 20-year-old Eury Pérez’s road debut for Miami.

Mariners 3, Athletics 2: J.P. Crawford and Ty France hit back-to-back home runs in a three-run fifth inning, and host Seattle sent Oakland to its sixth straight loss and 14th in 16 games.

Cubs 7, Mets 2: Christopher Morel, Matt Mervis and Seiya Suzuki homered and host Chicago ended New York’s five-game winning streak.

Brewers 6, Astros 0: Joey Wiemer and Owen Miller homered, Colin Rea combined with four relievers on a five-hitter and host Milwaukee stopped Houston’s eight-game winning streak.

White Sox 4, Guardians 2: Romy González’s two-run double off rookie starter Logan Allen (1-2) broke a 2-2 seventh-inning tie and sent visiting Chicago past Cleveland.

Cardinals 8, Reds 5: Paul Goldschmidt homered in his first two at-bats and visiting St. Louis’ Adam Wainwright beat Cincinnati for the first time since 2019.

Royals 4, Tigers 1: Maikel Garcia had three hits, an RBI and a run and host Kansas City beat Detroit to snap a four-game skid.

Olympics organizers defend Paris ticket prices

Associated Press

Organizers of the Paris Olympics said they have sold 6.8 million tickets out of 10 million available with 14 months left before the opening ceremony, and on Tuesday brushed off criticism that prices are too high.

Tony Estanguet, the organizing committee president, said the second ticketing phase that ended last week exceeded expectations despite some fans — and athletes — denouncing the hefty prices.

The most expensive tickets are about \$2,914 for the opening ceremony, and the

sports with the highest prices are the track and field, swimming and basketball finals. The cheapest tickets are less than \$26 and were quickly snapped up, leaving just 200,000 low-cost seats available in a later round to the frustration of many buyers.

A key goal was to keep a large amount of tickets affordable, said Estanguet, citing that the 5.3% of tickets that cost about \$432 each are guaranteeing that four million seats can be bought for about \$54 or less.

“There is a very big appetite among the public, French and international,” Estanguet said. “It is an important success in

terms of sales. It’s rather a good news for the Paris 2024 Games.”

A total of 5.2 million tickets have been sold to the general public across the first two phases — with 1.6 million going to corporate partners and others.

“Our goal was to sell 1.5 million tickets, and we were more successful than expected,” Estanguet said.

Some 610,000 seats were sold at nearly \$26 each, he added. More tickets will be put on the market this summer, without a lottery, and a resale platform is set to open in 2024.