

Israelis seize Rafah border crossing

Associated Press

CAIRO — An Israeli tank brigade seized control of Gaza's vital Rafah border crossing Tuesday as Israel brushed off urgent warnings from close allies and launched an incursion into the southern city even as cease-fire negotiations with Hamas remained on a knife's edge.

The U.N. warned of a potential collapse of the flow of aid to Palestinians from the closure of Rafah and the other main crossing into Gaza, Kerem Shalom, at a time when officials say northern Gaza is experiencing "full-blown famine."

The Israeli foray overnight came after hours of whiplash in the now 7-month-old Israel-Hamas war, with the militant group saying Monday it accepted an Egyptian-Qatari mediated cease-fire proposal. Israel, however, insisted the deal did not meet its core demands.

The high-stakes diplomatic

moves and military brinkmanship left a glimmer of hope alive — if only barely — for a deal to bring at least a pause in the war, which has killed more than 34,700 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and has devastated the Gaza Strip.

By capturing Rafah, Israel gained full control over the entry and exit of people and goods for the first time since it withdrew soldiers and settlers from Gaza in 2005, though it has long maintained a blockade of the coastal enclave in cooperation with Egypt.

The incursion appeared to be short of the full-fledged offensive into Rafah that Israel has planned and might have been a pressure tactic in the cease-fire talks.

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the capture of the crossing an "important step" toward dismantling Hamas' military and go-

verning capabilities, and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said Israel would "deepen" the Rafah operation if the talks on the hostage deal failed.

Fighting forced the evacuation of the Abu Youssef al-Najjar Hospital, one of the main medical centers that has been receiving people wounded in airstrikes on Rafah in recent weeks. It was not immediately clear how many patients had been moved to other facilities.

The looming operation threatens to widen a rift between Israel and its main backer, the United States, which says it is concerned over the fate of around 1.3 million Palestinians crammed into Rafah, most of whom have fled fighting elsewhere.

President Joe Biden warned Netanyahu again Monday against launching an invasion of the city after Israel ordered 100,000 Palestinians to evacuate from parts of Rafah. But Netan-

nyahu's far-right coalition partners have threatened to bring down his government if he calls off the offensive or makes too many concessions in cease-fire talks.

Palestinians' cheers of joy over Hamas' acceptance of the cease-fire turned to fear Tuesday. Families fled Rafah's eastern neighborhoods on foot or in vehicles and donkey carts piled with mattresses and supplies. Children watched as parents disassembled tents in the sprawling camps that have filled Rafah for months to move to their next destination — which for many remained uncertain.

Israel's 401st Brigade took "operational control" of the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing early Tuesday, the military said. Military footage showed Israeli flags flying from tanks in the area. It also said troops and airstrikes targeted suspected Hamas positions in Rafah.

Marines put new amphibious combat vehicle to work

BY JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps deployed its new amphibious combat vehicle overseas for the first time for the annual Balikatan training in the Philippines, according to a news release Tuesday.

ACVs from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit performed live-fire exercises Saturday at a waterborne range in Oyster Bay, on the island of Palawan, said the release by 15th MEU spokesman Capt. Brian Tuthill.

A platoon of combat vehicles launched from the amphibious landing ship USS Harpers Ferry in a simulated assault on

shore targets, according to the release. They use remote controlled, externally mounted Mark 19 40 mm grenade machine guns.

The crews fired training rounds that mark targets with orange chalk upon impact, instead of using high explosives, according to the Marines.

"The hard work and dedication of our Marines is what made today's training successful," 15th MEU commander Col. Sean Dynan said in the release. "Today's training is a proof of concept across the Marine Corps for successful ACV employment in its intended environment."

The ACV training took place during the Balikatan exercise, a training event involving 16,000 U.S. and Philippine troops that began April 22 and concludes Friday.

This year's exercise plays out following escalating attempts by Chinese coast guard vessels to interfere with the Philippines' resupply of an outpost on Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea, west of Palawan.

The mock assault marks the first operational use overseas of the ACV, which replaced the Corps' amphibious assault vehicles after the accidental deaths of nine Marines off the Southern

California coast in July 2020.

BAE Systems of York, Pa., developed the ACV under a \$67 million contract in June 2019. The following year, the company received a \$184 million contract for the vehicle's full production.

The Marine Corps announced in 2021 it would replace its aging amphibious vehicles.

The eight-wheeled ACVs move troops from ship to shore and are designed to ride the surf close to shore during assaults. They fit into the Marines' force redesign, which turns the Marine Corps into a distributed, light strike force equipped to fight across Pacific islands.

US soldier arrested in Russia for theft

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A U.S. Army staff sergeant who was visiting his girlfriend in Russia was arrested and remains in custody on charges he stole from her, U.S. officials said.

Staff Sgt. Gordon Black, 34, was detained Thursday in Vladivostok, a military and commercial port in the Pacific, and is in a pre-trial detention facility, Army spokeswoman Cynthia Smith said Tuesday in a statement. Black was assigned to Eighth Army, U.S. Forces Korea at Camp Humphreys in South Korea and was scheduled to move to Fort Cavazos, Texas,

Smith said.

Instead, Black, who is married, traveled to Russia to see a longtime girlfriend, according to officials who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss personnel details. His arrest only further complicates U.S. relations with Russia, which have grown increasingly tense over the war in Ukraine.

"Instead of returning to the continental United States, Black flew from Incheon, Republic of Korea, through China to Vladivostok, Russia, for personal reasons," Smith said. "Black did not request official clearance and [the Defense Department]

did not authorize his travel to China and Russia. There is no evidence Black intended to remain in Russia after his [permanent change of station] leave period ended."

An official from the Russian Ministry of Interior informed the U.S. Embassy in Moscow on Friday that Black was arrested Thursday for theft of personal property. Smith said there is no further information about Black's situation at this time.

"[Black] will remain in detention until his next hearing pending determination," she added.

A Russian court said Tuesday Black would be held in custody until July 2, NBC News report-

ed.

The Russian woman who Black was visiting had lived in South Korea, and last fall she and Black got into some type of domestic dispute or altercation, officials told the AP. After that, she left South Korea.

NBC News, which was the first to report the arrest, said the soldier is accused of stealing from a woman.

Black's mother, Melody Jones, told ABC's Good Morning America on Tuesday that the soldier was on a two-week leave when he traveled to Russia, and she felt he was being set up because she suspected his girlfriend was a spy.

US nuke stance unchanged after Russian drill notice

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military isn't adjusting its nuclear force posture in response to new saber-rattling from Russia, American officials said this week following the Kremlin's announcement that it will carry out strike drills in "the immediate future."

"This is an example of the kind of irresponsible rhetoric that we've seen from Russia in the past," Pentagon spokesman Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder told reporters Monday. "It's completely inappropriate given the current security situation."

Ryder's comments came hours after Moscow announced that it will launch drills that simulate missile strikes with battlefield nuclear weapons.

Tactical nuclear weapons deliver a smaller yield than strategic nuclear weapons and are intended to clear out opposing forces in more constrained area.

The drills are intended to send a signal to European lead-

ers whom Russia's defense ministry on Monday accused of escalating tensions in recent days.

The Kremlin was likely referring to French President Emmanuel Macron, who has suggested that French troops could have a role to play in Ukraine to support Kyiv in the war against Russia.

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron also has sharpened his rhetoric, saying that he backed the idea of Ukraine using missiles supplied by the U.K. to strike inside Russia.

The aim of the Kremlin's nuclear exercise is to "unconditionally ensure the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Russian state in response to provocative statements and threats by some Western officials," the Russian Defense Ministry said.

The drills will involve missile formations from Russia's Southern Military District, whose headquarters are in Rostov-on-Don, and will incorporate aircraft and naval forces.

Reagan enters 'underway period' before port shift

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The USS Ronald Reagan recently steamed out of Tokyo Bay, foreshadowing its final, impending departure from U.S. 7th Fleet.

The aircraft carrier left Yokosuka, its homeport, at approximately 10 a.m. Sunday alongside the guided-missile destroyer USS Higgins, Carrier Strike Group 5 spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Seth Koenig said by phone Tuesday.

The ship's departure is likely one of the last times it will transit the bay before it relocates sometime soon to Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Wash.

"The Ronald Reagan and Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group are proud of their service as America's only forward-deployed aircraft carrier and carrier strike group," Koenig said in an earlier email Tuesday.

"There will be additional op-

portunities to do so, but we will not pass up a chance to express our deep appreciation and gratitude to our Japanese friends and family for the strength and closeness of our alliance," he added.

Koenig declined to comment on when the Ronald Reagan will leave for Bremerton, citing concern for operational security.

He also would not say whether the carrier is undergoing sea trials, typically the last milestone before its annual, six-month patrol.

Instead, Koenig described the ship's departure as a "scheduled underway period" that includes "routine operations," he wrote.

"When we have more information to release about USS Ronald Reagan's departure," he added. "We will distribute that through the appropriate channels."

In the past, the carrier has undergone one or two weeks of trials before starting its patrol.

On stand, Daniels describes Trump tryst

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Stormy Daniels took the witness stand Tuesday at Donald Trump's hush money trial, describing for jurors a sexual encounter the porn actor says she had with him in 2006 that resulted in her being paid off to keep silent during the presidential race 10 years later.

Jurors appeared riveted as Daniels, over the repeated objections of defense lawyers and occasional admonitions from the judge, offered a detailed and at times graphic account of an encounter Trump has denied. Trump stared straight ahead as Daniels entered the courtroom, later shaking his head and whispering to his lawyers as she testified.

The testimony was by far the most-awaited spectacle in a trial that has toggled between tabloid-desque elements and dry record-keeping explanation. A courtroom appearance by a porn actor who says she had an intimate encounter with a former American president adds to the long line of historic firsts in the case, which was already laden with tawdry claims of sex, payoffs and cover-ups. It is unfolding as the presumptive Republican nominee

makes another bid for the White House.

Her statements are central to the case because in the final weeks of Trump's 2016 Republican presidential campaign, his then-lawyer and personal fixer, Michael Cohen, paid Daniels \$130,000 to keep quiet about what she says was an awkward and unexpected sexual encounter with Trump at a celebrity golf outing in Lake Tahoe in July 2006. Trump has pleaded not guilty.

Led by a prosecutor's questioning, Daniels described how an initial meeting at a golf tournament, where they discussed the adult film industry, progressed to a "brief" sexual encounter that she said Trump initiated after inviting her to dinner and back to his hotel suite.

She said she didn't feel physically or verbally threatened, though she knew his bodyguard was outside the suite, and there was what she perceived as an imbalance of power: Trump "was bigger and blocking the way."

After it ended, she said, "It was really hard to get my shoes because my hands were shaking so hard."

"He said, 'Oh, it was great. Let's get together again, honey

bunch,' " Daniels continued. "I just wanted to leave."

In the years since the encounter was disclosed, Daniels has emerged as a vocal Trump antagonist, sharing her story in a book and on television and criticizing the former president with mocking and pejorative jabs. But there was no precedent for Tuesday's events, when she came face-to-face with Trump and was asked in an austere courtroom setting to describe her experiences to a jury weighing whether to convict a former American president of felony crimes for the first time in history.

She said she met Trump because the adult film studio she worked for at the time sponsored one of the holes on the golf course. They chatted about the adult film industry and her directing abilities when Trump's group passed through. The celebrity real estate developer remarked that she must be "the smart one" if she was making films, Daniels recalled.

Later, in an area known as the "gift room," where celebrity golfers collected gift bags and swag, Trump remembered her as "the smart one" and asked her if she wanted to go to dinner, Daniels

said.

Daniels testified she accepted Trump's invite because she wanted to get out of a planned dinner with her company colleagues. She said her then-publicist suggested in a phone call that Trump's invitation was a good excuse to duck the work dinner and would "make a great story" and perhaps help her career.

"What could possibly go wrong?" she recalled the publicist saying.

After multiple discussions with the judge and Trump's lawyers out of the earshot of jurors, prosecutor Susan Hoffinger navigated her questioning about the encounter with caution, instructing her to keep her answers brief and free of extra details. Judge Juan M. Merchan repeatedly shot down Daniels' attempts to describe the encounter more vividly, striking several of her answers from the official court record.

Testimony so far has made clear that at the time of the payment to Daniels, Trump and his campaign were reeling from the Oct. 7, 2016, publication of the never-before-seen 2005 "Access Hollywood" footage in which he boasted about grabbing women's genitals without their permission.

University of Chicago clears pro-Palestinian demonstration

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Police cleared a pro-Palestinian tent encampment at the University of Chicago on Tuesday as tension ratcheted up in standoffs with demonstrators at other college campuses across the U.S. — and increasingly, in Europe.

Nearly three weeks into a movement launched by a protest at Columbia University, the Rhode Island School of Design held talks with protesters occupying a building, and MIT dealt with a new encampment on a site that was cleared but immediately retaken by demonstrators.

The confrontations come as campuses try a range of strategies

to resolve the protests against the Israel-Hamas war and clear the way for commencements.

At the University of Chicago, hundreds of protesters had gathered in an area known as the Quad for at least eight days. Campus administrators warned them Friday to leave the area or face removal.

Police in riot gear blocked access to the Quad early Tuesday as law enforcement dismantled the encampment. Officers later picked up a barricade erected to keep protesters out of the Quad and moved it toward the demonstrators. Police and protesters pushed back and forth along the barricade as the officers moved to reestablish control.

"The protesters were given an opportunity to disassemble their structures and depart the encampment, and there have been no arrests," school President Paul Alivisatos said in a message to the university community. "Where appropriate, disciplinary action will proceed."

By 7:30 a.m. Tuesday, the number of protesters had doubled to more than 200. About 30 minutes later, campus police removed a barricade and allowed protesters back into the Quad where they gathered in front of the campus administration building.

At MIT, protesters were given a Monday afternoon deadline to voluntarily leave or face suspen-

sion. Many left, according to an MIT spokesperson, who said protesters breached fencing after the arrival of demonstrators from outside the university. On Monday night, dozens of protesters remained at the encampment in a calmer atmosphere.

The student protests have spread to Europe, where they are gaining momentum. Police arrested about 125 activists Tuesday as they broke up a camp at the University of Amsterdam, and German police dismantled an occupation at Berlin's Free University. Students also have held protests or set up encampments in Finland, Denmark, Italy, Spain, France and Britain.

Ukraine: Russian plot to assassinate Zelenskyy foiled

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian counterintelligence investigators have foiled a Russian plot to assassinate President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other top military and political figures, Ukraine's state security service said Tuesday.

Two colonels in the State Guard of Ukraine, which protects top officials, were detained on suspicion of enacting the plan drawn up by Russia's Federal Security Service, a statement said.

The colonels were recruited before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, according to the statement.

It quoted the head of the State Security Service, Vasyl Maliuk, as saying the plot foresaw an attack ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inauguration for a fifth term Tuesday.

Maliuk said he personally oversaw the top-secret operation to track the plot.

Ukrainian claims of Russian efforts to kill Zelenskyy are not

new. Zelenskyy said in 2022 there have been at least 10 attempts to assassinate him as the war with Russia stretches into a third year.

Also, prosecutors in Poland said last month a Polish man had been arrested on allegations of being ready to spy on behalf of Russia's military intelligence in an alleged plot to assassinate Zelenskyy.

The Ukrainian statement said the Russian intelligence agents targeting Zelenskyy sought out members of the Ukrainian military close to the president's security detail who could take the head of state hostage and later kill him.

The operation was run from Moscow, it said, providing the names of three alleged Russian spies behind the conspiracy.

The broader plan was to identify the location of senior Ukrainian officials and target them with a rocket attack, followed by drones and missiles.

The two Ukrainian colonels were arrested on suspicion of treason, which carries a life sentence, the statement said.

Second tornado in 5 weeks damages Oklahoma town

Associated Press

A tornado destroyed homes, forced the evacuation of a nursing home and toppled trees and power lines when it roared through a small Oklahoma town, one of several twisters that erupted in the central United States amid a series of powerful storms that stretched into Tuesday. At least one death was reported.

The tornado ripped through the 1,000-person town of Barnsdall, about a 40-minute drive north of Tulsa, on Monday night. It was the second tornado to hit the town in five weeks — a twister on April 1 with maximum wind speeds of 90 to 100 mph damaged homes and blew down trees and power poles in Barnsdall.

The National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center cited 17 reports of tornadoes from Monday evening through early Tuesday in the central part of the U.S. Eight of the twisters were in Oklahoma, two each in Kansas, South Dakota and Iowa, and one each in Nebraska, Missouri and Tennessee.

At least 30 to 40 homes in the Barnsdall area were damaged Monday night, the Oklahoma Highway Patrol reported, and a nursing home said it evacuated residents because a gas leak could not be turned off due to

storm damage. Numerous road closings due to debris also were reported, according to Osage County Emergency Management.

One person died in Barnsdall and at least one is missing, Barnsdall Mayor Johnny Kelley said.

"There are several homes destroyed, completely leveled," he said. "The toughest thing on me as the mayor is this is a small community. I know 75 to 80% of the people in this town."

First responders rescued about 25 people, including children, from heavily damaged homes where buildings had collapsed on or around them, Kelley said. About a half dozen people suffered injuries, including a firefighter who was taken to a hospital with chest pains, he said.

Authorities launched a secondary search Tuesday morning to find one or two people who were still missing, Kelley said.

Aerial videos from Barnsdall showed several homes reduced to piles of rubble. The powerful twister tossed vehicles, downed power lines and stripped limbs and bark from trees across the town. A 160-acre wax manufacturing facility in the community also sustained heavy damage, Kelley said.

Boeing calls off astronaut launch, cites valve issue

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Boeing called off its first astronaut launch because of a valve problem on the rocket Monday night.

The two NASA test pilots had just strapped into Boeing's Starliner capsule for a flight to the International Space Station when the countdown was halted, just two hours before the planned liftoff.

United Launch Alliance CEO

Tory Bruno said an oxygen pressure-relief valve on the upper stage of the company's Atlas rocket started fluttering open and closed, creating a loud buzz.

The valve may have exceeded its 200,000 lifetime cycles, Bruno said, which means it would have to be replaced, pushing the launch into next week. But if engineers can determine the valve is still within that limit, the launch team could try again as soon as Friday.

It was the latest delay for Boeing's first crew flight, on hold for years because of capsule trouble.

Bruno said similar valve trouble had occurred in years past on a few other Atlas rockets launching satellites.

It was quickly resolved by turning the troublesome valves off and back on. But the company has stricter flight rules for astronaut flights, prohibiting valve recycling when a crew is

on board.

"And so we stayed with the rules and the procedures, and scrubbed as a result," Bruno said at a press conference.

NASA's commercial crew program manager Steve Stich acknowledged it was a tough call.

"We're taking it one step at a time, and we're going to launch when we're ready and fly when it's safe to do so," Stich told reporters.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Eight people arrested in retail theft operation

CA LOS ANGELES — Eight people have been arrested on suspicion of organized retail theft after authorities discovered several million dollars' worth of stolen medicines, cosmetics and other merchandise at multiple Los Angeles locations, L.A. County sheriff's officials announced.

The retail goods were stolen by crews of organized shoplifters at stores in California, Arizona and Nevada, according to detectives. The stolen items were then taken to various locations in L.A. County where they were sold to various "fence" operations, officials said.

The sheriff's department said they had also recovered a stolen firearm and a large sum of cash, according to a news release.

The suspects, who were not named, are being held on \$60,000 bail each.

Judge declines, for now, to lift ban on executions

KY LOUISVILLE — A Kentucky judge has declined to remove a court injunction that has blocked executions in the state for more than a decade.

Franklin County Circuit Judge Phillip Shepherd, whose order blocked Kentucky's lethal injections in 2010, wrote in a ruling he would hold off on deciding on the ban, saying there have been changes to lethal injection regulations since then. He said there may also be constitutional questions about the new regulations that have to be settled.

Kentucky prison officials

have carried out three executions since 1976, and none since 2008. There are about two dozen inmates on the state's death row.

Pastor survives shooting attempt during service

PA NORTH BRADDOCK — A man who tried to shoot a pastor during a service at a Pennsylvania church because "God told him to do it" was thwarted when his gun didn't fire and he was tackled by a congregant, authorities said.

The chaos at the Jesus' Dwelling Place Church in North Braddock took place Sunday while the service was being live-streamed, state police said in a news release.

Bernard J. Polite, 26, of Braddock, entered the church just after 1 p.m. and walked toward the front while the Rev. Glenn Germany was giving a sermon, police said. The pastor told WTAE-TV in Pittsburgh that Polite smiled at him and they made eye contact just before Polite pointed the gun at him.

Germany then ducked out of the way as a male congregant tackled Polite.

Germany and the congregant then worked together to wrest the gun away from Polite, who was soon subdued and held until state troopers arrived.

Election official is fined for fake absentee ballots

WI MADISON — A former Milwaukee election official convicted of misconduct in office and fraud for obtaining fake absentee ballots was sentenced to one year of

probation and fined \$3,000.

Kimberly Zapata, 47, also was ordered to complete 120 hours of community service.

Prosecutors charged Zapata in November 2022 with one felony count of misconduct in public office and three misdemeanor counts of election fraud. A jury in March found her guilty on all four counts.

Milwaukee County Circuit Court Judge Kori Ashley rejected an argument by Zapata's attorneys that she was acting as a whistleblower, telling her before handing down the sentence that she had ways to make her point other than breaking the law.

Speaking just before the sentence was handed down, Zapata said she regretted her actions that she said "stemmed from a complete emotional breakdown," Wisconsin Public Radio reported. She said she has autism spectrum disorder, which makes it difficult for her to regulate emotions, sensory input and thought processes.

Truck driver said to kill officer by driving into him

UT SANTAQUIN — A truck driver allegedly killed a police officer during a traffic stop on a Utah highway Sunday by driving his rig into the officer, police said.

A Santaquin police officer and a Utah Highway Patrol trooper had stopped the semi-trailer around 6:30 a.m. after somebody called 911 to report that a person was standing on the back of the rig as it was headed north on Interstate 15.

Spanish Fork police said the man began driving off during the stop, then turned the semi-

trailer around before driving the wrong way on the interstate. The rig crashed into two police cars and the Santaquin officer, who died at the scene.

Police identified the truck driver as Michael Aaron Jayne, 41.

Authorities have not released the Santaquin officer's name.

"Our entire department is hurt. And the family of the officer is hurt because of a senseless act by one individual," Spanish Fork police Lt. Cory Slaymaker said during a news conference.

The stop occurred on I-15 in Santaquin, a town of about 14,000 people 65 miles south of Salt Lake City.

Timeline, cost estimate, for rebuilding bridge set

MD ANNAPOLIS — Maryland plans to rebuild the Francis Scott Key Bridge in just over four years at an estimated cost between \$1.7 billion and \$1.9 billion, a state transportation official said.

As salvage efforts continue, authorities also announced they had recovered the body of a fifth person who died in the March 26 collapse.

The state plans to build a new span by fall of 2028, said David Broughton, a spokesman for the Maryland Department of Transportation. He said the cost estimate is preliminary, and detailed engineering specifics have not been confirmed.

Six members of a roadwork crew plunged to their deaths on March 26 when a container ship lost power and crashed into one of the bridge's supporting columns.

— From wire reports

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T-wolves rout Nuggets, take 2-0 lead

Associated Press

DENVER — The Minnesota Timberwolves, led by Anthony Edwards and Karl-Anthony Towns, overpowered the Denver Nuggets on Monday night in a stunningly efficient 106-80 thrashing of the reigning but reeling NBA champions.

"We've had some really good defensive efforts this year," Wolves coach Chris Finch said after his team took a surprising 2-0 lead in the Western Conference semifinals. "That has to be right up there with the best of them."

The Wolves held Denver to an ugly 29-for-83 shooting night, and the most impressive thing about that was the absence of their best defender, 7-foot-1 center Rudy Gobert, who was back in Minneapolis for the birth of his son.

Gobert's fingerprints were all over this masterpiece, Finch suggested.

"Rudy's driven the defensive culture here. I think it's a testament to his impact, his presence and what he's infused into the

team of how important defense is and how great it can be when we play it," Finch said. "That aside, we expect to win no matter who's with us and who's not."

Towns and Edwards both scored 27 points as the Wolves improved to 6-0 in the playoffs and gave themselves a chance to close out the fuming Nuggets with wins Friday night and Sunday in Minneapolis.

So flustered were the Nuggets by the second quarter that coach Michael Malone threw a fit at an official and scuffling point guard Jamal Murray threw a heat pack on the court in frustration as Towns was about to score on a layup.

Malone said he had no idea it was Murray who tossed the heat pack, saying, "I knew a heating pack was on the floor, but it was not in my field of vision."

Nor did the officials see him throw it, added crew chief Marc Davis.

"We weren't aware it had come from the bench. If we would have been aware it came

from the bench, we could have reviewed it under the hostile act trigger. The penalty would have been a technical foul," Davis told a pool reporter.

Finch said he knew only that the heat pack had come from the Nuggets' bench.

"We tried to impress upon (the officials) that there's probably not many fans in the building that have a heat pack. So, it probably had to come from the bench, which they found logical," Finch said. "But yeah, it's inexcusable and dangerous."

Murray, who has shot 9-for-32 in this series, left Ball Arena without comment for the second straight game. He is likely to be fined by the NBA for his actions.

Aaron Gordon led Denver with 20 points, Nikola Jokic had 16 points and 16 rebounds but their third-leading scorer was sub Justin Holliday with 13 points. Murray scored eight points on 3-for-18 shooting.

Kyle Anderson replaced Gobert in the starting lineup and had eight assists and nine re-

bounds and reserves Naz Reid and Nickeil Alexander-Walker both scored 14.

During a 43-18 first-half flourish by the Timberwolves — Edwards was on the bench for much of it, no less — the Nuggets grew so frustrated that Malone ran way out onto the court and got in Davis' face for an extended blowup during a timeout but avoided a technical.

"Although Coach Malone was visibly upset about both his team and the officials, I did not hear him say anything unsportsmanlike that warranted a technical foul," Davis explained.

Frustrated by their slow starts — the Nuggets have trailed by double digits in six of their seven playoff games and by nine in the other — Malone challenged his team to get off to a strong start for once.

Only Gordon heeded his coach's call, scoring 13 quick points, including a 3-pointer that brought the Nuggets to 18-17 late in the first quarter.

Things unraveled for Denver after that.

Brunson, Knicks rally past Pacers to open East semis

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jalen Brunson doesn't go into a game aiming to score 40 points more consistently than anyone in the postseason since Michael Jordan.

He only cares about winning games, so a late defensive stop is just as important to him as any of his shots.

"The little things can go a long way," Brunson said. "So yeah, the 40 points are cool and all, but it's the little things that help us win games like that. So I'm just happy to have the group of guys that I do."

And the New York Knicks are sure thrilled to have him.

Brunson scored 43 points, becoming the fourth player in

NBA history with four straight 40-point games in the postseason, and the Knicks beat the Indiana Pacers 121-117 on Monday night in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference semifinals.

Brunson had 21 in the fourth quarter, rallying the Knicks after they trailed by nine early in the period, and joined Hall of Famers Jerry West, who had six consecutive 40-point games in the postseason, and Michael Jordan and Bernard King (both with four).

Donte DiVincenzo hit the tie-breaking 3-pointer with 40 seconds remaining and scored 25 for the Knicks, who opened the second round with the type of close finish that marked many of the games in their first-round

victory over Philadelphia.

The Pacers then cut it to one, but Myles Turner was called for an offensive foul when DiVincenzo ran into him.

"I just think the way they work, they've invested a lot into this season and they put a lot into each and every day," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said. "So, when you make that commitment to each other, you're not going to give in, you're going to keep fighting. And that's the great fight. We know we're short-handed. So that's our way."

Josh Hart added a playoff career-high 24 points and added 13 rebounds and eight assists.

Turner scored 23 points for the sixth-seeded Pacers, who

got strong play from their bench and were in good shape to follow their first-round ouster of Milwaukee by jumping to the lead against the Knicks.

But Brunson guided New York through another tight finish, after it outscored Philadelphia by one total point over six games in the first round.

"Playing in an arena like this, having it come down to the last couple of possessions on the road in the playoffs, what more can you ask for?" Pacers guard T.J. McConnell said. "The ball didn't bounce our way. We just got to adjust and fix some things."

Pascal Siakam scored 19 for Indiana and McConnell added 18

Wheeler, Harper lead Phils to sweep Giants

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Zack Wheeler struck out 11 in seven innings, Bryce Harper hit a three-run homer and Kyle Schwarber added a solo shot to help the Philadelphia Phillies complete a four-game sweep of the San Francisco Giants with a 6-1 win on Monday.

Harper went deep off Giants rookie Mason Black, spoiling the major league debut of the Giants right-hander, who pitched into the fifth inning against the team he grew up rooting for.

"I hope he enjoyed it with his family and his teammates and everything else, because you only get one debut," Harper said.

This season's Phillies are winning as much as the ones Black cheered for as a kid.

The major league-leading Phillies (25-11) won their sixth straight and have won 10 of 11 and 17 of 20 to open a three-game lead over Atlanta in the NL East.

The Phillies have also won 10 straight games at Citizens Bank Park, just two wins shy of matching the team record set in 2012. Philadelphia also set a franchise record with 11 straight wins against NL West opponents.

"I feel like we're winning in different ways every night. And it's a different player coming up huge, whether it's a hitter, a pitcher. It's never the same guy, which is nice," catcher J.T. Realmuto said. "There's not too much pressure on one player. We all feel like we play really well together and we have a lot of fun, and guys contribute on a nightly basis."

Harper homered for the second straight game and his eighth of the season made it 4-0 against Black (0-1). Black made his major league debut in front of his parents, younger brother, girlfriend and scores of friends and relatives who

made the trip to watch him pitch against his boyhood favorite team.

The 24-year-old Black — named the seventh-best prospect in baseball, per MLB.com — was the Giants' third-round pick in the 2021 draft out of Lehigh University. Black recorded a 1-2-3 first inning that included strikeouts of Realmuto and Harper, the latter caught looking at an 88 mph changeup.

Black gave up eight hits, five runs and three walks. He struck out four in 4 1/3 innings.

Wheeler (4-3) showed the rookie how it is done. He rebounded from an 0-3 start — he allowed six runs total in his first three starts — to win his fourth straight start. Wheeler allowed one run, walked one and lowered his ERA to 1.64.

"Wheels today did what Zack kind of does every time he goes out there. It was fun to watch and kept us in the game," Harper said.

Matt Strahm tossed a scoreless eighth and Orion Kerker pitched the ninth to complete the five-hitter.

With shortstop Trea Turner out at least six weeks with a left hamstring strain, his replacements are starting to fill the void. Bryson Stott moved from second base to shortstop and made a great grab on a grounder by Wilmer Flores in the first to start an inning-ending double play. Whit Merrifield started at second and gave the Phillies a 1-0 lead with an RBI single in the fourth.

Rangers 4, Athletics 2: Corey Seager hit a three-run homer in the eighth inning and visiting Texas rallied past Oakland.

The defending World Series champions were trailing 2-0 until Seager drilled a full-count pitch from Lucas Erceg (1-2) over the right-center wall with two outs. Texas added an insurance run in the ninth on an error by first baseman Tyler Nevin.

Kirby Yates got three outs for his sixth save.

The A's, who are leaving Oakland at the end of this season for Sacramento while they await a new stadium in Las Vegas, drew a season-low 2,895 fans at the Coliseum.

Texas has won four of five, and tied a season high with its three-game win streak. The A's have dropped two in a row after winning six straight.

Dodgers 6, Marlins 3: Shohei Ohtani continued his power surge with his fourth home run in three games and host Los Angeles defeated Miami in Walker Buehler's first start in nearly two years.

Buehler went four innings, allowing three runs and six hits with four strikeouts. He threw 77 pitches, including 49 strikes.

Guardians 2, Tigers 1: José Ramírez hit a solo homer in the sixth inning, breaking Hall of Famer Larry Doby's franchise record with his 87th career go-ahead blast and lifting host Cleveland to a win over Detroit.

Ramírez's drive off starter Jack Flaherty (0-2) hit the foul pole in right field, snapping a 1-all tie that had stood since the first. The Guardians have the second-best record in the AL at 23-12.

Pirates 4, Angels 1: Edward Olivares hit his first career grand slam and Mitch Keller pitched a five-hitter to lead host Pittsburgh to a victory over Los Angeles.

Olivares' slam came off Tyler Anderson in the third inning to break a scoreless tie as the Pirates went on to their third consecutive victory. The Angels lost for the 14th time in 17 games.

Rays 8, White Sox 2: Jonny DeLuca continued his hot stretch with a homer and four RBIs, and host Tampa Bay beat Chicago for its fourth consecutive win.

DeLuca had a two-run single in a three-run second against Mike Clevinger, and hit a two-

run drive off Jared Shuster during a three-run fifth that made it 7-2.

Royals 3, Brewers 2: Michael Massey homered and Maikel Garcia singled in two runs in a three-run seventh inning as host Kansas City rallied past Milwaukee.

Cole Ragans allowed two runs on two hits in six innings for the Royals, striking out eight. Nick Anderson (2-1) pitched a scoreless seventh. Tyler Duffey and Will Smith got through the eighth — helped by catcher Salvador Perez, who threw out Jackson Chourio trying to steal third — and Chris Stratton worked the ninth for his second save.

Twins 3, Mariners 1: Simeon Woods Richardson struck out a career-high eight in six shutout innings of one-hit ball, and host Minnesota scored twice in the seventh to beat Seattle in the opener of their four-game series.

Woods Richardson issued just one walk. He struck out five of the first six batters he faced and had seven strikeouts through three innings. The only hit he permitted was a lead-off single by Mitch Garver in the third.

Padres 6, Cubs 3: Yu Darvish pitched five scoreless innings and Luis Campusano drove in three runs to lift visiting San Diego over Chicago.

Campusano, Xander Bogaerts, Jake Cronenworth and Donovan Solano each had two hits as the Padres won for the fifth time in six games. Robert Suarez got five outs for his 11th save in 11 opportunities.

Mets 4, Cardinals 3: Brandon Nimmo hit a tiebreaking homer in the seventh inning that sent visiting New York to a victory over St. Louis.

Sean Manaea (2-1) pitched six effective innings and Edwin Díaz rebounded from a blown save Sunday as the Mets bounced back from a weekend sweep at Tampa Bay.

Bruins roll past Panthers in Game 1

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — The sellout crowd in Florida was absolutely raucous during the playing of the national anthem. Singing it loudly, yelling at times, the energy in the building was palpable.

Boston goalie Jeremy Swayman looked around at those fans during the song, a most confident look upon his face. It was almost like he knew he was going to keep them quiet for the majority of the remainder of the evening.

And that's exactly what he did.

Swayman's brilliant postseason continued by stopping 38 shots, Brandon Carlo scored a goal just a few hours after his wife gave birth to their son and the Bruins topped the Panthers 5-1 in Game 1 of their second-round playoff series Monday night.

"I was just so impressed by the way all of us didn't take no

for an answer," Swayman said. "The physicality, the mental and everything was so good to see and I'm really excited for what's to come."

Morgan Geekie, Mason Lohrei, Justin Brazeau and Jake DeBrusk also had goals for Boston, which improved to 5-0-0 against the Panthers this season. Pavel Zacha had a pair of assists for the Bruins, who scored three times in the final 7:08 of the second period to erase a 1-0 deficit and seize control.

Swayman has been in net for all five of Boston's wins so far in these playoffs and was stellar yet again — just as he was against Toronto in a Round 1 series that ended with a Game 7 overtime thriller on Saturday night. He stopped all seven shots he saw on Florida's three power plays, improving the best stats of any netminder so far in these playoffs.

Through seven playoff ap-

pearances, Swayman has made a league-best 210 saves with a most-stingy goals-against average of 1.42.

"We made a lot of mistakes," Bruins coach Jim Montgomery said. "If not for Jeremy Swayman, that would have been a lot closer game and maybe they come out on top."

Matthew Tkachuk had the goal for Florida, which has rallied from a 1-0 deficit to win an NHL playoff series only twice in nine previous opportunities — one of those was last year against Boston in Round 1. Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 24 shots for the Panthers, who were playing for the first time in a week.

Game 2 is in Sunrise on Wednesday night.

"I didn't care for our game," Panthers coach Paul Maurice said. "And I think we can fix a big chunk of the things we didn't like."

It was the first one-sided

game of the five this season between the clubs who finished 1-2 — Florida first with 110 points, Boston second with 109 points — in the Atlantic Division. Boston won them all in the regular season, three by one goal and the other by two, but Florida was either tied or ahead in those games 78% of the time.

This one was different. Once Boston got the lead, the Bruins — who have now successfully rallied from deficits of 1-0 in four of the five games with Florida this season — went completely airtight defensively.

"We made some mistakes and probably weren't as hard as we needed to be tonight," Tkachuk said. "And they played well."

Swayman gave up the game's first goal to Tkachuk, the Florida star's fourth of the postseason, midway through the second after he and Bobrovsky were in a goalie's duel for the first 31 minutes. He didn't deal with the deficit for long.

Penske suspends 4 from team over cheating scandal

Associated Press

Roger Penske on Tuesday said he has suspended the president of Team Penske along with three others for two races for their roles in the cheating scandal that has rocked IndyCar ahead of the Indianapolis 500.

Penske said in an interview with The Associated Press that a review done by his general counsel found that the team had no "malicious intent by anyone" and chalked up the incident as a breakdown in internal processes and miscommunication.

He also said he remains committed to reigning Indianapolis 500 winner Josef Newgarden and is actively trying to sign the two-time IndyCar champion to a contract extension.

"We're the same company we have been for 50 years and I'm going to hold my head high,"

Penske told the AP. "This is an unfortunate situation and when you're the leader, you have to take action. We've done that and we're going to move on. I am not trying to run a popularity contest."

Tim Cindric, who oversees all of Team Penske's operations and is the strategist for Newgarden, is the top name to receive a two-race suspension.

Also suspended was team managing director Ron Ruzewski, Newgarden engineer Luke Mason and senior data engineer Robbie Atkinson.

Penske told the AP that Cindric and Ruzewski "raised their hands as the team leaders" to accept responsibility for the mess.

"For Ron and I as leaders of this team, it's not about what we did, it's about what we didn't do.

It is our responsibility to provide the team and all our drivers with the right processes to ensure something like this can't happen," Cindric said in a statement. "For that, I apologize to Roger, our team and everyone that supports us. Our number one job is to protect and enhance the reputation of our brand and that of those that support us."

"In that regard, as the overall leader, I failed, and I must raise my hand and be accountable with the others. This is a team, and in my position, it's the right thing to do."

Ruzewski and Atkinson both work on Will Power's car — Ruzewski is his strategist — and Power is the only of the three Penske drivers not accused of any wrongdoing in the push-to-pass scandal. Penske acknowl-

edged that Power had done nothing wrong and said the suspensions to his crew members were based solely on their roles within the team.

None of Scott McLaughlin's team members were punished.

The suspensions are for two races, which cover this weekend's event on the Indianapolis Motor Speedway road course and the Indy 500, which Penske is trying to win for a record-extending 20th time.

"That's a big deal, a significant impact to the team, to the individuals involved," Penske told the AP of the Indy 500 being included in the suspensions. "I talked to all of them and the goal was, 'How can we move forward and be competitive and win? Win the next two races?' That was the feeling I had when I left the meeting."