

## Special ops learn do more with less

*Associated Press*

FORT LIBERTY, N.C. — Forced to do more with less and learning from the war in Ukraine, U.S. special operations commanders are juggling how to add more high-tech experts to their teams while still cutting their forces by about 5,000 troops over the next five years.

The conflicting pressures are forcing a broader restructuring of the commando teams, which are often deployed for high-risk counterterrorism missions and other sensitive operations around the world. The changes under consideration are being influenced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, including lessons learned by British special operations forces there.

U.S. Army Special Operations Command, which bears the brunt of the personnel cuts, is eyeing plans to increase the size of its Green Beret teams — usually about 12 members — to

bring in people with more specialized and technical abilities. One possibility would be the addition of computer software experts who could reprogram drones or other technical equipment on the fly.

But similar changes could ripple across all the military.

"A 12-person detachment might be upgunned," said Gen. Bryan Fenton, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command. He said an Air Force pilot, Navy ship driver, cryptologist or cyber expert may be needed as battlefields become more challenging and high tech.

The United States is "taking a lot of lessons learned out of the experience in Ukraine, mostly through the eyes of our U.K. special operations partners, who not only have done that in their formations, but they've also learned very quickly that they needed other elements of their joint force," he said.

As an example, he said British commandos needed Royal Air Force pilots to help advise on drone operations and Royal Navy teammates "to help them understand, more than a SOF (special operations forces) teammate could, the way a ship in the Black Sea navigates."

The bulk of the cuts stem from the Army's decision to reduce the size of its force by about 24,000 and restructure its troops as the U.S. shifts from counterterrorism and counterrinsurgency to focus more on large-scale combat operations. The Army also has struggled to meet recruitment goals and had to reduce the overall size.

Army Special Operations Command, which Fenton said is absorbing about 4,000 cuts ordered over the past year and a half, is looking at bringing in people with high-tech skills.

"I think one of the questions is how much can you teach a

Green Beret versus some of these specialties are extremely technical," said Maj. Gen. Patrick Roberson, deputy commander of the command at Fort Liberty in North Carolina. "You can teach a person about how to use a drone. But then to say, I want to have a software engineer program that drone, that's something different."

The cuts to Army special operations forces have triggered some congressional opposition, including during recent Capitol Hill hearings where lawmakers noted the impact at Fort Liberty. Fenton also spoke at the hearings about the growing demand for special operations forces.

He said U.S. regional commanders around the world consistently want more and that cutting the forces means "we'll be able to meet less of what they demand. And I think we owe the secretary of defense our assessment as we go forward."

## Remote towns in Philippines to host US forces

*Associated Press*

SANTA ANA, Philippines — The far-flung coastal town of Santa Ana in the northeastern tip of the Philippine mainland has long been known by tourists mostly for its beaches, waterfalls, fireflies and a few casinos.

But that's changing after the laid-back town of about 35,000 people, which still has no traffic light, became strategically important to America.

The United States and the Philippines, which are longtime treaty allies, have identified Santa Ana in northern Cagayan province as one of nine mostly rural areas where rotating

batches of American forces could encamp indefinitely and store their weapons and equipment on local military bases under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement.

Thousands of U.S. forces withdrew from two huge Navy and Air Force bases in the Philippines in the early 1990s at the end of the Cold War, ending nearly a century of American military presence in the country. In recent years, Washington has been reinforcing an arc of military alliances in Asia to counter an increasingly assertive China, which it now regards as its greatest security

challenge.

That dovetails with Philippine efforts to bolster its external defenses after an alarming spate of territorial hostilities with Beijing in the South China Sea that started last year. The high seas confrontations have injured several Filipino navy personnel, damaged their boats and strained diplomatic ties.

The remote town of Santa Ana is caught in the geopolitical rivalry between Washington and Beijing because of its strategic location. It lies across a sea border from Taiwan, the self-governing island that China regards as a renegade province to

be reclaimed by force if necessary. The U.S. has vowed to defend the territory.

Some villagers in Santa Ana have expressed apprehension over the prospect of living near U.S. forces. Their governor, Manuel Mamba, has vehemently opposed the looming U.S. military presence, saying it would turn Cagayan into a military target of China.

Other villagers have said the Philippines needs the Americans as a crucial counterweight to China, which they say has been using its military might to threaten Manila's territorial interests in the South China Sea.

# US military to boost Okinawa drone fleet

By SETH ROBSON  
AND KEISHI KOJA

*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The U.S. military drone presence on Okinawa is growing with the deployment of a pair of Navy MQ-4C Triton maritime surveillance aircraft, according to the Japanese government.

The Guam-based Tritons will fly out of Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, between this month and October, a spokeswoman for Okinawa

prefecture's Military Base Affairs Division said by phone Monday.

Some Japanese government officials may speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

The drones will "conduct intelligence missions in the Nansei region and its surrounding areas, strengthening surveillance and reconnaissance," she said. The Nansei islands stretch from Kyushu — the southernmost of Japan's main islands — to Taiwan.

China in recent years has stepped up challenges to its neighbors' maritime claims in the East and South China seas. Its coast guard frequently enters waters claimed by Japan around the Senkakus.

U.S. military officials on Okinawa referred queries about the drones to U.S. 7th Fleet, based at Yokosuka Naval Base, south of Tokyo, which did not immediately respond to emailed questions Monday.

The date when the Tritons will arrive on Okinawa hasn't been released, the Japanese official said.

The drones will have limited impact on Okinawans since they will mostly fly over water and make less noise than other Kadena aircraft, she said.

The Triton, made by U.S. aerospace company Northrop Grumman, has previously deployed to Misawa Air Base in northeastern Japan.

## Seoul: N. Korea destroys station that served S. Korean tourists

By DAVID CHOI

*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea demolished a South Korean-funded fire station that briefly served tourists at a mountain just north of the border between the two countries, according to the South's Ministry of Unification.

The two-story fire station on 5,400-foot Mount Kumgang, near North Korea's eastern coast, was demolished in late April, ministry spokesman Koo Byung-sam said during a news conference Friday.

"The government expresses deep regret over North Korea unilaterally dismantling the fire station and sternly urges the North to immediately suspend all such actions," the ministry said in a statement that day. "North Korea's unilateral dismantlement cannot be justified under any pretext."

Mount Kumgang, or Diamond Mountain, served as a symbol of unity on the Korean Peninsula in the late 1990s.

The two countries allowed South Korean

citizens to tour the mountain starting in 1998 to promote inter-Korean relations and economic exchanges. The \$1.6 million fire station, funded entirely by South Korea, finished construction on July 8, 2008, to serve the visiting South Koreans, according to the ministry's statement.

Three days later, North Korean troops shot and killed a 53-year-old South Korean woman they said had exited the tourist zone and entered a restricted area. The South ceased tourist trips to the mountain.

The unification ministry described the shooting as "wrong in the light not only of inter-Korean relations but also of international norms" and urged the North to cooperate in its investigation, according to a statement on Aug. 4, 2008.

"The [South Korean] government cannot allow tourists to visit [Mount Kumgang] unless the case is resolved and tourists' security is guaranteed," the ministry said in 2008.

North Korea declined to conduct a joint

investigation and blamed the South for the incident, then-South Korean Prime Minister Han Seung-soon said at the time.

North Korea has demolished other buildings and areas that served South Korean tourists at the mountain, including a golf course. The Haegumgang Hotel, a South Korean-owned floating hotel docked in the North's eastern coast, was demolished in 2022, according to the unification ministry.

South and North Korean officials also held talks at the mountain to reunite families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War. The South Korean building that hosted the reunions appeared intact as of Friday, Koo said during that day's news conference.

Pyeongyang has destroyed other reconciliatory symbols amid its strained relations with the South. The two Koreas in December scrapped their five-year military deconfliction agreement after the North launched a military reconnaissance satellite the previous month.

## Japanese police hold Marine for allegedly fleeing head-on crash

By JONATHAN SNYDER  
AND KEISHI KOJA

*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Japanese police arrested a U.S. Marine on suspicion of fleeing the scene of a head-on vehicle collision over the weekend.

Cpl. Abel Reyes, 22, of Camp Foster, was still in custody

Monday, an Okinawa prefectural police spokesman said.

The incident occurred at 3:37 a.m. Sunday on Route 85 in the Yaeshima district of Okinawa city.

Reyes is a transmissions system operator with 12th Marine Littoral Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, according to a Marine

Corps photo released in March.

Police said Reyes, driving a Toyota Altezza sedan in the wrong lane, collided head-on with a northbound truck driven by a local man, age 53.

The Marine's passenger, a local woman, was treated at an area hospital, the spokesman said. Neither Reyes nor the oth-

er driver were injured.

No alcohol was detected in Reyes' system, according to police.

Reyes fled on foot but a witness followed him to a parking lot not far from the scene, where he was arrested at 5:10 a.m., the police spokesman said.

# 'You handle it': Cohen implicates Trump

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Donald Trump's fixer-turned-foe, Michael Cohen, directly implicated the former president in a hush money scheme Monday, telling jurors that his celebrity client approved hefty payouts to stifle stories about sex that he feared could be harmful to his 2016 White House campaign.

"You handle it," Cohen quoted Trump as telling him after learning that a doorman had come forward with a claim that Trump had fathered a child out-of-wedlock. The Trump Tower doorman was paid \$30,000 to keep the story "off the market" even though the claim was ultimately deemed unfounded.

A similar episode occurred after Cohen alerted Trump that a Playboy model was alleging that she and Trump had an extramarital affair. Again, the order was clear: "Make sure it doesn't get released," Cohen said Trump told

him. The woman, Karen McDougal, was paid \$150,000 in a hush money arrangement that was made after Trump was given a "complete and total update on everything that transpired."

"What I was doing was at the direction of and benefit of Mr. Trump," Cohen testified.

Cohen, Trump's former lawyer and personal fixer, is by far the Manhattan district attorney's most important witness in the case, and his appearance on the stand signaled that the first criminal trial of a former American president is entering its final stretch.

The testimony of a witness with such intimate knowledge of Trump's activities could heighten the legal exposure of the presumptive Republican presidential nominee if jurors deem him sufficiently credible. But prosecutors' reliance on a witness with such a checkered past — Cohen pleaded guilty to federal charges

related to the payments — also carries sizable risks with a jury. In addition, it could be a boon to Trump politically as he raises money off his legal woes and paints the case as the product of a tainted criminal justice system.

Though jurors have heard from others about the tabloid industry practice of "catch-and-kill," in which rights to a story are purchased so that it can then be quashed, Cohen's testimony is crucial to prosecutors because of his proximity to Trump and because he has said he was in direct communication with the then-candidate about embarrassing stories he was scrambling to prevent from surfacing.

Besides payments to the doorman and to McDougal, another sum went to porn actor Stormy Daniels, who told jurors last week that the \$130,000 she received was meant to prevent her from going public about a sexual encounter she says she had with

Trump in a hotel suite in 2006.

Cohen also matters because the reimbursements he received from that payment form the basis of the charges against Trump — 34 felony counts of falsifying business records. Prosecutors have said the reimbursements were logged, falsely, as legal expenses to conceal the payments' true purpose.

Cohen gave jurors an insider account of his negotiations with David Pecker, the then-publisher of the National Enquirer, and the newspaper's top editor about suppressing stories harmful to Trump, an effort that took on added urgency following the October 2016 disclosure of an "Access Hollywood" recording in which Trump was heard boasting about grabbing women sexually.

Defense lawyers have teed up a bruising cross-examination of Cohen, telling jurors during opening statements that he's an "admitted liar" with an "obsession to get President Trump."

## Citing cartels comments, more SD tribes ban Noem

Associated Press

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem is now banned from entering nearly 20% of her state after two more tribes banished her in recent days over comments she made earlier this year about tribal leaders benefiting from drug cartels.

The latest developments in the ongoing tribal dispute come on the heels of the backlash Noem faced for writing about killing a hunting dog that misbehaved in her latest book. It is not clear how these controversies will affect her chances to become Donald Trump's running mate because it is hard to predict what the former president will do.

The Yankton Sioux Tribe voted Friday to ban Noem from their land in southeastern South Dakota just a few days after the Sisseton-Wahpeton Ovate tribe took

the same action. The Oglala, Rosebud, Cheyenne River and Standing Rock Sioux tribes had already taken action to keep her off their reservations. Three other tribes haven't yet banned her.

Noem reinforced the divisions between the tribes and the rest of the state in March when she said tribal leaders were catering to drug cartels on their reservations while neglecting the needs of children and the poor.

"We've got some tribal leaders that I believe are personally benefiting from the cartels being there, and that's why they attack me every day," Noem said at a forum. "But I'm going to fight for the people who actually live in those situations, who call me and text me every day and say, 'Please, dear governor, please come help us in Pine Ridge. We are scared.'"

## Report: Guns thefts from cars skyrocketing in US

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The rate of guns stolen from cars in the United States has tripled over the last decade, making them the largest source of stolen guns in the country, an analysis of FBI data by the gun safety group Everytown found.

The rate of stolen guns from cars climbed nearly every year and spiked during the coronavirus pandemic along with a major surge in weapons purchases in the U.S., according to the report, which analyzes FBI data from 337 cities in 44 states and was provided to The Associated Press.

The stolen weapons have, in some cases, turned up at crime scenes. In July 2021, a gun taken from an unlocked car in Riverside, Fla., was used to kill a 27-year-old Coast Guard member as she tried to stop a car burglary in

her neighborhood.

The alarming trend underscores the need for Americans to safely secure their firearms to prevent them from getting into the hands of dangerous people, said Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Director Steve Dettelbach, whose agency has found links between stolen guns and violent crimes.

"People don't go to a mall and steal a firearm from a locked car to go hunting. Those guns are going straight to the street," said Dettelbach, whose agency was not involved in the report.

Nearly 112,000 guns were reported stolen in 2022, and just over half of those were from cars, the Everytown report found. That's up from about one-quarter of all thefts in 2013, when homes were the leading spot for firearm thefts, the report says.



# More misery in Rafah as Israeli troops press on

Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip — Aid workers are struggling to distribute dwindling food and other supplies to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced by what Israel has said is a limited operation in Rafah, as the two main crossings near the southern Gaza city remain closed.

The United Nations' agency for Palestinian refugees said 360,000 Palestinians have fled Rafah over

the past week, out of 1.3 million who were sheltering there before the operation began, most of whom had already fled fighting elsewhere over the course of the 7-month war between Israel and Hamas.

Israel has portrayed Rafah as the last stronghold of the militant group, brushing off warnings from the United States and other allies that any major operation there would be catastrophic for

civilians. Hamas has meanwhile regrouped in some of the most devastated parts of Gaza that Israel had previously claimed to have cleared with heavy bombardment and ground operations.

Thirty-eight trucks of flour arrived through the Western Erez Crossing, a second access point to northern Gaza, Abeer Etefa, a spokeswoman for the U.N.'s World Food Program, said Monday. Israel had announced the

opening of the crossing on Sunday.

But no food has entered the two main crossings in southern Gaza for the past week.

The Rafah crossing into Egypt has been closed since Israeli troops seized it a week ago. Fighting in Rafah city has made it impossible for aid groups to access the nearby Kerem Shalom crossing with Israel, though Israel has said it is allowing supply trucks to enter from its side.

# Fire burns down shopping complex in Poland's capital

Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland — A major fire broke out Sunday morning in a vast shopping complex in the Polish capital that housed some 1,400 shops and service outlets, and where many of the vendors were from Vietnam.

Huge plumes of black smoke could be seen rising over the vast area. The fire department said more than 80% of the Marywilka 44 shopping complex burned in the Bialoleka district of Warsaw, and that the roof caved in.

Police reported no injuries, but traders were in despair at the loss of their livelihoods. The Gazeta Wyborcza daily reported that some Vietnamese vendors wanted to enter to save their goods from the complex, but were blocked by security guards.

The Association of Vietnamese Entrepreneurs in Poland said the blaze meant "great financial losses for merchants," calling it a "terrible tragedy for thousands of merchants and their families."

Chemical and environmental rescue specialists were among the large numbers of rescue officials who took part in the operation. Authorities sent a text message warning Warsaw residents about the fire, and telling them to stay home with the windows closed.

Warsaw police said it had begun investigating the blaze, which began at around 3:30 a.m. local time, but hadn't yet determined the cause.

# Zelenskyy: Ukrainian army locked in 'fierce' border battles

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian troops are locked in intense battles with the advancing Russian army in two border areas, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, while the death toll from a Russian apartment building collapse blamed on Ukrainian shelling rose to 15.

Zelenskyy said "fierce battles" are taking place near the border in eastern and northeastern Ukraine as outgunned and outnumbered Ukrainian soldiers try to hold back a significant Russian ground offensive.

"Defensive battles are ongoing, fierce battles, on a large part of our border area," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address Sunday.

Ukraine's general staff said late Sunday that Russian forces had conducted at least 22 attacks over the previous 24 hours in two parts of the Kharkiv re-

gion and had "tactical success." The statement did not elaborate.

The Kremlin's forces are aiming to exploit Ukrainian weaknesses before a big batch of new military aid for Kyiv from the United States and European partners arrives on the battlefield in the coming weeks and months, analysts have said. That makes this period a window of opportunity for Moscow and one of the most dangerous for Kyiv in the two-year war, they say.

The new Russian push in the northeastern Kharkiv region, along with the ongoing drive into the eastern Donetsk region, come after months when the about 620-mile front line barely budged. In the meantime, both sides have used long-range strikes in what largely became a war of attrition.

The Kharkiv incursion may be an attempt to create a "buffer

zone" to protect Belgorod, an adjacent Russian border region battered by frequent Ukrainian attacks — to the Kremlin's embarrassment. In March, Russia announced plans to evacuate about 9,000 children from the Belgorod region because it was being shelled continuously.

Russian emergency services on Monday finished clearing the rubble in the region's capital city of Belgorod, where a section of a residential building collapsed following what authorities said was Ukrainian shelling.

Fifteen bodies were pulled from the rubble, Belgorod regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said, and 27 other people were wounded.

Another three people in the city of Belgorod were killed by shelling late Sunday, he said.

Yevgeny Poddubny, a usually well-connected military corre-

spondent for Russia's state TV corporation VGTRK, said in a recent Telegram post that the Kharkiv assault marked the beginning of "a new phase."

"We're pushing the enemy back from the border, destroying the enemy in order to deprive the Kyiv regime of the opportunity to use relatively cheap rockets to attack Belgorod," he said.

Zelenskyy said fighting in the Donetsk area is "no less intense" than in Kharkiv. He said the Kremlin aimed to "spread our forces thin" by opening a second active front in Kharkiv.

He described the area around Pokrovsk region, just inside the Ukrainian border in Donetsk, as "the most difficult."

Pokrovsk was a town of around 60,000 people before the war and was, until recently, a two-hour drive from the front line. Now it is less than half that.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Woman lived inside rooftop grocery store sign**

**M** IDLAND — Contractors curious about an extension cord on the roof of a Michigan grocery store made a startling discovery: A 34-year-old woman was living inside the business sign, with enough space for a computer, printer and coffee maker, police said.

"She was homeless," Officer Brennon Warren of the Midland Police Department said. "It's a story that makes you scratch your head, just somebody living up in a sign."

The woman, whose name was not released, told police she had a job elsewhere but had been living inside the Family Fare sign for roughly a year, Warren said.

The Family Fare store is in a retail strip with a triangle-shaped sign at the top of the building. The sign structure, probably 5 feet wide and 8 feet high, has a door and is accessible from the roof, Warren said.

"There was some flooring that was laid down. A mini desk," he said. "Her clothing. A Keurig coffee maker. A printer and a computer — things you'd have in your home."

**Prosecutors: No charges in leaked racist recording**

**CA** LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles County prosecutors said they suspect a crime was committed in the recording of a racist conversation that prompted the city council president to resign, but they declined to file charges.

The Los Angeles Times reported that the district attorney's office determined that two people who previously worked at the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor lived at a home that could be traced to social media posts highlighting the controversial recording.

Prosecutors said in a memo that they would not file charges because the individuals had no prior criminal record, and their office has not pursued felony charges in similar such cases. They referred the case to the city attorney's office to consider whether to file misdemeanor charges.

**Arrest made 23 years after death of law student**

**Arrest made 23 years after death of law student**

**GA** ATHENS — More than two decades after a University of Georgia law student was found dead in her burning home, authorities have arrested a man and charged him with murder in her slaying.

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation and Athens-Clarke County police announced the arrest of Edrick Lamont Faust, 48, in the January 2001 killing of Tara Louise Baker. Firefighters responding to a blaze at Baker's apartment in Athens found the 23-year-old first-year law student's body.

Investigators determined that Baker had been killed and the fire intentionally set, and police had been trying to find Baker's killer since then. The GBI's cold case unit partnered with Athens-Clarke County police in September to do an "in-depth review and analysis" of the investigation, the GBI said in a news release.

The release did not indicate what led investigators to Faust or explain how or whether he

and Baker knew each other.

**Scores of starving, sick pelicans found on coast**

**CA** NEWPORT BEACH — Scores of sick and starving pelicans have been found in coastal California communities in recent weeks and many others have died.

Lifeguards spotted a cluster of two dozen sick pelicans earlier last week on a pier in coastal Newport Beach and called in wildlife experts to assist.

Debbie McGuire, executive director of the Wetlands and Wildlife Care Center in Huntington Beach, said the birds are the latest group that they've tried to save after taking in more than 100 other pelicans that were anemic, dehydrated and weighing only half of what they should.

"They are starving to death and if we don't get them into care, they will die," McGuire said. "It really is a crisis."

It is not immediately clear what is sickening the birds. Some wildlife experts noted the pelicans are malnourished even though marine life abounds off the Pacific Coast.

**State unfurls new flag atop capitol for 1st time**

**MN** ST. PAUL — Minnesota officially unfurled its new state flag atop the capitol for the first time on statehood day.

The new flag and accompanying state seal were adopted to replace an old design that Native Americans said reminded them of painful memories of conquest and displacement.

The new symbols eliminate

an old state seal that featured the image of a Native American riding off into the sunset while a white settler plows his field with a rifle at the ready. The seal was a key feature of the old flag.

The new design adopted in December features a dark blue shape resembling Minnesota on the left, with a white, eight-pointed North Star on it. On the right is a light blue field that to those involved in the selection process symbolizes the abundant waters that help define the Land of 10,000 Lakes.

**Missing dog named Rippy rescued from rock quarry**

**CT** NORTH CANAAN — It was the barking that saved Rippy, a mutt that fell deep into a working rock quarry.

After passersby and even a drone failed to locate the lost dog, rescue workers drawn to his barks rappelled down the pit's walls and lifted him out three days after he went missing, according to a social media post about the saga.

The 30-pound terrier mix's owner reported Rippy missing in North Canaan on May 4. A local animal shelter got first word of the barking days later.

Shelter workers asked a volunteer to fly a drone over the Specialty Minerals quarry, but they couldn't find him. When workers at the quarry went on a lunch break the next day, Rippy's barks could be heard again. Quarry managers said they couldn't reach the dog, so firefighters were called in. Two members of a rope team then rappelled off a cliff and captured the mutt.

— From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com).

Reporting  
World, National  
and Military News

# Denver win at Minnesota knots series

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — The Denver Nuggets were far from done after dropping the first two games of the Western Conference semifinals at home in humbling fashion.

Nikola Jokic scored 16 of his 35 points in the fourth quarter, and Aaron Gordon had 27 points on 11-for-12 shooting to propel the Nuggets to a series-tying 115-107 victory over the Timberwolves on Sunday night in Game 4.

“It’s just like a laser-sharp focus,” Gordon said, “and a surgical execution.”

Jamal Murray had 12 of his 19 points in the third quarter for the defending champion Nuggets in a momentum carryover from his buzzer-beating swish from behind half court, and the Wolves had the deficit below double digits in the second half for only a total of 3:19.

Anthony Edwards scored 44 points in another spectacular performance for Minnesota that set the franchise postseason rec-

ord, shooting 16-for-25. But despite a 42-31 rebounding edge, the Wolves were beaten at their own game for the second straight time at home.

“Game 2 definitely woke us up,” Murray said. “We realized we can’t hold ourselves back.”

The series goes back to Denver for Game 5 on Tuesday night.

“This is a series. We won two games, but we didn’t think it was going to be easy,” Edwards said.

Mike Conley had 15 points, Karl-Anthony Towns went just 5-for-18 from the field for 13 points and 12 rebounds, and Rudy Gobert came alive late to score 11 points and grab 14 rebounds. Still, the Wolves were on their heels at home for a second straight game.

The Nuggets scored eight straight points in 20 seconds to close the first half, highlighted by Murray’s improbable heave.

Gordon didn’t miss until there was 3:39 to go. Most importantly, he took the lead in hounding Towns and even took some turns

trying to slow Edwards.

“The shot-making, the playmaking, the physicality, the defense on two All-Stars, so much is being asked of him right now,” coach Mike Malone said. “What you love about Aaron Gordon since Day 1, when he put on that Nuggets uniform, it’s always been about the Nuggets first. He is truly selfless.”

The three off days between Games 2 and 3 did the Wolves no good, yielding a 27-point defeat after which coach Chris Finch declared them feeling “fat and lazy” after all the fawning near and far for their performance in Denver. They needed to reintroduce their edge right away to keep the crowd consistently roaring, and Edwards dutifully led that response.

The 2020 first overall draft pick scored nine points in the first four-plus minutes before Murray even touched the ball, with Gordon and Jokic sharing the point guard duties to reduce the burden on Murray’s strained left calf muscle.

After a quiet Game 3, Edwards was on a mission to will the Wolves to win, as the Nuggets fully expected. Their loading up on him in the lane wasn’t enough, as he hit from everywhere on the court, but the rest of the Wolves frequently failed to make the Nuggets pay for leaving them open.

They missed tip-ins at the rim, and not just corner 3s. Towns missed his first seven shots, and while his effort and defense never suffered, he was a mess trying to get the ball to the basket, rarely drawing the fouls he argued for.

“It’s unfortunate that on Mother’s Day I have a shooting performance like that,” Towns said.

The Wolves showed off their league-best defense and enviable depth in the first two games, but the Nuggets copied and pasted that formula on the road.

Gordon, Justin Holiday, Christian Braun and Reggie Jackson went a combined 8-for-11 from 3-point range.

## Haliburton, Pacers race past short-handed Knicks

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — After three games that went down to the wire, the Indiana Pacers were off and running early in Game 4.

The short-handed New York Knicks just didn’t have the legs to keep up.

Tyrese Haliburton scored 20 points, T.J. McConnell finished with 15 points and 10 assists and the Pacers routed the Knicks 121-89, knotting the series with the third-largest playoff victory in the franchise’s NBA history.

Game 5 will be played Tuesday at Madison Square Garden.

“All we did was do our job,” Haliburton said after finishing with six rebounds, five assists and four 3-pointers. “When you’re at home, you have to protect home court, so we did our

job. We understand the magnitude of Game 5 and we’ll be prepared for that one.”

The first three games all came down to key plays in the final three minutes.

Sunday’s provided a different twist. Indiana led by as much as 43 — the largest deficit any playoff team has faced in these playoffs.

And while the Pacers could seemingly do nothing wrong, New York couldn’t do anything right.

Pascal Siakam and Obi Toppin each scored 14 points, Aaron Nesmith grabbed 12 rebounds and Indiana shot 56.8% from the field, 45.2% on 3-pointers and erased their only deficit of the game, 2-0, just 44 seconds into the game.

The Knicks, who again played

without four key players because of injuries, looked fatigued.

Alec Burks finished with 20 points for New York. Jalen Brunson, who entered the day with a league-best 34.6 points per game in the postseason, scored only 18 on a day the Knicks shot 33.7% from the field, 18.9% on 3s and flirted with posting the worst playoff loss in franchise history. The record, 41, came at Chicago in April 1991.

Brunson wasn’t the only one struggling. Donte DiVincenzo, who had 35 points in Game 3, scored just seven Sunday. The two guards were a combined 9-for-30 from the field and 1-for-11 on 3s.

“We can talk about fresher legs and you can give us all the pity we want,” Brunson said.

“Yeah, we’re short-handed, but that doesn’t matter right now. We have what we have. So there’s no ‘we’re short-handed.’ There’s no excuse. We lose, we lose. That’s what that was.”

Once again, the Pacers fed off the energy of a nearly full Gainbridge Fieldhouse, where they are now 5-0 with Game 6 coming back to Indianapolis on Friday.

Without forwards OG Anunoby, Bojan Bogdanovic and Julius Randle as well as center Mitchell Robinson, New York produced a 14-point first quarter and a 41-point first half — its two lowest totals through the first 10 playoff games this season.

A predictable result ensued. “We started slowly, they made shots, got a big lead and it snowballed,” Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said.



# Disputed tying goal helps Panthers win

Associated Press

BOSTON — One game after Sam Bennett punched Brad Marchand out of the playoffs, the Panthers forward sent the rest of the Bruins to the brink of elimination with an equally controversial shove to Charlie Coyle's back.

Already drawing boos in the Garden because of a hit on Marchand that the Bruins are calling a sucker punch, Bennett scored the game-tying goal in Game 4 on Sunday night after sending Coyle tumbling into Boston goalie Jeremy Swayman.

The goal was upheld by the NHL replay center in Toronto, and Aleksander Barkov scored the game winner four minutes later to lead Florida to a 3-2 victory and a 3-1 lead in the Eastern Conference semifinal series.

"I'm putting that puck in before Swayman's going to be able to get over there, whether Coyle was on him or not. So, I think

that's the reason why it stood," Bennett said. "And that's how I saw it, as well."

A year after Florida knocked out the record-setting Bruins in the first round on its way to the Stanley Cup Final, the Panthers won their third straight to send Boston one game from elimination. Florida rallied from a two-goal deficit and took the lead with 13 minutes left when Barkov slipped through three Bruins defenders for the tie-breaking goal.

"It's so much fun to watch Barky play hockey," Bennett said. "For anyone else, that's a career highlight goal. And for him, it's just another day in the office. Pretty remarkable what he can do."

Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 16 shots and Anton Lundell also scored for Florida, which can advance to the Eastern Conference finals with a victory in Game 5 at home on Tuesday night.

Playing without Marchand,

their captain and leading scorer in the postseason, Boston jumped to a 2-0 lead with goals from David Pastrnak and Brandon Carlo. Swayman made 38 saves, but he was covered up by Coyle when Bennett tied the game 3:41 into the third period.

"The fact is that my own player was pushed into me by theirs and I couldn't play my position," Swayman said.

According to NHL Rule 69.1, "If a defending player has been pushed, shoved, or fouled by an attacking player so as to cause the defending player to come into contact with his own goalkeeper, such contact shall be deemed contact initiated by the attacking player for purposes of this rule, and if necessary a penalty assessed to the attacking player and if a goal is scored it would be disallowed."

Bruins coach Jim Montgomery said he was told by the referees that "the play didn't interfere with the goal."

"That's the explanation I

got," Montgomery said.

Unlike its more popular major North American sports brethren, the NHL does not make referees available to reporters to explain controversial calls. The Bruins said general manager Don Sweeney would address the media on Monday.

For the Bruins, it was a pattern of missed calls that already cost them their captain. Bennett denied on Sunday night that he had tried to hit Marchand, saying he was bracing himself for the collision when he made contact with the Boston forward's head.

Marchand was scratched from Game 4 and was reportedly in the concussion protocol.

"People can have their opinions. I know it definitely wasn't intentional," Bennett said. "It's unfortunate that he got hurt. Obviously, he's a heck of a player and a big part of that team. So, it's unfortunate, but by no means was that an intentional punch in the face."

## Silovs, Canucks take 2-1 series lead over Oilers

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Vancouver rookie goalie Arturs Silovs is already earning a reputation for stepping up in big moments.

Silovs stopped 42 shots, Brock Boeser had two goals and an assist, and Elias Lindholm also scored twice as the Canucks held on to beat the Edmonton Oilers 4-3 on Sunday night to take a 2-1 lead in their Western Conference playoff series.

"The kid has given us game," Canucks head coach Rick Tocchet said of the goalie. "It's a big stage and he's not blinking. He's coming in every day and he's working hard."

Quinn Hughes and J.T. Miller each had two assists for the Canucks.

Silovs withstood another late barrage when the Oilers, trail-

ing 4-2, opted to pull goalie Calvin Pickard in favor of an extra attacker with 3:23 on the clock.

Edmonton head coach Kris Knoblauch did everything he could to keep superstars Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl on the ice, including calling a timeout with 2:39 to go.

The persistence finally paid off with 1:16 remaining when Evan Bouchard launched a long shot on net and the puck bounced off Silovs' glove and in.

The 23-year-old Latvian goalie faced 36 shots over the second and third periods while allowing just two goals.

"I just felt confident," Silovs said, adding that his teammates supported him in Vancouver's 5-4 win to open the series last Wednesday. "So I had to have them today. Everyone's resilient, blocking shots. Really

high scoring chances they had and our guys managed to block a lot of them. So credit to them, too."

Mattias Ekholm and Leon Draisaitl also scored for the Oilers. Stuart Skinner stopped 11 of 15 shots before he was replaced by Pickard to start the third period. Pickard finished with three saves in his NHL playoff debut.

Game 4 in the best-of-seven series is Tuesday night back here in Edmonton.

Edmonton's league-leading power play was 2-for-4, and Vancouver was 2-for-3.

"I thought we were the better team, for the most part," Draisaitl said. "In my eyes, it should have resulted in a win, but that's not the way hockey works, sometimes. We just regroup and get ready for Game 4."

Edmonton created a lot of chances, Knoblauch said, and the team will have to keep that up as the series continues.

"Eventually the pucks are going to start going in a little more," the coach said. "Tonight, having three, that's enough to win, especially during the playoffs. You look at the amount of opportunities that we have, we just have to be persistent and continue to push. We'll get some more breaks."

The Oilers' potent power play got to work early in the first period after Boeser was sent off for slashing. After Evander Kane's shot was blocked in front of the Vancouver net, the puck bounced out to Ekholm, who fired it past Silovs to put Edmonton up 5:37 into the game.

Ekholm now has goals in three straight playoff games.

# Red-hot Twins win sixth series in row

Associated Press

TORONTO — Carlos Santana hit a three-run home run, Bailey Ober matched his career high by striking out 10 over 6½ shutout innings and the Minnesota Twins won for the 17th time in 20 games, beating the Toronto Blue Jays 5-1 on Sunday.

The Twins have won six consecutive series for the first time since September 2010.

Minnesota lost 13 of its first 20 games this season before a 12-game winning streak turned things around.

“Seventeen in 20 is pretty cool to hear, especially where we started at,” Ober said. “I think everyone is just taking it day by day and excited to show up and go out there and play.”

Santana homered for the third straight game north of the U.S. border, extending Minnesota’s streak of games in Toronto with at least one home run to 20. The Twins homered in 21 straight games at Kansas City between July 30, 1998, and Aug. 25, 2001.

Max Kepler added a two-run double for the Twins, extending his career-best hitting streak to 14 games.

**Red Sox 3, Nationals 2:** Ced-

danne Rafaela had a two-run double after center fielder Victor Robles dropped a routine fly for an error during host Boston’s three-run second inning, as they held off Washington to take the series.

Behind a good start from Brayan Bello (4-1) and scoreless work from four relievers, the Red Sox won their second straight after losing the opener Friday.

**Astros 9, Tigers 3:** Justin Verlander dominated his former team and Kyle Tucker homered as visiting Houston beat Detroit.

Verlander (2-1) pitched seven scoreless innings, allowing two hits while striking out eight. He now has 3,365 career strikeouts.

**Yankees 10, Rays 6:** Jose Trevino hit two of visiting New York’s five homers, and Luis Gil went six scoreless innings to beat Tampa Bay.

Trevino hit a two-run shot in the third and a solo drive in a four-run eighth that put the Yankees ahead 10-5.

**Guardians 7, White Sox 0:** David Fry hit a two-run homer and Andrés Giménez lined a solo shot in visiting Cleveland’s three-run fourth inning, as it blanked Chicago to end a three-

game losing streak.

Logan Allen tossed six scoreless innings to help Cleveland remain in first place in the AL Central. The left-hander allowed six hits, walked one and struck out three.

**Cardinals 4, Brewers 3:** Michael Siani doubled home the go-ahead run, Paul Goldschmidt homered to break out of his slump and visiting St. Louis rallied to beat Milwaukee and snap a seven-game skid.

Goldschmidt had gone 1-for-34 in May until he led off the fifth inning with just his third homer of the season.

**Diamondbacks 9, Orioles 2:** Zac Gallen pitched six solid innings, and Arizona beat an unusually sloppy Baltimore for its first victory at Camden Yards since 2007.

**Cubs 5, Pirates 4 (10):** Cody Bellinger hit a go-ahead single before Patrick Wisdom added insurance with a home run in the 10th inning, lifting visiting Chicago to a win over the Pittsburgh for a series victory.

**Marlins 7, Phillies 6 (10):** Emmanuel Rivera hit a game-winning pinch-hit single in the 10th inning and host Miami beat Philadelphia.

**Rockies 3, Rangers 1:** Con-

verted reliever Ty Blach pitched five solid innings in his second start this season, Ezequiel Tovar homered and host Colorado completed a three-game series sweep of the defending World Series champions.

**Royals 4, Angels 2:** Seth Lugo racked up a career-high 12 strikeouts and allowed one run in eight strong innings, and Hunter Renfroe had a two-run single against his former team in visiting Kansas City’s victory over Los Angeles.

**Mariners 8, Athletics 4:** Julio Rodríguez and Mitch Garver both hit two-run home runs, Luis Castillo allowed two runs in six strong innings and host Seattle beat Oakland.

**Padres 4, Dodgers 0:** Yu Darvish gave up two hits in seven dominant innings to lead host San Diego to a victory over Los Angeles.

**Giants 6, Reds 5 (10):** Casey Schmitt hit a walk-off double in the 10th inning and host San Francisco beat Cincinnati.

**Mets 4, Braves 3:** Brandon Nimmo shook off an injury and came off the bench to hit a two-run homer in the ninth inning that gave host New York a victory over Atlanta.

## Keselowski wins NASCAR race to end 3-year drought

Associated Press

DARLINGTON, S.C. — There were so many special parts of Brad Keselowski’s first NASCAR victory in three years, it was difficult for him to say what meant the most.

It was the 36th of his career and his second at Darlington Raceway, which he reveres as an ultimate test of drivers. It came in front of his young family with his daughters, Scarlett, who’ll turn 9 later this month, and 4-year-old Autumn, joining him on the podium.

And it was his first since leaving the Penske organization to become co-owner at Roush Fenway Keselowski Racing in 2022.

“There’s a lot of things to be excited about, don’t know which one means the

most,” Keselowski said with a smile.

He moved to the front when leaders Chris Buescher and Tyler Reddick hit battling for first with nine laps left and held on to win the Goodyear 400 at Darlington Raceway on Sunday for his first NASCAR win in three years.

“Hell of an effort by everyone,” Keselowski said after crossing the finish line.

It appeared Keselowski’s employee at RFK, Buescher, would get the win after he passed his boss and Reddick with 29 laps to go. But Buescher and Reddick then hit and fell back, opening the door for Keselowski’s satisfying victory.

“What a heck of a day,” he said. “That battle out there with my teammate and Tyler

Reddick, we just laid it all on the line.”

Keselowski acknowledged the risk he took when he left Penske. Fans got on him, he said, when Austin Cindric won the 2022 Daytona 500 that it could’ve been him or when Penske drivers Joey Logano and Ryan Blaney won the past two NASCAR Cup Series crowns.

But he could not be happier with his choice and the direction RFK is headed.

“I think you guys know, I’m going to do things my own way,” Keselowski said.

Ty Gibbs was second, Josh Berry third and Denny Hamlin fourth. Chase Briscoe was fifth followed by William Byron, Bubba Wallace, Justin Haley and Michael McDowell.