

## Aid enters Gaza Strip via US-built pier

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Trucks carrying badly needed aid for the Gaza Strip rolled across a newly built U.S. pier and into the besieged enclave for the first time Friday as Israeli restrictions on border crossings and heavy fighting hindered the delivery of food and other supplies.

The shipment is the first in an operation that American military officials anticipate could scale up to 150 truckloads a day, all while Israel presses in on the southern city of Rafah in its 7-month offensive against Hamas.

But the U.S. and aid groups warn that the floating pier project is not a substitute for land deliveries that could bring in all the food, water and fuel needed in Gaza. Before the war, more than 500 truckloads entered the territory on an average day.

The operation's success also

remains tenuous because of the risk of militant attack, logistical hurdles and a growing shortage of fuel for the trucks to run due to the Israeli blockade of Gaza since Hamas' Oct. 7 attack. Militants killed 1,200 people and took 250 others hostage in that assault on southern Israel. The Israeli offensive since has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians in Gaza, local health officials say, while hundreds more have been killed in the West Bank.

Aid agencies say they are running out of food in southern Gaza and fuel is dwindling, while the U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.N. World Food Program say famine has already taken hold in Gaza's north.

Troops finished installing the floating pier on Thursday, and the U.S. military's Central Command said the first aid crossed into Gaza at 9 a.m. Friday. It

said no American troops went ashore in the operation.

The Pentagon said no back-ups were expected in the distribution process. The U.S. plan is for the U.N. to take charge of the aid once it leaves the pier. The world body's World Food Program will then turn it over to aid groups for delivery.

Aid distribution had not yet begun as of Friday afternoon, said a U.N. official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter. The official said the process of unloading and reloading cargo was still ongoing.

The U.N. humanitarian aid coordinating agency said the start of the operation was welcome but not a replacement for deliveries by land.

"I think everyone in the operation has said it: Any and all aid into Gaza is welcome by any route," spokesperson Jens Laerke, of the Office for the Co-

ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, told journalists in Geneva on Friday. Getting aid to people in Gaza "cannot and should not depend on a floating dock far from where needs are most acute."

The U.N. earlier said fuel deliveries brought through land routes have all but stopped and that would make it extremely difficult to bring the aid to Gaza's people.

"It doesn't matter how the aid comes, whether it's by sea or whether by land, without fuel, aid won't get to the people," U.N. deputy spokesperson Farhan Haq said.

Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh said the issue of fuel deliveries comes up in all U.S. conversations with the Israelis. She also said the plan is to begin slowly with the sea route and ramp up the truck deliveries over time as they work the kinks out of the system.

## Deadly storms knock out power in Texas, Louisiana

*Associated Press*

HOUSTON — Nearly 1 million homes and business remained without power Friday from Texas to Louisiana after fierce thunderstorms swept hurricane-force winds through Houston, blowing windows out of downtown skyscrapers and toppling transmission towers.

At least four people were killed and officials warned that electricity outages for some residents could last days.

The widespread destruction brought much of Houston to a standstill as crews raced to restore power and remove uprooted trees and debris. School districts in the Houston area canceled classes for more than

400,000 students, and government offices were closed. City officials urged people to stay off roads, many of which were flooded or lined with downed power lines and malfunctioning traffic lights.

Houston Mayor John Whitmire called downtown "a mess" and told people not to go to work Friday, unless they were considered essential workers.

"Stay home, take care of your children," Whitmire said in a Thursday evening briefing. "Our first responders will be working around the clock."

Whitmire said four people died during the severe weather. At least two of the deaths were caused by falling trees and another

happened when a crane blew over in strong winds, officials said. Whitmire said wind speeds reached 100 mph "with some twisters." Whitmire said the powerful gusts were reminiscent of 2008's Hurricane Ike.

Hundreds of windows were shattered at downtown hotels and office buildings, with glass littering the streets below. Fallen trees, power lines and broken glass have made some areas impassable, the city said. The state was sending Department of Public Safety officers to secure the area.

The storms weren't over Friday. Gulf Coast states could experience scattered, severe thunderstorms with tornadoes, large hail

and damaging winds. Heavy to excessive rainfall is possible for eastern Louisiana into central Alabama, the National Weather Service said. Flood watches and warnings remained Friday for Houston and areas to the east.

The storms also struck neighboring Louisiana on Thursday and left more than 215,000 customers without power at their peak. More than 100,000 Entergy Louisiana customers in the New Orleans area lost power, NO-LA.com reported.

The Storm Prediction Center's website showed a report of a tornado in Convent, La., about 55 miles from New Orleans, with multiple reports of trees and power poles down.

# Putin seeking a buffer zone in Kharkiv

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian President Vladimir Putin said Friday that Moscow's offensive in Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv region aims to create a buffer zone but has no plans to capture the city, as Ukraine will allow prisoners to join the army's depleted ranks and approved a fivefold increase in fines for draft dodgers.

Putin's comments on a trip to China were his first on the offensive launched on May 10, which opened a new front in the war and displaced thousands of Ukrainians within few days. It came hours after a massive Ukrainian drone attack on the Russia-occupied Crimean Peninsula early Friday caused power cutoffs in the city of Sevastopol after an earlier attack damaged aircraft and fuel storage at an airbase. In southern Russia, Russian

authorities said the attack on Friday also set a refinery ablaze.

Moscow launched attacks in the Kharkiv region in response to Ukrainian shelling of Russia's Belgorod region, Putin told reporters Friday on a visit to Harbin, China.

"I have said publicly that if it continues, we will be forced to create a security zone, a sanitary zone," he said. "That's what we are doing."

Putin said that Russian troops were "advancing daily according to plan" and said that there were no plans to capture Kharkiv, for now.

Ukrainian troops were fighting Friday to halt Russian advances in Kharkiv region that began late last week. In an effort to increase troop numbers, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has signed two laws, one to enable prisoners to join the

army and another that increases fines for draft dodgers by five times, one day before a controversial mobilization law goes into effect.

The legislation permitting prisoners to be enlisted allows "parole from serving a sentence and further enlistment for military service under a contract during a special period" for certain categories of people charged with criminal offenses. It doesn't include those convicted of crimes against Ukraine's national security. The updated legislation sets fines of up to \$650 for common citizens and \$1,300 for civil servants and legal entities for ignoring a draft notice or failing to update personal information with the military draft board in a timely manner.

Previously, the administrative fines for avoiding mobilization during the "special peri-

od" constituted up to \$130 for common citizens and \$215 for civil servants and legal entities.

The town of Vovchansk, located 3 miles from the Russian border, has been a hot spot in the fighting in recent days. Ukrainian authorities have evacuated around 8,000 civilians from the town. The Russian army's usual tactic is to reduce towns and villages to ruins with aerial strikes before its units move in.

By starting the new offensive, Russian troops "expanded the zone of active hostilities by almost 70 kilometers" (about 45 miles), in an effort to force Ukraine to spread its forces and use reserve troops, Ukraine's military chief, Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, said Friday. In the Kharkiv region, Russian forces have advanced 10 kilometers from the border, Zelenskyy told reporters on Friday.

## N. Korea fires suspected missiles day after joint drill

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea fired suspected short-range ballistic missiles off its east coast on Friday, South Korea's military said, a day after South Korea and the U.S. flew powerful fighter jets in a joint drill that the North views as a major security threat.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the weapons launched from the North's east coast Wonsan region traveled about 185 miles before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshiyuki Hayashi said a North Korean missile landed outside Japan's exclusive economic zone.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff statement called the launches "a clear provocation" that threatens peace on the Ko-

rean Peninsula. It said South Korea will maintain a firm readiness to repel potential aggressions by North Korea in conjunction with the military alliance with the United States.

North Korea has extended its run of weapons testing in recent months as part of its efforts to enlarge and modernize its arsenal while diplomacy with the United States and South Korea remains stalled. Last week, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised the test firing of a new multiple rocket launch system, according to the North's state media.

North Korea says it has been forced to boost its nuclear and missile programs to deal with U.S.-led hostilities. North Korea cites expanded U.S.-South Korean military training, which it calls an invasion rehearsal.

Many foreign experts say North Korea uses its rivals' military drills as a pretext for building a larger weapons arsenal in the belief that it would boost its leverage in future diplomacy with the U.S.

On Thursday, two South Korean F-35As and two U.S. F-22 Raptors were mobilized for a combined aerial exercise over the central region of South Korea. North Korea is extremely sensitive to the deployment of sophisticated U.S. aircraft. It was reportedly the first deployment of a U.S. F-22 to South Korea in seven months.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency said Friday the re-deployment of the U.S. F-22s for joint training with South Korea is "another clear proof of the hostile nature of the U.S." which seeks "a showdown

of force" with North Korea. KCNA accuses "the military gangsters" of South Korea of intensifying tensions to keep pace with "their master's confrontation scheme" against the North.

It warned the F-22s flyovers "will only precipitate the advent of a situation that the U.S. does not want to see." But it didn't elaborate what steps North Korea would take.

Also Friday, Kim's sister and senior official Kim Yo Jong said North Korea's recent weapons tests were part of the country's five-year arms buildup plan launched in 2021. She said the recently tested weapons are designed to attack Seoul, the South Korean capital, and denied outside speculation that the tests were meant to display weapons that North Korea plans to export to Russia.

# Justice Alito's home flew flag upside down after '21 insurrection

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An upside-down American flag, a symbol associated with former President Donald Trump's false claims of election fraud, was displayed outside the home of Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito in January 2021, The New York Times reported Thursday.

A photo obtained and published by the newspaper shows the flag flying on Jan. 17, 2021, days after Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. Dozens of the rioters were carrying similarly inverted flags and chanting slogans like "Stop the Steal."

The report could raise concerns about Alito's impartiality as the court considers two major cases related to the attack, including charges faced by the rioters and whether Trump has immunity from prosecution on election interference charges.

It comes as another conservative justice, Clarence Thomas, has ignored calls to recuse himself from cases related to the 2020 election over his wife, Ginni Thomas', support for Trump

and as public trust in the Supreme Court is at its lowest point in at least 50 years. Judicial experts said the flag clearly violates ethics rules set to avoid even the appearance of bias.

At the time the flag was flying, the court was still considering whether to take up cases over the 2020 election. It ultimately rejected them over dissent from three conservative justices, including Alito.

Alito, for his part, acknowledged the presence of the flag at his home in Alexandria, Va., but said it was placed there by his wife.

"I had no involvement whatsoever in the flying of the flag," Alito said in an emailed statement to the newspaper. "It was briefly placed by Mrs. Alito in response to a neighbor's use of objectionable and personally insulting language on yard signs."

Martha-Ann Alito had been in a dispute with another family in the neighborhood over an anti-Trump sign on their lawn, and neighbors also interpreted the flag as a political statement, the Times reported.

# Funeral held for airman killed in home by deputy

Associated Press

STONECREST, Ga. — Hundreds of Air Force members in dress blues joined Roger Fortson's family, friends and others at a suburban Atlanta megachurch on Friday to pay their final respects to the Black senior airman, who was shot and killed in his Florida home earlier this month by a sheriff's deputy.

People lined up well before the start of the service at the New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Stonecrest to file past the open coffin to say their goodbyes to Fortson, who was shot six times by a deputy who was responding to a May 3 call about a possible domestic violence situation at Fortson's apartment complex in the Florida Panhandle. He was 23.

Fortson's face and upper body were visible in his Air Force uniform, with an American flag draped over the lower portion of the casket. After viewing the body, many mourners paused to hug one another.

"As you can see from the sea of blue in front of me, I am not alone in my admiration of sniper airman Fortson," Col. Patrick Dierig told mourners.

"We would like to take credit for making him great, but the truth is that he was great before he came to us," said Dierig, the

commander of the 1st Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Air Force Base in Florida. "He will live in our Air Force hearts forever."

Fortson grew up in the Atlanta area before joining the Air Force. He was a senior airman who served in overseas combat zones and was stationed at Hurlburt when the deputy killed him.

The funeral came a day after Fortson's mother vowed to get justice for her son. At a news conference held by the family and its lawyer, Ben Crump, Meka Fortson, spoke glowingly about how her son was always on a positive path and had never been in trouble or shown signs of violence.

"Roger was light. There was not a stain on his name. He will not be put to rest in darkness because he was light," she said.

She also had a message for Okaloosa County Sheriff Eric Aden: "You're going to give me justice whether you want to, Sheriff Aden, or not," she said.

The deputy, whose name has not been released, shot Fortson six times within moments of Fortson responding to the deputy's knocking and opening the door of his apartment while holding a handgun pointed at the ground.

# Ex-Army sergeant pardoned in BLM protester death

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas Gov. Greg Abbott issued a full pardon Thursday for a former U.S. Army sergeant convicted of murder for fatally shooting an armed demonstrator in 2020 during nationwide protests against police violence and racial injustice.

Abbott announced the pardon shortly after the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles announced a unanimous recommendation that Daniel Perry be

pardoned and have his firearms rights restored.

Perry had been in state prison on a 25-year sentence since his 2023 conviction in the killing of Garrett Foster, and was released shortly after the pardon, a prison spokeswoman said.

Perry, who is white, was working as a ride-share driver when his car approached a demonstration in Austin. Prosecutors said he could have driven away from the confrontation with Foster, a white Air Force

veteran who witnesses said never raised his gun.

A jury convicted Perry of murder, but Abbott called it a case of self-defense.

"Texas has one of the strongest 'Stand Your Ground' laws of self-defense that cannot be nullified by a jury or a progressive district attorney," Abbott said.

Travis County District Attorney Jose Garza blasted the pardon as a "mockery of our legal system."

"The board and the governor

have put their politics over justice," Garza said. "They should be ashamed of themselves. Their actions are contrary to the law and demonstrate that there are two classes of people in this state where some lives matter and some lives do not."

The sergeant's defense attorneys argued that Foster did raise the rifle and that Perry had no choice but to shoot. Perry did not take the witness stand and jurors deliberated for two days before finding him guilty.

# Slovak PM remains in serious condition

Associated Press

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia — Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico has undergone another operation two days after being shot multiple times and remains in serious condition, officials said Friday.

Fico, 59, was attacked as he was greeting supporters after a government meeting in the former coal mining town of Handlova. A suspected assailant has been arrested.

Miriám Lapuniková, director of the University F. D. Roosevelt hospital in Banská Bystrica, where Fico was taken by helicopter after he was shot, said Fico underwent a CT scan and is currently awake and stable in an intensive care unit. She described his condition as “very serious.”

She said the surgery removed dead tissues that had remained inside Fico’s body.

“I think it will take several more days until we will definitely know the direction of the further development,” Robert Kaliniak, the defense minister and deputy prime minister, told reporters at the hospital.

Still, Kaliniak stressed that the government continues to work.

“The ministries are working on all their duties, nothing is frozen or halted, the country goes on,” he told reporters. “The state is stable and today the patient is stable as well.”

Fico has long been a divisive figure in Slovakia and beyond. His return to power last year on a pro-Russian, anti-American platform led to worries among fellow European Union and NATO members that he would abandon his country’s pro-Western course, particularly on Ukraine.

Earlier Friday the man

charged with attempting to assassinate Fico was escorted by police to his home. Local media reported that it was part of a search for evidence.

Markiza, a Slovak television station, showed footage of the suspect being taken to his home in the town of Levice on Friday morning, and reported that police had seized a computer and some documents. Police did not comment.

Prosecutors have told police not to publicly identify the suspect or release other details about the case. The suspect’s detention will be reviewed at a hearing Saturday at Slovakia’s Specialized Criminal Court in Pezinok, outside the capital Bratislava.

Unconfirmed media reports suggested he was a 71-year-old retiree who was known as an amateur poet, and may have previously worked as a security

guard at a mall in the country’s southwest.

Government authorities on Thursday gave details that matched that description. They said the suspect did not belong to any political groups, though the attack itself was politically motivated.

Slovakia’s presidential office said Friday that it was working to organize a meeting of leaders of all parliamentary parties for Tuesday. Outgoing President Zuzana Caputová announced the plan together with President-elect Peter Pellegrini, who succeeds her in mid June, in an attempt to reduce social tensions in the country.

At the start of Russia’s invasion, Slovakia was one of Ukraine’s staunchest supporters, but Fico halted arms deliveries to Ukraine when he returned to power, his fourth time serving as prime minister.

## Man killed, suspected of synagogue fire in France

Associated Press

ROUEN, France — French police shot and killed a man armed with a knife and a metal bar who is suspected of having started a fire that charred and blackened the insides of a synagogue in the Normandy city of Rouen early Friday, an attack the interior minister said was “clearly” antisemitic and which infuriated Jewish leaders facing a surge in hate crimes since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war.

The suspected arsonist was an Algerian national who wasn’t flagged as a suspected extremist, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said after inspecting the fire-damaged synagogue.

He said the man had sought permission to stay in France for medical treatment and, after it was refused, had been placed

on a police wanted list for possible return back to his country.

Darmanin praised the 25-year-old police officer for using his service weapon against the “particularly dangerous, particularly violent” assailant who rushed at him with a knife, declaring: “He was right to do so.”

The minister said the officer would be decorated for his “extremely courageous, extremely professional” behavior.

“This antisemitic act in Rouen affects all of us, deeply,” he said. France is “extremely determined to continue protecting all the Jews of France, wherever they are, who must practice their religion without fear.”

Antisemitic acts have surged in France in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war. France has the largest Jewish and Muslim populations in Western Europe.

## Israeli military finds and IDs bodies of 3 hostages in Gaza

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military said Friday its troops in Gaza found the bodies of three Israeli hostages taken by Hamas during its Oct. 7 attack, including German-Israeli Shani Louk.

A photo of 22-year-old Shani’s twisted body in the back of a pickup truck ricocheted around the world and brought to light the scale of the militants’ attack on communities in southern Israel.

The military identified the other two bodies as those of a 28-year-old woman, Amit Buskila, and a 56-year-old man, Itzhak Gelerenter.

All three were killed by Hamas at the Nova music festival, an outdoor dance party near the Gaza border, and their bodies taken into the Palestinian territory, military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said at a

news conference.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the deaths “heartbreaking,” saying, “We will return all of our hostages, both the living and the dead.”

The military said the bodies were found overnight, without elaborating, and did not give immediate details on where they were located. Israel has been operating in the strip’s southern city of Rafah, where it has said it has intelligence that hostages are being held.

Hamas-led militants killed around 1,200 people, mainly civilians, and abducted around 250 others in the Oct. 7 attack. Around half of those have since been freed.

Israel says around 100 hostages are still captive in Gaza, along with the bodies of around 30 more.

# Schauffele opens with PGA-record 62

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Xander Schauffele saw no reason to change anything in his swing or think any less of his game after yet another close call at ending two years without winning. The idea was to “keep chugging along.”

Thursday looked more like a sprint, right into the PGA Championship record book.

Schauffele seized on soft, still conditions that hardly resembled a major championship test for a 9-under 62, the lowest score in PGA Championship history, and matched another PGA record by building a three-shot lead after the opening round at vulnerable Valhalla.

Sixty-four players broke par, the most ever for a first round at the PGA Championship. The field of 156 players produced 542 birdies and seven eagles on the spongy turf and forgiving greens, with cheers coming from all corners of the course.

It still wasn't enough to get Schauffele, a 30-year-old who oozes California chill, all that excited. He shot 62 in the first round of the U.S. Open last year at Los Angeles Country Club — so did Rickie Fowler — and finished the week in a tie for 10th.

Schauffele led by three shots over Tony Finau, Sahith Theegala and Mark Hubbard, all reaching 65 with a burst of birdies somewhere along the way.

Masters champion Scottie Scheffler saw Schauffele's score and cared only about putting together a good round in his first competition since his son was born last week.

That he did, holing out with a 9-iron from 167 yards on the

first hole for eagle, the highlight in a round of 67. Scheffler failed to birdie the par 5s on the back nine and had a few other mistakes that sent him to the range after his round.

“I felt like there was a couple things I can clean up going into tomorrow, but overall today was a solid round,” Scheffler said after his 41st consecutive round at par or better.

This was an easy day to keep that streak going. Valhalla didn't put up much of a fight. Even players who stumbled from the start had ample opportunity to turn it around.

Jon Rahm opened with four bogeys in six holes, threw a club in disgust on the 16th hole and still managed a 70 by making four birdies down the stretch. Collin Morikawa was 2 over through five holes, but he responded with three straight birdies and finished with a 65.

“You knew there were a lot of birdies out there,” Morikawa said. “It played soft and the greens were pretty slow.”

Even so, Schauffele posted a special round. He one-putted 12 times — two of them for par that he considered crucial to his round — and he didn't go more than one hole without a birdie until the very end, when he finished par-par for the record.

The three-shot lead matches the 18-hole record held by Bobby Nichols in 1964 at Columbus (Ohio) Country Club and Raymond Floyd in 1982 at Southern Hills. Both went on to win.

Schauffele had a 54-hole lead last week at Quail Hollow, only for Rory McIlroy to blitz him on the last day with a 65. Schauffele also had a 54-hole lead at The

Players Championship, but Scheffler shot 64 in the final round to beat him by one.

“I've just been playing some really solid golf,” he said. “Been having close calls. My team and I, we just say let's keep chugging along.”

Schauffele had plenty of attention, playing alongside Louisville native Justin Thomas and in the group ahead of Tiger Woods, who was followed by McIlroy. Thomas rallied late for a 69 that required some perspective of his own.

“When you're playing with one of the easiest 9 unders you've ever seen, it makes you feel like you're shooting a million,” Thomas said.

McIlroy, back on the course where he won his last major 10 years ago, ran off three birdies late in his round for a 66 that left him in a large group that included Morikawa and Tom Kim.

There had been 17 scores of 63 at the PGA Championship, most recently Koepka in the opening round at Bethpage Black in 2019. The list includes Jose Maria Olazabal at Valhalla in 2000 during the third round. Schauffele did one better.

He hit 6-iron to a pin back and left on the par-3 11th to 2 feet — his second hole of the day — followed by a 15-foot par save on the 12th, one of the few times he was out of position.

Schauffele birdied three of the last four holes on the back nine for a 31, and then he ran off three birdies in a four-hole stretch on the front nine. He had to get up-and-down from behind the green on the par-3 eighth to a front pin, and he two-putted for par from 30 feet on the ninth.

That makes four rounds of 62 in all the majors, and Schauffele has two of them. Branden Grace also shot 62 in the third round at Royal Birkdale in the 2017 British Open.

After his latest 62, Schauffele began the 24-hour wait before his next shot Friday afternoon.

“The greens will be a little bit bumpier with a lot of foot traffic coming through. Who knows with the weather — it might rain — so the course might be playing completely different,” Schauffele said.

“Just going to bed knowing I'm playing some pretty good golf, might just wipe the slate clean.”

It was the perfect recipe for scoring — the sun above, soft turf below, not much wind, and greens still relatively smooth.

“You for sure know there's going to be some holes there for the taking,” Finau said. “You're going to hit some good shots. You're going to have a lot of looks. That's what you saw out there today. ... I think you can go on a run here with the conditions.”

“And it's going to make for a fun week.”

It was frustrating for Woods, who holed enough putts and hit enough good shots that he was 1 under going to the final three holes. But he failed to take advantage of the par-5 seventh, and he three-putted for bogey on his final two holes for a 72. That marked the eighth straight round in which he failed to break par in a major.

“That wasn't the way I like to finish off a round,” Woods said. “Long way to go, and we'll see what happens.”

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# Yankees complete sweep of Twins

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Clarke Schmidt cruised to a career-long eight shutout innings after Anthony Volpe led off the game with a home run that sparked a three-run first inning, and the New York Yankees finished a three-game sweep with a 5-0 victory over the Minnesota Twins on Thursday.

Schmidt (5-1) scattered a double and two singles without a walk while striking out eight batters and winning his third consecutive start.

The 2017 first-round draft pick, who has allowed three runs or fewer in each of his nine starts this season, lowered his ERA from 2.95 to 2.49 while throwing a career-high 103 pitches. His previous long was 6½ innings, matched in his most recent outing at Tampa Bay on Friday.

**Pirates 5, Cubs 4:** Edward Olivares and Nick Gonzales homered as visiting Pittsburgh beat Chicago.

Olivares hit a two-run homer in the first inning. He also doubled and scored in the sixth against Justin Steele (0-1) to make it 5-3.

Gonzales hit a solo drive in the fourth, and Jared Jones (3-4) struck out seven in six solid innings. Colin Holderman gave up a sacrifice fly to Christopher Morel in the eighth, but the Pirates opened the four-game series on a winning note after losing six of eight. They dropped two of three to the Cubs in Pittsburgh last weekend.

Jones was charged with three runs and seven hits. The 22-year-old right-hander has gone at least five innings and allowed three runs or fewer in each of his nine career starts.

**Astros 8, Athletics 1:** Rookie Joey Loperfido hit his first major league home run and Cristian Javier pitched six scoreless innings to help host Houston beat Oakland and complete a four-game sweep.

The victory extended Houston's winning streak to a season-long five games. The Astros have won seven of their last eight games.

Yainer Diaz hit a three-run double and Loperfido added his two-run shot off Joey Estes (1-1) in a six-run third inning that gave the Astros a big lead early.

Javier (3-1) bounced back from a terrible performance in his prior outing to allow just two hits with eight strikeouts. The right-hander gave up seven runs in just 1⅓ innings in his last start after returning from an 18-game absence with neck discomfort.

**Mets 6, Phillies 5 (11):** Pete Alonso homered, J.D. Martinez hit a go-ahead single in the 11th inning and visiting New York overcame another blown save by Edwin Díaz, avoiding a four-game home-and-home sweep with a win over Philadelphia.

Starling Marte had two hits for the Mets, who followed a closed-door meeting held by rookie manager Carlos Mendoza on Wednesday night by winning their second game in the last seven.

Kyle Schwarber and Alec Bohm hit RBI doubles for the Phillies, who lost for only the fourth time in 20 games. NL East-leading Philadelphia is 10 games in front of the Mets.

**Rays 7, Red Sox 5:** Erasmo Ramírez retired Romy González on a game-ending groundout with two on after Tampa Bay was forced to remove Jason Adam because they lost track of mound visits in a victory over host Boston.

Isaac Paredes had a tiebreaking single in the ninth off Kenley Jansen (1-1) that hit off the Green Monster, and Richie Palacios added a sacrifice fly.

Adam allowed a two-out walk to Rob Refsnyder and a single to Rafael Devers. Rays pitching coach Kyle Snyder started to the mound and had crossed the foul line when he was stopped

## Dodgers' first Ohtani bobblehead snarls traffic outside of stadium

The first Shohei Ohtani bobblehead giveaway of the season snarled traffic outside Dodger Stadium on Thursday and created long lines of eager fans.

Cars snaked the roadways around Chavez Ravine and stadium parking lots were filling up two hours before the Los Angeles Dodgers hosted the Cincinnati Reds in a city known for fans showing up late and leaving early. A line of fans waited on the sidewalk outside the main gate before it opened.

"Shohei creates a stir," manager Dave Roberts said before the game. "I can't imagine what it's like outside. It's great for Shohei and it's good for the Dodgers."

Only the first 40,000 fans received the bobblehead, which depicts a smiling Ohtani with his bat perched above his left shoulder. The box's design features Japanese anime.

The giveaway attracted a sellout crowd of 53,527 — the largest in the majors this season and the most at Dodger Stadium since Sept. 20, 2019.

"It's going to be a hot-tick-

et item," Roberts said. "The more I see him every day the more I realize how special of a person and a ballplayer he is."

On eBay, the Ohtani giveaway was being offered for \$150 and up with sellers advertising it as new in the box.

As a surprise, 1,700 road gray jersey bobbleheads were randomly mixed in with the giveaway. One was listed for \$2,300 on eBay.

Game tickets were going from \$168 to \$388 with fees included on Stubhub.

Roberts and the rest of the Dodgers didn't need to worry about getting their hands on the souvenir. Boxes were sitting in each player's locker before the game.

"I get one for each bobblehead night," Roberts said, "so I've got quite the collection."

The Dodgers have scheduled three other Ohtani giveaways this season to mark his first year with the team after spending six seasons in Anaheim with the Angels. They will offer a hat, a second bobblehead and a shirt.

— Associated Press

by plate umpire Alex Tosi. The Rays had lost track of mound visits when catcher Ben Rortved had gone out to speak with Adam earlier in the inning.

If a team has exhausted its mound visits entering the ninth inning, it gets an additional one. But the Rays used their last one in the ninth.

After a delay of about six minutes, Ramirez retired Gonzalez on a 2-2 pitch for his first save since 2020.

**Reds 7, Dodgers 2:** Elly De La Cruz went 4 for 4 with a ca-

reer-best four stolen bases and scored three times in Cincinnati's victory at Los Angeles.

Nick Martinez (1-2) won in relief, permitting one hit over five shutout innings and striking out four for the Reds, who used seven pitchers in a bullpen game.

Cincinnati snapped the Dodgers' franchise record of 22 straight games allowing four runs or fewer.

Los Angeles lost back-to-back games for the first time since April 19-20 and has dropped four of seven overall.

# Kreider's 3rd-period hat trick pushes Rangers into East final

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — The New York Rangers went from cruising through the NHL playoffs with an unbeaten record to suddenly struggling to close out a second-round series despite having a huge lead.

Worse, they found themselves down entering the third period with the prospect of having to play a Game 7.

Instead, Chris Kreider took over to ensure the Presidents' Trophy winners finally closed out the Carolina Hurricanes and earned their spot in the Eastern Conference Final.

Kreider had a third-period hat trick to help the Rangers erase a two-goal deficit and beat the Hurricanes 5-3 in Game 6 on Thursday night, a stunning reversal after their postseason momentum had gone decidedly in the wrong direction.

"We talk about being a resilient group and a competitive group," Kreider said, "and I think we showed that tonight."

Kreider erased the Hurri-

canes' 3-1 lead entering the final period. The go-ahead score — which completed the natural hat trick — came when he got position on Jalen Chatfield at the top of the crease and tipped in Ryan Lindgren's pass to make it 4-3 at the 15:41 mark.

That made Kreider the third Rangers player to score three goals in a series-clinching game and first since Mike Gartner in 1990. It was also reminiscent of famed captain Mark Messier's "guarantee" game in 1994, when he had a third-period hat trick in Game 6 of the Eastern Conference Final against New Jersey after promising the Rangers would force a seventh game. The Rangers went on to win the series and their most recent Stanley Cup title.

Kreider's heroics finally allowed the Rangers to put away the Hurricanes, who had won two straight after falling into a 3-0 hole in the best-of-7 series. The Hurricanes appeared on the verge of forcing a Game 7 for a pressure-packed finale,

but couldn't contain the Rangers' surge in the final 14 minutes.

"We just had to go out there and make a decision in the third period," said Vincent Trocheck, a former Hurricane who scored the Rangers' first goal on a second-period deflection. "Either show up and play and be a part of the series, or don't. I think we had 20 guys show up in the third."

Barclay Goodrow finished this one off by getting to a loose puck near the boards and scoring a long empty-net goal in the final minute, sending Goodrow to the nearby Rangers bench to be mobbed by teammates.

That sent the Rangers on to the East final to face the Boston-Florida winner, with the Panthers leading that series 3-2.

"This puts a tough way to end a really good year," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "These guys played their butts off all year. But this is what you're going to remember. And that's the hard part."

## NFL distances itself from comments by Chiefs kicker

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The NFL is distancing itself from Kansas City Chiefs kicker Harrison Butker, saying "his views are not those of the NFL as an organization."

Butker appeared as the commencement speaker last week at Benedictine College, a private Catholic liberal arts school, and said most of the women receiving degrees were probably more excited about getting married and having children.

Butker, 28, also said some Catholic leaders were "pushing dangerous gender ideologies onto the youth of America."

"Harrison Butker gave a speech in his personal capacity," Jonathan Beane, NFL senior vice president and chief diversity and inclusion officer, said in a statement released Thursday.

"His views are not those of the NFL as an organization. The NFL is steadfast in our commitment to inclusion, which only makes our league stronger."

The three-time Super Bowl champion delivered his roughly 20-minute address Saturday at the school in Atchison, Kan., which is located about 60 miles north of Kansas City.

Butker, who's made his conservative Catholic beliefs well known, also assailed Pride month, a particularly important time for the LGBTQ+ rights movement, and President Joe Biden's stance on abortion.

Butker referred to a "deadly sin sort of pride that has a month dedicated to it," an oblique reference to Pride month. He also took aim at Biden's policies, including his condemnation of the Supreme Court's reversal of the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision and advocacy for freedom of choice — a key campaign issue in the 2024 presidential race.

## Miller goal gives Canucks 3-2 series lead

Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — J.T. Miller scored with 33 seconds remaining to lead the Vancouver Canucks to a 3-2 victory over the Edmonton Oilers on Thursday night that put them a win away from the Western Conference Final.

Carson Soucy and Phillip Di Giuseppe both scored in their returns to the lineup for Vancouver, which will try to wrap up the series in Game 6 on Saturday in Edmonton. Rookie Arturs Silovs made 21 saves for the Canucks.

With the game tied at 2, Vancouver's Pius Suter fired a shot from near the boards and it

bounced off the skate of teammate Elias Pettersson in front of the net and hit the post. Miller picked it up and batted it in for the go-ahead goal, his third of the playoffs.

"I was open for a split second earlier and I'm glad 'Lindy' didn't force it there because (Connor) McDavid was ready to go the other way and it's one of the ones where we got a nice bounce," Miller said.

Evander Kane and Mattias Janmark scored for the Oilers, who got 32 saves from Calvin Pickard.

Leon Draisaitl set up the first goal of the game, digging out a puck behind Vancouver's net

and backhanding it to Kane at the bottom of the face off circle. Kane snapped a shot past Silovs for his third goal of the postseason 4:34 into the game.

Draisaitl's assist gave him at least one point in each of Edmonton's 10 playoff games. He has eight goals and 13 assists in the postseason.

Soucy, who sat out Game 5 while serving a suspension, tied it at 1 late in the first with a blast from the face off circle that pinged off the bar at the 17:27 mark. The defenseman was suspended by the NHL for cross-checking Edmonton's Connor McDavid after the final horn in Game 3.

# Edwards, T-wolves force Game 7

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Anthony Edwards flashed seven fingers to the roaring crowd as he walked off for a fourth-quarter timeout during a blowout by the Minnesota Timberwolves.

He had that tenacious look of a superstar player refusing to cede to the defending champs all night.

Edwards scored 27 points to pull the Timberwolves out of their mid-series slump and deliver a flawless 115-70 victory over the Denver Nuggets on Thursday to force a Game 7 in this roller-coaster matchup.

Jaden McDaniels pitched in 21 points and lockdown defense, and Mike Conley had 13 points in his return from injury. Big men Rudy Gobert, Karl-Anthony Towns and Naz Reid combined for 38 rebounds and a relentless effort to keep NBA MVP Nikola Jokic to a relatively quiet 22 points.

The Wolves posted the largest winning margin in a postseason game since 2015, when Chicago beat Milwaukee by 54 points in a first-round series clincher, ac-

cording to Sportradar.

“Guys just believing in themselves,” Edwards said. “I think the last three games we were all down on ourselves.”

The decisive game for a spot in the Western Conference finals is in Denver on Sunday night. Just as Edwards promised the locker room staffer at Ball Arena after the Wolves lost in Game 5.

Jamal Murray struggled again with 10 points on 4-for-18 shooting while battling a sore elbow for the Nuggets, whose bench was outscored 36-9 — and seven of those points came in the final five minutes. The Wolves reserves led a 24-0 run in the fourth quarter on the way to a staggering 50-point lead, a fitting follow-up to the 20-0 surge the starters led in the opening frame.

“We talked a lot today just about getting our edge back, our swagger, playing a little more free and easy,” coach Chris Finch said. “It just felt like we hadn’t had our best effort on both sides of the ball yet.”

No defending NBA champion

had ever lost in the playoffs by more than 36 points until this flop by the Nuggets, who were outrebounded 62-43.

“That to me speaks volumes about the game and our approach,” Denver coach Mike Malone said.

Aaron Gordon had 12 points and eight rebounds for the Nuggets, who finished just 7 for 36 from 3-point range and trailed by at least 17 points for the last 31 minutes of the game.

For the Wolves, offense from McDaniels is typically a bonus, but he can’t be as quiet as he was over the first five games with a total of 35 points. He was all over the court this time, going 3 of 5 from deep and mixing in some well-timed dunks to ignite the crowd.

Edwards, whose 44-point performance was wasted in a Game 4 loss the last time he played at Target Center, had nine in the 20-0 spurt and needed only nine shots from the floor to get 19 points in the first half.

“Just shoot it every chance I get, because last game they took the ball out of my hands,” Ed-

wards said.

In the third quarter, he turned a steal into a fast break before using two crossover dribbles to get Michael Porter Jr. in the air and blow by him for a dunk. A few minutes later, he drove past Porter to draw a foul and landed hard on his back. The Wolves called timeout to give Edwards more time to catch his breath, and when he walked back on the court without missing time the “MVP!” chants fired up.

The Wolves were frequently in disarray on offense during Game 5 in Denver while Conley sat out with right leg soreness, and the 17-year veteran point guard clearly helped keep the half-court sets crisp and organized in his return.

“It was a no-brainer. I was going to try to find a way,” Conley said. “We’re just better when we’re a complete team.”

The Wolves held the Nuggets to 14 points in the first quarter, tied for the second-lowest total this postseason behind Miami (12 points) in a Game 3 loss to Boston in the first round.

## Stewart, Liberty ruin Clark’s home debut in rout

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Indiana Fever rookie Caitlin Clark learned some tough lessons from her first two WNBA tests.

She has struggled with fouls, expectations and, like most rookies, making a smooth transition from college ball to the pro level. And, here, there’s no grading curve, as Clark found out Thursday night.

Two-time league MVP Breanna Stewart ruined Clark’s regular-season home debut by scoring 31 points to lead the New York Liberty to a 102-66 victory in front of a sellout crowd of 17,247.

“I think this is how you want everything to be, you want a sel-

lout crowd like this,” Stewart said. “It gives you a little bit of a playoff atmosphere feel because usually in the playoffs, the games are sold out. We might be changing our terminology if we’re just going to continue to set the precedent of sellouts home or away.”

Clark’s presence has changed everything about the women’s sport — except the wins and losses for Indiana, which hasn’t made the playoffs since 2016 and is now 0-2 in the Clark era.

This game was Indianapolis’ most anticipated rookie debut since Peyton Manning with the NFL’s Indianapolis Colts in 1998, but things didn’t go according to plan.

She picked up three fouls in the first half and a fourth early in the third quarter. When Clark went to the bench early in the second quarter, she took out her frustrations on a towel and at one point after a Fever miscue she flipped the ball over her head to the ref.

Clark finished with nine points, seven rebounds and six assists and showed some progress by finishing with three turnovers — none after the first quarter — a dramatic improvement over the 10 she had in Tuesday night’s opener. Clark also was 2 of 8 from the field and just 1 of 7 on 3-pointers.

“I have great perspective of on everything and I think the

same is true of my college career,” she said before the game. “There were some moments that were absolutely amazing and there were some moments where I was not happy with how I played and how I performed and how my team performed. But that’s just life. That’s just basketball.”

Clark did not speak with reporters after the game though she did two lengthy interview sessions earlier Thursday.

Sabrina Ionescu and Jonquel Jones each scored 14 for New York. Jones also had 10 rebounds.

Aliyah Boston led the Fever with 12 points and seven rebounds.