

Recruits not tested for pot under new bill

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — New recruits and incoming officers into the military would not have to undergo mandatory cannabis testing under the House's version of an annual must-pass defense policy bill.

The draft of the 2025 National Defense Authorization Act bars the services from requiring an individual to submit to marijuana testing as a condition of enlisting or commissioning.

Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., attempted to add the provision as an amendment to last year's authorization bill, which sets priorities for the Pentagon, but was unsuccessful. Its inclusion this year was "a collaborative effort," he said Friday.

Supporters of the measure believe it will help the military attract recruits at a time when few young people want to or are eligible to serve.

"I do not believe that prior use of cannabis should exclude Americans from enlisting in the armed forces," Gaetz said

last year. "We should embrace them for stepping up to serve our country."

The military has long maintained a zero-tolerance, marijuana-use policy but has revisited and loosened its rules in recent years as more states legalized the drug.

The Air Force and Space Force began a pilot program in 2022 that allows some recruits who test positive for THC — the main psychoactive component in marijuana — to retake the test after 90 days.

The Army, Navy and Marine Corps also give applicants second chances to take a cannabis test, and the Navy announced in February that it will no longer send home recruits who test positive for marijuana upon their arrival at boot camp.

A 2021 Rand Corp. study of the Army's marijuana waiver policies showed recruits who received waivers for testing positive for cannabis or admitting to past drug use "perform no worse" than other soldiers.

"That should be welcome news in recruiting offices nationwide. More than half of all new recruits come from states where marijuana is now legal, at least for medicinal use," an essay accompanying the study said.

Recreational marijuana is now legal in 24 states, while medical marijuana use is legalized in another 14 states, according to the Pew Research Center.

The use and possession of marijuana remains illegal under federal law, but President Joe Biden's administration moved Thursday to downgrade marijuana from the most dangerous and restrictive category of drugs.

"Far too many lives have been upended because of a failed approach to marijuana, and I'm committed to righting those wrongs," Biden said.

The House Armed Services Committee is expected to meet this week to discuss the defense authorization legislation. The Senate Armed Services Committee has not yet released its version of the bill.

Navy seeks more high school access amid struggles

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Navy leaders on Thursday said they are pushing for more access to high schools as the service faces another recruiting shortfall this year and recruiters across the military complain of limited admission to campuses.

Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said the service wants to see recruiter access to high schoolers increase from a minimum of two times per year to four.

The Pentagon is pitching lawmakers on a similar proposal, describing current access standards for all services as "sub-optimal."

"We're getting the required level of access, not necessarily the desired level of access," Ashish Vazirani, the acting undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, said at a recent congressional hearing.

Del Toro told the Senate Armed Services

Committee on Thursday that the Navy's recruiters have cited a lack of adequate access to high schools as one of their top challenges. He said he has written thousands of letters to high school principals urging them to open their doors.

"We're working very closely with the Department of Education and with supervisors from across the nation to try to break down those barriers so that our recruiters can actually get access to the high schools," he said.

The Navy is expected to fall short of its 2024 recruiting goal by 6,200 sailors.

It has taken several controversial steps to boost its ranks, including enlisting people who did not graduate from high school as long as they scored at least a 50 out of 99 on the Armed Services Qualification Test. In 2022, the Navy started accepting more sailors who scored very low on the test and raised the maximum enlistment

age from 39 to 41.

Adm. Lisa Franchetti, chief of naval operations, assured senators the Navy was not lowering its standards. She said retention remained strong and recruitment was picking up, despite struggles to meet growing manning requirements at sea.

"We are 2,500 recruits ahead of where we were last year at this time, and I remain optimistic our marketing and data analytics investments will show additional progress throughout the year," she said.

Access to high schools remains a top focus, however. Graduating high school students are a critical source of new recruits for the military, and federal statutes mandate that recruiters be given the same access to public high schools as colleges and employers.

But about 5% of schools nationwide are failing to provide that access, according to an April report by the Rand Corp.

Army experiments with Guam missile defense

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

HONOLULU — The Army remains on track to deliver a “composite” missile-defense battalion that will become part of an integrated defense system for Guam, the commander of 94th Army Air and Missile Defense Command said Wednesday.

Guam is the test ground for the composite-battalion approach the Army will use to integrate its missile-defense capabilities, primarily the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, and Patriot systems.

“I can’t comment on the exact timeline, but the Army remains on track on the commitments that they’ve made to [U.S. Indo-Pacific Command] to deliver capability on time,” Brig. Gen. Patrick Costello said during a question-and-answer session at the Land Forces Pacific, or LANPAC, symposium on Wai-iki Beach.

“We are making strides on a daily basis on improving our defensive posture in Guam,” he said.

The 94th oversees the Army’s air defenses in the Indo-Pacific region and integrates them with the joint force and U.S. allies.

The Army’s Guam defense system will also employ the not-yet-fielded Indirect Fire Protection Capability, or IFPC — a mobile, ground-based system used to defeat cruise missiles, drones, rockets and mortars.

Costello said the Army will conduct the first live-fire testing of the integrated components on Guam before the end of the year.

Tying together the Army’s missile defense for Guam will be made possible by the Integrated Air Missile Defense Battle Command System that will be fielded over the next couple of years, Costello said.

The command system, designed by Northrop Grumman, can link any sensor or radar to any weapon anywhere, bypassing stove-piping that has historically kept missile-defense systems isolated from one another.

“By consolidating data from a number of different sensors, including radars, satellites and other partners and allies in the joint force, [the Battle Command System] creates a unified and comprehensive picture of the battlespace, providing expeditionary forces unparalleled situational awareness in decision-making capabilities,” Costello said.

USAF report cites power loss, weather in F-16 crash

By **DAVID CHOI**
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — A crash that resulted in the total loss of a \$30 million fighter jet last year was caused by a power loss and adverse weather conditions, according to an Air Force report released Friday.

The F-16C Fighting Falcon, assigned to the 80th Fighter Squadron at Kunsan Air Base, took off at 9:27 a.m. May 6, 2023, for routine training with three other aircraft, said the report from the service’s Accident Investigation Board.

Kunsan, about 115 miles south of Seoul on the Yellow Sea, is home to the 8th Fighter Wing and roughly 40 F-16s that make up most of the 7th Air Force’s fleet.

The horizon at the time was obscured by clouds from 1,400 feet to 17,000 feet, the report said. The unidentified pilot was flying through the clouds 11 seconds after takeoff when he experienced a partial electrical power loss

that resulted in inaccurate measurements from his flight and navigation instruments.

The readings caused the pilot to become “spatially disoriented” and “unable to tell where the horizon was located,” according to the report. As a result, the pilot unintentionally flew at a low altitude.

“The [pilot] fought through several human factors while attempting to maintain aircraft control and determine which instruments were providing accurate information,” the report said.

The combination of power loss and weather conditions were the sole culprits in the accident and “the absence of either factor may have prevented this mishap,” the investigation board said. It also determined that the aircraft was properly maintained by qualified crew members.

Investigators were unable to determine what caused the power loss due to a lack of evidence after the crash.

LCS quartet lined up by Navy for Mideast mine operations

By **SHANNON RENFROE**
Stars and Stripes

MANAMA, Bahrain — The Navy is on track to homeport four Independence-class littoral combat ships in Bahrain next year as part of a new mine countermeasures force in the Middle East, service officials said.

The first three ships will be USS Canberra, USS Tulsa and USS Santa Barbara, all based out of San Diego. The fourth is not yet identified, Capt. Nathan Wemett, commander of Naval Surface Group Central, said Friday.

The Navy has been required to wait on retiring its Bahrain-based Avenger-class ships, which were built in the 1980s and 1990s to counter mines, until the long-delayed introduction of a minehunting module for the littoral ships.

In April, USS Canberra became the inaugural LCS equipped with a mine countermeasures mission package, setting the stage for the ship’s deployment in 2025.

The upgrade featured the in-

tegration of sensors, software and unmanned vehicles, while the ship’s crew trained on using the module.

The Navy plans for 15 Independence-class ships in its global fleet to conduct the mine countermeasures mission, Rear Adm. Fred Pyle, the director of surface warfare on the chief of naval operations’ staff, said in a statement.

Deployment of ships with the mine countermeasure mission package will enhance the flexibility of the service’s expeditionary forces, Navy officials have said.

The pier construction on Naval Support Activity Bahrain, which lasted over three years, was necessary to support the ships with power, water, sewage and internet connections.

“We have taken the lessons learned from deploying the ships to Singapore, as well as USS Sioux City and Indianapolis over the last two years, to best posture our waterfront to support the LCS,” Wemett said.

Power will return in Houston after storms

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Houston area residents affected by deadly storms last week that left at least seven dead were finally getting some good news as officials said they expected power to be restored by Sunday evening to a majority of the hundreds of thousands still in the dark and without air conditioning amid hot and humid weather.

Help was also on the way in the form of disaster assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and loans from the Small Business Administration, said Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, the top elected official in the county where Houston is located. The federal assistance, which can help pay for temporary housing and repairs, will help residents affected by last week's storms as well as by flooding from heavy rainfall in late April and early May in parts of Houston, Harris County and several counties north of Houston.

The widespread destruction of Thursday's storms brought much of Houston to a standstill. Thunderstorms and hurricane-force winds tore through the

city — reducing businesses and other structures to piles of debris, uprooting trees and shattering glass from downtown skyscrapers.

A tornado also touched down near the northwest Houston suburb of Cypress.

More than 352,000 homes and businesses in Texas remained without electricity Sunday morning.

"It's been a madhouse out here," Cypress resident Hallie O'Bannon said.

"You know we don't have any power. No hot water. It's been really crazy."

CenterPoint Energy said it anticipated that about 80% of affected customers in the Houston area would have service restored by Sunday evening.

Hidalgo said 90% could be restored by Wednesday.

Officials had worried that high-voltage transmission towers torn apart by the high winds would substantially prolong efforts to restore power.

"They were able to go around and reroute around those downed towers because of the new technologies. It's great news," Hidalgo said.

Biden tells Morehouse graduates he hears their protests over Gaza war

Associated Press

ATLANTA — President Joe Biden on Sunday told the graduating class at Morehouse College that he heard their voices of protest over the Israel-Hamas war, and that scenes from the conflict in Gaza have been heartbreaking.

"I support peaceful nonviolent protest," he told students, some who wore keffiyeh scarves around their shoulders on top of their black graduation robes. "Your voices should be heard, and I promise you I hear them."

The president told the crowd that it was a "humanitarian crisis in Gaza, that's why I've called for an immediate ceasefire to stop the fighting" and bring home the hostages taken when Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7. The comments, toward the end of his address that also reflected on American democracy and his role in safeguarding it, were the most direct recognition to U.S. students about the campus protests that have swept across the country.

Morehouse's announcement that Biden would be the commencement speaker drew some backlash among the school's

faculty and supporters who oppose Biden's handling of the war. Some Morehouse alumni circulated an online letter condemning school administrators for inviting Biden and soliciting signatures to pressure Morehouse President David Thomas to rescind it.

The letter claimed that Biden's approach to Israel amounted to support of genocide in Gaza and was out of step with the pacifism expressed by Martin Luther King Jr., Morehouse's most famous graduate.

Some members of the graduating class showed support for Palestinians in Gaza by tying keffiyeh scarves around their shoulders on top of their black graduation robes. One student draped himself in a Palestinian flag. On the stage behind the president, academics unfurled a Democratic Republic of Congo flag. The country has been mired in an ongoing civil war that has plunged the nation into violence and displaced millions of people. Many racial justice advocates have called for greater attention to the conflict and for greater attention in the U.S. to the conflict as well as American aid in ending the violence.

Trump gets NRA nod, urges no votes for Biden, Kennedy

Associated Press

DALLAS — Former President Donald Trump urged gun owners to vote in the 2024 election as he addressed thousands of members of the National Rifle Association, which officially endorsed him just before Trump took the stage at their annual meeting in Texas on Saturday.

"We've got to get gun owners to vote," Trump said. "I think you're a rebellious bunch. But let's be rebellious and vote this time."

Trump, in his speech, said the

Second Amendment "is very much on the ballot" in November, alleging that, if Democratic President Joe Biden "gets four more years they are coming for your guns, 100% certain. Crooked Joe has a 40-year-record of trying to rip firearms out of the hands of law-abiding citizens."

The Biden administration has taken a number of steps to try to combat gun violence, including a new rule that aims to close a loophole that has allowed tens of thousands of guns to be sold ev-

ery year by unlicensed dealers who do not perform background checks.

Trump has pledged to continue to defend the Second Amendment, which he claims is "under siege," and has called himself "the best friend gun owners have ever had in the White House" as the United States faces record numbers of deaths due to mass shootings. Last year ended with 42 mass killings and 217 deaths, making it one of the deadliest years on record.

Trump also laced into inde-

pendent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr., calling him "radical left" and "a disaster," and noting that Kennedy had once called the NRA a "terror group."

"Don't think about it. Don't waste your vote," he said. "He calls you a terrorist group, and I call you the backbone of America." (Kennedy later said in a Fox News interview that he didn't remember his 2018 tweet. "I don't consider them a terror group, and I support the Second Amendment," he said.)

Cavoli: Russia incapable of 'breakthrough'

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The Russian military lacks enough troops for a major breakthrough in Ukraine despite recent battlefield gains, the top U.S. military commander in Europe said recently.

Gen. Christopher Cavoli, speaking at the end of high-level talks Thursday in Brussels, said problems in the Russian army will likely confine it to incremental advances for now.

"The Russians don't have the numbers necessary to do a strategic breakthrough," said Cavoli,

NATO's supreme allied commander and head of U.S. European Command.

The Russians also are hindered by the low quality of their force, as heavy casualties have taken a toll on the officer corps, according to NATO officials.

"They don't have the skill and the capability to ... operate at the scale necessary to exploit any breakthrough to strategic advantage," Cavoli said.

His comments come after a series of Russian advances in recent days that has caused alarm in Ukraine.

While the Russians have their

own challenges, Ukraine is struggling with a lack of manpower and a dwindling supply of ammunition.

Still, Cavoli said he expects Ukraine's military to "hold the line."

Ukraine's position could improve in the days ahead as large amounts of ammunition recently provided by the U.S. after months of political delay begins flowing to ground units.

Still, there are concerns about the future course of the war.

Dutch Adm. Rob Bauer, head of NATO's military committee, said the Russians have adapted after their failures in the early

phase of the conflict.

Russia has improved its logistics and ramped up deployment of electronic warfare systems, which, to the surprise of NATO leaders, was absent at the outset of the fighting, Bauer said.

The Russians also have transitioned to a domestic wartime economy, churning out weaponry and equipment to replace what's been damaged on the battlefield.

"Industrial capacity is a change that we see, where they are actually moving forward faster than we (are) in Europe and in North America," Bauer said.

Israeli airstrike kills dozens; Gaza governance discussed

Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — An Israeli airstrike killed 27 people in central Gaza, mostly women and children, and fighting with Hamas raged across the north on Sunday as Israel's leaders aired divisions over who should govern Gaza after the war, now in its eighth month.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faces criticism from the two other members of his War Cabinet, with his main political rival, Benny Gantz, threatening to leave the government if a plan is not created by June 8 that includes an international administration for postwar Gaza.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan was meeting with Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders Sunday to discuss an ambitious U.S. plan for Saudi Arabia to recognize Israel and help the Palestinian Authority govern Gaza in exchange for a path to eventual statehood.

Netanyahu opposes Palestinian statehood and has rejected those proposals, saying Israel will maintain open-ended security control over Gaza and partner with local Palestinians unaffiliated with Hamas or the Western-backed Palestinian Authority.

Gantz's ultimatum expressed support for normalizing ties with Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, but he also said, "we will not allow any outside power, friendly or hostile, to impose a Palestinian state on us." His withdrawal would not bring down Netanyahu's coalition government but would leave him more reliant on far-right allies who support the "voluntary emigration" of Palestinians from Gaza, full military occupation and the rebuilding of Jewish settlements there.

Even as discussions about the future take on new weight, the war rages. In recent weeks, Hamas militants have regrouped in parts of northern Gaza that were heavily bombed in the war's early days and where Israeli ground troops operated.

The airstrike in Nuseirat, a built-up refugee camp in central Gaza dating back to the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, killed 27 people, including 10 women and seven children, according to records at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in nearby Deir al-Balah, which received the bodies.

A separate strike on a Nuseirat street killed five people, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent emergency service.

Helicopter carrying Iran's leader apparently crashed

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, the country's foreign minister and other officials apparently crashed in the mountainous northwest reaches of Iran on Sunday, sparking a massive rescue operation in a fog-shrouded forest as the public was urged to pray.

The likely crash came as Iran under Raisi and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei launched an unprecedented drone-and-missile attack on Israel last month and has enriched uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels.

Iran has also faced years of mass protests against its Shiite theocracy over an ailing economy and women's rights—making the moment that much more sensitive for Tehran and the future of the country as the Israel-Hamas war inflames the wider Middle East.

Raisi was traveling in Iran's East Azerbaijan province. State TV said what it called a "hard landing" happened near Jolfa, a city on the border with the nation of Azerbaijan, some 375 miles northwest of the Iranian capital,

Tehran.

Later, state TV put it farther east near the village of Uzi, but details remained contradictory.

Traveling with Raisi were Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabbollahian, the governor of Iran's East Azerbaijan province and other officials and bodyguards, the state-run IRNA news agency reported. One local government official used the word "crash," but others referred to either a "hard landing" or an "incident."

Neither IRNA nor state TV offered any information on Raisi's condition in the hours afterward. However, hard-liners urged the public to pray for him. State TV later aired images of the faithful praying at Imam Reza Shrine in the city of Mashhad, one of Shiite Islam's holiest sites, as well as in Qom and other locations across the country.

State TV aired images of SUVs racing through a wooded area and said they were being hampered by poor weather conditions, including heavy rain and wind.

Raisi had been on the border with Azerbaijan early Sunday to inaugurate a dam with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Giant gas planet as fluffy and puffy as cotton candy

FL CAPE CANAVERAL — Astronomers have identified a planet that's bigger than Jupiter yet surprisingly as fluffy and light as cotton candy.

The exoplanet has exceedingly low density for its size, an international team reported. The gas giants in our solar system — Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune — are much denser.

"The planet is basically super fluffy" because it's made mostly of light gases rather than solids, lead author Khalid Barkaoui of Massachusetts Institute of Technology said in a statement.

Scientists said an outlier like WASP-193b is ideal for studying unconventional planetary formation and evolution. It's thought to consist mostly of hydrogen and helium, according to the study published in *Nature Astronomy*.

Man guilty in stolen Masters items scheme

IL CHICAGO — A former warehouse assistant for Augusta National Golf Club in Georgia pleaded guilty to transporting millions of dollars worth of stolen Masters tournament memorabilia and historic items, including one of Arnold Palmer's iconic green jackets.

Richard Globensky, of Georgia, entered the plea in federal court in Chicago. He was charged with one count of transporting goods knowing they had been stolen.

According to federal prosecutors, the 39-year-old took items from the warehouse for sellers in Florida, who then sold them online at a significant markup.

Globensky was paid through a limited liability company set up in his wife's name, among other ways. The scheme lasted for more than a decade and earned him more than \$5 million.

As part of a plea deal, Globensky must write a \$1.5 million cashier's check to the government within days. He remains free on bond and faces a maximum 10-year prison term when he's sentenced Oct. 29, but will likely get closer to two years in prison under federal guidelines.

Walmart to lay off some workers, relocate others

AR BENTONVILLE — Walmart announced layoffs affecting several hundred jobs at the retail giant's campus offices.

It also said it will require most remote workers and personnel in its Dallas, Atlanta and Toronto offices to relocate to its primary offices in Bentonville, Ark.; Hoboken, N.J.; and the San Francisco Bay Area.

The news, conveyed via a Walmart staff memo provided to The Associated Press, said the relocations will serve the goal of "bringing more of us together more often." The memo likewise noted that being together in person "makes us better and helps us to collaborate, innovate and move even faster."

The memo did not give a reason for the layoffs beyond stating that "some parts of our business have made changes" that will result in job losses.

Feds: Steering wheel decals can cause injuries

MI DETROIT — Federal auto safety regulators are warning people not to stick

decals on their steering wheels because they can be hurled at drivers if the air bags inflate in a crash.

The warning from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration comes after another driver was severely hurt by a flying emblem during a crash. The air bag inflated and sent two pieces of metal from an aftermarket decal into the driver's face and neck.

The agency said it couldn't say where or when the injury occurred. But it said the injury was the second it is aware of involving an aftermarket decal. In the previous case the driver lost sight in one eye after being hit by a rhinestone-adorned decal that hit them in the face, NHTSA said in a statement.

The decals usually have an adhesive on the back and cover the vehicle's logo in the middle of the steering wheel. But the agency says any alterations to the air bag or its cover can cause malfunctions.

'Judge Judy' sues tabloids for defamation story

NY NEW YORK — "Judge Judy" Sheindlin sued the parent company of the *National Enquirer* and *InTouch Weekly* for a story that she said falsely claimed that she was trying to help the Menendez brothers get a retrial after they were convicted of murdering their parents.

The story was first published on *InTouch Weekly's* website under the headline "Inside Judge Judy's Quest to Save the Menendez Brothers Nearly 35 Years After Their Parents' Murder," according to the lawsuit, filed in circuit court in Collier County, Fla.

A version of the story later appeared in the *National Enquirer*, a sister publication to *InTouch Weekly* also owned by Accelerate360 Media.

Sheindlin said she's had nothing to say about the case. Her lawsuit speculated that the news outlets used statements in a Fox Nation docuseries made by "Judi Ramos," a woman identified as an alternate juror in the first Menendez trial, and misattributed them to the television judge.

Legislature OKs tough data privacy measure

VT MONTPELIER — The Democrat-controlled Vermont legislature has passed one of the strongest data privacy measures in the country aimed at cracking down on companies' use of online personal data, which would let consumers file civil lawsuits against companies that break certain privacy rules.

However, Republican Gov. Phil Scott has concerns about how part of the legislation could affect small businesses. He hasn't seen the final bill that passed before the Legislature adjourned. He will make a decision once he's had a chance to review it, his spokesperson Jason Maulucci said.

The bill prohibits the sale of sensitive data, such as Social Security and drivers' license numbers, financial or health information. It also sets meaningful limits on the amount of personal data that companies can collect and use, according to the non-profit Electronic Privacy Information Center based in Washington, D.C.

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Usyk tops Fury, unifies heavyweight title

Associated Press

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Oleksandr Usyk has been shorter, lighter and older than all of his opponents since he moved up to the heavyweight division.

Usyk's heart and skill are enormous, and he overcame a major size disadvantage against Tyson Fury to become the world's first undisputed heavyweight boxing champion in 24 years.

Usyk defeated Fury by split decision on Sunday, knocking down his hulking opponent in the ninth round and eventually earning a narrow win on two scorecards. The 37-year-old Ukrainian is the first heavyweight to hold every major title belt since Lennox Lewis.

Usyk (22-0) added Fury's WBC title to his own WBA, IBF and WBO belts with a spectacular late-round rally in a back-and-forth matchup between two previously unbeaten champions from a strong era of heavyweight boxing. Two judges

es favored Usyk, 115-112 and 114-113, while the third gave it to Fury, 114-113.

"It's a great time. It's a great day," said Usyk, who is 6 inches shorter than Fury and weighed in 30 pounds lighter last week.

Usyk started quickly, but then had to survive while the confident, charismatic Fury dominated the middle rounds. Usyk surged in the final rounds, just as the Olympic gold medalist has done so many times in his career, taking control with a dominant eighth and nearly stopping Fury in the ninth.

Usyk hurt the 6-foot-9 Fury (34-1-1) with a left hand and eventually sent him sprawling into a corner in the final seconds of the round, getting credit for a knockdown right before Fury was saved by the bell. Fury struggled to mount a consistent attack after nearly getting stopped, and the knockdown turned out to be the decisive factor in the decision.

"Thank you so much to my team," Usyk said while fighting back tears in the ring. "It's a big opportunity for me, for my family, for my country. Slava Ukraini!"

Fury kissed Usyk on the head after the final bell, and Usyk hugged Fury several moments after the decision was read. Fury also said he wants the rematch in October.

"I believe I won that fight," Fury said. "I believe he won a few of the rounds, but I won the majority of them, and I believe it was one of those what-can-you-do, one of them ... decisions in boxing. We both put on a good fight, best we can do."

"You know, his country is at war, so people are siding with a country at war. But make no mistake, I won that fight, in my opinion, and I'll be back. I've got a rematch clause."

Usyk is the first undisputed heavyweight champion since Lewis held the honor for five months in 1999 and 2000. He is

also now the lineal heavyweight champion by beating Fury, who beat Wladimir Klitschko to earn that distinction in 2015.

After moving up from cruiserweight, Usyk upset Anthony Joshua to win three title belts in 2021. He kept them through a rematch and another defense while angling for the ultimate payday of a fight against Fury in Saudi Arabia.

Usyk landed 41% of his 407 punches, while Fury landed just 31.7% of his 496 punches, according to CompuBox statistics. Usyk both threw (260 to 210) and landed (122 to 95) more power punches.

Usyk has now joined the elite club of fighters who held every major world championship belt at heavyweight — and he is the first to do it in the four-belt era, which began in 2007. The list of undisputed champions includes Jack Dempsey, Joe Louis, Floyd Patterson, Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier and Mike Tyson.

Mavericks edge Thunder to reach Western finals

Associated Press

DALLAS — Kyrie Irving probably wondered if his uncanny run of closeout victories without a loss in his career was finally near an end.

The streak lives, and the Dallas Mavericks are through to the Western Conference finals for the second time in three seasons.

P.J. Washington Jr. made two free throws before an intentional miss with 2.5 seconds left as the Mavs rallied from 17 points down in the second half for a 117-116 victory over the Oklahoma City Thunder to finish the second-round series Saturday night.

The Mavericks wrapped up the series in Game 6 at home against the top-seeded Thunder, just as they did in the first round against the Los Angeles Clippers.

Dallas — which trailed by 17 early in the third quarter and by nine early in the fourth — will start the West finals at the Denver-Minnesota winner on Wednesday night.

"Being down 17 in a closeout game isn't a position you want to be in," said Irving, who

is now 14-0 in such games and will play in the conference finals for the first time since 2017 with Cleveland. "But that's where we found ourselves. We had to respond the way we've been responding all season."

Washington was fouled by Shai Gilgeous-Alexander on a 3-point attempt after Chet Holmgren put the Thunder in front 116-115 with a dunk on an assist from his star guard with 20 seconds remaining.

Luka Doncic, who had 29 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for his fourth triple-double this postseason, worked his way to the basket in the final seconds before passing to Washington in the corner. Washington pump-faked to get Gilgeous-Alexander in the air and the whistle blew as the shot fell short.

Oklahoma City challenged the call, but replay showed Gilgeous-Alexander making contact with Washington's arm as he went up to shoot.

"Obviously if I had the moment back I wouldn't have fouled him," said Gilgeous-Alexander, who had a playoff career high

with 36 points. "I would have just let him miss the shot. You wish you would take the moment back. Just have to learn from it, and I will."

After making the first two free throws to put Dallas in front, Washington missed on purpose with the Thunder out of timeouts after the challenge. Holmgren passed to Jalen Williams, whose desperation shot from well behind half court wasn't close.

"If it was a clear-as-day foul, I obviously wouldn't have challenged it and held the timeout," Oklahoma City coach Mark Daigneault said. "Even if you advance the ball with 2.5 seconds at a deficit, your chances are very low."

The final sequence capped a riveting fourth quarter with five lead changes and two ties in the final five minutes after the Thunder led for all but one minute until then.

Irving and Derrick Jones Jr. scored 22 points apiece for Dallas. It was the second consecutive game with a playoff career high for Jones.

Two tied for lead in PGA championship

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — The cheers were endless Saturday in the PGA Championship, and when another record day of scoring finally ended at vulnerable Valhalla, so were the possibilities.

Xander Schauffele and Collin Morikawa were tied for the lead. Shane Lowry thrust his way into the mix with a 62 to tie a major championship record last set just two days earlier. Bryson DeChambeau chipped in for eagle on the last hole to set off a wild celebration.

And all Scottie Scheffler could do during all this chaos — at least it was inside the ropes this time — was listen to them.

Scheffler's remarkable streak of 42 consecutive rounds at par or better finally ended in the second-lowest scoring average for a Saturday at the PGA Championship. He faded early, never quite recovered and shot 73 to finish eight shots back

with 23 players ahead of him.

"Too many mistakes," Scheffler told CBS. He declined to speak to reporters. "I came out here hoping to have a good round and didn't get it done."

Schauffele, who opened the week with a 62 that felt easy, labored to stay in front and was two shots ahead until a 9-iron came out hot and sailed over the green at the 15th. With water on the other side of the green, he was careful with a chip out of shin-high grass and moved it 10 feet. He chipped on and two-putted for a double bogey, only his second hole over par this week.

Schauffele bounced back with two closing birdies for a 3-under 68.

Morikawa briefly took the lead with a 6-foot birdie putt that went 360 degrees around the cup before dropping on the 15th, and he holed a 10-foot birdie on the 18th for a 67 to tie Schauffele. They were at 15-

under 198 with plenty of company.

Sahith Theegala birdied six of his last 10 holes for a 68 and was one shot behind. Another shot back was the trio of Lowry, DeChambeau (67) and Viktor Hovland (66) — a British Open champion, U.S. Open champion and FedEx Cup champion.

And it didn't stop there. Fifteen players were separated by five shots.

"There are a ton of guys who can do it (Sunday)," Morikawa said.

The shocker was Scheffler not being among them.

Scheffler was coming off the most heart-racing day of his career that featured an arrest for not following police orders, brief jail time and a 66 to get into contention for a second straight major. But he was never a factor after an early stretch of double bogey-bogey-bogey.

"I definitely did not feel like myself today," he said. "Yes-

terday happened, I did my best to recover from it and come out and compete. This morning was not my usual routine for a round. At the end of the day, I came out hoping to have a good round but I wasn't able to get it done, which was frustrating."

Even at the home of the Kentucky Derby, this final round could be tough to handicap.

Lowry's magnificent performance — he made 161 feet worth of putts — ended with a wedge to just inside 12 feet and a clear shot at 61, only to not give the putt enough pace.

"Probably the most disappointed anyone can ever be shooting 62," Lowry said. "Look, I went out there with a job to do today, and my job was to try to get myself back in the tournament. And I definitely did that."

DeChambeau had only three birdies and didn't get much out of his round until he chipped in for his eagle.

Oilers roll past Canucks, force deciding 7th game

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — The Edmonton Oilers weren't ready to have their season end. Now they're going to the limit in their second-round series against the Vancouver Canucks.

Evan Bouchard and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins each had a goal and two assists, Connor McDavid added three assists and the Oilers beat the Canucks 5-1 on Saturday night to avoid elimination and force a deciding Game 7.

"The boys were ready from the start. We obviously knew what was at stake tonight," Edmonton forward Dylan Holloway said. "There was probably a bit of nerves, but once we kind of got settled in we played our game and rolled all four lines and got going there and never looked back."

Dylan Holloway, Zach Hyman and Evander Kane also scored for the Oilers, and Stuart Skinner stopped 14 shots.

"We played faster, we played cleaner, we were better with the puck, better coming through the neutral zone," McDavid said.

"We did a great job of getting on top of them on the forecheck and keeping pucks alive.

"Nothing to be satisfied or excited about, we just bought ourselves another day and I would expect the same level of urgency and desperation from our group. I would expect Vancouver to play a better game as well and I would expect it to be a highly competitive, great Game 7."

Nils Hoglander scored for Vancouver, which is trying to make it to the Western Conference finals for the first time since 2011. Arturs Silovs finished with 22 saves.

"We knew obviously this was going to be a difficult test to win tonight," Canucks forward Brock Boeser said. "Obviously, they got a couple of goals that obviously sucked and took the wind out of us. I think the belief is in this room."

Game 7 is Monday night in Vancouver, with the winner advancing to face Dallas in the Western Conference finals.

Edmonton started the scoring at 8:18 of the first period as Leon Draisaitl fed it up to Holloway and he danced through the de-

fense before tucking it between Silovs' legs for his third of the playoffs.

"What an unbelievable effort," Hyman said. "For a guy who came up really for the playoffs to do that, he's had big moments here, but it's a huge goal to settle the team down to get us up."

Draisaitl has picked up at least one point in all 11 playoff games this season.

Less than two minutes later, the Canucks evened it up as Elias Pettersson sent a pass from behind the net out front to Hoglander, who snuck his first of the playoffs past Skinner just past the midpoint of the period.

The Oilers looked to have scored with 1 second remaining in the first on a point shot from Bouchard, but the goal was called off due to McDavid making incidental contact with Silovs.

Edmonton went ahead for good at 7:14 of the second as McDavid spotted Hyman in the slot and his shot deflected and bounced up and over Silovs and into the Vancouver net for his 10th of the playoffs.

Soto helps Yanks push win streak to 6

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Juan Soto had his first multihomer game with the Yankees, Luis Gil struck out a career-high 14 and New York beat the Chicago White Sox 6-1 on Saturday to extend its winning streak to a season-high six games.

Giancarlo Stanton and Jose Trevino also went deep for New York, which has won 12 of 14 and improved to an AL-best 32-15. Soto was 4 for 4 with a walk and is batting .317 with 11 homers and 37 RBIs.

"It was a fun day," said Soto, who has rebounded after a 3-for-25 slide on a six-game road trip.

New York is 12-2-1 in series, matching 2002 as the only times since 1950 the Yankees have won 12 of their first 15 series.

Soto tied the score in the first with a 417-foot drive deep into the right-field bleachers, had an RBI single in the second and hit another solo shot in the fifth with a 437-footer deeper into the right-field bleachers. It was the 18th multihomer game for Soto, who combined with Stanton and Aaron Judge to make New York the first team this

year with a trio of double-digit home run hitters.

Gil (5-1) won his fourth straight start and fifth consecutive decision, allowing one run, five hits and one walk in six innings. Gil has given up two runs over 24½ innings in his last four starts.

Brad Keller (0-2) allowed a career-high four homers. Making his second start this season, he gave up six runs — five earned — and seven hits in four-plus innings. Chicago batters struck out a season-high 16 times as the White Sox dropped to a major league-worst 4-18 on the road and 14-32 overall.

Cubs 1, Pirates 0: Christopher Morel singled in Cody Bellinger with one out in the ninth to give host Chicago a win over Pittsburgh.

Rays 5, Blue Jays 4: Jonny DeLuca hit a go-ahead home run in the eighth inning and visiting Tampa Bay overcame a four-run deficit to beat Toronto for their 11th win in 15 games.

Giants 14, Rockies 4: Luis Matos hit a three-run homer and had a career-high six RBIs to continue his hot streak, Matt Chapman went 4 for 4 and

scored three runs and host San Francisco used 18 hits to rout Colorado.

Marlins 10, Mets 9 (10): Josh Bell hit a tying homer off Edwin Díaz in a four-run ninth inning, the latest costly meltdown by the struggling New York closer, and Otto Lopez singled home the winning run in the 10th as host Miami rallied for a victory.

Guardians 11, Twins 4: José Ramírez homered and had three RBIs and Logan Allen pitched six strong innings, sending host Cleveland to a romp over Minnesota, which lost its fifth straight and remained in an offensive funk.

Royals 5, Athletics 3: Seth Lugo struck out 10 and earned his American League-leading seventh victory as host Kansas City beat Oakland.

Phillies 4, Nationals 3 (10): Bryce Harper hit a game-winning sacrifice fly in the 10th inning after Kody Clemens tied it with a home run with two outs in the ninth, lifting host Philadelphia to a victory over Washington.

Brewers 4, Astros 2: William Contreras hit a go-ahead three-run homer off Justin

Verlander in the fifth inning to give visiting Milwaukee a win over Houston.

Mariners 4, Orioles 3: Cal Raleigh and Dylan Moore hit RBI doubles in the eighth inning, capping a comeback that gave visiting Seattle a victory over Baltimore.

Cardinals 7, Red Sox 2: Nolan Gorman homered early and added an RBI single during a five-run eighth inning that propelled host St. Louis to a victory against Boston.

Dodgers 4, Reds 0: Walker Buehler pitched six sharp innings with seven strikeouts in his third start since returning from Tommy John surgery, leading host Los Angeles to a victory over Cincinnati.

Rangers 3, Angels 2 (13): Nathaniel Lowe was hit by a pitch from Carson Fulmer with the bases loaded in the 13th inning, forcing home the winning run as host Texas outlasted Los Angeles.

Tigers 8, Diamondbacks 3: Wenceel Pérez hit a three-run triple to break open a close game and Jack Flaherty picked up his first victory of the season as visiting Detroit rallied to beat Arizona.

Seize the Grey goes wire-to-wire to win Preakness

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — D. Wayne Lukas worked his way to Seize the Grey after his horse won the Preakness Stakes and kept getting interrupted by well-wishers offering congratulations.

"I think they're trying to get rid of me," Lukas said. "They probably want me to retire. I don't think that'll happen."

Not when the 88-year-old Hall of Fame trainer keeps winning big-time races.

Seize the Grey ended Kentucky Derby winner Mystik Dan's Triple Crown bid Saturday by going wire to wire to win

the Preakness, giving Lukas his seventh victory in the race, one short of the record held by good friend Bob Baffert.

"I'm only one behind him — I warned him already," Lukas said. "It never gets old at this level, and I love the competition. I love to get in here with the rest of them."

The strapping grey colt took advantage of the muddy track just as Lukas hoped he would, pulling off the upset in a second consecutive impressive start two weeks after romping in a race on the Derby undercard at Churchill Downs. Going off at

9-1 as one of the longest shots on the board, Seize the Grey moved to the lead immediately out of the starting gate and never looked back, finishing 2¼ lengths ahead of Mystik Dan in 1:56.82.

"I thought his action down the backside was beautiful, and I knew that he was handling the track," Lukas said. "I said, 'Watch out, he's not going to quit.'"

Mystik Dan finished second in the field of eight horses running in the \$2 million, 1⅓-mile race. After falling short of going back to back following his win

by a nose in the Kentucky Derby, it would be a surprise if he runs in the Belmont Stakes on June 8 at Saratoga Race Course.

"My colt's a fantastic colt and proud of him," trainer Kenny McPeck said. "It just wasn't his day, but he'll live to race again."

Seize the Grey was a surprise Preakness winner facing tougher competition than in the Pat Day Mile on May 4. Though given the Lukas connection, it should never be a surprise when one of his horses is covered in a blanket of Black-Eyed Susan flowers.