

DOD's maritime aid effort has setbacks in Gaza

The Washington Post

The Pentagon's highly anticipated plan to deliver aid to suffering Palestinians via a floating pier off the Gaza Strip has encountered almost immediate logistical and security setbacks, officials said Tuesday, marking an inauspicious start to the mission intended to ease a severe humanitarian crisis there.

After desperate people seized food destined for a U.N. warehouse over the weekend, U.S., Israeli and aid officials have begun discussing alternative routes into Gaza, said Maj. Gen. Patrick Ryder, the Pentagon's spokesman.

"The goal, of course, is to get this humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people who need

it most," Ryder told reporters. He said that 569 metric tons of aid, supplied by the United States along with European and other nations, has been consolidated on the shore. It is unclear how much of that aid has left the site for distribution in Gaza.

U.S. military personnel shipped the pier to the Mediterranean and assembled it at great cost in recent weeks. The obstacles facing the operation, which began making deliveries into Gaza on Friday, are another reflection of the complex conditions created by the war between Israeli forces and Hamas militants, and the acute humanitarian crisis the conflict has engendered.

According to officials with the

United Nations' World Food Program, 10 trucks' worth of food assistance were delivered from the U.S.-established staging area to a U.N. warehouse Friday.

On Saturday, however, some aid was looted during a subsequent delivery to the storage facilities. Of 16 trucks transporting aid from the staging area that day, five arrived with shipments intact, while most or all of the food parcels were taken from 11 other trucks, WFP said.

Many of the details about the nascent aid operation remained unclear Tuesday, and officials gave conflicting accounts about the situation on the ground.

While Ryder said none of the U.S.-facilitated aid had been

distributed to civilians in Gaza, where U.N. officials are sounding the alarm about famine conditions, WFP officials said some of that aid had reached recipients.

WFP spokesperson Shaza Moghraby cautioned that "safe and consistent access" and "basic operating conditions" for delivering assistance would be required for the operation.

"To minimize the risk of that happening again, we need sufficient supplies to enter Gaza and our security concerns addressed," Moghraby said. "Community acceptance and trust that this is not a one-off delivery is key for the success of the operation. It would be very difficult to proceed otherwise."

Judge dismisses convictions in 5 'Fat Leonard' cases

The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — A federal judge Tuesday dismissed the felony convictions of five retired military officers and blasted the U.S. Attorney's Office for its "significant misconduct" in the prosecution of the U.S. Navy's "Fat Leonard" bribery and corruption scandal.

U.S. District Judge Janis Sammartino said the continued crumbling of the case is an "embarrassment to the government." During a hearing in her San Diego courtroom, she called it an "extremely unfortunate" situation that was "all the government's making."

Sammartino made the comments during a hearing in which she agreed — reluctantly — to throw out a previous guilty plea by former Navy Cmdr. Stephen Shedd and dismissed all charges against him. She also dismissed felony pleas by three other former Navy officers and a retired Marine colonel and allowed the four men to each plead guilty to a single misdemeanor.

In a similar move last year as the result of the same government misconduct, the

judge tossed out the jury convictions of four Navy officers who had been found guilty at trial and allowed them to plead guilty to misdemeanor counts.

Sammartino made it clear Tuesday that there was no new information to suggest the five defendants in her courtroom did not accept the bribes or commit the acts to which they previously pleaded guilty. But she said the misconduct and its snowball effect made it so that dismissing Shedd's charges and allowing the four misdemeanor plea deals was the best remaining option.

"While not a perfect resolution, it is accepted to minimize disparities in this case," the judge said. If their previous felony pleas had been left to stand, the officers who pleaded guilty would have faced harsher penalties than those who went to trial.

Sammartino also said the government's continued lack of communication to the public and the military community about what has gone wrong with the prosecution was "troublesome."

Tuesday's hearing provided the latest twist in what has become a spectacular unraveling of the legal case against the dozens of Navy officers who took bribes from Leonard Glenn Francis, aka "Fat Leonard," the Malaysian contractor at the center of the corruption scheme.

As the case dragged on, it began to show cracks. Defense attorneys raised questions about evidence that they believed prosecutors tried to hide — questions that led Sammartino to declare Assistant U.S. Attorney Mark Pletcher, the former lead prosecutor in the case, had committed "flagrant misconduct."

The defense attorneys also questioned the reliability of other documents in the case and the prosecution's failure to disclose that a key investigator had made false statements in a similar investigation.

Defense attorneys also raised red flags about the preferential treatment Francis received while on house arrest before he absconded and fled the country in late 2022. He has since been returned to the United States as part of a prisoner swap.

DOD plans return to Peleliu in Pacific

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon is proposing a new U.S. military site on a Micronesian island where a bloody battle raged during World War II.

Department of Defense representatives met Republic of Palau leaders and residents May 13-15 to discuss the proposed facility on the island of Peleliu, according to a May 17 statement from Joint Region Marianas.

Engineers from the Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps shared details of the proposal with the Palauans, including plans to repair and expand the Peleliu Airstrip and South Dock, the statement said.

Efforts by Beijing to gain influence in the region, including a pact with the Solomon Islands that's seen as a precursor to forward basing by the Chinese navy, has the attention of U.S. officials.

President Joe Biden signed legislation March 9 that provides \$7.1 billion over two dec-

ades and renews compacts with Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau.

The compacts grant the U.S. military exclusive access to the nations' land, airspace and waters, while their citizens are allowed to work and attend school in America, enlist in the U.S. armed services and access veterans' health care.

The U.S. Army began training again in Palau in 2019, after a 37-year hiatus. The following year, a Patriot missile battery deployed there and shot down a target drone during an exercise.

In October 2020, then-Palau President Tommy Remengesau Jr. offered to host new military facilities, including ports and air bases.

"Palau's request to the U.S. military remains simple — build joint-use facilities, then come and use them regularly," Remengesau wrote to then-Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, according to a Wall Street Journal report the following month.

RIMPAC exercise drawing nearly 30 nations, 40 ships

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

Forty ships from nearly 30 nations are slated to participate in this summer's Rim of the Pacific exercise in and around the Hawaiian islands, the Navy said in a news release Tuesday.

The biennial RIMPAC, which the U.S. Navy touts as the largest international maritime exercise in the world, has been held 29 times since it began in 1971.

The training starts June 26 and runs through Aug. 2 and will include three submarines, 14 land-based forces, over 150 aircraft and about 25,000 personnel, according to the Navy.

This year's exercise includes forces from Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Ecuador, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tonga, the United Kingdom and the U.S.

The head of U.S. 3rd Fleet will serve as the Combined Task Force commander for the exercise.

Vice Adm. Michael Boyle is currently commander of the San Diego-based 3rd Fleet.

Vice Adm. John Wade, who previously oversaw the task force in charge of defueling the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility in Hawaii, has been nominated to replace Boyle.

Commodore Alberto Guerrero, of the Chilean navy, will serve as deputy commander of the Combined Task Force. Rear Adm. Kazushi Yokota of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force will serve as vice commander.

The expected participation in this year's exercise is an increase over the 26 nations and 38 ships that joined the drills in 2022.

The Navy did not provide specifics about what drills will take place this summer.

The training will "strengthen our collective forces and promote a free and open Indo-Pacific," the news release states.

The exercise will enhance the capability of the joint force "to deter and defeat aggression by major powers across all domains and levels of conflict," according to the release.

Court: Judge erred in barring anime in child porno case

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

A military judge erred in deciding that anime with childlike characters didn't qualify as child pornography and was inadmissible as evidence in a noncommissioned officer's pending court-martial, an Air Force appellate court unanimously ruled.

"The questions of whether those images are of persons or minors, and whether the depictions are obscene, are questions of fact" that should be determined at trial, Air Force Court

of Criminal Appeals judges stated in a 3-0 decision on Tuesday.

The ruling stems from the case of Staff Sgt. Remington Carlisle, who was charged with one specification each of possessing, viewing and distributing child pornography.

Court documents described 33 images and videos found on his smartphone as "anime style depictions" of "overtly sexualized characters and sexually explicit images and plots."

The judge, Col. Brian Thompson, found that most of the char-

acters "appear to have the developmental age of a child in the six- to ten-years-old range," according to court papers.

But the case stalled in January, when government prosecutors responding to a defense demand provided a "bill of particulars," a written statement that detailed all 33 visual depictions.

The defense moved to exclude the material, arguing that it did not depict minors and was not sexually explicit.

In an Article 39 pretrial hearing at Mountain Home Air

Force Base, Idaho, Thompson determined that the videos and images were inadmissible and irrelevant, saying the subjects did not appear to be minors or human beings but fictional cartoon characters, according to court documents.

In overruling Thompson, the Air Force Court of Criminal Appeals said he had no legal basis to review the prosecution's anticipated evidence before trial, deem it insufficient for a conviction and prevent the case from going ahead.

Iowa town reels from deadly tornado

Associated Press

GREENFIELD, Iowa — Authorities in Iowa were conducting search and rescue efforts Wednesday, a day after a deadly tornado slammed the state, devastating the town of Greenfield and killing an undetermined number of people there.

In Greenfield, a town of 2,000 about 55 miles southwest of Des Moines, the tornado left a wide swath of obliterated homes and crumpled cars and had earlier ripped apart and crumpled massive power-producing wind turbines.

"It's horrific," Iowa Gov. Kim

Reynolds said Wednesday at a news conference just outside the devastated town. "It's hard to describe."

She and other officials declined to give details of the number of dead and missing in Greenfield, noting that the amount of devastation and debris had made it difficult to be sure of those numbers.

About 25 miles southwest of Greenfield, a woman died Tuesday when the vehicle she was driving was blown off the road during the storms near Corning, Iowa, the Adams County Sheriff's office said. The woman's

name and age were not immediately released.

Later Tuesday, the storms moved eastward to pummel parts of Illinois and Wisconsin, knocking out power to tens of thousands of customers in the two states.

The deadly twister that hit Iowa came amid a historically bad season for tornadoes in the U.S. at a time when climate change is heightening the severity of storms around the world. April had the second highest number of tornadoes on record in the U.S.

Through Tuesday, there have been 27% more tornadoes in the

country than average. The preliminary count for this year of 859 is the highest since 2017 and is significantly more than the average of 676 through May 21, according to NOAA's Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma. Nearly 700 of the tornadoes have been in April and May.

Iowa has had the most tornadoes this year with 81, followed by Texas with 74 and Kansas and Ohio each with 66. The National Weather Service said it received 23 tornado reports Tuesday, with most in Iowa — including the one in Greenfield — and one each in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

US daily pot use outpaces daily drinking, study finds

Associated Press

Daily and near-daily marijuana use is now more common than similar levels of drinking in the U.S., according to an analysis of national survey data over four decades.

Alcohol is still more widely used, but 2022 was the first time this intensive level of marijuana use overtook high-frequency drinking, said the study's author, Jonathan Caulkins, a cannabis policy researcher at Carnegie Mellon University.

"A good 40% of current cannabis users are using it daily or

near daily, a pattern that is more associated with tobacco use than typical alcohol use," Caulkins said.

The research, based on data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, was published Wednesday in the journal *Addiction*. The survey is a highly regarded source of estimates of tobacco, alcohol and drug use in the United States.

In 2022, an estimated 17.7 million people used marijuana daily or near-daily compared to 14.7 million daily or near-daily drinkers, according to the study. From

1992 to 2022, the per capita rate of reporting daily or near-daily marijuana use increased 15-fold.

The trend reflects changes in public policy. Most states now allow medical or recreational marijuana, though it remains illegal at the federal level. In November, Florida voters will decide on a constitutional amendment allowing recreational cannabis, and the federal government is moving to reclassify marijuana as a less dangerous drug.

Research shows that high-frequency users are more likely to

become addicted to marijuana, said Dr. David A. Gorelick, a psychiatry professor at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, who was not involved in the study.

The number of daily users suggests that more people are at risk for developing problematic cannabis use or addiction, Gorelick said.

"High frequency use also increases the risk of developing cannabis-associated psychosis," a severe condition where a person loses touch with reality, he said.

White House cancels another 160,000 student loans

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration is canceling student loans for another 160,000 borrowers through a combination of existing programs.

The Education Department announced the latest round of cancellation on Wednesday, saying it will erase \$7.7 billion in federal student loans. With the latest action, the administration said it has canceled \$167 billion in student debt for nearly 5 mil-

lion Americans through several programs.

"From day one of my administration, I promised to fight to ensure higher education is a ticket to the middle class, not a barrier to opportunity," President Joe Biden said in a statement. "I will never stop working to cancel student debt — no matter how many times Republican-elected officials try to stop us."

The latest relief will go to borrowers in three categories who

hit certain milestones that make them eligible for cancellation. It will go to 54,000 borrowers who are enrolled in Biden's new income-driven repayment plan, along with 39,000 enrolled in earlier income-driven plans, and about 67,000 who are eligible through the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

Biden's new payment plan, known as the SAVE Plan, offers a faster path to forgiveness than earlier versions.

More people are now becoming eligible for loan cancellation as they hit 10 years of payments, a new finish line that's a decade sooner than what borrowers faced in the past.

The cancellation is moving forward even as Biden's SAVE Plan faces legal challenges from Republican-led states. In two federal lawsuits, states say Biden needed to go through Congress for his overhaul of federal repayment plans.

3 in Europe to recognize Palestinian state

Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — Norway, Ireland and Spain said Wednesday that they would recognize a Palestinian state, a historic but largely symbolic move that further deepens Israel's isolation more than seven months into its grinding war against Hamas in Gaza. Israel immediately denounced the decisions and recalled its ambassadors to the three countries.

Palestinians welcomed the announcements as an affirmation of their decadeslong quest for statehood in east Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip — territories Israel seized in the 1967 Mideast war and still controls.

While some 140 countries — more than two-thirds of the United Nations — recognize a Palestinian state, Wednesday's cascade of announcements could build momentum at a time when even close allies of Israel have piled on

criticism for its conduct in Gaza.

It was the second blow to Israel's international reputation this week after the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court said he would seek arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his defense minister. The International Court of Justice is also considering allegations of genocide that Israel has strenuously denied.

Israel recalled its ambassadors to the three countries and summoned their envoys, accusing the Europeans of rewarding the militant Hamas group for its Oct. 7 attack that triggered the war. Foreign Minister Israel Katz said the European ambassadors would watch grisly video footage of the attack.

In that assault, Hamas-led militants stormed across the border, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 hostage. The ICC prosecutor is also seeking arrest war-

rants for three Hamas leaders. Israel's ensuing offensive has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

"History will remember that Spain, Norway, and Ireland decided to award a gold medal to Hamas murderers and rapists," Katz said.

In response to the announcements in Europe, Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir paid a provocative visit Wednesday to the Al-Aqsa mosque compound — a flashpoint in Jerusalem that is sacred to Muslims and Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount. The move could escalate tensions across the region.

Netanyahu's government opposes Palestinian statehood and has said the conflict can only be resolved through direct negotiations, which last collapsed over 15 years ago.

The international community has long viewed the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel as the only realistic way to resolve the conflict, and in past weeks several European Union countries have indicated they plan to recognize a Palestinian state to further those efforts. In contrast, the United States and Britain, among others, have backed the idea of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, but said it should come as part of a negotiated settlement.

The formal recognition by Norway, Spain and Ireland is planned for May 28.

President Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of the Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, welcomed the decisions and called on other nations to "recognize our legitimate rights and support the struggle of our people for liberation and independence."

Russia begins nuclear drills in apparent warning to West

Associated Press

Russia's military began drills Tuesday involving tactical nuclear weapons that were announced by Russian authorities earlier this month in an apparent warning to senior Western officials who had spoken about the possibility of deeper involvement in the war in Ukraine.

It was the first time Russia has publicly announced drills involving tactical nuclear weapons, although its strategic nuclear forces regularly hold exercises.

According to a statement by the Defense Ministry released Tuesday, the first stage of the new drills envisioned "practical training in the preparation and use of non-strategic nuclear weapons," including nuclear-capable Kinzhal and Iskander missiles.

The maneuvers are taking place in the Southern Military

District, which consists of Russian regions in the south, including on the border with Ukraine; Crimea, illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014; and four Ukrainian regions that Russia illegally annexed in 2022 and partially occupies.

The drills were announced May 6, with the Defense Ministry saying in a statement they would come in response to "provocative statements and threats of certain Western officials regarding the Russian Federation."

Tactical nuclear weapons include air bombs, warheads for short-range missiles and artillery munitions and are meant for use on a battlefield. They are less powerful than the strategic weapons — massive warheads that arm intercontinental ballistic missiles and are intended to obliterate entire cities.

US: Houthis carrying weapons that can reach Mediterranean

Bloomberg News

The Houthi militants in Yemen have weapons that can reach as far as the Mediterranean Sea, according to a senior defense official, lending some credence to the group's threats that it can expand its attacks on shipping beyond its immediate borders.

The U.S. government is concerned the Iran-backed group has the capability to extend strikes on shipping beyond the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden to the Mediterranean, said the official, who asked for anonymity to discuss private talks. The official said Houthis have access to advanced weaponry and that their deployment of anti-ship ballistic missiles is virtually unprecedented.

The assessment comes as defense officials from the United States and the Gulf Cooperation Council meet Wednesday in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The U.S. will seek to pursue further integration

of air and missile defenses, including sharing radar data and developing early-warning capabilities.

The official added that the success by Israel, the U.S., U.K. and regional partners to repel an April 13 barrage on Israel of more than 300 missiles and drones from Iran and proxies is proof of the effectiveness of Washington's integrated defense alliances.

The Houthis recently said they would expand their range to vessels in the eastern Mediterranean. The organization began the attacks as a show of solidarity with Hamas in the Gaza war.

The official added that no strikes in the Mediterranean have been detected, and didn't specify if the group had the capability to hit moving targets on the water over such a distance. Almost all of its successful strikes on ships have been close to Yemen. The Houthis have threatened vessels since October.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Court: Publicly funded ads can bash governor

CT HARTFORD — Connecticut's Supreme Court on Monday ruled that state elections officials violated the constitutional free speech rights of two Republicans running for the state legislature when it fined them thousands of dollars for criticizing the Democratic governor in ads paid for by their publicly funded campaigns in 2014.

In a 5-0 decision, the justices overturned the \$5,000 civil fine against now-Sen. Rob Sampson and the \$2,000 penalty against former Sen. Joe Markley imposed by the State Elections Enforcement Commission — a ruling their lawyer said could have influence in other states.

The commission had determined that Sampson and Markley violated the rules of the state's Citizens' Election Program, which provides public funds to campaigns for statewide office and the legislature, when they sent out campaign materials touting how they would fight what they called the bad policies of then-Gov. Dannel Malloy.

While the program bars a candidate from spending their public funds on the campaigns of others not in their race, the Supreme Court said the commission went too far when it interpreted the law to mean Sampson and Markley couldn't criticize Malloy, who was running for reelection.

Grizzly attack prompts closure of mountain

WY MOOSE — A grizzly bear attacked and seriously injured a man in west-

ern Wyoming's Grand Teton National Park, prompting closure of a mountain there Monday.

The grizzly was one of two that surprised the 35-year-old man from Massachusetts on Sunday afternoon on Signal Mountain. Rescuers flew the injured man by helicopter to an ambulance that drove him to a nearby hospital.

He was expected to recover, park officials said in a statement, declining to identify him.

The statement did not detail the man's injuries or say how he encountered the bear. Park officials closed a trail and the road to an overlook atop the 7,700-foot mountain.

Professor swept away in study trip has died

TN COLUMBIA — A Tennessee community college professor who was swept away by an ocean wave during a study-abroad trip in Brazil has died, his school said Monday.

Clifford Gordon, associate professor of art, was walking with three students along an oceanside road in Paraty, Brazil, when they stopped to take pictures and a wave struck them, according to Columbia State Community College. The three students were not seriously injured, but Gordon was swept away and Brazilian authorities searched for him, the school said.

Columbia State received confirmation on Monday morning that Gordon's body was found and positively identified.

Twelve students from four community colleges across Tennessee were scheduled to board flights Monday and arrive back in Tennessee on Tuesday, Rick

Locker, a spokesperson for the College System of Tennessee, said. They will be offered counseling.

Moose kills man taking pictures of baby calves

AK ANCHORAGE — A 70-year-old Alaska man who was attempting to take photos of two newborn moose calves was attacked and killed by their mother, authorities said Monday.

The man killed Sunday was identified as Dale Chorman, a Homer, said Austin McDaniel, a spokesperson for the Alaska Department of Public Safety.

A second man, who has not been publicly identified, was with Chorman and was uninjured. The attack happened as the two were running away, McDaniel said.

Medics pronounced Chorman dead at the scene. The cow moose left the area, Alaska State Troopers said in an online post.

Taxpayer costs to reach \$314M in profiling case

AZ PHOENIX — Seven years after Joe Arpaio was ousted as sheriff of Arizona's most populous county, taxpayers are still footing the bills from a racial profiling verdict over his signature immigration crackdowns — and those costs have been getting heavier since.

The tab for the legal and compliance costs in overhauling the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office is expected to reach \$314 million by mid-summer 2025, including \$41 million approved Monday by county officials — the most expensive for Maricopa County taxpayers since the law-

suit was filed in 2007.

Nearly 11 years ago, a federal judge concluded sheriff's deputies had racially profiled Hispanics in Arpaio's traffic patrols that targeted immigrants. Consequently, the judge ordered costly overhauls of the agency's traffic patrol operations and, later, its internal affairs unit.

The taxpayer spending is expected to continue until the sheriff's office attains full compliance with the court-ordered changes for three straight years. Though progress has been made on some fronts, the agency hasn't yet been deemed fully compliant.

Judge blocks gun sales background check rule

TX AUSTIN — A federal judge has blocked the Biden administration from enforcing a new rule in Texas that would require firearms dealers to run background checks on buyers at gun shows or other places outside brick-and-mortar stores.

The decision by U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, an appointee of former President Donald Trump, came before the rule had been set to take effect Monday. The order also prevents the federal government from enforcing the rule against several gun-rights groups, including Gun Owners of America. It does not apply to Louisiana, Mississippi and Utah, which were also part of the lawsuit.

"Plaintiffs understandably fear that these presumptions will trigger civil or criminal penalties for conduct deemed lawful just yesterday," Kacsmaryk said in his ruling.

— From wire reports

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Celtics need OT to get past Pacers

Associated Press

BOSTON — The Celtics entered the playoffs expecting to get everyone's best shot.

The East's top seed barely survived a tough one to open the Eastern Conference finals.

Jayson Tatum scored 36 points, including 10 in overtime after Jaylen Brown's tying 3-pointer with 6.1 seconds remaining in regulation, and Boston rallied just in time for a 133-128 victory over the Indiana Pacers on Tuesday night.

Jrue Holiday added a season-high 28 points and Brown finished with 26.

"Welcome to the NBA

playoffs. You've just got to manage your emotions. Anything can happen," Brown said of his tying 3. "It's not over until the final buzzer sounds. ... It's not over until it's over. We found a way to win the game at the very end."

It gave his team a new life and helped it hang on to home-court advantage with Game 2 set for Thursday in Boston.

But guarding against complacency was also on the mind of Tatum. The Celtics have lost Game 2 in each of their previous two series.

"It doesn't prove anything," Tatum said. "We won a big-time

game. The series is far from over."

Tyrese Haliburton had 25 points and 10 assists for the Pacers, who knocked down 13 3-pointers and scored 56 points in the paint against a Celtics team still playing without 7-footer Kristaps Porzingis.

But Boston dialed up its defense, finishing with 11 steals — three each by Brown, Tatum and Holiday.

The Celtics become the first team in NBA playoff history to have three players record 25 points and three steals in a game.

The Celtics were cold for

most of the game from 3-point range, but ended the night 15-for-45 from beyond the arc.

"We keep talking about protecting home court," Celtics forward Al Horford said. "It's whatever it takes."

Pascal Siakam added 24 points and 12 rebounds. Myles Turner finished with 23 points and 10 rebounds for the sixth-seeded Pacers, who twice turned it over with a three-point lead in the final 30 seconds of regulation.

Brown made them pay for the second one, hitting a 3 from the corner with Siakam right in his face to tie it at 117.

None of 4 remaining teams have won Cup since 1999

Associated Press

No matter which team wins the Stanley Cup championship this year, it will be a first this century.

The Dallas Stars won the franchise's lone championship in 1999, months before the world worried computers would malfunction at the start of a new millennium. The New York Rangers haven't done it since their magical run in 1994 that ended a 54-year title drought.

The Edmonton Oilers have not done it since the last title of their dynasty in 1990, seven years before current star Connor McDavid was born. The Florida Panthers have never won the Cup since their inception in 1993, when hockey in the U.S. Sun Belt was just starting to become a reality.

"It's something that all these markets are starving for," said Mike Rupp, an NHL Network analyst whose three-point Game 7 performance in 2003 gave New Jersey its third championship. "I love seeing new blood in it."

New blood when it comes to a title but not unfamiliar with this stage of the playoffs. Florida and Dallas were each in their respective conference finals last year (Florida advanced to the Final, too), while New York and Edmonton are back after getting there in 2022.

Thirteen different teams have hoisted the Cup since 1999, including Chicago, Pittsburgh and Tampa Bay doing it three times, and New Jersey, Colorado and Los Angeles

twice each.

The more things change ...

None of the remaining teams has had the same coach for more than the past two seasons.

Paul Maurice took over the Panthers and Peter DeBoer the Stars in the summer of 2022. Peter Laviolette got the Rangers' job less than a year ago. Kris Knoblauch was an early season replacement for the Oilers in November.

Part of that is just the cyclical nature of coaching changes in hockey, though the high volume over the past 18 months has gotten the attention of the fraternity, with DeBoer calling it "insanity."

There's still value in experience, though, with Knoblauch the only first-time NHL head coach in the final four. He is eight wins away from being the fourth coach hired in-season to win the Cup that year.

Laviolette is in his sixth head coaching job. He coached Carolina to the Stanley Cup championship in 2006 and took Philadelphia in 2010 and Nashville in 2017 to the final. DeBoer has two trips to the Final on his résumé: 2012 with New Jersey and 2016 with San Jose. No one has coached more NHL regular-season and playoff games without winning the Cup than Maurice with 1,973.

... the more they stay the same

This isn't quite like the Tampa Bay Light-

ning going back to back in 2020 and '21 and reaching the final in '22, but these teams have all played a lot of playoff hockey in recent years.

Counting their bubble run to the Cup Final four years ago, the Stars have been in 79 playoff games dating to 2019.

"Dallas has been a good team for a long time, just never able to kind of get over the hump and had some really tough paths in the playoffs," Rupp said.

McDavid and the Oilers have played 54 postseason games since 2020, their first of five consecutive postseason appearances, with an asterisk on the expanded pandemic format.

The Panthers, who have played 52 over the past five playoffs, have usurped the Lightning as the best team in Florida, including knocking their cross-state rivals out in the first round this year. They're now co-Cup favorites along with Dallas, according to BetMGM Sportsbook.

The Rangers, with 40 games of playoff experience since 2020, are actually the longest shot on the board despite winning the Presidents' Trophy as the NHL's best team in the regular season. Since general manager Chris Drury took over, New York has gone from youth movement to powerhouse.

"The days of the rebuild of the Rangers, it wasn't all that long ago," Rupp said. "They were setting themselves up for some very lean years, and they turned it around a lot quicker, I think, than people thought."

Proposed settlement clears 2nd step

Associated Press

A potential multibillion-dollar settlement of an antitrust lawsuit cleared the second of a three-step NCAA approval process Tuesday, with no change to a payment structure that would have the 27 college conferences not named in the suit cover the majority of a \$1.6 billion portion of the damages.

The Division I Board of Directors voted to move forward on a proposed \$2.77 billion settlement of House vs. NCAA, according to two people who had been briefed on the vote. They said the vote was not unanimous, but it was unclear exactly how the 24-member board voted.

The people spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because the NCAA was not revealing its internal discussions related to the settlement. The NCAA Board of Governors still must sign off on the deal for final approval. It is scheduled to meet later this week.

The D-I board's finance committee recommended Monday to stick with the original finance plan for the settlement, which has drawn the ire of non-power conference leaders who believe their leagues will bear a disproportionate financial bur-

den.

The NCAA, Big Ten, Big 12, Atlantic Coast Conference, Pac-12 and Southeastern Conference are defendants in the House case, a class-action lawsuit that seeks back pay for college athletes who were denied name, image and likeness compensation dating to 2016. The NCAA lifted its ban on earning money for sponsorship and endorsement deals in 2021.

The Big 12 and the ACC voted to approve the settlement Tuesday. The Big Ten, SEC and Pac-12 presidents were scheduled to vote later this week.

The approved finance plan for the settlement calls for the NCAA to cover 41% of the \$2.77 billion in damages over 10 years, with the Power Five conferences accounting for 24% and the other five major college football conferences — the so-called Group of Five — covering 10%.

The conferences that compete in the Championship Subdivision would cover 14% of the overall settlement, and the non-football D-I conferences would be on the hook for 12%.

The NCAA's portion would come from a reduction of operating expenses, insurance, reserve funds and withheld distributions to its 352 D-I member

schools.

The conference commissioners from leagues that do not compete in the Bowl Subdivision, have taken issue with the \$1.6 billion in withheld distribution portion of the settlement.

The 27 conferences not named in the lawsuit are expected to cover 60% of withheld distributions, with the other 40% coming from power conferences currently comprised of 69 schools.

The commissioners of the 22 non-FBS conferences proposed the finance structure be flipped so power conference withheld distributions cover 60% of the \$1.6 billion.

Big Sky Commissioner Tom Wistrick said Tuesday that the non-FBS conferences were holding out hope for reconsideration.

"We're fighting uphill," he said.

The Big Sky is one of the most successful conferences in the Championship Subdivision.

"We believe over 95% of the damages are going to go to (Power Five) football and basketball players. For non-A5 conferences to pay for that is disproportionate. We're asking for a more proportionate structure because our student-athletes are not going to see the

money," Wistrick said.

The conferences not named in the lawsuit did not find out about details of the proposed settlement until two weeks ago through media reports, Wistrick said. He said they are hoping the settlement can be approved with an opportunity for the NCAA financing plan to be readdressed, but the prospects of that diminished even further with the full board's approval Tuesday night.

Wistrick said the formula for withheld distributions the NCAA is using, which is based on the percentage a conference received of overall NCAA distributions between 2016-2024, is projected to cost the Big Sky around \$3 million per year over 10 years.

He said while power conferences will have a larger total distribution withheld on a per school basis, that revenue is a much smaller part of athletic department budgets that typically soar past \$100 million annually.

Big Sky school athletic budgets run about \$20 million annually.

"The money is flowing to their student-athletes while disproportionately (the settlement) is penalizing our institutions," Wistrick said.

Drivers Rudd, Edwards selected for NASCAR Hall

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Ricky Rudd was clearing away leaves by his pool when he got an anonymous text message that he might want to make the 20-minute drive south to Charlotte — quickly.

Rudd knew right away that he was finally getting into the NASCAR Hall of Fame in his eighth year on the ballot.

The tough-as-nails driver from Virginia was selected as part of the Class of 2025 on Tuesday along with driver Carl

Edwards and mechanic and race strategist Ralph Moody, who made it in on the pioneer ballot.

They will be officially inducted into the Hall of Fame on Feb. 7 at a ceremony in Charlotte.

"You don't think about the Hall of Fame when you're racing," Rudd said. "But after you retire and drift away from the sport there is a little bit more importance. ... I always tried to make sure I was in town on this day just in case I got a phone call."

Dr. Dean Sicking, who is credited with creating the SAFER barrier after being commissioned by NASCAR to make racing safer following the death of Dale Earnhardt at Daytona in 2001, was selected as the Landmark Award winner for his contributions to the sport.

Wembanyama first rookie on All-Defense

NEW YORK — Victor Wembanyama's latest accolade was like none other.

The San Antonio center has

become the first player in NBA history to make the league's All-Defensive first team as a rookie. The league announced the teams Tuesday, and Wembanyama appeared on 98 of the 99 ballots cast.

Defensive player of the year Rudy Gobert of Minnesota headlined the team and was the only unanimous selection. He was joined on the first team by Wembanyama, Miami's Bam Adebayo, New Orleans' Herb Jones and the Los Angeles Lakers' Anthony Davis.

Guardians beat Mets for 5th straight win

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — José Ramírez connected on a two-run homer and an RBI double as the Cleveland Guardians beat the New York Mets 7-6 on Tuesday night, matching their longest winning streak of the season at five games.

David Fry added his first career pinch-hit home run, a two-run shot in the sixth inning, for the AL Central-leading Guardians. Cleveland has the fourth-best record in the majors at 32-17 and has won six straight at Progressive Field.

Ramírez has driven in 34 runs in his last 34 games — taking over the American League lead with 44 — and reached 600 extra-base hits with his homer in the fifth.

“I don’t like to talk about numbers, but I thank God for having me here and to do my work,” Ramírez said through an interpreter. “When I’m able to recognize those pitches, it tells me I’m in a good position to connect.”

Jeff McNeil and Starling Marte each hit two-run homers and Mark Vientos had a solo shot for the Mets, who have dropped the first two games of the series and are 3-9 since May 10. McNeil and Vientos scored twice apiece.

The Mets have lost eight of 11 and dropped to a season-worst six games under .500.

Nick Sandlin (4-0) recorded two outs in the fifth and Emmanuel Clase worked the ninth for his MLB-best 15th save in 18 chances, retiring Pete Alonso on a game-ending double play. Clase pitched for the third day in a row and lowered his ERA to 0.36.

“When he comes in, all of us in the dugout know he is going to get a zero,” Fry said. “We’re having so much fun. I mean, the locker room is awesome. Everybody is just having a blast right now.”

Red Sox 5, Rays 2: Jarren Duran homered and stole home as visiting Boston beat Tampa Bay.

Duran scored to make it 4-2

during a double steal with Rafael Devers in a go-ahead, two-run eighth against Jason Adam (2-1). Duran headed home after Rays catcher Ben Rortvedt tried to throw out Devers at second and beat a return throw to the plate with a head-first slide.

Devers singled in three at-bats to extend his hitting streak to 11 games. He was intentionally walked in the decisive eighth that saw Willyer Abreu hit a tie-breaking single earlier in the inning.

White Sox 5, Blue Jays 0: Garrett Crochet and three relievers combined on a two-hitter, Corey Julks and Danny Mendick each had two RBIs and visiting Chicago snapped a four-game losing streak by beating Toronto.

The White Sox avoided falling a season-worst 21 games below .500 and snapped a seven-game losing streak in Toronto. The Blue Jays were blanked for the third time.

Crochet (5-4) allowed two hits, struck out four and walked just one in six innings to win his fourth straight start. The left-hander extended his scoreless innings streak to 19.

Cubs 4, Braves 3 (10): Nico Hoerner hit a game-ending infield single in the 10th inning in his return to the lineup, and host Chicago beat Atlanta.

The Cubs had runners on the corners with one out in the 10th when the Braves brought their infield in. Hoerner then hit a high chopper to the right side that first baseman Matt Olson and second baseman Ozzie Albies converged on.

Albies had no play as Cody Bellinger scampered home with the winning run. It was Hoerner’s first hit after missing six straight games with left hamstring tightness.

Twins 10, Nationals 0: Byron Buxton hit two homers and drove in three runs, Joe Ryan pitched seven scoreless innings and visiting Minnesota halted a seven-game losing streak with a victory over Washington.

Jose Miranda added a two-run homer as the Twins scored eight runs off Nationals left-hander Patrick Corbin (1-5). Willi Castro added a two-run shot off reliever Jacob Barnes as Minnesota responded following a players-only meeting after Monday night’s 12-3 loss in the series opener.

Reds 2, Padres 0: Andrew Abbott threw seven shutout innings, Elly De La Cruz doubled home a run and host Cincinnati shook off a disastrous road trip to beat San Diego.

The Reds went 3-11 on their swing out West, losing series to the Giants, Diamondbacks and Dodgers. Back home, they did just enough offensively to win one behind another terrific outing by Abbott (3-4).

Phillies 5, Rangers 2: Ranger Suárez stuck out 10 over seven innings and improved to 9-0 to lead host Philadelphia to its MLB-best 35th win with a victory over Texas.

Bryce Harper hit his 11th homer of the season to help the Phillies win for the ninth time in 11 games and continue one of the best starts in franchise history.

Brewers 7, Marlins 5: Christian Yelich hit a go-ahead, two-run triple in the eighth inning and visiting Milwaukee beat Miami.

William Contreras had two hits and three RBIs, and Willy Adames doubled twice for the NL Central-leading Brewers (28-20).

Pirates 7, Giants 6 (10): Nick Gonzales’ run-scoring single in the bottom of the 10th inning lifted host Pittsburgh to a victory over San Francisco.

Gonzales’ leadoff hit up the middle off Erik Miller (0-2) scored automatic runner Connor Joe from second base and ended the Giants’ season-high four-game winning streak. The Pirates have won four of their last five games.

Mariners 6, Yankees 3: Bryan Woo pitched shutout ball at Yankee Stadium for the sec-

ond straight season, Dylan Moore homered twice with four RBIs and Seattle held on to beat New York.

Ty France and Luke Raley also homered for the Mariners, who dealt the Yankees their first consecutive losses since April 29 and 30 at Baltimore. Seattle rallied from a three-run, ninth-inning deficit for a 5-4 victory in the series opener that stopped New York’s seven-game winning streak.

Astros 6, Angels 5 (10): Kyle Tucker homered twice to give him an MLB-leading 17 and Jeremy Peña’s RBI single with one out in the 10th inning lifted host Houston to a win over Los Angeles.

The Angels intentionally walked Yordan Alvarez with no outs in the 10th and Tucker on second as the automatic runner. Both players advanced on a flyout by Alex Bregman before Peña singled off Carlos Estévez (0-3) on a line drive to right field to give the Astros a victory.

Athletics 5, Rockies 4: Abraham Toro hit a go-ahead homer in the eighth after Seth Brown hit a tying two-run drive the previous inning, and host Oakland snapped an eight-game losing streak with a win over Colorado.

J.D. Davis also homered as the A’s avoided matching the longest losing streak in the majors this year of nine by Miami from March 28-April 6. Oakland, which drew an announced crowd of 4,005, had been swept in consecutive series.

Diamondbacks 7, Dodgers 3: Joc Pederson slugged a three-run homer, Christian Walker also went deep and visiting Arizona beat Los Angeles.

Ketel Marte singled in the seventh to extend his hitting streak to 20 games and Pederson followed with a blast to the right-field pavilion against his old team.

Royals 10, Tigers 3: Bobby Witt Jr. homered twice as host Kansas City beat Detroit for its fifth straight win.