

## Retired admiral is convicted in scheme

By ALISON BATH  
AND CAITLYN BURCHETT  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — A retired four-star admiral who once was the Navy's second-highest ranking officer was convicted of federal bribery and conspiracy charges in a scheme to direct lucrative contracts to a training company in exchange for a \$500,000-a-year job.

Robert Burke, who served as the 40th vice chief of naval operations from June 2019 to June 2020, was found guilty Monday by a federal jury in Washington of single charges of bribery and conspiracy to commit bribery.

Burke is facing up to 30 years in prison for his role in a plan to direct contracts potentially worth millions of dollars to a New York City-based company that offered training programs to the Navy.

In return for his help, Burke was hired by the company, Next Jump, for \$500,000 a year and was given lucrative stock options and other benefits after he left the Navy, the Justice Department said in a statement Monday.

Burke, who led naval forces in Europe and Africa from 2020 until his retirement in 2022, was also convicted of charges of performing acts affecting a personal financial interest and concealing material facts from the United States.

"When you abuse your position and betray the public trust to line your own pockets, it undermines the confidence in the government you represent," U.S. Attorney Jeanine Ferris Pirro said following the five-day trial. "Our office, with our law enforcement partners, will root out corruption — be it bribes or illegal contracts

— and hold accountable the perpetrators, no matter what title or rank they hold."

U.S. District Judge Trevor McFadden set Burke's sentencing for Aug. 22.

Burke's attorney Timothy Parlatore described the verdict as a "miscarriage of justice," adding that the prosecution intentionally withheld information from the jury and only presented them with a sliver of the truth.

"This jury should have heard more. They should have heard a lot more. But we were prevented from showing the jury the full picture," Parlatore told Stars and Stripes.

Parlatore said jurors heard only three snippets of a more than two-hour interview Burke agreed to give to investigators in which he defended his conduct. The quotes, Parlatore said, were

taken out of context and left the jury with a false impression of the conversation.

Parlatore sought to have the jury listen to the full interview, or at a minimum, additional parts of the interview to put those quotes into context, but the judge did not allow it.

Parlatore said he will appeal Burke's conviction.

Burke is only the second Navy admiral ever convicted of a federal crime committed on active duty. The first was Adm. Robert Gilbeau, who was sentenced to 18 months in prison in May 2017 after admitting he lied in telling federal officials he had never received any gifts from a Malaysian businessman.

The businessman, known as "Fat Leonard," was at the center of a massive bribery scandal involving Navy officers over a period of years.

## Trump's 'Golden Dome' choice to cost tens of billions

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump was expected to announce on Tuesday the concept he wants for his future Golden Dome missile defense program — and while it would not be the most expensive option that the Pentagon had offered, it would still cost taxpayers tens of billions of dollars and take years to make a reality.

If realized, the system would mark the first time that the U.S. would put weapons in space, which could be fired to destroy an incoming missile during flight.

Trump also was expected to announce that Gen. Michael Guetlein, who currently serves as the vice chief of space operations, will be responsible for overseeing Golden Dome's pro-

gress.

Golden Dome is envisioned to include ground and space-based capabilities that are able to detect and stop missiles at all four major stages of a potential attack: detecting and destroying them before a launch, intercepting them in their earliest stage of flight, stopping them midcourse in the air, or halting them in the final minutes as they descend toward a target.

For the last several months, Pentagon planners have been developing options — which a U.S. official described as medium, high and "extra high" choices, based on their cost — that include space-based interceptors.

The administration picked the "high" version, with an initial cost ranging between \$30 billion

and \$100 billion, according to the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to detail plans that have not been made public.

The difference in the three versions is largely based on how many satellites and sensors in space would be purchased, and for the first time, space-based interceptors.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated this month that just the space-based components of the Golden Dome could cost as much as \$542 billion over the next 20 years. Trump has requested an initial \$25 billion for the program in his proposed tax break bill now moving through Congress.

The Pentagon has warned for years that the newest missiles developed by China and Russia are

so advanced that updated countermeasures are necessary. Golden Dome's added satellites and interceptors — where the bulk of the program's cost is — would be focused on stopping those advanced missiles early on or in the middle of their flight.

The space-based weapons envisioned for Golden Dome "represent new and emerging requirements for missions that have never before been accomplished by military space organizations," Gen. Chance Saltzman, head of the U.S. Space Force, told lawmakers at a hearing Tuesday.

But there's no money for the project yet, and the program overall is "still in the conceptual stage," newly confirmed Air Force Secretary Troy Meink told senators Tuesday.

# Marines move into new barracks on Guam

By ALEX WILSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

The first group of U.S. Marines and sailors moved into newly constructed barracks on Guam on Friday, marking a key milestone for the Marine Corps' newest installation, which is still under development.

About 50 junior enlisted personnel relocated from Andersen Air Force Base to bachelor enlisted quarters on Camp Blaz's main cantonment, base spokeswoman Maj. Diann Rosenfield said Monday.

Additional service members living on Naval Base Guam are expected to move into the facility later this month, she added.

The barracks were originally slated to open in June, but Secretary of the Navy John Phelan

directed that they open by Friday, Marine Corps Headquarters spokeswoman Capt. Brenda Leenders said by email Tuesday.

The 300-room facility can house up to 600 service members and includes a common area with a kitchen, laundry facilities, study spaces and recreational areas, according to a Monday news release from the installation.

"This marks the beginning of life on Camp Blaz's Main Cantonment," base commander Col. Ernest Govea said in the release. "Marines and Sailors are going to finally be able to live on the base and have an improved quality of life and readiness."

Blaz was officially activated

in 2020, becoming the first new Marine base in 72 years. Construction is ongoing, with seven more enlisted barracks still in progress.

Once complete, the eight barracks will accommodate approximately 4,800 Marines.

"It is really unique to be able to be the first person to move into a barracks room, and that will probably never happen again in my career," Lance Cpl. Juan Dela Cerda, an administrative clerk, said in the release. "Besides how unique it is, it's just nice to have a place to call my own."

Two bachelor officer quarters, each designed for 388 Marines, are also under construction, Rosenfeld said last month.

Another 30 projects — in-

cluding a third officer quarters, a warehouse and a dining facility — are expected to be completed by the end of this fiscal year, said Rachel Landers, spokeswoman for the office in charge of construction at Blaz.

"Most projects do not have a formal 'completion' like a ribbon cutting but are turned over to the Marine Corps through a gradual process called 'activation,'" she said Monday.

The base will eventually host about 4,000 Marines relocating from Okinawa as part of a 2012 agreement between the United States and Japan to reduce the American military footprint on the southern Japanese island. Nearly 30,000 of the 55,000 troops in Japan are based on Okinawa.

## Navy decorates sailors for helping save a child on base

By JANIQUEA ROBINSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

A group of U.S. Navy sailors sprang into action during a base open house in Japan, helping to save the life of a child who suddenly went limp in her mother's arms.

Five sailors — one assigned to Sasebo Naval Base and four from the amphibious assault ship USS America — were awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal for their roles in the emergency during Sasebo's Fleet Friendship Day on April 5.

Petty Officers 1st Class Guillermo Gutierrez and Chantese Moore, both masters-at-arms, heard a cry for help and saw a Japanese woman holding the child, Gutierrez said Thursday.

Moore alerted a nearby Naval Criminal Investigative Service agent to call emergency serv-

ices and began clearing a path for them.

Senior Chief Petty Officer Chase Speed, a hospital corpsman and senior enlisted leader in base health services, arrived moments later, he said Friday.

An ambulance took the child to Sasebo General Hospital.

The America's commander, Capt. Ethan Rule, awarded medals to Speed, Moore and Jobes-Saint during an April 14 ceremony.

"The swift and decisive actions of our medical team during Fleet and Friendship Day were instrumental in helping a child in critical need," Rule said in comments emailed Tuesday by ship spokeswoman Lt. Carolina Fernandez.

Gutierrez received the same decoration from Sasebo commander Capt. Michael Fontaine on April 7.

## Boat landings on Taiwan are a new source of concern

*Associated Press*

TAIPEI — China has long sought to intimidate Taiwan with its massive navy, air force and the world's largest standing army, but it's mere dinghies that are now causing the most consternation.

Taiwan's coast guard has documented five cases totaling 38 Chinese citizens crossing the 100-mile wide Taiwan Strait separating the self-governing island from the authoritarian Chinese mainland, according to the body's deputy director-general Hsieh Ching-chin.

That includes at least one case posted to Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, in which a man speaking with a strong mainland Chinese accent is seen planting a Chinese flag on what he says is a Taiwanese beach. Scenes in the background appear to show a stretch

of coastline south of the capital.

China claims Taiwan as its own territory, to be conquered by force if necessary. The man has not been found or publicly identified, and Taiwanese authorities are seeking to ascertain whether he received help.

Another case involved a father and son who were apprehended shortly after reaching land, along with a man who came ashore at a fishing port in a tourist area north of Taipei.

The small size of the boats, some just inflatables for having fun at the beach, makes it difficult for Taiwan's radar to pick them up. More cameras and other detection devices and manpower would be needed to cover the vast spaces of inhospitable coastline surrounding the island, but the terrain would make a Chinese D-Day-type landing highly challenging.

# Trump seeks Republican unity on big bill

*Associated Press*

President Donald Trump implored House Republicans at the Capitol to drop their fights over his big tax cuts bill and get it done, using encouraging words but also the hardened language of politics over the multitrillion-dollar package that is at risk of collapsing before planned votes this week.

During the more than hour-long session Tuesday, Trump warned Republicans not to touch Medicaid with cuts. The president, heading into the meeting, called himself a “cheerleader” for the Republican Party and praised the leadership of Speaker Mike Johnson.

“We have unbelievable unity,” Trump said as he exited. “I think think we’re going to get everything we want.”

The president arrived at a pivotal moment. Negotiations are slogging along and it’s not at all clear the package, with its sweeping tax breaks and cuts to Medicaid, food stamps and green energy programs, has the

support needed from the House’s slim Republican majority. Lawmakers are also being asked to add some \$350 billion to Trump’s border security, deportation and defense agenda. Inside, he spoke privately in what one lawmaker called the president’s “weaving” style and took questions.

The president also made it clear he’s losing patience with the various holdout factions of the House Republicans, according to a senior White House official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private meeting. But Trump himself disputed that notion as well as reports that he used an expletive. Instead, he said afterward, “That was a meeting of love.” He received several standing ovations, Republicans said.

Conservatives are insisting on quicker, steeper cuts to federal programs to offset the costs of the trillions of dollars in lost tax revenue. At the same time, a core group of lawmakers from New York and other high-tax states want bigger tax breaks

for their voters back home. Worries about piling onto the nation’s \$36 trillion debt are stark.

Trump’s visit to address House Republicans at their weekly conference tested the president’s deal-making powers. The Republican speaker, Johnson, is determined to push the bill forward and needs Trump to provide the momentum, either by encouragement or political warnings or a combination of both. With House Democrats lined up against the package, GOP leaders have almost no votes to spare.

Trump has been pushing hard for Republicans to unite behind the bill, which has been uniquely shaped in his image as the president’s signature domestic policy initiative in Congress. The sprawling package carries Trump’s title, the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act,” as well as his campaign promises to extend the tax breaks approved during his first term while adding more, including no taxes on tips, automobile loan interest

and Social Security.

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a nonpartisan fiscal watchdog group, estimates that the House bill is shaping up to add roughly \$3.3 trillion to the debt over the next decade.

Republicans criticizing the measure argued that the bill’s new spending and tax cuts are front-loaded, while the measures to offset the cost are back-loaded. In particular, the conservative Republicans are looking to speed up the new work requirements that Republicans want to enact for able-bodied participants in Medicaid. They had been proposed to start Jan. 1, 2029, but GOP Majority Leader Steve Scalise said on CNBC that work requirements for some Medicaid beneficiaries would begin in early 2027.

At its core, the sprawling legislative package permanently extends the existing income tax cuts and bolsters the standard deduction, increasing it to \$32,000 for joint filers, and the child tax credit to \$2,500.

## Trump signs legislation making ‘revenge porn’ a federal crime

*Associated Press*

President Donald Trump on Monday signed into law the Take It Down Act, a measure that imposes penalties for online sexual exploitation that first lady Melania Trump helped usher through Congress, and he had her sign it, too, despite what sounded like a mild objection on her part.

Melania Trump’s signature is merely symbolic since first ladies are not elected and they play no role in the enactment of legislation. In March, Melania Trump used her first public appearance since resuming the role of first lady to travel to Capitol Hill to lobby House members to pass the bill.

The bill makes it a federal

crime to “knowingly publish” or threaten to publish intimate images without a person’s consent, including AI-created “deep-fakes.” Websites and social media companies will be required to remove such material within 48 hours after a victim requests it. The platforms must also take steps to delete duplicate content.

The measure isn’t without critics. Free speech advocates and digital rights groups say the bill is too broad and could lead to censorship of legitimate images, including legal pornography and LGBTQ+ content. Others say it could allow the government to monitor private communications and undermine due process.

## Babbitt family to receive \$5M in DOJ settlement

*Associated Press*

The Trump administration agreed to pay just under \$5 million to settle a wrongful death lawsuit that Ashli Babbitt’s family filed over her shooting by an officer during the U.S. Capitol riot, according to a person with knowledge of the settlement.

The settlement would resolve the \$30 million federal lawsuit that Babbitt’s estate filed last year in Washington, D.C.

On Jan. 6, 2021, a Capitol police officer shot Babbitt as she tried to climb through the broken window of a barricaded door leading to the Speaker’s Lobby.

The officer who shot her was cleared of wrongdoing by the

U.S. Attorney’s office for the District of Columbia, which concluded that he acted in self-defense and in the defense of members of Congress. The Capitol Police also cleared the officer.

On May 2, Babbitt’s estate and the Justice Department told a federal judge that they had reached a settlement in principle but were still working out the details before a final agreement could be signed.

Thousands stormed the Capitol after President Trump spoke to supporters at his Jan. 6 “Stop the Steal” rally near the White House.

Over 100 police officers were injured in the attack.



# Central US hit with more severe weather

Associated Press

LONDON, Ky. — More tornadoes plowed through the central U.S. on Monday, ripping apart buildings and knocking out power as people from Texas to Kentucky continued to clean up from days of severe weather that killed more than two dozen people and destroyed thousands of homes and buildings.

At least four tornadoes were confirmed in Oklahoma and Nebraska on Monday evening, according to a preliminary report from the National Weather Service.

Across Oklahoma, at least 10 homes were destroyed and multiple buildings were damaged, including a fire station that was

wiped out, according to the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management. A spokesperson for the agency said they have not received any reports of injuries or deaths.

Around 115,000 customers were without power in Oklahoma, Arkansas and Missouri, according to PowerOutage.us.

Parts of several highways were also closed due to flooding or storm damage.

In northwest Arkansas, severe weather caused a Halsey concert to be canceled and a municipal airport had to close temporarily Monday night so crews could remove debris from the field. And in Oklahoma, Tulsa Public Schools canceled all after-school activities.

ities.

Northern Texas saw softball-sized hail measuring 4½ inches in diameter, according to Scott Kleebauer, a meteorologist with the service's Weather Prediction Center.

Earlier Monday in St. Louis, where officials estimated a Friday tornado damaged 5,000 buildings and may cost well over \$1 billion, the mayor warned that federal assistance could take weeks.

Kentucky has been hardest hit by the storms. A devastating tornado late Friday into early Saturday damaged hundreds of homes, tossed vehicles and killed at least 19 people, most of them in southeastern Laurel County.

In London, Ky., where the devastation was centered, the small airport became a beehive of cleanup work after it took a direct hit from a tornado. Small aircraft stored there had dents in them and even wings ripped open. Officials were using it as a base to get water, food, diapers and other supplies out to the community.

"We have 1,001 things going on. But we're managing it. And we're going to get it all cleaned up," said London Mayor Randall Weddle.

Officials in Kansas and Texas also were evaluating damage from late Sunday storms.

The risk of severe storms moved into Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee on Tuesday, the weather service said.

## US sets new requirements for use of COVID vaccines

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Annual COVID-19 shots for healthy younger adults and children will no longer be routinely approved under a major new policy shift unveiled Tuesday by the Trump administration.

Top officials for the Food and Drug Administration laid out new requirements for yearly updates to COVID shots, saying they'd continue to use a streamlined approach that would make vaccines available to adults 65 and older as well as children and younger adults with health problems that puts them at higher risk.

But the FDA framework urges companies conduct large, lengthy studies before tweaked vaccines can be approved for healthier people. In a framework published Tuesday in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, agency officials said the approach still could keep annual vaccinations available for between 100 million and 200 million adults.

The changes raise questions about people who may still want a fall COVID-19 shot but don't fall

into one of the categories.

"Is the pharmacist going to determine if you're in a high-risk group?" asked Dr. Paul Offit, a vaccine expert at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. "The only thing that can come of this will make vaccines less insurable and less available."

The framework is the culmination of a series of steps scrutinizing the use of COVID shots and raising major questions about the broader availability of vaccines under President Donald Trump.

For years, federal health officials have told most Americans to expect annual updates to COVID-19 vaccines, similar to the annual flu shot. Until now the FDA has approved updated COVID shots when manufacturers provide evidence that they spark just as much immune protection as the previous year's version.

But FDA's new guidance appears to be the end of that approach under Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who has filled agencies with outspoken critics of the government's handling of COVID shots.

## In rebuke to Trump, Iran says nuke deal unlikely

Bloomberg News

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said negotiations with the U.S. over his country's nuclear program are unlikely to result in a deal and called the Trump administration's latest demands on Iran "outrageous."

Speaking at an event to commemorate the death of former Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on Tuesday, Khamenei said "there were indirect negotiations during his time as well. Needless to say, there was no result. We don't think these negotiations will yield results now either. We don't know what will happen."

The comments are the latest sign that President Donald Trump's efforts to fast-track deals to resolve some of the world's most destabilizing crises and conflicts — from Russia's war in Ukraine to Israel's in the Gaza Strip — are floundering.

Benchmark Brent oil jumped then pared its gains following the comments, which were the most pessimistic by the Islamic Repu-

blic's top decision maker since indirect talks started in April. Trump has threatened Iran with military action if it doesn't make a deal with the U.S.

Khamenei's statement was also a direct repudiation of Trump's claim last week that Iran and the U.S. were "getting close to maybe doing a deal" and that Iran "has sort of agreed to the terms."

The two countries are trying to resolve years of animosity and strike a deal that will contain Iran's nuclear activity in exchange for relief from U.S. sanctions that have severely hobbled the OPEC-member's oil exports and broader economy.

Under the terms of the defunct 2015 nuclear deal that Trump scuttled in his first term, Iran was able to enrich uranium but with stringent caps on its purity levels and quantities. Those limits have been significantly breached by Iran since 2019, about a year after Trump withdrew from the landmark accord and started imposing severe sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## 4 killed and 8 injured in shootings over weekend

**GA** MACON — Four people were fatally shot and eight others injured in less than 48 hours in a central Georgia city this weekend, including one shooting at a bar where three people died.

The Bibb County Sheriff's Office was investigating the fatal shooting of three people who were killed in the parking lot outside of the Midtown Daiquiri Bar and Grill in Macon, Ga., on Sunday after 12 a.m. Bibb County chief coroner Leon Jones identified the victims as Jedarrius Meadows Jr., 28; Javonta Faulks, 32; and Javarsia Meadows, 24. Six other people were injured and are in stable condition, according to Jones.

"It's frustrating and its depressing to see the killing," said Jones, who also runs a local organization that tries to prevent gun violence. "We were doing so good, but this week alone we've had five homicides."

## Ice cream maker recalls containers over concerns

**IA** DES MOINES — An Iowa-based ice cream manufacturer has recalled nearly 18,000 containers of ice cream and frozen yogurt over concerns they could contain pieces of plastic.

Wells Enterprises issued the voluntary recall last month, according to recently released information from the Food and Drug Administration.

The company's brands include Blue Bunny and Halo Top ice cream products.

KXAS-TV reports that the nationwide recall includes 22 fla-

vors of ice cream and frozen yogurt in 3-gallon containers. The recalled products have "Best If Used By" dates ranging from March to October 2026.

## Tornadoes on track for a record-setting pace

**MI** DETROIT — Michigan's recent string of tornadoes has brought the statewide total to 24 so far this year, according to the National Weather Service.

That's nearly twice Michigan's 30-year annual average of 13 tornadoes a year and puts the state on track for a record-setting pace.

According to records dating back to 1950, no other year has seen this many tornadoes so early in the season. The annual record is 40 tornadoes in 1974, according to the NWS.

On Saturday, the National Weather Service confirmed that three additional tornadoes touched down in Michigan early Friday, bringing the total to six in the state from the severe storm.

## Gang leader found guilty of abducting missionaries

**DC** WASHINGTON — Germine Joly, once one of the most powerful gang leaders in Haiti — even when he was behind prison bars — has been found guilty of kidnapping 16 U.S. citizens who worked in Haiti as missionaries.

The missionaries were abducted in 2021, and 12 members of the group from Ohio-based Christian Aid Ministries, including a Canadian national, were held for two months. They won their freedom only after a \$350,000 ransom was paid and Joly's co-gang leader, Lanmo

Sanjou, set up their release to look like an escape to avoid his fellow gang member's wrath.

Joly, known as "Yonyon," took the stand in his defense and refuted any involvement with the 400 Mawozo gang. On Friday he was found guilty by a federal jury in the District of Columbia for his role in orchestrating the hostage taking.

The verdict was announced by U.S. Attorney Jeanine Ferris Pirro and FBI Assistant Special Agent in Charge Ryan James of the Miami Field Office.

Joly was found guilty in a federal court in Washington of one count of conspiracy to commit hostage taking and 16 counts of hostage taking of a U.S. national for ransom.

## Standards promote election misinformation

**OK** OKLAHOMA CITY — Oklahoma high school students studying U.S. history learn about the Industrial Revolution, women's suffrage and America's expanding role in international affairs.

Beginning next school year, they will add conspiracy theories about the 2020 presidential election.

Oklahoma's new social studies standards for K-12 public school students, already infused with references to the Bible and national pride, were revised at the direction of state School Superintendent Ryan Walters. The Republican official has spent much of his first term in office lauding President Donald Trump, feuding with teachers unions and local school superintendents and trying to end what he describes as "wokeness" in public schools.

"The left has been pushing

left-wing indoctrination in the classroom," Walters said. "We're moving it back to actually understanding history ... and I'm unapologetic about that."

The previous standard for studying the 2020 election merely said, "Examine issues related to the election of 2020 and its outcome." The new version is more expansive.

## Councilor was \$19K in debt at time of kickback

**MA** BOSTON — Boston City Councilor Tania Fernandes Anderson was nearly \$20,000 in debt in 2023, the same year that she pocketed a \$7,000 kickback in a City Hall bathroom that recently resulted in her federal corruption conviction, public records show.

Fernandes Anderson owed \$19,000 of a \$35,000 loan from what appeared to be a student loan provider at the time, according to a financial disclosure statement she filed with the city clerk last year and which covered the year of 2023.

Her "debt, loan or liability" is seemingly listed as being to Naviance, which describes itself as an American college and career readiness software, although the handwritten name of that debt provider was misspelled by the councilor.

How much, if any, of the debt Fernandes Anderson still owes is unclear, as financial disclosure forms covering last year are not due until May 30, according to City Clerk Alex Gournas.

On her 2023 calendar year form, Fernandes Anderson wrote that she was under a "deferring" payment plan for the loan. Her form lists no assets.

— From wire reports

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# Parity on full display in NBA's final four

Associated Press

The parity era continues in the NBA.

The New York Knicks haven't won an NBA championship since 1973. The Indiana Pacers won their most recent title that year — in the ABA. The Oklahoma City Thunder franchise has one title in its history, that coming in 1979 when the team called Seattle home. And the Minnesota Timberwolves have never even been to the NBA Finals.

Meet the NBA's final four.

When Commissioner Adam Silver hands one of those teams the Larry O'Brien Trophy next month, it'll mark a league first — seven championship franchises in a seven-year span.

There hasn't been a back-to-back NBA champion since Golden State in 2017 and 2018. From there, the list of champions goes like this: Toronto in 2019, the Los Angeles Lakers in 2020, Milwau-

kee in 2021, the Warriors in 2022, Denver in 2023 and Boston last season.

It's the longest such run of different champions in NBA history; Major League Baseball, the NHL and the NFL have all had longer ones, and not too long ago, either.

But for the NBA, this is different. The league wanted unpredictability, especially after four consecutive Cleveland-Golden State title matchups from 2015 through 2018.

And things have been highly unpredictable since. No matter what the Finals matchup is this year, the NBA will be seeing 11 conference-champion franchises in the span of seven seasons.

"We've still got eight more wins to achieve our ultimate goal," Timberwolves coach Chris Finch said. "We've still got two more series. We're only halfway there."

The season is over for 26 of the NBA's 30 clubs. But the fun stuff is just starting.

The Western Conference finals — No. 6 seed Minnesota vs. No. 1 seed Oklahoma City — began Tuesday night in Oklahoma. The Eastern Conference finals — No. 4 seed Indiana vs. No. 3 seed New York — begin Wednesday night in Manhattan. The Wolves lost the West finals last year; the Pacers lost the East finals a year ago.

"You've got to have big dreams," Indiana coach Rick Carlisle said. "You don't know how often you're going to be in this position."

Indeed, the championship window for teams doesn't seem to be staying open as long as it did in the past.

The Celtics were a huge favorite to win their second straight title; Boston didn't get out of Round 2, in part because it

couldn't hold onto big leads and in part because Jayson Tatum ruptured his right Achilles tendon in that series with the Knicks.

"Upset or not, whatever it is, we beat a great team," New York guard Jalen Brunson said. "They obviously lost a huge piece ... but they're still a great team."

Damian Lillard tore an Achilles tendon in Round 1, ending the Bucks' hopes. The Cavaliers, the top seed in the East, bowed out in Round 2 against the Pacers after a slew of Cleveland players were dealing with health issues. Stephen Curry strained his hamstring; that was all it took to doom the Warriors' chances in Round 2 against Minnesota.

"He's our sun," Golden State coach Steve Kerr said. "This is a solar system. He's our sun."

And now, the NBA solar system is about to see new star holding the trophy.

## NHL teams left are familiar, known for long runs

Associated Press

The NHL playoff field included some unexpected entrants, and the first two rounds featured some surprises and a handful of upsets.

Yet as things stand right now with the conference finals beginning Tuesday night, the teams still in contention for the Stanley Cup are a familiar mix of those who have been fighting for it the past few years.

The West final is a rematch of this same round last year with the Dallas Stars facing the Edmonton Oilers. The defending Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers are in the East final for a third consecutive spring after beating Toronto in Game 7 of their series, and next face the Carolina Hurricanes with these teams meeting at this stage for the second time in three years.

"We've already been in a conference final, and we know what's going to happen there," said Carolina's Andrei Svechnikov, whose eight goals are second in the post-season to only Mikko Rantanen. "It's not going to be easy there."

### East: Carolina vs. Florida

The Panthers trailed the Maple Leafs

two games to none, then lost their first chance to move on. They made no such misstep Sunday night, waxing Toronto to set up a rematch of the 2023 East final.

That was a sweep, with Florida winning each time by a goal: Game 1 in four overtimes, Game 2 less than two minutes into OT, Game 3 1-0 and Game 4 when Matthew Tkachuk scored with 4.9 seconds left. The banged-up Panthers lost to the Golden Knights in the final, but learned lessons that helped them win it all last year.

The Hurricanes, who beat New Jersey without best player Jack Hughes in the first round and suffocated Washington in the second, get the benefit of rest having played just 10 games this postseason.

"You hope it's a value," coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "There definitely is something to that."

### West: Dallas vs. Edmonton

Katy Perry was scheduled to be on tour at the Stars' arena on Wednesday night. Instead, it will be Corey Perry and the Oilers.

Edmonton has rolled since opening the playoffs with a pair of losses at Los Angeles, getting back to the third round

thanks to an unlikely combination of defense and goaltending. And, oh yeah, Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl have combined for 33 points, too. No big deal.

The Oilers won the West final last year in six games, with Stuart Skinner putting up a 1.91 goals-against average and a .922 save percentage and Dallas' Jake Oettinger a 2.56 and .901. Oettinger has been a rock this playoffs to get the Stars through Colorado and Winnipeg and now has the chance to show he can carry a team into the final.

"The guys that hadn't had any experience, we have all the experience in the world now," Oettinger said. "It's up to us as a group to take that next step, and I think we should feel great about what we've done with the adversity we've faced. I think our best hockey is yet to come."

Pete DeBoer has now coached a team into the third round for the sixth time in seven years. He was fired twice in that span, by San Jose and Vegas.

"You've got two hungry teams that have been really close and haven't gotten there yet," DeBoer said. "It's going to be a battle of wills here."



# Hays, Reds top Pirates for 5th straight win

Associated Press

**PITTSBURGH** — Austin Hays had three hits and two RBIs, and scored the go-ahead run on Monday night as the Cincinnati Reds beat the Pittsburgh Pirates 7-1 for their fifth consecutive victory.

Gavin Lux hit two doubles, his second scoring Hays in the sixth inning to break a 1-1 tie. Hays singled with two outs, continued to second on shortstop Isiah Kiner-Falefa's throwing error and then scored on Lux's line drive to left field.

TJ Friedl also had three of Cincinnati's 11 hits and Elly De La Cruz had two hits and two RBIs.

Reds left-hander Nick Lodolo (4-4) allowed one run and four hits in six innings. He struck out seven and walked one.

Lynn Richardson, Scott Barlow and Brent Suter finished with one scoreless inning each.

Mitch Keller (1-6) also pitched six innings and gave up two runs — one earned — and six hits with five strikeouts and one walk. Keller has not won since his season debut on March 28 at Miami and Pittsburgh has lost his last seven starts.

The Pirates are 3-7 since promoting bench coach Don Kelly to manager May 8. They have also lost 17 of their last 21 games and not scored more than four runs in 24 straight games.

Cincinnati added two runs in the eighth and three in the ninth to extend their lead to 7-1.

**Marlins 8, Cubs 7:** Jesús Sánchez hit a leadoff homer and a game-ending triple, finishing with three hits and four RBIs as host Miami came back to beat Chicago.

Rookie catcher Agustín Ramírez also went deep in the first inning for the Marlins, who squandered two leads before Sánchez's two-run triple won it with two outs in the ninth.

Miami was down to its last strike against reliever Daniel Palencia when Derek Hill dou-

bled on an 0-2 count and Javier Sanoja walked. Sánchez then hit a hard smash past first baseman Michael Busch and into the right-field corner, sending both runners home for the Marlins' sixth walk-off win of the season.

After the Cubs took a 7-6 lead in the sixth, Valente Bellozo threw three scoreless innings of relief for the win.

Miguel Amaya homered, doubled and drove in five runs for NL Central-leading Chicago.

**Mariners 5, White Sox 1:** Julio Rodríguez hit a grand slam, Luis Castillo pitched seven crisp innings and visiting Seattle beat Chicago for its fourth straight victory.

Castillo allowed three hits, struck out five and walked none in his first win since April 26. The right-hander is 2-0 with a 1.71 ERA in four career starts against the White Sox.

Last-place Chicago wasted a sharp performance by Davis Martin in its fifth consecutive loss. The right-hander pitched a career-high 7½ innings of four-hit ball.

**Red Sox 3, Mets 1:** Jarren Duran had a double and a triple as host Boston tagged New York ace Kodai Senga for three runs — the most he has given up all season — and beat the Mets.

Senga (4-3) fell behind 3-0 after two innings before settling down and retiring the last seven batters he faced. He allowed five hits and three walks in all while striking out five.

Red Sox starter Hunter Dobbin held New York to one run on five hits, allowing back-to-back singles before he struck Tyrone Taylor out on a called third strike for the second out in the fifth. Justin Wilson (2-0) fanned Francisco Lindor to end the threat.

**Brewers 5, Orioles 4:** William Contreras went 4-for-4 and hit a tiebreaking two-out single in the eighth inning as host Milwaukee sent Baltimore to its seventh consecutive loss.

The Orioles erased a three-run deficit but still fell to 0-3 since firing manager Brandon Hyde and handing the job to Tony Mansolino on an interim basis. Mansolino had been working as Hyde's third-base coach.

Baltimore tied the game on Cedric Mullins' three-run homer off Nick Mears in the seventh inning. Mears hadn't allowed an earned run in 13 straight appearances before giving up the homer.

**Astros 4, Rays 3:** Jake Meyers hit a go-ahead home run and Josh Hader stranded a runner on third in the ninth inning to preserve host Houston's victory over Tampa Bay.

Chandler Simpson reached on catcher's interference to begin the ninth against Hader. Simpson advanced on a ground out before stealing third. Hader then got Taylor Wells to pop up a bunt and Isaac Paredes to pop out near 3rd for his 12th save in 12 opportunities.

Meyers went 2 for 3 and hit his third home run on the second pitch from reliever Manuel Rodríguez (0-2) to put the Astros ahead in the seventh.

**Cardinals 11, Tigers 4:** Sonny Gray (5-1) struck out 10 and threw six scoreless innings while Brendan Donovan had three hits, leading host St. Louis to a rain-delayed victory over Detroit.

The Cardinals have won 13 of their last 15 games while outscoring opponents 85-36 in that stretch. Masyn Winn, Lars Nootbaar, Alec Burleson, Iván Herrera and Victor Scott II each added two hits in the 16-hit St. Louis attack.

The Cards added six runs in the seventh after a 34-minute rain delay. The big hit in the inning came on a two-run homer by Pedro Pagés.

**Phillies 9, Rockies 3:** Kyle Schwarber hit his 300th career home run, a 466-foot solo blast off the facing of the third deck in right field, Edmundo Sosa had four hits, including his first

home run of the season, and visiting Philadelphia rallied to beat scuffling Colorado.

Alec Bohm hit a go-ahead two-run homer and Trea Turner drove in two more with a double to center in a four-run eighth inning for the Phillies, who have won four straight.

**Royals 3, Giants 1:** Kris Bubic threw seven scoreless innings, losing a no-hit bid in the sixth on an official scoring change, and Vinnie Pasquantino hit a two-run homer in the eighth as visiting Kansas City got past San Francisco.

Bubic (5-2) carried his no-hit bid until there were two outs in the sixth. Wilmer Flores hit a grounder to the right side. Second baseman Michael Massey ranged to his left and slipped as the ball got past him. The play was originally ruled an error on Massey, then was changed to a single.

**Angels 4, Athletics 3:** Taylor Ward hit a two-run homer, Nolan Schanuel also went deep and visiting Los Angeles beat the skidding Athletics in the opener of a four-game series.

Lawrence Butler's double, a walk and a hit batter loaded the bases with nobody out in the bottom of the first against Angels starter José Soriano. Butler scored when Brent Rooker grounded into a double play, and Shea Langeliers' infield single made it 2-1.

**Diamondbacks 9, Dodgers 5:** Brandon Pfaadt (7-3) became the first seven-game winner in the majors, Lourdes Gurriel Jr., Gabriel Moreno and Geraldo Perdomo each hit a two-run homer, and visiting Arizona beat Los Angeles.

Coming off a three-game sweep by the last-place Los Angeles Angels, the NL West-leading Dodgers dropped their fourth in a row at home for the first time since May 2018, when they lost five straight. They've allowed six or more runs in five of seven games to begin the homestand.

# Newgarden, Power fast at Indy practice

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Will Power and Josef Newgarden were among the fastest cars in Indianapolis 500 practice Monday, just hours after their teams were penalized for illegal modifications in qualifying, while Team Penske teammate Scott McLaughlin was searching for speed in a car built up following his practice crash.

IndyCar champion Alex Palou paced the two-hour session — the last before Carb Day on Friday, when drivers get on the track one last time before Sunday's race — with a lap of 226.765 mph. Palou was followed by Helio Castroneves and Takuma Sato, and Jack Harvey, Ryan Hunter-Reay and Nolan Siegel were next, raising some eyebrows throughout the paddock.

Power was seventh on the speed chart. Newgarden was eighth.

Power, the 2018 winner, and Newgarden, the two-time de-

fending champion, will start side-by-side in the final row for the 109th running of "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing." That was among penalties levied by IndyCar on Monday for unapproved changes to the attenuator, a safety device on the rear of the car designed to absorb and reduce the force of impacts.

They will also be without their race strategist, lose their qualifying points and their teams were issued \$100,000 fines.

"Did you guys see Josef out there today? He'll be just fine," quipped Kyle Larson, who returned to Indianapolis Motor Speedway early Monday from the NASCAR All-Star Race the previous night.

Larson will make a second attempt at running all 1,100 laps of the Indy 500 and Coca-Cola 600 in Charlotte Sunday.

"It's kind of a weird situation, I would say. You don't see this every year," Rinus Veekay, who

had qualified last but will now start 31st, said of the Penske penalties. "If you told me a week ago that I would be starting on the same row as two Penskes, I would be very happy. Unfortunately, we're at the tail end of the field."

McLaughlin had a car capable of winning the pole until his crash in an hour-long practice Sunday, which left the No. 3 team just over 24 hours to put together the backup for him. IndyCar said the unapproved alteration on the cars of his teammates was not found on McLaughlin's wrecked ride, so he will maintain his 10th starting position.

McLaughlin's best lap on Monday was 221.561 mph, better only than Kyffin Simpson and Christian Lundgaard.

Other favorites struggled, too.

Robert Shwartzman, the first rookie to win the pole in 42 years, was 26th among the 33 cars with a best lap of 222.561 mph. And while 2008 winner

Scott Dixon showed plenty of speed, he managed only six laps before warning lights went off to signal an overheating issue, and he spent the last 90 minutes of the session in the garage.

The only incident in practice involved Christian Rasmussen, who touched the wall for the second time in five days. The impact sent him across the track and bumping into the inner wall, though his car appeared to escape significant damage.

Rasmussen had just run a lap of 225.247 mph, which wound up being the ninth-quickest on the day.

"I'm just bummed for the guys. We're into race week and it's just not where we want to be," Rasmussen said. "There's always things you can do differently, but were preparing to race — we're trying to race as close to the front as we can. You've got to try to do something but we have to look at what we have and reevaluate."

## Adding climb a big change to Tour de France finale

Associated Press

PARIS — Breaking with tradition at the Tour de France is stirring controversy.

Since race organizers announced plans last week to climb the iconic Montmartre hill in Paris during the final stage in July, the cycling world has been abuzz. Could the climb actually decide the Tour winner? Or disrupt the final sprint by injecting tactical uncertainty into what is usually a celebratory day?

Well, that remains to be seen. But one thing seems certain: The stage will be a spectacle.

At last year's Olympics, massive crowds lined the streets of Montmartre — the area in the northern part of Paris that is popular among artists and offers grand vistas of the city — to

cheer on riders.

Inspired by the frenetic atmosphere and willing to build on the momentum, Tour organizers said this month that riders competing in cycling's biggest race this summer would climb the Montmartre hill and pass beneath the Sacré-Coeur basilica before "batting it out on a stage that may break from the traditions established over the past 50 years in the heart of the capital."

Traditionally, the Tour final stage is largely processional until a sprint decides the day's winner on the Champs-Élysées. Last year's final stage was held outside Paris for the first time since 1905 because of the Olympics. The world famous avenue is back on the program this year for the conclusion of the race.

The inclusion of the steep Montmartre climb could dramatically change the dynamics of the stage. If the hill features just a few miles from the finish line, or is climbed several times, pure sprinters will likely be dropped before they can compete for the stage win. And if the general classification remains tight ahead of the final stage, the yellow jersey itself could be decided in Paris.

Full details of the route will be presented at a news conference Wednesday. With a peloton roughly twice as big as it was at the Olympics, organizers are working with Paris authorities and the Prefecture of police to ensure the security of the race on the narrow and cobbled streets of the area. But some top riders have already expressed

their lack of enthusiasm about the addition.

"Montmartre was nice to do in the Olympics, it seemed good, a lot of people, a really good atmosphere," two-time Tour champion Jonas Vingegaard told reporters this week. "But when they came to the Montmartre, there was only 15 riders left in the bunch. And when we do the Tour de France, there will be 150 guys fighting for positions on a very narrow climb. It could end up being more stress than they want to have."

Even Remco Evenepoel, who won the Olympic men's road race in Paris last year, is also opposed to the idea.

"There will be enough battle for positioning in the first week of the Tour," he told sports media Spozza.