

## Trump's irritation with Putin boils over

*The Washington Post*

President Donald Trump lashed out at the Kremlin on Tuesday for its unwillingness to negotiate a ceasefire with Ukraine as he continued to consider increased sanctions against Russia, an escalation from his previously friendly tone toward Vladimir Putin that came as the president appeared to grow gloomier about his ability to broker peace in Ukraine.

In perhaps his harshest rhetoric yet against Putin, Trump declared that Putin is “playing with fire” — a reference to Russia’s escalating bombardment of Ukraine in recent days despite the U.S. president’s efforts to broker a peace agreement between Kyiv and Moscow.

Trump has offered mixed messages about Putin, oscillating between praise of a leader with whom he has said he believes he can do business and frustration about his inability to bring Russia to the bargaining table.

The frustration appears to have boiled over this week. On Tuesday, he suggested that he had been shielding Putin from tough consequences related to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

“What Vladimir Putin doesn’t realize is that if it weren’t for me, lots of really bad things would have already happened to Russia, and I mean REALLY BAD. He’s playing with fire!” Trump posted on Truth Social.

The post followed Trump’s suggestion Sunday that he might be open to sanctions against Russia, a significant shift after months in which he had been so cautious about pressuring Putin that he even exempted the country from tariffs that he imposed on most of the rest of the world.

“This war is Joe Biden’s fault, and President Trump has been clear he wants to see a negotiated peace deal. President Trump has also smartly kept all options on the table,” White House press secretary Karoline Lea-

vitt said Tuesday.

But it was still unclear whether Trump was truly prepared to impose more sanctions, and he has kept quiet about whether he supports a bipartisan effort in Congress to bolster them. Russia has faced years of U.S. sanctions, although experts say they could be tightened against its energy and banking sector.

The State and Treasury departments have each been drafting potential sanctions packages against Russia that would focus on those sectors, one diplomat familiar with the discussions said.

The same teams have also been assessing the effectiveness of the current sanctions regime and contemplating the rollback of certain existing sanctions, said the diplomat, who, like others, spoke only on the condition of anonymity to speak frankly about closed-door talks.

But any shift would depend on the personal preference of Trump, who has made clear that

he alone is the arbiter of U.S. policy. For now, there has been no action either to pressure Putin or boost Ukraine, which is still receiving the final tranches of military aid approved during the Biden administration. That assistance is due to run out in the coming months, and Trump has not signaled plans to revive or extend it, putting Kyiv in an uncertain strategic position.

“There is a choice facing the current administration, which is to authorize additional security assistance for Ukraine so they continue to receive the weapons they need to defend their country,” said David Shimer, the former Ukraine director on President Joe Biden’s National Security Council. “Or to chart a different course, which is to let U.S. security assistance wind down, which would disadvantage Ukraine, play to Russia’s advantage, and ultimately embolden and incentivize Russia to keep this war going.”

## Rear admiral is fired following Navy IG investigation

By CAITLYN BURCHETT

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — A rear admiral was fired Tuesday after the Navy’s inspector general substantiated a complaint lodged against the senior leader, the service said.

Rear Adm. Kevin Smith, the Navy’s executive officer for its unmanned and small combatants program, was relieved of his duties due to a loss of confidence based on a complaint substantiated by an Office of the Naval Inspector General investigation.

The Navy did not respond to a

request for additional information, including what the nature of the complaint was or when the complaint was filed. The U.S. military routinely cites only a vague “loss of confidence” when removing commanders and other leaders from positions of authority.

“The Navy maintains the highest standards for leaders and holds them accountable when those standards are not met,” the service said in a statement.

Smith was promoted to rear admiral in 2023 and was assigned as the executive officer

for the Navy’s unmanned and small combatants program. The program falls under the Navy’s acquisition department and authorizes the design, development, build, maintenance and modernization of unmanned maritime systems, mine warfare systems, special warfare systems, expeditionary warfare systems and small surface combatants.

Smith was relieved by Brett Seidle, the acting assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition. Melissa Kirkendall, executive director for the program, as-

sumed temporary responsibilities. Smith was temporarily reassigned to the staff of Naval Sea Systems Command.

Smith has served on ship development teams multiple times throughout his career. He was a lead systems engineer and later a deputy program manager at the Dahlgren Division of the Naval Surface Warfare Center. Smith also served as a test officer for the supervisor of shipbuilding, where he was responsible for combat system installation, activation, integration, test and trials for five new destroyers.

# SEAL tapped as top senior enlisted adviser

By CAITLYN BURCHETT  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Indo-Pacific Command's top sailor and a SEAL was tapped to serve as the armed forces' most senior enlisted service member, the Pentagon announced Tuesday.

Fleet Master Chief David Isom was selected as the next senior enlisted adviser to Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

and the nation's highest-ranking military officer. Isom now serves as the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's senior enlisted leader, a position he has held since June 30, 2022.

As an adviser to Caine, Isom will represent the enlisted force by providing military advice and improving communication between enlisted members and the chairman, helping to ensure that the perspectives of enlisted

troops are represented at the highest levels.

Isom will be the first sailor to hold the position. He will replace Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Troy Black, who was appointed to the position in November 2023. Black will retire June 20.

Isom served previously as the senior enlisted leader for Special Operations Commands for the Pacific and Northern Command. He was also the command

master chief of Naval Special Warfare Group 10 and Special Reconnaissance Team 2.

Isom enlisted in the Navy in 1987. Upon completing basic training, he reported to the USS Mauna Kea, an ammunition replenishment ship. Isom was later assigned to USS Mount Hood, another ammunition replenishment ship, prior to being selected to attend Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training.

## Hegseth: Poland 'leading the way' funding defense

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth is calling for closer U.S. ties with Poland, praising its military investment and leadership on NATO's eastern flank amid a Pentagon review that could reshape how American troops are deployed across Europe.

Poland is "leading the way" on military spending, Hegseth said Tuesday during a meeting with Polish Defense Minister Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz at the Pentagon, citing the country's push to build Europe's largest land army.

The discussions also come ahead of a NATO defense ministers meeting next week followed by a June summit of leaders in The Hague, where defense spending will be at the top of the agenda.

"We don't have to encourage Poland," Hegseth said in reference to Warsaw's commitment to spending 5% of its gross domestic product on defense.

The two countries share a common approach to military matters and defense spending, he added.

Kosiniak-Kamysz said Poland supports President Donald Trump's push to get allies to agree on a plan to increase NA-

TO's defense spending benchmark from 2% of GDP to 5%.

"I'm also certain that it was necessary to send Europe a strong message, a strong signal for burden sharing within NATO, recognizing that Europe must take greater responsibility for its own defense," Kosiniak-Kamysz said.

During the NATO summit, which Trump will attend, allies also are anticipating more information about the future of the American military mission in Europe.

When Hegseth took the Pentagon reins in January, he launched a force posture review to assess U.S. troop levels overseas.

The review aligns with Trump administration calls for Europe to take over most defense responsibilities in Europe.

That has raised questions about the future of the roughly 80,000 U.S. troops currently stationed in Europe, with some allies bracing for possible reductions.

Hegseth hasn't indicated which countries are most likely to be targeted for troop cuts. During Trump's first term, Germany was singled out for a 12,000-troop reduction, but those plans never came to fruition.

## USS Canberra arrives at base in Bahrain to replace minehunter

By LARA KORTE  
*Stars and Stripes*

The littoral combat ship USS Canberra arrived at the U.S. naval base in Bahrain last week, the first of four new vessels expected to replace aging mine countermeasures ships in the Middle East, according to U.S. Naval Forces Central Command.

The older Avenger-class ships, which have operated in the region for decades, feature fiberglass-covered wooden hulls that the Navy says have become increasingly expensive to maintain. The last three Avenger-class ships, purchased in 1990, are capable of finding, classifying and destroying moored and bottom mines. Wooden hulls were used primarily to reduce the ship's magnetic signature, a key safety feature in mine countermeasure operations.

The littoral combat ship's minehunting module was once scheduled to reach initial operating capability in 2015, but reliability issues delayed that until 2023, forcing the Navy to continue deploying the older minehunters.

USS Canberra, which left San Diego for Bahrain on its maiden deployment in March, moves at a top speed of about 46 mph, while the Avenger-class ships top out at

about 16 mph. Canberra also comes equipped with unmanned maritime sensors designed to locate and destroy mines at a greater distance.

Canberra is conducting routine operations as part of its scheduled deployment. It eventually will be permanently stationed in Bahrain along with three more littoral combat ships, Navy officials told Stars and Stripes.

Canberra was welcomed with a ceremony Monday that included Bahraini defense officials, U.S. Ambassador to Bahrain Steven Bondy and NAVCENT commander Vice Adm. George Winkoff. It is the first Independence-class littoral combat ship to be deployed to the region, NAVCENT said. The Independence-class LCS is a trimaran with a larger flight deck than its counterpart, the single-hulled Freedom variant. Canberra also has room for two helicopters or multiple drones, according to manufacturer Austal USA.

Cmdr. Bill Golden, commander of Canberra's blue crew, previously served aboard a mine countermeasures ship deployed to Bahrain. He said that "to see the differences between that platform and what Canberra offers is incredible."

# Musk critical of Trump's 'big beautiful bill'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON—Elon Musk is criticizing the centerpiece of President Donald Trump's legislative agenda, a significant fracture in a partnership that was forged during last year's campaign and was poised to reshape American politics and the federal government.

The billionaire entrepreneur, who supported Trump's candidacy with at least \$250 million and has worked for his administration as a senior adviser, said he was "disappointed" by what the president calls his "big beautiful bill."

The legislation includes a mix of tax cuts and enhanced immigration enforcement. While speaking to CBS, Musk described it as a "massive spending

bill" that increases the federal deficit and "undermines the work" of his Department of Government Efficiency, known as DOGE.

"I think a bill can be big or it could be beautiful," Musk said. "But I don't know if it could be both."

His CBS interview came out Tuesday night. White House officials did not immediately respond to questions.

Republicans recently pushed the legislation through the House and are debating it in the Senate.

Musk's comments come as he steps back from his government work, rededicating himself to companies like the electric automaker Tesla and rocket manufacturer SpaceX. He's also said

he'll reduce his political spending, because "I think I've done enough."

At times, he's seemed chastened by his experience working in government. Although he hoped that DOGE would generate \$1 trillion in spending cuts, he's fallen far short of that target.

"The federal bureaucracy situation is much worse than I realized," he told The Washington Post. "I thought there were problems, but it sure is an uphill battle trying to improve things in D.C., to say the least."

Musk had previously been effusive about the opportunity to reshape Washington. He wore campaign hats in the White House, held his own campaign rallies and talked about excessive spending as an existential

crisis. He was also effusive in his praise of Trump.

"The more I've gotten to know President Trump, the more I like the guy," Musk said at one point. "Frankly, I love him."

Trump repaid the favor, describing Musk as "a truly great American." When Tesla faced declining sales, he turned the White House driveway into a makeshift showroom to illustrate his support.

But Trump remains the dominant figure within the Republican Party, and many lawmakers have been unwilling to cross the president when he applies pressure for his agenda.

It's unclear what, if any, impact that Musk's comments about the bill would have on the legislative debate.

## After explosions, SpaceX fumbles new launch

Associated Press

After back-to-back explosions, SpaceX launched its mega rocket Starship again on Tuesday evening but fell short of the main objectives when the spacecraft tumbled out of control and broke apart.

The 403-foot rocket blasted off on its ninth demo from Starbase, SpaceX's launch site at the southern tip of Texas. Residents voted this month to organize it as an official city.

CEO Elon Musk's SpaceX hoped to release a series of mock satellites following liftoff, but that got nixed because the door failed to open all the way. Then the spacecraft began spinning as it skimmed space toward an uncontrolled landing in the Indian Ocean.

SpaceX later confirmed that the spacecraft experienced "a rapid unscheduled disassembly," or burst apart. "Teams will continue to review data and work toward our next flight test," the company said in an on-

line statement.

Musk noted in a post on X it was a "big improvement" from the two previous demos, which ended in flaming debris over the Atlantic. Despite the latest setback, he promised a faster launch pace moving forward, with a Starship soaring every three to four weeks for the next three flights.

It was the first time one of Musk's Starships — intended for moon and Mars travel — flew with a recycled booster. There were no plans to catch the booster with giant chopsticks back at the launch pad, with the company instead pushing it to its limits. Contact with the booster was lost at one point, and it slammed into the Gulf of Mexico in pieces as the spacecraft continued toward the Indian Ocean. Then the spacecraft went out of control.

Communication ceased before the spacecraft came down, and SpaceX ended its webcast soon afterward.

## Trump set to pardon TV's Chrisley couple of fraud

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump announced Tuesday that he's planning to pardon TV stars Todd and Julie Chrisley, famous for "Chrisley Knows Best," a reality show that followed their tight-knit family and extravagant lifestyle that prosecutors said at trial was boosted by bank fraud and hiding earnings from tax authorities.

The Chrisleys were convicted in 2022 of conspiring to defraud banks around the Atlanta area out of more than \$30 million in loans by submitting false documents.

They were also found guilty of tax evasion, obscuring their earnings while showcasing a luxurious way of living that authorities said included high-priced cars, designer clothes, real estate and travel.

Prosecutors said the couple walked away from their responsibility for repayment when Todd Chrisley declared bank-

ruptcy and left \$20-plus million in unpaid loans.

Julie Chrisley was sentenced to seven years in federal prison, and Todd Chrisley got 12 years behind bars.

The couple was also ordered to pay \$17.8 million in restitution.

"Your parents are going to be free and clean and I hope that we can do it by tomorrow," Trump said in a call with their daughter, Savannah Chrisley, according to a video posted online by a White House aide.

In a social media post, the aide declared, "Trump Knows Best!"

"They've been given a pretty harsh treatment based on what I'm hearing," the president added a few moments later of the couple.

A White House official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss decisions that hadn't yet been made public, said the pardons would be forthcoming.



# UN: 'Jury is still out' on Iran-US talks

*Associated Press*

VIENNA — The head of the United Nations' atomic watchdog said Wednesday that "the jury is still out" on negotiations between Iran and the U.S. over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program but described the continuing negotiations a good sign.

Rafael Mariano Grossi, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, described himself as being in near-daily conversation with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi as well as talking to Steve Witkoff, the U.S. Middle East envoy.

Grossi acknowledged one of his deputies was in Tehran on Wednesday. Iranian officials identified the official as Massimo Aparo, the head of the IAEA's safeguards arm. That's the division that sends inspectors into Iran to monitor its program, which now enriches uranium up to 60% purity — a short, technical step from weapons-grade levels of 90%.

"For the moment, the jury is still out. We don't know whether there's going to be an agreement or not," Grossi told journalists attending a week-long seminar at the agency in

Vienna.

However, he described the ongoing meetings as a good sign.

The talks seek to limit Iran's nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of some of the crushing economic sanctions the U.S. has imposed on the Islamic Republic, closing in on a half-century of enmity.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened to unleash airstrikes targeting Iran's program, if a deal isn't reached. Iranian officials increasingly warn they could pursue a nuclear weapon with

their stockpile of uranium.

Trump has described Iran as having an American proposal to reach a deal. However, Iran repeatedly has denied receiving such a proposal, including on Wednesday with Mohammad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.

However, if a deal is reached, Iran might allow the IAEA to have American inspectors on their teams during inspections, Eslami said. Americans represent the largest single nationality of IAEA employees, a 2023 agency report showed.

## Gaza officials: crowd fired upon at US backed aid site

*Associated Press*

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — At least one Palestinian was killed and 48 others wounded when a crowd was fired upon while overrunning a new aid distribution site in the Gaza Strip set up by an Israeli and U.S.-backed foundation, Gaza's Health Ministry said Wednesday.

Crowds of Palestinians on Tuesday broke through fences around the distribution site where thousands had massed. An Associated Press journalist heard Israeli tank and gun fire and saw a military helicopter firing flares.

It was not yet known whether the death and injuries were caused by Israeli forces, private contractors or others. The foundation said its military contractors had not fired on the crowd but "fell back" before resuming aid operations. Israel said its troops nearby had fired warning shots.

The Israeli military said it destroyed aircraft used by the rebels. It was not immediately clear if anyone was killed or wounded in the strikes.

The distribution hub outside Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah was opened the day before by the Gaza Humanitarian Founda-

tion, which has been slated by Israel to take over aid operations.

The U.N. and humanitarian organizations have rejected the new system, saying it won't be able to meet the needs of Gaza's 2.3 million people and allows Israel to use food to control the population. They have also warned of the risk of friction between Israeli troops and people seeking supplies.

Palestinians have become desperate for food after nearly three months of Israeli border closures pushed Gaza to the brink of famine.

Israel says it helped establish

the new aid mechanism to prevent Hamas from siphoning off supplies, but it has provided no evidence of systematic diversion and U.N. agencies say they have mechanisms in place to prevent it while delivering aid to all parts of the territory.

GHF says it has established four hubs, two of which have begun operating in the now mostly uninhabited southern city of Rafah. They are guarded by private security contractors and have chain-link fences channeling Palestinians into a what resemble military bases surrounded by large sand berms.

## Skittles removes controversial additive targeted by RFK Jr.

*Bloomberg News*

Mars' Skittles candies are no longer being made with titanium dioxide, a chemical that whitens foods, brightens colors and makes candy appear shiny, the company confirmed to Bloomberg News. The ingredient was removed from all Skittles production at the end of last year, a spokesperson said.

In 2023, groups including the

Environmental Working Group and the Center for Food Safety filed a petition with the Food and Drug Administration to remove the approval of titanium dioxide as a color additive in food. That petition was still under review as of March 2024, according to the FDA website.

Titanium dioxide hasn't been banned in the U.S., though Mars pledged to stop using the

additive in 2016. It was still listed as an ingredient in Sour Skittles earlier this year. In a statement to Bloomberg News in January, the company said its use of the ingredient was "in compliance with government regulations."

The company is now in the process of updating its website to reflect the reformulation, though shoppers may see prod-

ucts containing titanium dioxide on shelves until those products sell through.

Other foods — including Mondelez International's Sour Patch Kids Watermelon, Kraft Heinz's Lunchables Cookie Dunks and JM Smucker's Donettes — currently use titanium dioxide. It's also a common ingredient in sunscreens and white paints.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Despite outbreak, vaccine exemptions to get easier

**TX** AUSTIN — Texas this year has been the center of the nation's largest measles outbreak in more than two decades, but a bill approved by state lawmakers and sent to Republican Gov. Greg Abbott would make it significantly easier for parents to enroll their children in school without vaccinations for diseases such as measles, whooping cough, polio and hepatitis A and B.

Supporters say the bill streamlines an already legal exemption process that allows families to avoid vaccines for reasons of conscience, religious beliefs or medical reasons. It would let them download the required forms from a website instead of contacting state health officials and waiting for one to come in the mail.

The bill does not change which vaccines are required. However, critics say easing the exemption process opens a door to further outbreaks.

## Second crypto investor charged in kidnapping

**NY** NEW YORK — A second cryptocurrency investor surrendered to police Tuesday in the alleged kidnapping of a man who said he was tortured for weeks inside an upscale Manhattan townhouse by captors seeking the password to access his Bitcoin account.

William Duplessie, 32, faces charges of kidnapping, assault, unlawful imprisonment and criminal possession of a weapon, according to police.

His arrest comes four days af-

ter the alleged victim — a 28-year-old Italian national — escaped, bloodied and barefoot, from a lavish townhouse where he said he had been severely beaten, drugged, shocked and threatened with death for nearly three weeks.

On Friday evening, hours after the man's escape, the crypto investor John Woeltz was taken into custody and charged in the alleged kidnapping scheme.

Authorities said the pair lured the victim into an eight-bedroom apartment in Manhattan's Soho neighborhood, one of the most expensive in the city, on May 6 to steal his Bitcoin fortune.

Over the next 17 days, the man told police he was bound by the wrists, shocked with electrical wires, pistol-whipped, cut on the leg with a saw and forced to smoke from a crack pipe. At one point, he said, he was dangled from the home's top flight of stairs.

Believing he would soon be killed, the victim said he agreed Friday morning to give the men access to the password. As the men went to retrieve his computer, the victim was able to escape from the home and flag down a traffic agent.

## Judge who left to arrest defendant is suspended

**WI** MADISON — The Wisconsin Supreme Court suspended a Dane County judge for a week Tuesday for leaving court to try to arrest a hospitalized defendant herself and getting into a sarcastic exchange with another defendant seeking a trial delay.

The court agreed with a judicial conduct review panel's

suspension recommendation for Ellen Berz, finding that she deserved more than a reprimand because she behaved impulsively and showed a lack of restraint. The suspension will begin June 26, the court ordered.

The suspension order noted that Berz has acknowledged the facts of the case and has accepted full responsibility. Andrew Rima, one of two attorneys for Berz listed in online court records, declined to comment. Her other attorney, Steven Caya, didn't immediately respond to an email.

## Court rejects 'only two genders' T-shirt case

**DC** WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Tuesday turned down a middle-school student's claim he had a free-speech right to wear a T-shirt stating there are "only two genders."

Over two dissents, the justices let stand a ruling that said a school may enforce a dress code to protect students from "hate speech" or bullying.

After three months of internal debate, the justices decided they would not take up another conservative, culture war challenge to progressive policies that protect LGBTQ+ youth.

Justice Samuel Alito filed a 14-page dissent joined only by Justice Clarence Thomas. He said the case "presented an issue of great importance for our nation's youth: whether public schools may suppress student speech because it expresses a viewpoint the schools disfavor."

Liam Morrison, a 7th grader from Massachusetts, said he was responding to his school's

promotion of Pride Month when students were encouraged to wear rainbow colors and posters urged them to "rise up to protect trans and gender non-confirming students."

Two years ago, he went to school wearing a black T-shirt that said "There are only two genders."

A teacher reported him to the principal who sent him home to change his shirt. A few weeks later, he returned with the word "censored" taped over the words "two genders" but was sent home again.

The T-shirt dispute asked the Supreme Court to decide whether school officials may limit the free expression of some students to protect others from messages they may see as offensive or hurtful.

## Man shoots himself with gun he grabbed from cop

**MA** BOSTON — A man in Boston was arrested after grabbing a gun from a police officer outside a hospital and shooting himself, prompting a large emergency response, authorities said Tuesday. The man's injury appeared to be non-life-threatening.

The officer "was approached by someone who appeared to be suffering from some sort of mental health issue," Boston Police Commissioner Michael Cox told reporters. He said the man was able to get a hold of the officer's firearm, and discharged at least one round.

The man was taken to the hospital, Cox said. Authorities didn't release his name.

Cox said passers-by and other officers stepped in to help.

— From wire reports

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# Pacers top Knicks to move win away from Finals

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Tyrese Haliburton finished with 32 points, 15 assists and 12 rebounds without a turnover in a historic postseason performance to lead the Indiana Pacers past the New York Knicks 130-121 on Tuesday night for a 3-1 lead in the Eastern Conference finals.

With his father, John, back in Gainbridge Fieldhouse, Haliburton became the first player with such a stat line in the postseason since turnovers were first tracked in 1977-78 and he carried Indiana within a victory of its second trip to the NBA Finals. Nikola Jokic and Oscar Robertson are the only other players to post 30 points, 15 assists and 10 rebounds in a playoff game.

Game 5 is Thursday in New York.

"I'll look at that later and reflect on that at a different time. For me, it's just about winning,"

Haliburton said. "I wanted to prove I could respond when my back is against the wall, my team's back is against the wall. I feel like we responded the right way."

Pascal Siakam added 30 points while Haliburton had four steals in his second career postseason triple-double. Obi Toppin's 3-pointer with 46 seconds left sealed it.

Jalen Brunson scored 31 points. Karl-Anthony Towns had 24 points and 12 rebounds, and OG Anunoby finished with 22 points. But New York couldn't rally from another double-digit deficit.

It marked the first time in the series the home team won and leaves the Knicks one loss away from getting eliminated for the second straight year by the Pacers.

"We've all got to be better. We've got to be better as a team," Towns said after shaking off a left leg injury with 2:11 to play to

finish the game. "It's unfortunate we couldn't find a way tonight when we found a way in all the other series to do it."

Nearly a dozen former Indiana players, including Jermaine O'Neal and Lance Stephenson, joined Haliburton's father in the heavily gold-clad crowd. So did WWE Hall of Famer Triple H, rappers Rob 49 and 50 Cent and singers John Mellencamp and Jelly Roll. Haliburton also brought New York firefighter Hans Perez, a Pacers fan, to the game and gave him a signed No. 0 jersey.

John Haliburton had been forced to watch Indiana's previous eight postseason games from afar after he ran onto the court and confronted Milwaukee star Giannis Antetokounmpo following his son's last-second shot to eliminate the Bucks in the first round. The Pacers allowed him to return for Game 4 and he sat in a suite.

Both teams were shooting at a

clip of 70% long into the first quarter as Indiana raced to a 43-35 lead. Haliburton helped the Pacers close the half on a 6-0 run to make it 69-64 as he finished the half just two rebounds short of his third career triple-double.

"He was our leader tonight and we had some difficult film stuff yesterday, not fun," Indiana coach Rick Carlisle said. "We allowed things to go a different direction than they needed to go in Game 3 and tonight we were determined to turn it back in our direction."

Did they ever.

The Pacers opened the second half with an even more aggressive style that spurred a 9-2 run and closed the quarter on a 9-4 spurt to extend the margin to 102-91. Siakam scored the final five points of a 9-3 run early in the fourth to give Indiana a 111-96 lead.

The Knicks got as close as six three times in the closing minutes, but couldn't get any closer.

# Oilers take commanding 3-1 series lead over Stars

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — The Edmonton Oilers are one win away from a return trip to the Stanley Cup Final.

Leon Draisaitl and Corey Perry each had a power-play goal and an assist and Edmonton took a commanding lead in the Western Conference final series with a 4-1 victory over the Dallas Stars on Tuesday night.

Kasper Kapanen and Adam Henrique added empty-net goals, and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Connor McDavid each had two assists for the Oilers, who took a 3-1 lead in the series by winning three consecutive games after a third-period collapse cost them the opening game in Dallas. Since that game, Edmonton has outscored the Stars 13-2.

Draisaitl said it was far from easy in Game 4.

"There are going to be some swings in a series. They're one of the last four teams standing, so they're going to have their push, and there's going to be periods where they control the play. That's just the way it is," Draisaitl said.

"But I think we've managed it really well.

(goalie Stuart Skinner) has been incredible when we needed him to be, and our third period was really well played."

The Oilers are now 9-0 in Game 4s over their past three playoff runs.

Skinner continued to shine in the Edmonton net, making 28 saves in the win.

"How we all played as a team was fantastic and shows a lot of courage, the way that guys are blocking shots," Skinner said. "For myself, it definitely felt good out there. I'm just trying to give my team the best chance that I possibly can every night."

Jason Robertson scored for the Stars, who are in danger of being eliminated in the West final by the Oilers for the second year in a row.

"It's time to reset again, it's not over until somebody wins four games," said Dallas forward Mikko Rantanen, who has been held scoreless for seven straight games after scoring nine goals in the six previous games. "So now we go on home ice and it's just one game at a time. I mean, I don't even think really what the series is, it's just try to win one game and come back to Alberta."

Jake Oettinger recorded 29 stops while

taking the loss in the Stars net, falling to 5-11 in his career in West final contests.

After surviving a flurry of Dallas chances to start the game, Edmonton started the scoring on the power play with 8:37 to play in the opening period as Nugent-Hopkins kept up his hot play in the series, feeding it to Draisaitl who beat Oettinger with a one-timer from a bad angle for his seventh of the playoffs.

It was Nugent-Hopkins' fourth consecutive multipoint performance, becoming the first player in 35 years to accomplish that feat in a conference final, and the first Oiler to have nine or more points through the first four games of a conference final since Wayne Gretzky 37 years ago.

There was some cause for concern for Edmonton in the first frame, however, as forward Zach Hyman took an open ice hit from Mason Marchment and left the game with an upper-body injury and did not return.

Stars forward Roope Hintz returned to the lineup after missing a game. He was helped off the ice late in the third period of Game 2 after being slashed on the top of the left foot by Oilers defenseman Darnell Nurse.



# Ohtani hits 20th HR in Dodgers' win

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Shohei Ohtani hit his major league-leading 20th home run of the season and the Los Angeles Dodgers defeated the Cleveland Guardians 9-5 on Tuesday night.

Michael Conforto and Max Muncy also went deep for the Dodgers. Dustin May (3-4) won his second straight start. The right-hander had a season-high nine strikeouts and allowed three runs in five innings.

Daniel Schneemann had a three-run homer in the fourth inning as the Guardians dropped their third straight. José Ramírez extended his hitting streak to 20 games — the longest active run in the majors — with a base hit in the frame.

Ohtani drove a cutter from Tanner Bibee (4-5) into the left-field stands to extend the Dodgers' lead to 4-0 in the fourth inning.

It was the second time this season and 10th since Ohtani came to the majors from Japan for the 2018 season he has homered in three straight games.

**Cardinals 7, Orioles 4:** Nolan Arenado hit a tiebreaking homer in the eighth inning, and visiting St. Louis topped Baltimore.

The Orioles were on a season-high three-game winning streak, but they reverted to old habits, going 1-for-14 with runners in scoring position. The lone hit was a three-run homer by Ryan O'Hearn that gave Baltimore a 4-3 lead in the fifth, but the Cardinals responded with a run in the seventh and three in the eighth off the Orioles' bullpen.

**Tigers 3, Giants 1:** Wenceel Pérez homered in his first at-bat in his season debut, Jack Flaherty worked six scoreless innings and Riley Greene had three hits and two RBIs as the American League-leading host Detroit beat San Francisco.

Pérez, who had missed the entire season due to a lower back injury, hit a 2-0 pitch 351

feet to right field in the second inning for his first homer since Aug. 7.

**Phillies 2, Braves 0:** Ranger Suárez struck out eight in six shutout innings, and Philadelphia survived an injury scare to slugger Bryce Harper to beat visiting Atlanta.

Harper left in the first inning after he was hit near the right elbow by a 95.3 mph fastball from Braves starter Spencer Strider (0-3). Harper sustained a bruise, and an X-ray was negative, the Phillies said.

**Twins 4, Rays 2:** Kody Clemens hit his fifth home run of the season, with father Roger Clemens watching from the stands, and visiting Minnesota beat Tampa Bay to stop the Rays' season-high, six-game winning streak.

Kody Clemens extended his hitting streak to a career-high eight games when he homered off leading off the second against Taj Bradley (4-4).

**Mets 6, White Sox 4:** Pete Alonso and Jared Young each hit a two-run homer in the first inning, and New York beat visiting Chicago for its fourth consecutive comeback victory.

Tyler Megill (4-4) recovered from a shaky start, allowing two runs in 5½ innings, to help the Mets (34-21) match a season high at 13 games above .500 with their 14th come-from-behind win.

**Reds 7, Royals 2:** Elly De La Cruz hit two long home runs, Brady Singer pitched seven strong innings against his former team and Cincinnati beat host Kansas City.

De La Cruz hit a 436-foot shot to center in the fourth inning that tied the score at 2 against Jonathan Bownan, then a go-ahead 451-foot drive into the right-center fountain in the sixth off Taylor Clarke (1-1).

**Brewers 5, Red Sox 1 (10):** Christian Yelich hit a grand slam in the 10th inning for his first career-walk-off homer,

giving Milwaukee a win over Boston.

With Joey Ortiz on at second, Brice Turang lined a four-seam fastball off Liam Hendriks (0-2) for a base hit that moved Ortiz to third. Jackson Chourio walked. One out later, Yelich drove a 1-1 pitch 400 feet to right-center.

**Rangers 2, Blue Jays 0:** Josh Jung's two-out single scored pinch runner Sam Haggerty in the eighth inning to break a scoreless tie and Texas beat visiting Toronto.

The Rangers' second run scored when Toronto catcher Alejandro Kirk threw into left field when attempting to pick Wyatt Langford off third base.

**Astros 11, Athletics 1:** Jose Altuve's 40th four-hit game included a pair of home runs and Houston rolled to a home win that dealt the Athletics their 12th loss in 13 games.

Altuve singled on the first inning, homered leading off a three-run third and hit a two-run drive in the fourth, getting his 13th career multihomer game with his eighth home run this season. He singled in the sixth ahead of Christian Walker's homer.

**Cubs 4, Rockies 3 (11):** Michael Busch and Matt Shaw hit run-scoring singles in the 11th inning, lifting Chicago past visiting Colorado and sending them to their 21st consecutive series loss.

Chicago has won nine of 11 while the Rockies fell to 9-46 and are on pace to finish 27-135. Colorado is 0-18 in series this season and also lost its last three in 2024.

The Rockies exceeded the 20 straight lost series by the Chicago White Sox last year.

**Mariners 9, Nationals 1:** Julio Rodríguez hit a two-run home run, Cal Raleigh hit a pair of solo homers and Seattle opened a nine-game homestand with a win over visiting Washington.

Rodríguez and Raleigh went

back-to-back after J.P. Crawford led off the first with a single to stake Seattle rookie Logan Evans to a 3-0 lead.

**Yankees 3, Angels 2:** Carlos Rodón pitched seven scoreless innings of five-hit ball, and Devin Williams barely survived a perilous ninth inning to earn his first save since April 17 in New York's victory over hosting Los Angeles.

Yoán Moncada homered in the ninth as the Angels ended a stretch of 16 scoreless innings in the series with two runs and three hits off Williams, the Yankees' embattled new reliever.

Williams lost the closer role last month after a shaky beginning to his New York tenure, and he hadn't had a save opportunity since April 25.

**Padres 6, Marlins 6:** Three-time batting champion Luis Arraez singled in the tying and go-ahead runs against one of his former teams and Miami rookie second baseman Ronny Simón's three errors helped host San Diego rebound from a six-run deficit for a wild win.

Simón originally had been charged with a fourth error but the official scorer changed the call to a single by Xander Bogaerts.

**Pirates 9, Diamondbacks 6:** Bryan Reynolds had four hits, including a go-ahead three-run homer in the eighth, and Pittsburgh overcame a six-run deficit to stun visiting Arizona.

The Pirates, who entered the night 0-29 when trailing after seven innings, were down 6-2 before scoring seven times in the eighth against Arizona relievers Kevin Ginkel and Jalen Beeks.

The key blows were Isiah Kiner-Falefa's three-run double, which tied the game and knocked out Ginkel (0-3). After Geraldo Perdomo's error allowed Oneil Cruz to reach base, Reynolds followed with a homer to left-center off Beeks to make it 9-6.

# Borges, knee eliminate Ruud at French Open

Associated Press

PARIS—Clearly hampered by a bad left knee, two-time French Open finalist Casper Ruud dropped 13 of the last 14 games and lost 2-6, 6-4, 6-1, 6-0 to Nino Borges in the second round at Roland-Garros on Wednesday, then revealed he had been playing in pain off-and-on throughout the clay-court season.

The seventh-seeded Ruud reached at least the semifinals each of the past three years in Paris—he was the runner-up to Rafael Nadal in 2022 and Novak Djokovic in 2023—and this exit is his earliest at the tournament since bowing out in the second round in his debut in 2018.

Ruud's been taking pain-killing and anti-inflammatory pills the past several weeks and did so again Wednesday. But he said the knee began bothering him in the first set against Borges, who is ranked 41st and became the first Portuguese man to get to the French Open's third round.

Ruud said the worst shot for his knee is an open-stance backhand, in which he slides on his left foot,

so he's been avoiding it in practice.

"Certain movements out there are kind of what makes it painful. Certain shots are painful to do. When you're playing matches, you can't really control it in the same way (as in practice). You do everything you can to get to every ball," said Ruud, who also reached the final at the 2023 U.S. Open. "Sometimes you kind of forget that this is a shot I shouldn't go for."

Ruud was visited by a trainer and took some pills during Wednesday's match, but nothing seemed to help.

"It's a Slam. I love this tournament," Ruud said. "Looking back, I tried my best to continue (and tried) to avoid the shots that are hurting. But towards the end, there were also other movements that started hurting, so it wasn't ideal."

Ruud said the problems began in his first clay event of the pre-French Open stretch, at Monte Carlo in April and that he had medical exams a couple of weeks later in Madrid—where he went

on to win the title. He pulled out of the Geneva Open, which was played last week.

Now he'll have more tests done.

"I took five days completely off at home. It wasn't enough to make the pain go away," Ruud said. "I wish I could stay here longer."

Both defending champions were in action at Court Philippe-Chatrier. Carlos Alcaraz overcame a one-set blip to defeat Fabian Marozsan 6-1, 4-6, 6-1, 6-2, and Iga Swiatek beat Emma Raducanu.

The 23-year-old Swiatek was in fine form against 2021 U.S. Open champion Raducanu, putting together a whopping 32-8 edge in winners and saving all four break points she faced while taking all eight of her service games.

"I felt good on court, so I could do whatever I planned to, whatever I wanted to," said Swiatek, who improved to 5-0 against Raducanu and ran her winning streak in the clay-court Grand Slam tournament to 23 matches.

Other women's winners included 2024 runner-up Jasmine Paolini, Olympic gold medalist

Zheng Qinwen and 18-year-old Canadian qualifier Victoria Mboko, while Olympic silver medalist and Wimbledon semifinalist Donna Vekic lost to unseeded American Bernarda Pera 6-2, 4-6, 7-6 (10-3).

The second round concludes with 24-time major champion Novak Djokovic taking on France's Corentin Moutet in Court Suzanne-Lenglen in a match that could feature a raucous atmosphere. French fans are likely to make a lot of noise at Court Philippe-Chatrier, too, because another one of their own, Richard Gasquet, could be playing the final match of his career when he takes on No. 1 Jannik Sinner. At night in Chatrier, No. 5 Jack Draper of Britain takes on yet another French veteran, Gael Monfils.

No. 2-seeded Coco Gauff, against Tereza Valentova, and No. 3 Jessica Pegula, against Ann Li in an all-American match, are among the top women in action, along with No. 6 Mirra Andrejeva against Ashlyn Krueger of the United States.

## Bueckers scores 21, gets first pro win in Connecticut return

Associated Press

UNCASVILLE, Conn. — Paige Bueckers returned to a familiar place to get the first win of her WNBA career.

The No. 1 pick in the draft by Dallas had lost the first four games as a pro and couldn't remember a longer losing streak in her storied basketball career. She wouldn't let it get to five.

Bueckers scored a season-best 21 points in the Wings' 109-87 victory over the Connecticut Sun on Tuesday night.

"Felt great just to play like that as a team and obviously that environment is special to me," Bueckers said. "To play like that as a team and put a full 40 minutes together. ... It felt good to be out there."

It's been a week of homecomings for Bueckers as the former UConn star played in the state of Connecticut for the first time since helping the Huskies win the school's 12th national championship nearly two months ago. Six days before the game in Connecticut, she played in Minnesota,

where she grew up.

With the victory, Bueckers remained unbeaten at Mohegan Sun Arena, where the Sun plays their home games. She went 15-0 at the arena, including winning four Big East championships while playing for UConn.

"I don't think I ever lost here. I was trying to carry that into tonight," Bueckers said.

Tuesday night was like a home game for Bueckers, who received a loud ovation from the sellout crowd when introduced before the game. Many fans were wearing her No. 5 jersey from the Huskies and Dallas, cheering everything she did. The St. Teresa's basketball team was sitting on the bench pregame and screamed with jubilation when she ran onto the court.

Bueckers gave them and the rest of the crowd—which included a few of her former UConn teammates—a lot to cheer about. She got the Wings (1-4) going early with seven points and four assists in the opening quarter as she was aggressively attacking for baskets or finding opening teammates.

She finished the half with 15 points as Dallas took control, going up by 14 points at the break.

"She just continues to do things that should be surprising but aren't," Wings coach Chris Koclanes said. "I take a step back to just appreciate, the type of player and even more so the type of person that she is."

A day earlier, Bueckers posted on Instagram a video of a surprise meeting that Verizon put together of people who had benefited from a food security project that the guard started in Minnesota in 2022. As Chegg's first student-athlete brand ambassador, she worked to raise awareness about student hunger, an issue that had worsened due to the pandemic.

"It was a total, complete surprise just for them to bring in those people who have been a part of my story and been a part of my journey," Bueckers said. "It means so much to give back, to see the impact firsthand. It's truly inspiring. I was extremely grateful for that."