

Fighting breaks out in the Middle East

BY LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

U.S. forces have defeated multiple Iranian attacks aimed at commercial vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz, U.S. Central Command said Monday, the first show of force in the U.S. military's newest endeavor to restore traffic to the vital waterway.

Iran launched multiple cruise missiles, drones and small attack boats at the commercial ships and some U.S. Navy vessels, CENTCOM Commander Adm. Brad Cooper told reporters. Apache and Seahawk helicopters were used to sink six small Iranian boats on Monday morning, he said.

"U.S. forces are helping the international community in restoring the flow of global commerce," he said. "The [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps], on the other hand, is doing everything it can to terrorize and threaten commercial shipping."

The U.S. Navy is providing cover for commercial ships as part of Project Freedom, the latest effort announced by Presi-

dent Donald Trump on Sunday to protect vessels moving through the Strait of Hormuz and restore freedom of navigation.

Cooper, speaking to reporters Monday, said there are ships from 87 countries in the Persian Gulf seeking passage through the waterway, which has been virtually blocked by Iran since joint Israeli-U.S. strikes began on Feb. 28.

As part of the mission, the U.S. will coordinate with vessels and provide information on safe passage, while keeping a fleet of aircraft and warships on hand to stop any Iranian interference, Cooper said.

The U.S. has managed over the last couple of weeks to clear a pathway through seamines laid by Iran, Cooper said.

The addition of guided-missile destroyers, more than 100 aircraft and 15,000 service members provides an extra defensive layer on top of that, he said.

The command had reached out to dozens of ships earlier in the day to encourage traffic

flow, and that news was received with enthusiasm.

"We're already beginning to see movement," he said, noting that two U.S.-flagged merchant vessels were able to pass hours earlier.

Despite claims from Iranian state media, no U.S. vessels have been hit, Cooper said. He declined to say whether the mutual attacks mean the ceasefire is over.

"I think the key thing for us is, we're merely there as a defensive force, and in force, to give a very thick, layered defense to commercial shipping to allow them to proceed out of the Arabian Gulf. That's what we're focused on," he said.

Residents in the United Arab Emirates on Monday received the first reports of incoming Iranian attacks in more than three weeks. Cooper said the country has "exceptional capability" and is "well-positioned to defend themselves."

The UAE Defense Ministry said Iran had launched four cruise missiles, with three shot down and one falling into the

sea. Authorities in the eastern emirate of Fujairah said an Iranian drone sparked a fire at a key oil facility. The British military reported two cargo vessels ablaze off the UAE.

Meanwhile, the South Korean government said an explosion and fire had broken out aboard a South Korean-operated ship anchored in the strait off the UAE, The Associated Press reported. No injuries were reported. It was not immediately known if the vessel was one of the burning ships reported by the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center.

The developments occurred hours after Trump said the U.S. would help ships stranded in the Persian Gulf transit the strait, describing it as a "humanitarian gesture."

Trump and Defense Department officials said late Sunday that the U.S. will help guide ships from "neutral and innocent" countries out of the waterway, which has been virtually blocked for more than two months amid hostilities.

US, allies rehearse war at sea on Philippine coasts

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

LA PAZ SAND DUNES, Philippines — On a stretch of windswept coastline facing the South China Sea, rockets arced across the sky Monday as American, Philippine, Japanese and Canadian troops rehearsed how they might respond to a maritime attack.

The live-fire drill, held near the city of Laoag on Luzon's northwestern coast, was part of

Balikatan, the annual military exercise that has grown in size and complexity as tensions simmer in the region.

About 700 U.S. soldiers and Marines trained alongside roughly 250 Philippine troops, 60 members of Japan's Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade and 50 Canadian forces.

Japan and Canada were participating for the first time.

From a nearby observation

tent, military officials and international observers watched as missiles streaked over the dunes toward simulated targets at sea.

The setting has strategic importance. The training ground lies along the South China Sea, where the Philippines has ongoing territorial disputes with China, and sits about 50 miles from the Luzon Strait, a key waterway between the Philippines and Taiwan.

At the center of the drill was HIMARS — the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System — operated by the Hawaii-based 25th Infantry Division. The system, which has been used extensively in recent conflicts, is being adapted for a broader range of missions.

"It extends the reach of our forces," Maj. Gen. James Batholomees, the division's commander, told reporters gathered on the dunes.

Tank brigade readies for Europe deployment

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

A U.S. Army tank brigade is gearing up for a deployment to Europe as operations along NATO's eastern flank show no signs of slowing down following last week's announcement that 5,000 troops will be pulled from Germany.

The 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division cased its colors Friday at Fort Hood, Texas, to mark the start of a nine-month mission aimed at deterring Russian aggression.

Nearly 4,000 soldiers from the "Black Jack" brigade will be taking up positions in Poland and other areas along NATO's eastern edge.

"Make no mistake, our adversaries are paying attention," divi-

sion commander Maj. Gen. Tom Feltey said during the ceremony. "When an armored brigade combat team deploys forward, it sends a clear and unmistakable signal."

The ceremony coincided with a Pentagon announcement Friday that roughly 5,000 U.S. troops will be pulled out of Germany, a move that could have implications for how the Army operates across Poland and the Baltic states.

While rotational units such as the incoming brigade are tasked with coordinating with allies in that region, permanently based troops in Germany also play a big role in those countries, all of which border Russia.

The Vilseck, Germany-based 2nd Cavalry Regiment is currently fanned out in the region, with

troops involved in a show-of-force road march in Poland. They're traveling more than 600 miles from their base in Germany to training areas for exercises.

The regiment also is operating in Lithuania, a front-line NATO state sandwiched between the Russian military exclave of Kaliningrad and Kremlin ally Belarus.

At Pabrade Training Area in Lithuania, 2nd Cavalry troops have been experimenting with unmanned ground vehicles and aerial drones to better incorporate into their fighting formations.

The unit has been the focal point for U.S. Army Europe and Africa's efforts to draw lessons from the Russia-Ukraine war and update American infantry tactics

for a future battlefield where unmanned systems play a dominant role.

However, the unit appears to have been pegged for a withdrawal from Germany, where it was a fixture throughout the Cold War.

It's unclear where the unit would go if the Pentagon follows through with its plan to pull soldiers within six to 12 months, but there are few, if any, options for the regiment to relocate to another location in Europe.

The 2nd Cavalry Regiment is the only U.S. brigade based in Germany, where there are roughly 34,000 troops. The other unit affected by the Pentagon plan is a long-range fires battalion that was expected to take up a posting in Germany later this year.

Rutte: NATO allies preparing to aid in Iran 'next phase'

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

European allies are adjusting course after President Donald Trump's criticism of their lack of involvement in the Iran conflict, NATO's top official said Monday.

Secretary-General Mark Rutte said leaders have heard Trump's complaints "loud and clear" and suggested that allies are preparing for a possible role in assisting the U.S. on matters related to securing the Strait of Hormuz.

"I see more and more European countries pre-position essential logistical and other support, for example minehunters ... for the next phase," Rutte said at the start of a meeting of the European Political Community in Armenia. He did not give further details.

Numerous allies have been in discussions for weeks over a multinational mission focused on securing safe passage through the strait once the U.S.-Israeli con-

flict with Iran is formally ended.

Trump has frequently panned the idea of other countries getting involved after the fact. Still, even if Iran and the U.S. agree on terms to end the conflict, there will likely be a need for an extended mission to clear the strait of mines, a task European navies could perform.

Rutte's comments come amid high tension between the U.S. and allies in Europe and on the heels of Trump's announcement that he is planning to pull 5,000 troops out of Germany.

The Pentagon announcement Friday came after repeated rebukes by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz over the U.S. handling of the conflict, prompting intense pushback from Trump.

On Sunday, Merz sought to do damage control, saying on German television that he's not "giving up cooperation" with Trump.

"The Americans are our most important partners in the NATO alliance," he added.

Schools warn against using water guns in viral 'Senior Assassin' game

By BRIAN McELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

The Defense Department high school at Kadena Air Base on Okinawa, Japan, is warning parents about a viral social media game in which seniors target each other with water guns.

Kadena High School principal James Bleecker emailed parents on Friday with the subject line: "Senior Assassin Social Media Trend."

The letter reminds parents that weapons of any kind, including toys or replicas, are not permitted on campus.

Students may be planning to participate in a trending social media game called "Senior Assassin," according to Bleecker's emailed letter. In the game, students "track and eliminate each other with squirt guns while try-

ing to avoid being targeted themselves."

"We ask you to take a moment to speak with your student about the potential risks associated with participation in this activity, and ensure they fully understand that participation is not permitted at school," the letter states.

The letter was sent "after school leadership became aware of students' intent to participate," Ferguson said via email Monday. DODEA shared a template letter with school leaders "across the agency for use as needed to inform parents," she added.

"Schools have notified families with a letter at locations where administrators are aware students have been discussing participation," she said in a follow-up email. She did not specify which schools sent letters.

NASA keeps Starliner's flights on hold

Orlando Sentinel

ORLANDO, Fla. — NASA said it was not ready to nail down Boeing Starliner's next flight to the International Space Station as it continues to work through the problems found during its beleaguered Crew Flight Test mission in 2024.

NASA had since last year been targeting Starliner's return to flight as early as April 2026, but that month came and went with no clear sign on progress to work through the failures of its last mission, which flew up NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams for what was supposed to be as short as an eight-day stay on board the station.

Because of helium leaks and thruster failures after launching from Cape Canaveral, NASA opted to send Starliner back to Earth without its two crew, who stayed on board the space station eventually flying home on a SpaceX Crew Dragon and having remained in space for 10 months.

In February, NASA Adminis-

trator Jared Isaacman called out the agency's handling of the problematic mission, which had its critical flaws detailed in a report from the independent Program Investigation Team. Isaacman at the time said Starliner had "qualification deficiencies [and] is less reliable for crew survival" than other vehicles.

"Launch opportunities for NASA's uncrewed Boeing Starliner-1 cargo mission remain under review as teams continue working through technical issues discovered during the Crew Flight Test in 2024, as well as final actions from the Program Investigation Team report," the agency stated in an update released on its website Friday. "The agency is assessing operational readiness and space station traffic to determine the earliest feasible launch window."

Some of the leadership that had been in place of NASA's Commercial Crew Program were replaced soon after the report's release.

Starliner was supposed to share astronaut ferry duties alongside SpaceX's Crew Dragon when Boeing and SpaceX were originally awarded contracts in 2014 to develop spacecraft to launch from Florida and end NASA's reliance on Russia after the end of the Space Shuttle Program in 2011.

SpaceX was the first to fly crew to the station with the Demo-2 mission in 2020 and followed that with its first operational mission later that year. Including 12 crew rotation flights so far as well as Demo-2, four private astronaut flights for Axiom Space to the station and three private astronaut orbital flights, SpaceX's fleet of five Crew Dragon spacecraft have flown 20 mission carrying 78 humans. Isaacman flew two of those missions, Inspiration4 and Polaris Dawn, before he became the head of NASA.

Boeing's efforts to keep up kept hitting development snags including its first uncrewed test flight, which missed its

rendezvous with the space station entirely in 2019. Boeing's redo of that mission came more than three years later, and while it seemed to perform well, several other issues struck Starliner that forced more delays before it finally launched its first mission with crew, the CFT mission, in 2024.

With the spacecraft grounded until its problems are fixed, NASA redid Boeing's contract. The company was originally tapped to fly six operational crew rotation flights after performing both of its uncrewed and crewed test flights successfully. Now Starliner-1, which was supposed to be with crew, will instead be cargo only. And it won't be until Starliner-2 that crew get back on board, and then only if NASA certifies it as safe.

That will be only one of three crew rotation missions Boeing would be allowed to fly to the station under the revised contract, and then only if the space station is still around by the time Starliner's issues are resolved.

Study links 'forever chemicals,' and childhood leukemia

The Orange County Register

Prenatal exposure to PFAS, or "forever chemicals," is linked to acute lymphoblastic leukemia, the most common childhood cancer, in a new study led by the University of California, Irvine.

"Forever chemicals" is a catch-all term for a group of about 14,000 man-made compounds linked to cancers and fertility issues, so named because they do not degrade easily over time and can build up in the body. They're found in drinking water, nonstick cookware, food and drink packaging and cosmetics.

For this study, researchers examined the newborn blood samples of babies born from 2000 to 2015 in Los Angeles County. The samples were taken from 125 children later diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia and 219

cancer-free kids.

Seventeen different "forever chemicals," primarily PFOA and PFOS, were detected in the blood samples, according to the study, which was published in April in the *Journal of Exposure Science & Environmental Epidemiology*. Elevated levels were linked to an increased likelihood of developing acute lymphoblastic leukemia, and the combined presence of the two chemicals was correlated with an even greater risk of cancer.

Based on these results, the scientists can't say that forever chemicals cause cancer; rather, they might just contribute to cancer risk.

"This research moves us closer to understanding what babies are exposed to from the very start by directly measuring PFAS present

at birth," said corresponding author Veronica Vieira, a UC Irvine professor of environmental and occupational health. "By capturing exposures during a critical window of development, we are gaining a clearer picture of how environmental contaminants may contribute to childhood cancer risk."

Because the study was limited to Los Angeles County and had a small sample size, findings "should be interpreted cautiously," said Rena Jones, an National Institutes of Health researcher who focuses on environmental contaminants. But the study "adds to the growing evidence" that PFAS exposure during pregnancy may contribute to acute lymphoblastic leukemia, said Jones, who was not involved with the study.

Rates of childhood cancers have increased in recent decades in industrialized countries, including the U.S., which suggests environmental factors might be at play, according to the study. Previous research by the same team indicated that elevated levels of PFOA and PFOS also were connected to other childhood cancers, including acute myeloid leukemia and Wilms tumor.

Several factors were associated with higher levels of PFOA and PFOS — children whose parents were older, born in the U.S., received higher education and had private insurance all had higher PFOS exposure. That's because forever chemicals are commonly found in nonessential or more expensive products, such as Scotchgard, weather-resistant apparel and makeup, Vieira said.

3 dead amid virus outbreak on cruise ship

Cleveland.com

A cruise ship remains stranded off the coast of Cape Verde after a suspected hantavirus outbreak left three passengers dead and at least three others sick, the World Health Organization said Sunday, according to CNN.

The MV Hondius, operated by Oceanwide Expeditions, has been denied permission to dock in Praia, the island nation's capital, as health authorities work to contain potential spread of the rare and deadly illness. The vessel carries 149 people, including 17 Americans and two crew members suffering from symptoms.

A 70-year-old Dutch man

died aboard the ship April 11 after experiencing fever, headache and abdominal pain, CNN reported. His 69-year-old wife later died at a South African hospital after collapsing at an airport while attempting to return to the Netherlands. A German national died on the vessel May 2, though an official cause of death has not been determined.

Only one case has been laboratory-confirmed. A British passenger who became ill after the ship departed Saint Helena remains in critical condition at a Johannesburg medical facility, according to South Africa's health department. The five other symptomatic individuals

are considered suspected cases.

Hantavirus is typically transmitted through contact with saliva or waste from infected rodents and carries a mortality rate of approximately 38% once respiratory symptoms develop, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Most variants do not spread between people, though the Andes variant found in South America has shown limited evidence of person-to-person transmission.

The ship departed Ushuaia, Argentina, seven weeks ago and made stops in Antarctica and Saint Helena before reaching Cape Verde, according to CNN. While hantavirus is endemic in parts of Argentina and Chile,

the health ministry in Tierra del Fuego reported there have never been cases in Ushuaia.

Travel vlogger Jake Rosmarin, a passenger on the ship, described the emotional toll of remaining confined aboard in a video posted Monday.

"We're people, people with families, with lives, with people waiting for us at home," Rosmarin said. "There's a lot of uncertainty and that's the hardest part."

The WHO and Dutch foreign ministry are coordinating with ship operators to evacuate symptomatic individuals and conduct a public health risk assessment for remaining passengers, CNN said.

Mount Fuji inspectors to be stationed on trail

BY HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Hikers who aspire to summit Mount Fuji on its most popular trail can expect a "strict" inspection of their clothing and gear at the entry gate for the second year in a row, according to Yamanashi prefecture.

Inspectors from the prefecture will conduct "three-set gear checks" for hikers on the Yoshida trail on the northern side of the mountain, according to a prefectural news release April 27.

Congestion on the popular mountain is creating environmental and safety concerns and costing local governments for upkeep and rescues.

Last year, 205,100 people climbed Mount Fuji, with 59%, or about 121,068 hikers, taking the Yoshida trail, according to the Japan Ministry of the Environment.

Many accidents and rescues result from improperly clothed or equipped hikers navigating the rocks and cinders on the vol-

cano's flanks. Light clothing, such as T-shirts, shorts and sandals are significant safety concerns, according to the prefecture.

The trail is scheduled to open July 1 and close Sept. 10, according to the release.

The three items required are hiking boots or appropriate mountain footwear, two-piece rainwear consisting of jacket and pants, and clothing appropriate for cold weather, such as a fleece or warm jacket.

Again this year, hikers must reserve a spot on the Yoshida trail and expect to pay \$25.44 in admission fees.

The prefecture began accepting reservations April 27 for trail access, the news release states.

Hikers should expect strict gear inspections at the entry gate, an official at the Mount Fuji Tourism Promotion unit of the prefectural office said by phone Thursday. Improperly dressed hikers will not be allowed past the gate, he said, but stores at the station sell approved items.

Court restores access to mail-order abortion pills

Boston Herald

The Supreme Court on Monday restored broad access to the abortion pill mifepristone, blocking a ruling that had threatened to upend one of the main ways abortion is provided across the nation.

The order signed by Justice Samuel Alito temporarily allows women seeking abortions to obtain the pill at pharmacies or through the mail, without an in-person visit to a doctor. Those rules had been in effect for several years until a federal appeals court imposed new restrictions last week.

Alito's order will remain in effect for another week while both sides respond.

Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey had joined calls across the nation urging the Supreme Court to immediately reverse the decision to cut access to mailing mifepristone after the appeals court ruling.

"This decision will hurt the health and well-being of women and should be immediately reversed," Healey stated. "Here

in Massachusetts, we'll always protect women's access to reproductive health care, including medication abortion, and we will keep standing up to efforts by President Trump and his allies to roll back reproductive rights."

Two manufacturers of mifepristone asked the Supreme Court on Saturday to issue the block of the appeals ruling.

The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals released its unanimous ruling in *State of Louisiana v. U.S. Food and Drug Administration* on Friday marking a victory for abortion opponents, requiring mifepristone to be distributed only in person and overruling regulations allowing it to be prescribed online.

The manufacturer Danco Laboratories sought the emergency pause from the Supreme Court, stating the appellate ruling "injects immediate confusion and upheaval into highly time-sensitive medical decisions," which was followed by a similar request from fellow maker GenBioPro.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Judge tosses charges tied to alleged voter data leak

MI LANSING — A Michigan judge has dismissed felony charges against a former township clerk and a prominent Republican lawyer accused of allowing a breach of sensitive voter data.

In May 2024, Attorney General Dana Nessel's office first accused lawyer Stefanie Lambert and former Adams Township Clerk Stephanie Scott of providing an analyst investigating unproven claims of fraud in the 2020 presidential election with access to voters' personal information. However, Hillsdale County Circuit Court Judge Sara Lisznyai ruled the voter records in question, which included people's birth dates and driver's license numbers, were not required to be kept confidential under state election law.

The law said the information was merely exempt from disclosure under the state's open records policy, the judge said.

College president to retire due to Epstein ties

NY ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON — Bard College President Leon Botstein is retiring from the institution he led for half a century after revelations about his well-documented relationship with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein came to light.

"After completing 51 years as the president of Bard, I am announcing that I will be retiring from the presidency at the end of this academic year, June 30, 2026," Botstein wrote in a letter to the campus on Friday.

Botstein spent time with the late disgraced financier, includ-

ing on a trip to the Caribbean in 2012, according to emails released by the U.S. Department of Justice. One message shows photographs of Epstein and Botstein together in an office surrounded by books.

Botstein said that Epstein was a prospective donor, not his friend, and that his interactions were "solely focused on the effort to secure funds for the programs of Bard College," in a letter to the campus earlier this year.

Tucker Carlson nicotine among recovered cargo

CA LOS ANGELES — One man was arrested and about \$4 million in stolen cargo — televisions, shoes, printers and the nicotine pouches sold by conservative commentator Tucker Carlson — were recovered after the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department served a search warrant in Vernon.

Carlson had millions of dollars worth of boxes filled with ALP Drifter Nicotine pouches stolen in transit in March. Authorities did not say whether the recovered merchandise was from that stolen shipment.

The suspect was arrested and booked on charges of receiving stolen property, according to the Sheriff's Department.

In March, ALP Supply Co. confirmed that more than 378,000 tins of its nicotine pouches were stolen after they were picked up from a Southern California facility.

The carrier that hauled the cargo away had presented what appeared to be legitimate credentials and the truck appeared to be headed to Kentucky before the company lost communica-

tion with the truck, according to authorities.

Nicotine pouches, televisions, shoes, printers, data center cooling equipment, speakers and skin care cosmetics were among the goods recovered, according to a statement released by the Sheriff's Department.

Right whales see 'positive news' this calving season

MA BOSTON — It has been a good year for the North Atlantic right whale, according to scientists at the New England Aquarium.

The calving season, from mid-November until mid-April in the Southeast, generated "positive news" for the critically endangered species, as it produced 23 mother-calf pairs, the fourth-highest count ever.

So far this spring, at least 18 mother-calf pairs have been seen in Massachusetts waters. The most recent sighting came on Wednesday when a mom and her child were seen in Gloucester Harbor.

About 380 individual right whales remain in the world.

Scientists at the Aquarium's Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life said they are "pleased" to see shorter intervals between calving for most whale moms.

Mayor thanks supporters after wife bitten by snake

NC CHARLOTTE — Monroe Mayor Robert Burns thanked the community Friday after he said a venomous copperhead snake bit his wife, Lauren.

"Thank you all for your support and prayers," Burns said on social media site X. "We cherish all the love. Keep pray-

ing!"

The mayor revealed the bite on social media Thursday. "Word has gotten out that my sweet wife was bitten by a large copperhead last night," he said.

Burns said he rushed his wife to their local hospital emergency room, where staff "were absolutely amazing. They were responsive, kind, very helpful, and overall fantastic."

"Fortunately, things stabilized, her vitals were steady, and they sent us home," Burns wrote. "We're not out of the woods yet, though. She is in a lot of pain, probably more than I've ever seen her in."

Law signed placing new limits on teacher unions

FL TAMPA — Standing behind a placard declaring Florida "the education state," Gov. Ron DeSantis on Friday signed into law two measures that make it harder for teachers to collectively bargain pay and working conditions.

The first item (SB 1296) changes the rules for how unions can win and retain their certification, mandating that at least half of all eligible members must vote in elections establishing their existence. That way, DeSantis said, the unions that remain will have demonstrated they represent a majority. The second (HB 1279) removes unions from the discussion as school districts establish pay incentives to bring highly evaluated teachers to low-performing schools.

DeSantis called unions partisan and argued the organizations don't have the best interests of their members, schools and students at heart.

— From wire reports

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Pistons win first playoff series in 18 years

Associated Press

DETROIT — Cade Cunningham had 32 points and 12 assists, Tobias Harris added 30 points and the Detroit Pistons beat the Orlando Magic 116-94 in Game 7 on Sunday to win a playoff series for the first time in 18 years.

Cunningham averaged 32.4 points for Detroit, which last won a postseason series by beating Orlando in the second round in 2008. The Pistons advance to play Cleveland, which beat Toronto in Game 7 on Sunday.

Game 1 will be Tuesday at Little Caesars Arena.

“We were pushed to the limit,” Cunningham said. “And it made us really reflect on how we were playing, what got us to this position and what made us win as many games as we won in the regular season. And it got us back to playing the basketball that we knew we were capable of.”

Detroit became the 15th team in NBA history to overcome a 3-1 deficit and the second in the last two nights, after Philadelphia

came back to eliminate Boston.

“I mean, it’s expected,” Pistons coach J.B. Bickerstaff said of his team’s resiliency. “And that’s the amount of belief that we have in this group. This is a special group. And you can’t count us out. No matter the circumstances, no matter the situation, I like our chances to fight our way back.”

They trailed by 24 points in Game 6 in Orlando before rallying to take the series at home. The Magic only scored 113 points in the final six quarters of the series — an average of 18.8 per period.

Cunningham and Harris became the first Detroit teammates to score 30 points in a playoff game since Bob Lanier (33) and Howard Porter (30) against Golden State on April 17, 1977.

“We really bonded this season,” Cunningham said. “This group is super tight. We think we can do anything. We’ve had our backs against the wall at times in the regular season, but we stuck together and we found our way out of it.”

Paolo Banchero scored 38 for Orlando.

Each team needed a second scoring option in Game 7. Cunningham had carried the Pistons while Banchero was the Magic’s only weapon after Franz Wagner was injured in Game 4.

Harris filled that role for Detroit, but Orlando only had one other player reach double figures in the first three quarters, as Desmond Bane had 10.

The Pistons also got a big game from All-Star center Jalen Duren. He was outplayed by Wendell Carter Jr. in the first six games, but put up his first double-double of the series with 15 points and 15 rebounds.

Harris scored 17 points in the second quarter as Detroit finished the half on a 9-2 run to take a 60-49 lead.

The Pistons’ surge continued into the second half, as they opened the third quarter with a 11-2 run to go up 71-51. Nine of the points came from Cunningham and Harris.

The Magic finished the third quarter with 15 points — the

third time in their last five periods they couldn’t reach 20 points.

Daniss Jenkins hit a buzzer-beating 3-pointer to give Detroit a 83-64 lead going into the fourth, and Orlando never threatened down the stretch.

Cavaliers 114, Raptors 102: Jarrett Allen tied his playoff career high with 22 points and grabbed 19 rebounds as host Cleveland advanced to the Eastern Conference semifinals with a victory over Toronto in Game 7 of their series.

Donovan Mitchell led the Cavaliers with 22 points and James Harden added 18 in a series in which the home team won every game.

Scottie Barnes had 24 points and nine rebounds and RJ Barrett scored 23 for the Raptors, who couldn’t capitalize on their first playoff appearance since 2022.

Cleveland, the No. 4 seed, will visit top-seeded Detroit on Tuesday night in Game 1 of the second round. The Central Division rivals split their four regular-season meetings.

Canadiens edge out Lightning in Game 7 to cap series

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — The Montreal Canadiens made the most of their limited opportunities.

Alex Newhook broke a tie with 8:53 left and Montreal — with only nine shots on goal — outlasted the Tampa Bay Lightning 2-1 in Game 7 on Sunday night to end the thrilling first-round series.

The Canadiens will face the Buffalo Sabres in the second round after finishing off their first series victory since losing the Stanley Cup Final to Tampa Bay in 2021. Game 1 is Wednesday night in Buffalo.

Rookie goaltender Jakub Dobes made 28 saves and Nick Suzuki got his first goal of the series for Montreal. The Canadiens are the first team to win a

playoff game with fewer than 10 shots on goal since shots were first tracked in the 1959-60 season.

“Sometimes you win the game and not the score,” Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. “When it’s Game 7, there’s no moral victory.”

Each game of the series was decided by one goal and four went to overtime. The score was tied or within one goal for all but six minutes in the seven games.

“It’s a tough building to play in, it’s a chaotic environment out there,” Suzuki said. “We’ve been a good road team all season. We knew we had to come in here and anything can happen in a Game 7.”

Tampa Bay was eliminated in

the first round for the fourth straight season after falling two wins short of a Stanley Cup three-peat in 2022.

The Lightning’s tough defense held Montreal without a shot for nearly 27 minutes from the first period into the third and just four through two periods. Brandon Hagel made an outstanding, sliding stick save with an open net in the final minute, but Tampa Bay couldn’t get the tying goal during a 6-on-5 and 6-on-4 for the final six seconds.

The Canadiens got a couple lucky bounces to score twice on their first eight shots on goal.

After Lane Hutson fired a slap shot that went wide and bounced back out, Newhook backhanded the puck out of the air and in off

Andrei Vasilevskiy’s pad and his backside.

Avalanche 9, Wild 6: Cale Makar scored twice in the third period after returning from an earlier injury and host Colorado overcame blowing a three-goal lead to beat Minnesota in a wacky Game 1 of their second-round playoff series.

Makar, who left in the first period with an undisclosed ailment, scored his second goal of the game with 2:54 remaining to make it 8-6. Nathan MacKinnon added an empty-net goal with 2:08 remaining to seal it.

This was the 10th playoff game ever with at least 15 combined goals and just the second since 1994. There were five goals in each period.

Royals quiet Mariners to finish off sweep

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Vinnie Pasquantino scored the go-ahead run in a three-run fourth inning and the Kansas City Royals held the Seattle Mariners to just four hits for a 4-1 win Sunday.

Kris Bubic (3-1) pitched seven innings, allowing four hits, one earned run and striking out seven to finish off a three-game sweep.

Seattle starter Luis Castillo (0-3) walked Carter Jensen with the bases loaded to tie the game. Jac Caglianone followed with a grounder to Naylor, who got the force out at second but Pasquantino scored to make it a 2-1 game.

Isaac Collins then hit a fly ball to center field to score Salvador Perez from third, as Perez barely beat the throw home by Julio Rodríguez. Home plate umpire Clint Vondrak initially called Perez out, but the call was overturned and the Royals pushed their lead to two runs.

Collins drove in Caglianone with an RBI double in the sixth to make it 4-1.

Dodgers 4, Cardinals 1: Justin Wroblewski (5-0) tossed six scoreless innings to help visiting Los Angeles beat St. Louis to snap a four-game losing streak.

Andy Pages opened the scoring with an RBI double in the second, and Hyeseong Kim, Freddie Freeman and Alec Bureson all added RBI singles as the game went on.

Shohei Ohtani went 0-for-3 with a walk and was hit by a pitch from Justin Bruihl in the seventh inning. He is 0 for 14 over his last four games, his longest hitless streak since going five straight games without a hit as a member of the Los Angeles Angels from May 24-28, 2022.

Pirates 1, Reds 0: Oneil Cruz hit a tie-breaking single in the bottom of the eighth inning and host Pittsburgh completed a sweep of Cincinnati.

Pirates rookie shortstop Konnor Griffin doubled off the cen-

terfield wall against Reds reliever Tony Santillan (1-1) with two outs in the eighth. Pinch hitter Jake Mangum worked a full count walk and Cruz followed by lacing a single to center.

Gregory Soto (3-0) got the last four outs after taking over following a brilliant performance by starter Braxton Ashcraft, who allowed four hits in 7½ innings with a pair of walks and six strikeouts.

Nationals 3, Brewers 2: Nasim Núñez had a pair of run-scoring singles, CJ Abrams had two hits and scored twice, and host Washington beat Milwaukee to avoid a three-game sweep.

José Tena had an RBI triple for Washington, which improved to 4-12 at Nationals Park.

Twins 4, Blue Jays 3: Andrew Morris (1-1) pitched 3½ scoreless innings in relief of starter Joe Ryan, who exited with elbow soreness, and host Minnesota held on to beat Toronto to split a four-game series.

Luke Keaschall had a pair of hits, including an RBI double in a three-run fifth inning for the Twins, who had lost 13 of 16 entering the game.

Phillies 7, Marlins 2: Bryson Stott hit a three-run homer to cap a six-run first inning, Jesús Luzardo (3-3) pitched into the seventh and visiting Philadelphia beat Miami.

Trea Turner led off the game with a ground-rule double off Chris Paddack (0-5), who then walked Kyle Schwarber and Bryce Harper to load the bases. Alec Bohm drove in a run with a slow roller when Harper hustled to beat shortstop Otto Lopez's throw to second. Brandon Marsh walked to score another run and J.T. Realmuto hit a sacrifice fly on Paddack's 27th pitch for the first out and a 3-0 lead.

Rays 2, Giants 1 (10): Jonathan Aranda hit a game-ending single in the 10th inning to cap a 4-for-5 afternoon, and host

Tampa Bay beat San Francisco to complete a three-game sweep.

After Junior Caminero was intentionally walked leading off the 10th, Aranda blooped an 0-1 fastball from Caleb Kilian (1-1) into short right-center to score automatic runner Chandler Simpson from second, giving the Rays their ninth win in 10 games and sending the Giants to their sixth straight loss.

Cubs 8, Diamondbacks 4: Michael Busch hit a three-run triple and a sacrifice fly, and host Chicago beat Arizona for its fifth straight win.

Moisés Ballesteros homered as the Cubs improved to 15-3 in their last 18 games. Matthew Boyd (2-1) pitched six innings of two-run ball.

Yankees 11, Orioles 3: Jason Domínguez hit a two-run homer and an RBI single in a seven-run eighth inning and host New York routed Baltimore for its 13th win in 15 games.

Aaron Judge hit his 13th homer in the third off Orioles rookie Trey Gibson to give the Yankees a 3-1 lead and tie Munetaka Murakami of the Chicago White Sox for the major league lead in home runs.

Astros 3, Red Sox 1 (10): Cam Smith hit a two-out, two-run single off the Green Monster in the 10th inning, and visiting Houston beat Boston to take the series.

Red Sox starter Ranger Suárez left the game after four scoreless innings due to right hamstring tightness. Coming off eight scoreless innings of one-hit ball with 10 strikeouts in his last start, he gave up three hits, struck out three and walked one.

Athletics 7, Guardians 1: Colby Thomas, Zack Gelof and Tyler Soderstrom homered to back a strong start by Aaron Civale and the host Athletics beat Cleveland to avoid a series sweep.

Civale (3-1) gave up just one run in six innings on a home run

to rookie Chase DeLauter in the fifth. It was DeLauter's sixth homer — and first since April 3 — to tie the game at 1 and extend his hitting streak to eight games.

Braves 11, Rockies 6: Jonah Heim homered, doubled and drove in five runs, Jorge Mateo also hit a home run and visiting Atlanta beat Colorado.

Spencer Strider made his season debut for the Braves and allowed three runs and four hits in 3½ innings in his return from an oblique injury suffered in spring training. He struck out six and walked five. Aaron Bummer (1-1) came on in relief of Strider and gave up two runs in one inning while earning the win.

Mets 5, Angels 1: Mark Vientos hit two homers and drove in four runs and right-hander Clay Holmes allowed one run in 6½ innings as visiting New York beat Los Angeles.

Holmes (4-2) allowed four hits with three walks and six strikeouts as the Mets took two of three games from the Angels and won a series for just the second time since April 7.

Padres 4, White Sox 3: Xander Bogaerts hit a go-ahead single in the eighth, Miguel Andujar and Manny Machado homered and host San Diego beat Chicago to snap a four-game skid.

Jason Adam (1-0) pitched a scoreless eighth and Mason Miller struck out the side in the ninth for his 11th save, ending the White Sox's five-game winning streak. Griffin Canning started in his debut for the Padres and allowed one run and struck out seven in five innings.

Tigers 7, Rangers 1: Spencer Torkelson hit a two-run homer and host Detroit pulled away to a victory over Texas.

Kevin McGonigle had two RBI singles and Matt Vierling added a two-run double for Detroit, which has won all five of its home series. Hao-Yu Lee chipped in a run-scoring single.

Elliott gets push in 2nd win of season

Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — Chase Elliott went low, got a push from his Hendrick Motorsports teammate and held on to become only the second NASCAR Cup driver with multiple wins this season.

Elliott stayed ahead of Denny Hamlin for the closing four laps after a final restart at Texas on Sunday for his second victory this year. He finished just ahead of Hamlin in both of those wins.

On that final restart at the 1½-mile Texas track, Elliott took the bottom line and had teammate Alex Bowman behind him. He cleared Hamlin going onto the backstretch and remained in front to the checkered flag.

“I just felt like, man, if I didn’t get clear off of (Turn) 2, I was going to be in a lot of trouble,” Elliott said. “So fortunately Alex gave me a great push. I was able to execute Turns 1 and 2, get clear, and then just kind of manage the last few laps.”

Elliott, voted NASCAR’s most

popular driver each of the past eight seasons, got his 23rd career win and his second at Texas, where two years ago he ended a 42-race winless streak. He led five times Sunday for a race-high 87 laps, finishing 0.407 seconds ahead of Hamlin, closer than the 0.565-second margin when they finished 1-2 at Martinsville in late March.

Bowman, whose spin brought out a caution on lap 93, finished third. Tyler Reddick was fourth after winning five of the first 10 races this season for Michael Jordan’s 23XI Racing.

Elliott, who started 14th, had already taken the white flag when John Hunter Nemechek wrecked in the back of the field after contact with Kyle Busch. The caution flag never came out since Nemechek was able to get his car to the apron.

Chris Buescher was fifth, his first top-10 finish in 17 starts at track less than an hour from his hometown of Prosper.

Carson Hocevar, the polesitter

at Texas for the second year in a row, finished seventh, a week after his breakthrough win at Talladega. He also won the Truck Series race in the Lone Star State on Friday night. He finished a spot behind Daniel Suarez, his Spire Motorsports teammate. Hocevar led the first 22 laps last year, three more than he did at the start of this 267-lap race, though he did get back in front for 18 more laps later Sunday.

Corey Heim, in only his third start this year for 23XI Racing, led 69 laps, but with 11 laps left brought out the final caution of the day, the fourth because of a single-car spinout. The 23-year-old Heim was the Truck Series champion last year.

Bell rung out of the race

Christopher Bell, an Oklahoma native who considers Texas his home track, led 22 laps and was still near the front on lap 69 when he got clipped by Todd Gilliland, who spun ahead of him.

Bell bobbled and then

slammed hard into the outside wall along the frontstretch, doing significant damage to the front right of the No. 20 Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota. He finished last in the 38-car field.

Pit road crashes

Joey Logano, who won at Texas last year, was going about 180 mph when he just avoided hitting the spinning car of William Byron on lap 93.

Going much slower on the ensuing yellow-flag stop, the front left of Logano’s car was crushed when he was unable to avoid contact when Cole Custer stopped on pit lane with Ty Gibbs pulling out ahead of him. That knocked out Logano, whose winless streak is now 36 races.

During that same round of stops, Chase Briscoe got damage to his front right when pulling out of his box and getting hit by Kyle Larson.

Hamlin was pulling out when he had a close call with Connor Zilisch.

Antonelli wins Miami Grand Prix for third straight F1 victory

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Kimi Antonelli made history as the first driver to win his first three Formula 1 races from the pole when the 19-year-old Mercedes driver won the Miami Grand Prix on Sunday.

It was the third consecutive victory for Antonelli, the current points leader who is proving early this season to be a legitimate championship contender.

“It is just the beginning, the road is still long, but we’re working super hard,” Antonelli said. “The team is doing an incredible job and without them I wouldn’t be here. I’m going to enjoy this one and then get back to work.”

The Italian and teammate George Russell have won the first four races of this season for Mercedes and all four poles to date. They were blocked from the podi-

um in Saturday’s sprint race, which was a 1-2 finish for Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri of McLaren in the only thing the Mercedes drivers have not won this season.

“Kimi, that was very, very impressive. You know I like to complain, but there was nothing to complain about today,” Mercedes boss Toto Wolff told his young driver. “Very good.”

Antonelli holds a 20-point lead over Russell in the championship standings.

Antonelli started from the pole but had a slick start on a damp surface at the Miami International Autodrome.

Still, the first 25 laps were attacked by the drivers as if the rain could return at any moment, and that led to early chaos, even for Antonelli.

Charles Leclerc of Ferrari had a spectacular start from third and

surged to the lead when Antonelli went wide off course trying to defend. A split-second later, Max Verstappen spun trying to hold off Leclerc when the two cars made contact.

The contact caused Verstappen, who started a season-best second, to plummet to ninth after the spin.

Antonelli recovered and reclaimed the lead on the fifth lap, and the leaders briefly swapped positions as Leclerc moved back to the front before reigning world champion Norris took over on Lap 14.

Verstappen worked his way through the field and briefly took the lead as others pitted, but Antonelli beat Norris off pit lane and reclaimed the lead for good once everything cycled out.

Norris finished second, 3.2 seconds behind Antonelli.

Leclerc was poised to finish third until Oscar Piastri of McLaren passed him on the final lap. Leclerc spun and settled for sixth.

Russell was fourth and Verstappen finished a season-best fifth for Red Bull.

Messy start

Isack Hadjar had been disqualified after qualifying and started last, but his race lasted five laps before he drove his Red Bull into the wall. Hadjar was openly angry at the result as he pounded his helmet before climbing from his car and angrily stomping away.

Seconds later, Pierre Gasly and Liam Lawson made contact that caused Gasly’s car to do a full rollover. The Frenchman’s car ended stuck with its rear tires atop a barrier and he climbed from the half-suspended BMW on his own.