

Navy outlines \$300B shipbuilding plan

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

The Navy plans to spend hundreds of billions of dollars on shipbuilding over the next few years as it works to amass a larger, stronger fleet that now includes a nuclear-powered battleship.

The service's 2027 shipbuilding plan, released Monday, calls for \$305.7 billion in spending from 2027 to 2031 on submarines, destroyers, amphibious ships, oilers and other "battle force" vessels.

The annual blueprint outlines how the Navy will expand its fleet, modernize its force and build up the U.S. maritime industrial base over the next 30 years.

This year's plan also offers a look at the Navy's "Golden Fleet" initiative, which aims to preserve existing Navy platforms while rapidly expanding its force of surface combatants, auxiliary

ships and unmanned vessels.

"This plan outlines how we will deliver the capability our warfighters deserve," acting Secretary of the Navy Hung Cao said in a statement. He added that success would be measured by growing a larger, more capable fleet, both manned and unmanned.

To that end, the Navy will invest in 75 vessels from 2027 to 2031, including five Columbia-class submarines, seven Arleigh Burke-class destroyers and 23 medium landing ships.

The list also includes five amphibious transport dock ships, five ocean surveillance vessels and three Trump-class nuclear-powered battleships, a proposed new class of warship first unveiled in December.

"The battleship's primary role is to deliver high-volume, long-range offensive fires and serve as a robust, survivable forward

command and control platform," the service said. "It is not a destroyer replacement."

According to the blueprint, the Trump-class battleship will feature hypersonic weapon capabilities and is meant to send "an unmistakable signal of American resolve matched today only by our aircraft carriers."

The Navy said the Trump-class battleship, seen as the centerpiece of the Golden Fleet, is needed because Arleigh Burke guided missile destroyers are nearing the limits of their design capacity. The battleships, it said, will be built with a modular architecture intended to support future weapons and systems.

The Navy envisions a force of 299 battle force ships, 68 auxiliary vessels and 83 unmanned vessels by 2031. The service currently operates 291 battle force ships, although it is required by law to have 355, according to the plan.

The scheme also includes retiring 46 ships, including two aircraft carriers, 10 destroyers and cruisers, and 16 submarines of various classes from 2027 to 2031.

The plan also validated Ford-class aircraft carriers, calling them battle-proven and citing 10,500 aircraft launches and recoveries aboard the USS Gerald R. Ford in a recent deployment.

That achievement showcased the class's increased combat power and ability to maintain high-tempo operations, the Navy said.

The service also said it would invest \$3.11 billion to buy 47 medium unmanned surface drones and another \$1.13 billion to buy 16 extra large unmanned underwater vehicles over the same five-year period. The systems, the Navy said, would increase mission success rates while reducing risk to ships and personnel.

4th new Gerald Ford-class carrier delivery is delayed

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The Navy has revised the projected delivery date of the aircraft carrier USS Doris Miller to 2034 — two years later than previously expected.

The new date for delivery of the fourth Gerald R. Ford-class carrier — numbered CVN-81 — was listed in the Navy's Fiscal Year 2027 Shipbuilding and Conversion Justification Book, released last week.

"The CVN-81 delivery date shifted from February 2032 to February 2034 due to shipbuilder construction footprint constraints limiting their ability to build CVN-81 ship modules," the shipbuilding report says.

The shortage of physical space in the shipyard, slowing construction, has already had a domino effect on the Navy's carrier replacement plans.

All carriers must be built at HII Newport News Shipbuilding, the only facility in the U.S. that can build nuclear-powered aircraft carriers.

The USS George H.W. Bush was the last Nimitz-class carrier built. It was laid down in September 2003 and launched in October 2006 and received by the Navy at its commissioning in January 2009.

Work then shifted to the new Gerald R. Ford class aircraft carriers. Work began on the initial ship, the USS Gerald R. Ford, in

November 2009. The ship was launched in November 2013 and delivered at commissioning in July 2017.

Delays in shipyard work have pushed the expected delivery of the third ship, the USS Enterprise (CVN-80), an additional eight months compared to the estimate in the Navy's 2026 shipbuilding plan. The ship's keel was laid in April 2022.

"The CVN-80 delivery date shifted from July 2030 to March 2031 due to delay in critical path construction required for launch of the ship," the Navy report says.

HII confirmed Monday that the lack of a construction schedule for the Doris Miller was being impacted by delays caused by the

construction of the new USS Enterprise. Capacity constraints have hindered work in the dry dock, but the company hopes to host the keel-laying this year.

"We are holding ourselves accountable to complete these important national security assets as quickly as possible by addressing production and supply base challenges impacting aircraft carrier programs," said HII spokesman Danny Hernandez.

The shipyard and the Navy have said delays in the carrier construction and other shipbuilding activity in recent years was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, supply-chain delays and the recruiting and retention of qualified workers.

Restored B-1B bomber returns to fleet

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

A revitalized B-1B Lancer brought out of storage — with a new name and nose art that pays homage to a World War II bombing crew shot down over Burma — is ready for action in the Middle East if needed.

The Apocalypse II is back in the fleet as the flagship Lancer for the 7th Bomb Wing at Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, the Air Force said in a statement on Wednesday.

The dedication ceremony at Dyess last month marked the jet's return to combat capability after nearly two years of

restoration work, which included replacement of more than 500 components and a complete system overhaul, Air Force officials said.

The bomber, previously nicknamed Rage, was one of the 17 B-1Bs retired in 2021 and sent to the “boneyard” at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., according to the Air Force.

The service later returned the bomber to service to replace another aircraft undergoing extensive structural repairs, a decision made to meet the congressionally mandated fleet of 45 B-1Bs.

The B-1B is a long-range, multirole bomber that carries the largest payload of precision and unguided munitions in the Air Force inventory.

The jets were used to conduct long-range strikes deep inside Iran as part of Operation Epic Fury, U.S. Central Command said.

At one point, 21 Lancers were deployed to RAF Fairford, where they had been flying regular missions before a ceasefire was agreed to last month, Air and Space Forces Magazine reported, citing local spotters and flight-tracking data.

Refurbishment of the jet be-

gan in July 2024 at Tinker Air Force Base, Okla., where more than 200 airmen and civilians from the 567th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron worked on the aircraft.

Pilots from Tinker's 10th Flight Test Squadron conducted flight tests in the aircraft in a stripped, bare-metal finish over Oklahoma in February. Then the aircraft went to the paint facility, the Air Force said.

At Dyess, the jet received new Apocalypse II nose art honoring the crew of a B-24J Liberator named the Apocalypse, which was shot down on Dec. 1, 1942, over Burma.

Daniel Inouye finishes maintenance ahead of schedule

By JONATHAN BAEZ
Stars and Stripes

The guided-missile destroyer USS Daniel Inouye returned to Pearl Harbor eight days ahead of schedule after completing what the Navy described as a “complex maintenance period.”

The Hawaii Regional Maintenance Center oversaw the work, which was carried out by Honolulu-based contractor Pacific Shipyards International, according to a Pacific Fleet news release Friday. The destroyer

returned to Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam on April 23.

“This maintenance period for USS Daniel Inouye set the highest standards across the Pearl Harbor waterfront,” Capt. Brian Ryglowski, deputy commander of the maintenance center, said in the release. “This was an unprecedented performance that gave back significant operational time.”

The Navy did not disclose how long the maintenance period lasted or specify the repairs

and upgrades completed aboard the ship. A Pearl Harbor Shipyard representative was unavailable after business hours Monday in Hawaii for further information, shipyard spokeswoman Ana Maring said by phone.

The Daniel Inouye, commissioned in 2021, was likely undergoing what the Navy calls a selected restricted availability, a maintenance period that typically lasts six to 12 months and includes repairs and moderni-

zation work.

The destroyer completed its first deployment — a nine-month assignment with the 3rd and 7th fleets — in October 2024. In January, ship watchers photographed the vessel leaving Pearl Harbor for sea trials following what WarshipCam described on X as an 11-month maintenance period.

The early completion stands out at a time when Navy ship maintenance delays have become increasingly common.

Hegseth, South Korean counterpart discuss defense

By YOOJIN LEE
Stars and Stripes

The civilian leaders of the U.S. and South Korean militaries met Monday at the Pentagon to discuss defense cooperation, including Seoul's plan to assume wartime operational control of allied forces on the Korean Peninsula.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and his South Korean counterpart, Ahn Gyu-back, met dur-

ing the two-day Korea-U.S. Integrated Defense Dialogue, according to statements released by both countries.

Their meeting came a day before President Donald Trump was scheduled to travel to China to meet with leader Xi Jinping.

South Korea aims to assume wartime operational control, known as OPCON, in 2028, the Yonhap News Agency reported Tuesday. The transfer would

shift command of allied forces during a conflict on the peninsula from the United States to South Korea.

The commander of U.S. Forces Korea, Army Gen. Xavier Brunson, testified before Congress last month that the target timeline extends to no later than the first quarter of 2029.

At the Pentagon meeting, Hegseth emphasized the alliance's importance and welcomed

South Korea's increased defense spending, according to a Defense Department transcript.

“Real burden-sharing is the foundation of a resilient alliance, and it is essential for effectively deterring our mutual adversaries,” he said.

Ahn discussed Seoul's efforts to strengthen its defense capabilities and assume a larger security role, according to a joint statement.

Court extends order on abortion pill access

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court extended a temporary order that lets medical providers keep dispensing a widely used abortion pill by mail while the justices debate privately how to handle the issue.

The order keeps a pause on a federal appeals court decision that would require patients to visit a provider in person to get a prescription for mifepristone. The new Supreme Court order lasts until Thursday.

Louisiana is seeking to overturn the Food and Drug Administration's decision during Joe Biden's presidency to permit remote

prescriptions for mifepristone. The state says regulators gave short shrift to safety concerns.

Mifepristone has been available by mail since 2021, when the FDA said it would stop enforcing the in-person rule because of the pandemic. The FDA formally lifted the requirement in 2023.

The clash has threatened to upend abortion access nationwide. Pill-induced abortions accounted for 63% of all abortions in 2023, and mifepristone was used in the vast majority of cases, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research organization

that supports reproductive rights. Louisiana and other states with abortion bans say remote prescriptions are undermining those laws.

The drug's manufacturers, Danco Laboratories and GenBioPro, asked the Supreme Court to intervene, saying in separate requests that the 5th U.S. Court of Appeals created chaos by restricting access to mifepristone even in states where abortion is legal.

The companies say the FDA acted based on a wealth of evidence that mifepristone is safe without an in-person visit.

Order a Diet Coke or bomb Iran: Anti-Trump art stays on message

Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — Secret Handshake, the anonymous arts and activism group behind an ongoing series of satirical public sculptures — mostly about President Donald Trump's alleged ties to convicted sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein — has channeled its black comedy into a new video game about the Iran war called "Operation Epic Furious: Strait to Hell."

"The game features furious tweet battles against Iranian schoolgirls, low-flow shower heads and other threats to American freedom like DEI and the Pope. And just to save you time, the only way you can lose is by trying to hold Melania's hand. But it's the Middle East, so you also can't win either," Secret Handshake wrote in an email to The Times.

The group placed three old-school arcade-style games inside the Neoclassical DC War Memorial, which is located near the Reflecting Pool in Ash Woods and resembles a domed, open-air bandstand.

The pivot from sculpture to video games was necessitated by current events, said a member of the group.

"We didn't sit down and say, let's make a video game. The video game was the answer because that's what was happening to us. It was about watching the actions take place in Iran and some truly, truly horrible things, and how that was being spun into something cool and hip and edgy through the actual administration, through the use of video games," the man said. "They were literally cutting in 'Call of Duty' and 'Grand Theft Auto' and others as well into these hype videos for the war, almost as if it was before a concert or a wrestling match."

The game, which is also available to play on-

line, begins with a shot of the White House. "Another big, beautiful day as the best President ever," a caption reads.

The game moves into the Oval Office where Trump sits at the Resolute Desk under the words, "Uh-oh another one of your executive orders was halted by the courts." Players can then choose whether to order a Diet Coke or bomb Iran — if you choose to do the latter, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth enters the room and says, "Hey boss! Just saw on Truth Social you declared war on Iran. Hell yeah!"

"Some call it a war, I call it renovating my Middle East ballroom," Trump says.

"My delts are ready, let's liberate some oil," Hegseth yells.

Secret Handshake has been erecting satirical Trump sculptures on the National Mall for more than a year, making headlines in September when the park service toppled one of its pieces, titled "Best Friends Forever," featuring Trump and Epstein gleefully holding hands. The statue, bruised and battered by its fall, ultimately went back up.

Secret Handshake is meticulous about getting the necessary permits to display its protest art, which is why the pieces have lately remained in their designated spots for up to a week. The "Operation Epic Furious" video games are scheduled to stay up for at least the next few days, the rep said.

The goal is to get people to think, not to mock or glorify violence, the Secret Handshake rep said. It's also important to the group to be mindful of various political viewpoints.

"I would say that everything we've done, we've tried to do with respect to the other side and to not make it cruel," the rep said. "And also we've done it with permission."

Not-guilty plea for man charged in gala shooting

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — The man accused of trying to assassinate President Donald Trump at a Washington hotel gala last month pleaded not guilty during a hearing in federal court Monday.

Cole Tomas Allen, 31, has been charged with attempted assassination and gun offenses following a shootout April 25 with Secret Service agents at the hotel where Trump was attending the White House Correspondents' Association annual dinner. A magistrate judge ordered him to remain locked up while the criminal case proceeds.

Allen was wearing an orange jumpsuit and appeared calm during the proceeding.

Allen was arrested outside the Washington Hilton ballroom after he tried to charge through a security checkpoint with a shotgun and a pistol, authorities alleged. Several shots were fired, and a Secret Service agent was hit in the chest, though he was wearing a protective vest, the government said.

According to charging documents, Allen sent a manifesto to friends and family that prosecutors said outlined a planned attack that involved Trump and other administration officials, although he didn't name the president. Allen wrote that he felt "awful" but had "experience(d) rage thinking about everything this administration has done," according to the government.

Allen is seeking to disqualify top Justice Department officials from being involved in his prosecution because they are potential crime-scene witnesses and have made public comments that are prejudicial to his defense.

US, Iran avoid renewed war, peace remains elusive

Stars and Stripes

Five weeks after the United States and Iran agreed to a ceasefire, the conflict remains in a fragile standoff, with diplomacy sputtering, economic pressure building and neither side showing signs of backing down.

Hopes for a diplomatic end to the war and a quick reopening of the Strait of Hormuz appeared to fizzle this week after President Donald Trump dismissed Iran's latest peace proposal as "garbage."

According to Iranian state media, Tehran has demanded that the U.S. pay reparations, lift sanctions and recognize its sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz, terms Trump deemed "totally unacceptable."

Trump didn't detail his objec-

tions, but on Monday he said the ceasefire struck on April 8 was "on massive life support" and had little chance of survival.

From the start, Trump has been adamant that Iran must not retain any ability to build a nuclear weapon.

Tehran has resisted dismantling its uranium enrichment program despite a heavy bombing campaign, economic sanctions and repeated threats against its critical infrastructure.

Meanwhile, Iran has managed to inflict global economic pain by largely shutting down the Strait of Hormuz, which in peacetime carries nearly one-fifth of the world's oil supply.

The strain on fuel supplies has already roiled international

markets and added to political pressure on Trump, whose approval ratings have fallen since the war began.

Trump has on numerous occasions declared that the U.S. has already won the war, but with gas prices rising, midterm elections approaching and diplomacy showing little progress, pressure appears to be mounting on the president to find a solution quickly.

"I think what the White House is struggling with, or what they haven't really accepted, it seems, is that Iran doesn't see themselves in a position of weakness right now," said Kelly Grieco, a senior fellow at the Stimson Center. "They see it as: time is on their side."

Despite intermittent vio-

lence, both sides have so far avoided returning to full-scale hostilities.

But Trump is growing increasingly frustrated with negotiations and has been seriously considering a return to combat in recent weeks, CNN reported.

H.R. McMaster, a former national security adviser during Trump's first term, told CNN that it's likely that Iran's rigidity will prompt further strikes from the U.S.

But the U.S. has already caused significant damage to Iran's military, including strikes that killed many of its senior leaders, degraded parts of its missile and drone infrastructure, and weakened much of its conventional naval capability.

In Iran war, China sees familiar US mistakes

Los Angeles Times

BEIJING — The Trump administration has repeatedly framed the war in Iran as a quick, winnable fight, vowing to defeat the Islamic Republic "totally and decisively" — incomparable to the "dumb" wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But from China's perspective, the parallels are clear.

"You can blow everything up — destroy it all," one Chinese official told *The Times*, describing the Americans, "but you don't have a strategy."

President Donald Trump arrives in Beijing this week for talks with a Chinese government that is confident as ever in its ascendance on the world stage, taking stock of its leverage and still baffled the U.S. administration chose yet another costly war in the Middle East.

China has watched as the United States, over seven weeks of fighting an outmatched enemy, has depleted nearly half of its stockpiles of high-end muni-

tions — including its THAAD and Patriot batteries — and fired its Army chief of staff, among other leaders, who had warned of critical shortages.

Marco Rubio, Trump's national security adviser and secretary of state, has said the military operation that started the war known as Operation Epic Fury "is over."

But the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most vital commercial waterways, remains effectively shuttered. Iranian attacks in the region continue. And talks between Washington and Tehran have failed to reach a diplomatic agreement to bring a definitive end to the conflict.

"The Chinese have high regard for the operational proficiency of U.S. forces, but they recognize that, thus far at least, the Trump administration has not achieved its core objectives in going to war with Iran," said David Ochmanek, a former deputy assistant secretary of defense now with the Rand Corp.

UK's Starmer seen to be losing fight to stay in power

Bloomberg News

LONDON — Keir Starmer was facing a decision to step down as prime minister as dozens of members of Parliament, including his own home secretary, joined the calls for him to set out a timetable for his departure.

Starmer insisted Tuesday that he has no intention of resigning, *The Associated Press* reported.

Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood, who has overseen Starmer's controversial immigration crackdown, told the prime minister that he should consider laying out a plan for a successor, according to people familiar with the matter. The Home Office didn't respond to a request for comment on the exchange, which was first reported by the *Times* newspaper. No. 10 Downing St. declined to comment.

The addition of Mahmood to the ranks of those calling for Starmer to resign signals a new

level of peril for the prime minister in the wake of Labour's disastrous performance in last week's local elections. She was among more than 70 members of Parliament who had urged the prime minister to step aside, with many speaking up in the hours after the prime minister announced his plans for a reset on Monday.

Such critics included Joe Morris, a ministerial aide of Health Secretary Wes Streeting, and Streeting's constituency neighbor Jas Athwal, leading to intense speculation in Labour that the health secretary was preparing to challenge Starmer. Around half a dozen other ministerial aides also resigned Monday.

Mahmood's comments follow recent overtures by Energy Secretary Ed Miliband. A Labour official said they believed several more Cabinet members were ready to tell the premier he needed to set a timetable for his departure.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

One dead following fire, fireworks explosions

CA LOS ANGELES — A man was found dead Saturday following a fire that broke out at a South Los Angeles home and sent flames and fireworks into the sky.

The Los Angeles Fire Department said that it responded around 5:30 a.m. to find a detached garage in the 2400 block of 9th Avenue “fully involved with fire and explosions” and quickly put out the blaze.

Authorities recovered large amounts of fireworks from the Jefferson Park property and discovered a man dead, Los Angeles Police Department spokesman Dennis Orris said.

Orris said it was unclear whether the fire killed the man or if he had died before the blaze.

Employee charged with rape at fire station

CA LOS ANGELES — A man who worked as a firefighter and paramedic at a Cal Fire station in Riverside County has been charged with raping three women, at least one of them while on duty — and the alleged victim in that incident says the agency shares responsibility for letting it happen.

The woman, listed as Jane Doe in a civil claim filed this month, said she arrived at Station 96 in Temecula just after 10 one evening last November to visit a man she’d met online.

According to the woman’s claim, David Renteria, 51, greeted her at the entrance and the two walked to a shed at the back of the property.

Over roughly six hours on the

evening of Nov. 6, the claim alleges, Renteria raped the woman repeatedly.

At one point, according to the claim, he forced her to walk naked through the main station, photographed her in his firefighting gear and told her he would hurt her children if she tried to leave. Other firefighters, the claim alleges, were on duty inside the building the entire time — apparently oblivious.

He faces a potential life sentence, and is being held at the Riverside County Southwest Detention Center with his bail set at more than \$7 million.

Endowment to grow \$2B thanks to AI investment

MI DETROIT — The University of Michigan’s endowment appears to be in for a windfall.

The university made a \$20 million investment in the early days of OpenAI that is estimated to be worth \$2 billion when the company goes to the public market in a likely initial public offering, according to reports citing court documents.

Business Insider reported that documents in Elon Musk’s federal lawsuit against Sam Altman show the university made the investment in OpenAI before Microsoft made its \$1 billion investment in 2019.

OpenAI, which runs ChatGPT, launched in 2022 and could go public in late 2026 or early 2027, according to reports.

Over 100 people get norovirus on cruise ship

FL MIAMI — A Princess Cruises ship with more than 100 passengers on board that had caught norovirus

during its sailings arrived to Port Canaveral, Fla., on Monday morning, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Caribbean Princess completed an 11-day voyage that had departed on April 28 from Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale, during which passengers and crew suffered from an outbreak of the highly contagious virus, which has predominant symptoms of diarrhea and vomiting.

The outbreak affected 102 of the 3,116 passengers on board, or 3.3%, as well as 13 of the 1,131 crew, or 1.2%, according to the CDC’s Vessel Sanitation Program outbreaks website.

The outbreak was first reported on May 7.

A CDC crew arrived to the ship to conduct an environmental assessment and outbreak investigation to assist the ship in controlling the outbreak.

Embattled task force leader says he aided feds

MD BALTIMORE — Convicted former Baltimore Police Sgt. Wayne Jenkins, who led the city’s Gun Trace Task Force, is seeking to cut short his 25-year federal prison sentence, claiming he secretly cooperated for years with federal investigators probing police corruption and was promised favorable treatment that never materialized.

Jenkins, 45, filed a series of motions in federal court this month asking a judge to reduce his sentence and compel what he called “specific performance” tied to his alleged cooperation with the U.S. Department of Justice.

The filings reopen one of the darkest chapters in modern

Baltimore policing.

Jenkins, who was once hailed inside the Baltimore Police Department as a hard-charging anti-crime officer, later admitted to leading a rogue squad of officers who robbed residents, stole drugs and cash, filed false reports, claimed fraudulent overtime and planted evidence over the course of several years.

Federal prosecutors said in court filings that Jenkins had personally participated in at least seven robberies between 2011 and 2016.

2nd man dies on same popular trail in a week

CA SIERRA MADRE — A man died while hiking the Mount Wilson trail Saturday, the second death on the rugged path in a week, authorities said.

The Sierra Madre Police Department said the 53-year-old man passed away after experiencing a medical emergency on the trail, and that no foul play was suspected.

The victim wasn’t identified. Firefighters and officers arrived on the scene at 10 a.m. following reports of a man experiencing health problems and administered care, but were unable to save him, according to a news release from the police department.

Sierra Madre police and the Los Angeles County Department of Medical Examiner are investigating the incident, the release said.

Saturday’s death comes one week after another man was declared dead after falling down a ravine on the same trail, at Mount Wilson Road and the Little Santa Anita fire break.

— From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Thunder outlast Lakers to finish sweep

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 35 points, Chet Holmgren made a tiebreaking dunk with 32.8 seconds to play and the Oklahoma City Thunder swept the Los Angeles Lakers out of the second round of the NBA playoffs with a 115-110 victory in Game 4 on Monday night.

Ajay Mitchell scored 10 of his 28 points in the frantic final period as the Thunder overcame the Lakers' tenacious effort and improved to 8-0 in the playoffs with their toughest victory of the post-season.

"We've done our job so far, that's all it really means," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "We've gone out there, we've executed, we've played at a high level and we've been able to win eight tough games against really good opponents. That's all it means. Nothing is guaranteed."

LeBron James had 24 points and 14 rebounds in the final game of the unprecedented 23rd season for the top scorer in NBA his-

tory, but he missed a driving bank shot with 20 seconds left that would have put the Lakers ahead.

The 41-year-old James has repeatedly said he hasn't decided whether to play next season, so there was no ceremony or momentousness around this game. Instead, the Lakers desperately tried to extend their year, only to lose to Oklahoma City for the eighth time this season.

"I don't know what the future holds for me, obviously, as it stands right now, tonight," James said. "I've got a lot of time. I'll go back and recalibrate with my family and talk with them, and when the time goes, obviously you guys will know what I decide to do."

Austin Reaves scored 27 points before missing a tying 3-point attempt with eight seconds left for the Lakers, who advanced one round farther than almost anybody expected after losing NBA scoring champion Luka Dončić and Reaves to significant injuries a month ago.

Los Angeles still lost six of its

final seven playoff games and fell well short of the conference finals for the third straight season.

Oklahoma City faced its first fourth-quarter deficits of the entire playoffs in Game 4 as the Lakers repeatedly refused to fold. The Thunder still got it done, and they've earned at least the rest of the week off before they open the conference finals against the winner of San Antonio's second-round series with Minnesota. The Spurs and Timberwolves are even heading to Game 5 on Tuesday night.

"They won more of the minutes tonight than we did, and that hadn't been the case (earlier in the series)," Oklahoma City coach Mark Daigneault said. "They outplayed us for stretches. They're a really good team with prideful players. We did not expect them to give us an unearned win, and we went out and earned it."

Oklahoma City went 8-0 against the Lakers this season, winning all four regular-season matchups as well — but this one

was the toughest. The Lakers took the lead and kept it close down the stretch with big buckets from Reaves and Rui Hachimura, who scored nine of his 25 points in the fourth quarter.

Holmgren's dunk with 2:03 left put the Thunder up 109-103, but Hachimura coolly converted a four-point play. Marcus Smart then drove the lane and hit a lay-up while being fouled in the final minute, converting a three-point play for a 110-109 Lakers lead. But Holmgren got the ball inside and triple-pumped for a dunk with 32.8 seconds left, and James missed on his drive. After Gilgeous-Alexander hit two free throws, Reaves missed again, and the Thunder hung on to secure their sixth berth in the Western Conference finals in the last 16 seasons.

Dončić missed the final 15 games of the Lakers' season after incurring a hamstring strain on April 2. He apparently didn't get close to returning from the injury, which often requires two months of recovery.

Mitchell scores 39 in second half, Cavs pull even with Pistons

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — The Cleveland Cavaliers are back on even footing in their second-round series after Donovan Mitchell's huge second half.

Mitchell tied an NBA playoff mark with 39 points in the final two quarters as he rallied the Cavaliers to a 112-103 victory Monday night.

"What a shift, right? Really struggled in the first half and then big-time, second-half performance by Don," Cavaliers coach Kenny Atkinson said.

The home team has won all four games in the series, which shifts to Detroit for Game 5 Wednesday night.

Mitchell matched the mark of Eric "Sleepy" Floyd on a free throw with 27.6 seconds remaining. He had a chance to break the

record, set in 1987 when the Golden State Warriors faced the Los Angeles Lakers, but missed his second foul shot.

"Everybody let me know that I missed a free throw to break the record, though," said Mitchell, who finished with 43 points. "I will say that, but we're two and two headed to Detroit. That was what we came home to do and that's all that matters."

James Harden had his 40th playoff double-double with 24 points and 11 assists. Evan Mobley had 17 points as Cleveland remained unbeaten at home in six playoff games.

Caris LeVert had a season-high 24 points for Detroit. Cade Cunningham scored 19, the first time he has been held under 20 in 11 playoff games this season, and Tobias Harris added 16.

Pistons coach J.B. Bickerstaff, who takes pride in the physical style his team plays, was not pleased with the free throw disparity. Mitchell had more trips to the foul line (15) than Detroit (12).

Even though Mitchell struggled in the first half and the Cavaliers shot 15-for-38, with most of their shots being 3-pointers, the Cavaliers felt pretty fortunate to be down 56-52 at halftime.

Atkinson's message at halftime was to play with more pace and attack downhill, which opened things up.

Mitchell scored 15 during Cleveland's 24-0 run that went from the last 12 seconds of the first half to the first six minutes of the third quarter. Cleveland trailed 56-52 at halftime before taking control.

The Cavs were 10-for-12 from the field and made three 3-point-

ers. They also converted five turnovers by the Pistons into nine points.

"When (Mitchell) sees a gap, he's going to go. We've got to eliminate his touches and catches on the run," Cunningham said. "That run, we just never caught our footing again. That was the first time they really got loose in the series."

The 24-0 run was the longest in an NBA playoff game since since Minnesota also scored 24 straight in Game 6 of its Western Conference semifinal series against Denver in 2024.

Mitchell and Harden accounted for 49 points apiece with their points scored and points off assists. Mobley was a force on both ends of the court with eight rebounds, five assists, three steals and five blocked shots.

Avs defeat Wild to take 3-1 series lead

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Ross Colton and Parker Kelly each scored in the third period for Colorado, an opportune time for their first goals of the postseason as the high-scoring Avalanche snapped back from a midseries lull and beat the Minnesota Wild 5-2 in Game 4 on Monday night to take a 3-1 lead in the second round of the NHL playoffs.

“It’s just about staying ready,” Kelly said, “and all these guys in here are ready.”

Mackenzie Blackwood made 19 saves in his first start this postseason after relieving Scott Wedgewood during a 5-1 loss in Game 3 on Saturday, and the Avalanche moved within one win of taking the first spot in the Western Conference finals.

Game 5 will be in Denver on Wednesday.

“You’re never going to be perfect after 30 days off, so I just try to do my best to stay sharp,” said Blackwood, who learned the day before he would be starting.

Nazem Kadri scored on a power play in the second period, and Nathan MacKinnon — who had a brief absence to fix a bloody nose from a puck to the face — and Brock Nelson added empty-net goals in the final minute.

Nico Sturm tied the game at 2 for Minnesota with his first goal of the postseason about two minutes after Colton scored, but the Wild were outshot 20-4 over roughly the first half of the game by an energized Colorado offense.

Rookie Danila Yurov scored his first career postseason goal on a deflection midway through the first period for the Wild during a four-minute power play prompted by a double minor penalty on defenseman Josh Manson, but they failed to consistently get pucks deep into the offensive zone and allowed their crowd-noise advantage to all but disappear during their slog of a second period before coming to life down the stretch.

“The style of game that we needed to play to win the game, we didn’t,” coach John Hynes said. “We made the conscious choice not to play that way tonight, so we’ll readdress that and then we’ll get ready for Game 5.”

After leading the NHL in goals

during the regular season while posting the league’s best record, the Avalanche scored 14 times over the first two games before Wild goalie Jesper Wallstedt stonewalled them in Game 3.

But Colton, whose wrist shot was set up by a slick across-the-slot pass by linemate Nicolas Roy, became the 15th player to score for the Avalanche in just eight postseason games this spring. Then Kelly made it 16.

“They were doing a lot of what we want to do — quick with the puck, get it down deep, work our players down low,” Wallstedt said. “They got a lot of pucks to the net. They were creating rebounds. They were creating scoring chances. We want to do the exact same thing. It just took a little longer for us to get there.”

Weathers loses no-hit bid, Yankees drop 4th straight

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — First, Ryan Weathers lost his no-hit bid. Not long after that, the New York Yankees lost the lead.

And ultimately, they ended up with their fourth straight defeat.

Pitching for the first time since May 2 after a severe viral infection caused him to lose nine pounds, Weathers took a no-hitter and a 2-0 lead into the seventh inning against the Baltimore Orioles on Monday night.

Perhaps the last thing on the left-hander’s mind was completing the Yankees’ first no-hitter since Domingo Germán threw a perfect game against the Athletics on June 28, 2023.

“To be honest with you, I had zero idea,” Weathers said afterward. “I was walking guys and stuff like that, so I guess it never really rang a bell with me what was going on.”

Truth is, Weathers issued only three walks. One to open the game, another in the fifth inning and the last in the seventh, which proved to be the last bat-

ter he faced.

After Adley Rutschman opened the seventh with a single up the middle to end Weathers’ no-hit bid, Pete Alonso grounded out before Tyler O’Neill walked. Yankees manager Aaron Boone then summoned Brent Headrick from the bullpen, and Coby Mayo sent the lefty’s third pitch into the left-field seats for a three-run homer.

Final score: Orioles 3, Yankees 2.

Weathers threw 101 pitches in his comeback from a virus that had him running a fever of 102 degrees.

For the Yankees, it’s been a difficult stretch after a 16-3 run that bolted them into first place in the AL East. During that streak, New York registered a four-game sweep of the Orioles by a combined 39-10 score.

On this night, however, the Yankees were beaten by the sub-.500 Orioles. And the final nail came with a decision by the replay room.

After pinch-runner José Ca-

ballero was called safe at second on an attempted steal with two outs in the ninth, the Orioles challenged the call. Turned out, second baseman Blaze Alexander made the tag after all, and the ruling was reversed — leaving New York with a particularly frustrating loss.

Guardians 7, Angels 2: Joey Cantillo pitched six scoreless innings, rookie Travis Bazzana capped a five-run third inning with a two-run double and host Cleveland defeated Los Angeles.

The AL Central-leading Guardians improved to 28-4 against the Angels in Cleveland since the start of the 2014 season. The Angels also lost for the 16th time in their last 21 games.

Rays 8, Blue Jays 5: Jonathan Aranda hit a home run and drove in three, Richie Palacios had three hits and three RBIs, and AL East-leading Tampa Bay beat Toronto for a road victory. It was their 15th win in their last 17 games.

Tampa Bay has won 10 straight and 20 of 21 when scor-

ing four or more.

Diamondbacks 1, Rangers 0: Michael Soroka allowed three singles over 6½ scoreless innings, and Geraldo Perdomo drove home the game’s only run three batters in as visiting Arizona beat Texas.

Perdomo’s RBI double one-hopped into the right field corner after Corbin Carroll hit a one-out double to left center in the first. The Diamondbacks have won three straight for the first time since mid-April.

Mariners 3, Astros 1: Julio Rodríguez homered and Randy Arozarena added two hits to lead Seattle to a road win over Houston.

It’s Seattle’s franchise-record eighth straight win over the Astros and comes after the Mariners dropped their last two games.

Giants 9, Dodgers 3: Rafael Devers homered early and drew a bases-loaded walk that broke a seventh-inning tie as visiting San Francisco beat scuffling Los Angeles in the opener of a four-game series.

Sinner's 31st straight Masters win ties mark

Associated Press

ROME — The records keep coming for Jannik Sinner.

The top-ranked Sinner beat qualifier Andrea Pellegrino 6-2, 6-3 to reach the Italian Open quarterfinals on Tuesday and match Novak Djokovic's record with a 31st consecutive Masters Series victory.

Sinner hasn't been beaten in a Masters Series event — the biggest tournaments outside the Grand Slams — since he retired with cramps in extreme heat against Tallon Griekspoor in Shanghai in October.

Djokovic won 31 straight Masters matches in 2011.

"If you want to be a great player you've got to play on all the surfaces and all the tournaments at your maximum," Sinner said. "It's the mind that makes the difference."

Like in his previous match, Sinner took control quickly with a break in the opening game before a packed Campo Centrale — where many fans were decked out in orange, which is Sinner's theme color. He improved to 19-0 against fellow Italians.

If Sinner raises the trophy in Rome, he'll become the second man after Djokovic to triumph at all nine Masters 1000 events. Djokovic has won each event at least twice.

Sinner has already won a record five straight Masters events and with Carlos Alcaraz sidelined due to a right wrist injury, it doesn't seem like anyone can prevent him from winning in Rome and at the upcoming French Open.

"It's time to take the title away from Adriano," read a sign that one fan held aloft at the Foro Italico, referring to the last Italian man to win the singles title in Rome: Adriano Panatta 50 years ago.

Panatta will present the winner's trophy after Sunday's title match.

Overall, Sinner extended his winning streak to 26 matches. He hasn't lost since getting beat by Jakub Mensik in the Qatar Open quarterfinals on Feb. 19.

Sinner's quarterfinal opponent will be either 12th-seeded Andrey Rublev or Georgian qualifier Nikoloz Basilashvili, who were playing later.

Also, 19-year-old Rafael Jodar swept aside Learner Tien 6-1, 6-4 to become only the second teenager after Rafael Nadal (in 2005) to reach the Madrid and Rome quarterfinals in the same season.

Jodar will next face Luciano Darderi, who saved four match points in the second set of a 1-6, 7-6 (10), 6-0 victory over two-time Rome

champion Alexander Zverev,

Casper Ruud eased past Lorenzo Musetti 6-3, 6-1 with Musetti getting treatment for a left thigh issue.

Ruud will face Karen Khachanov, who beat Dino Prizmic 6-1, 7-6 (2). Prizmic eliminated Novak Djokovic on Friday.

Cirstea makes semis run at 36

In the women's tournament, 36-year-old Sorana Cirstea reached the semifinals with a 6-1, 7-6 (0) victory over 2017 French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko.

Cirstea upset top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka in the third round and is now the second oldest semifinalist in a WTA 1000 clay-court event. Only Martina Navratilova did it at an older age, at 37 in Rome in 1994.

"I always said there's no expiration date for ambition and dreams," said Cirstea, who plans to retire at the end of the year. "I think everyone can see that I absolutely love this sport. I have so much passion for it."

Defending champion Jasmine Paolini, who lost in the third round of singles, withdrew from the doubles competition due to a "minor foot issue." She and partner Sara Errani are the defending champions in doubles, too.

SEC commissioner Sankey stands firm on 16-team CFP

Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Southeastern Conference commissioner Greg Sankey stood firm behind a 16-team College Football Playoff expansion Monday, indicating that a disagreement with the Big Ten — which backs doubling the current bracket to 24 teams — is lingering deep into the offseason.

"That focus hasn't changed," Sankey said at the APSE Southeast Region meeting at the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame. "We're open to the conversation, but there are a lot of ideas out there that have to be supported with analysis and information, not speculation."

Sankey said all changes in college athletics must come with appropriate research — something he believes the SEC has provided in support of a four-team expansion to 16. To Sankey, the Big Ten-

backed plan and whether it would offer much difference from 16 teams, is an unknown. A decision on the 2027 format would need to be made later this year.

The playoff expanded from four to 12 teams in 2024, and after decision-makers failed to reach an expansion agreement, the CFP will use the same model for the 2026-27 season. The discussion carries major implications for the college football schedule in general, including when it kicks off, the role of still-lucrative conference championship games and when the season comes to a close in January.

"We're trying to inform that with research. We've done that, from our perspective, with 16," Sankey said. "We want to understand, through some analytic support, games that matter in an expanded environment, and games

that might not matter."

Sankey cited Oklahoma's late push into the playoff last season as the blueprint, saying it was "good for college football."

An NCAA committee last month recommended that Football Bowl Subdivision teams play a 12-game schedule over 14 weeks beginning in 2027 with the season starting on the Thursday of what is now designated Week Zero and ending the Saturday after Thanksgiving.

Last week, the American Football Coaches Association proposed changes to the schedule that included eliminating conference championship games, reducing scheduled bye weeks from two to one and reducing the minimum number of days between games to no fewer than six. Sankey suggested he was hearing different from league coaches.

"The American Football

Coaches Association without, like, picking up the phone and having a conversation with those of us in the decision-making role, issues a set of statements and says we want to get the season done earlier," said Sankey, who contended the AFCA plan had "mutually exclusive" options. "And oh, by the way, we just met with our football coaches, (who) said, 'If we're going to go to Week Zero, two open weeks is the priority, not an earlier rush into the postseason.' Two open weeks work for injury purposes, for recovery purposes, for development purposes, is the priority."

Sankey did acknowledge a host of headaches when it comes to scheduling, with power leagues moving to a nine-game conference schedule and the ongoing desire to use non-conference dates as a chance for a marquee game to polish a CFP resume.