

GAO: DOD lacks suicide prevention data

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon's Defense Suicide Prevention Office lacks the information to monitor department-wide completion of suicide prevention training, a government watchdog disclosed Wednesday.

A defense official told the Government Accountability Office that the DSPO does not receive data from the military services on whether they are completing the training, the report said.

The GAO also said the military services' headquarters suicide prevention offices generally do not effectively monitor whether training is completed. The Army, Navy, and Marine Corps offices do not regularly track required annual training completion and only the Na-

Military official says services not tracking completion of training

tional Guard Bureau takes action to help ensure training completion.

"Developing and implementing evaluation plans would help the services ensure a systematic approach to assessment and determine if trainings are achieving intended outcomes, such as recognizing risk factors for suicide," the 54-page report says.

The GAO made 17 recommendations, including:

- Requiring Pentagon guidance for the services to report suicide prevention training completion data to DSPO.

- Developing training evaluation plans.

- Regularly monitoring training completion by the Army, Navy and Marine Corps.

The Defense Department

agreed with nine recommendations, partially agreed with six and did not agree with two.

"(The) GAO clarified two recommendations and maintains all recommendations remain valid," the report states.

The suicide rate among active-duty troops decreased in 2024 from the previous year, according to an annual report released by the Pentagon in March.

Overall, there were 471 reported suicides across the total force in 2024, the most recent year for which statistics are available, compared with 531 in 2023.

However, the suicide rate for the active component has increased since 2011.

"It remains to be seen whether the short-term decreases ob-

served in 2024 in the active component will signal a change in long-term trends," the March report says.

For years, the Pentagon has struggled to bring down the number of suicides in the ranks. The Defense Department began collecting and reporting quarterly surveillance data on service member suicides in 2018 to help guide prevention efforts.

The rate is calculated based on an active-duty force of about 1.33 million troops and about 770,000 reserve and National Guard personnel combined.

The Defense Department in recent years has aimed to improve mental health care access for troops, amid increases in suicide rates and an outcry from Congress and others.

Iran: Latest US proposal has 'narrowed the gaps'

Bloomberg News

Iran said the latest proposal from the U.S. has partly bridged the gap between the warring sides, as they seek to turn a fragile ceasefire into a peace deal.

Tehran is in the process of responding to a text submitted by the U.S., which "has narrowed the gaps to some extent," the semi-official Iranian Students' News Agency reported on Thursday, without saying where it got the information. "Further narrowing requires an end to the temptation for war on Washington's part."

The exchange of messages is based on Iran's 14-point text from several weeks ago, the Iranian foreign ministry said separately. That plan essentially

suggests a short-term deal that would see Iran reopen the Strait of Hormuz and the U.S. lift a blockade of Iranian ports, with the warring sides then going into deeper negotiations over Tehran's nuclear program.

Iran gave no indication of when it would formally answer the U.S.

The Iranian foreign ministry reiterated it wants a commitment that fighting will end "on all fronts, including Lebanon." It also called for the unfreezing of sanctioned assets.

Field Marshal Asim Munir, who has positioned himself as the most powerful person in Pakistan, is visiting Tehran on Thursday, ISNA reported. Islamabad is the main mediator be-

tween the sides.

The developments follow renewed threats of escalation between the U.S. and Iran as their stand-off drags on.

President Donald Trump told reporters on Wednesday that the U.S. was in the "final stages" with Iranian diplomacy, sparking investor hopes a deal was close.

U.S. Treasury prices jumped and oil dropped.

But the president then warned he may resume attacks in the coming days if Iran didn't agree to his terms, a threat he has made multiple times since a ceasefire took effect April 8.

"We'll either have a deal or we're going to do some things that are a little bit nasty," he

said. "But hopefully that won't happen."

Key sticking points between the sides include Iran's nuclear enrichment and its stocks of highly-processed uranium. The U.S. is demanding Tehran hands over the latter, due to fears Tehran may use it to build an atomic bomb, and commits to ending enrichment for at least a decade.

Iranian leaders have balked at those in public.

Reuters, on Thursday, reported that Iran's Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei had issued a directive that the country's near-weapons-grade uranium should not be sent abroad. Reuters cited two unnamed Iranian people familiar with the matter.

Remains recovered near Tokyo bear attack

By **SETH ROBSON**
AND **HANA KUSUMOTO**
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Large paw prints were found near human remains recovered recently from a mountainous area in western Tokyo, according to Japanese authorities investigating the discovery.

Officials removed the remains Tuesday afternoon from the Nippara area of Okutama, about 30 miles west of Yokota Air Base, a Tokyo Metropolitan Police spokesman said Wednesday.

The victim's age and gender have not yet been determined, he said. Authorities also found signs the remains had been damaged by an animal.

The discovery follows a Sunday bear attack that injured a Russian hiker near Mount Kuzumotori.

The remains were found near a hiking trail about six miles from where that attack occurred, an official with Okutama's tourism and industry division said Wednesday.

Some Japanese government officials must speak to the media anonymously.

Okutama sits within Chichibu-Tama-Kai National Park, a mountainous area known for wildlife, including bears, Okutama Mayor Nobumasa Morooka said in a message posted Wednesday on the town's website.

He noted several previous bear incidents in the area, including an August attack on a fisherman near the Tama River and injuries to field workers and climbers in recent years.

USS Nimitz becomes Navy's longest-serving carrier ever

By **GARY WARNER**
Stars and Stripes

Somewhere between Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro on May 10, the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz became the longest-serving flattop in Navy history, the service said this week.

Nimitz recently celebrated 51 years since its May 3, 1975, commissioning. The ship is in the final stages of its homeport move from Naval Base Kitsap in Bremerton, Wash., to Naval Station Norfolk, in Virginia.

During the long circumnavigation of South America, it has held joint exercises with several militaries, including Chile and Argentina. In Brazil, a "big top" reception was held on the ship's flight deck in the waters off Rio.

"Fifty-one years in, Nimitz's

legacy isn't something we merely remember — it's something we carry forward through war-fighting readiness, operational excellence and exceeding expectations in our current mission of partnership-building throughout the Americas," said Rear Adm. Cassidy "Dudley" Norman, commander of Carrier Strike Group 11, which includes Nimitz.

A second milestone was passed a week later.

"USS Nimitz (CVN 68) has been in active service longer than USS Enterprise (CVN 65)," said a statement from the Naval Heritage and History Command.

The retired USS Enterprise — the world's first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier — was commissioned Nov. 26, 1961, and

deactivated Dec. 1, 2012, ending its status as an operational carrier in the U.S. Navy.

That is 51 years and five days after it was commissioned. In its final years, it passed legendary carriers such as USS Kitty Hawk, USS Midway, USS Forrestal, USS Saratoga in terms of service time.

No carrier had ever served half a century before Enterprise passed the mark in 2011. On May 10, Nimitz set the new mark of 51 years and six days of operational service.

Enterprise was finally decommissioned — after five years spent defueling the nuclear reactors and deactivating the propulsion system — Feb. 3, 2017, 55 years and 68 days after commissioning.

Arctic exercise pushes drone testing

By **ALISON BATH**
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The U.S. Navy and Norway are testing the capabilities of high-tech drones in the Arctic, where China and Russia are seen as an increasing threat to U.S. and European security.

The bilateral drone exercise is being held in Ramsund, Norway — about 130 miles inside the Arctic Circle — amid extreme cold, rugged fjords and difficult underwater conditions.

"We are pushing the boundaries of innovation in the most challenging environmental conditions, proving these technologies can provide a critical defensive edge anywhere in the world," Vice Adm. Jeffrey Anderson, 6th Fleet commander,

said in an official statement.

The drill involves surface and undersea drones used for mine countermeasures, undersea infrastructure protection and intelligence gathering, along with other uses, the statement said.

Anderson called the drone deployment in the High North a "landmark" moment.

NATO officials have expressed growing concern about Russia-China cooperation, especially in the Arctic.

Gen. Alexus Grynkeiwich, NATO supreme allied commander Europe, warned in January that Moscow and Beijing are "trying to figure out how they can counter NATO capabilities on and under the sea."

The partnership could "grow very quickly, and we need to be

mindful of it and ready for it," Grynkeiwich said at a security conference.

The nearly three-week exercise, which ends Sunday, is designed to leverage the geographical expertise of the Norwegian Armed Forces alongside Navy know-how in robotics, unmanned systems and expeditionary operations, 6th Fleet said.

During the exercise, Navy forces are using surface and underwater drones to detect, identify and neutralize threats — which can be especially challenging in unique Arctic conditions.

U.S. and Norwegian personnel are also using underwater drones and specialized dive gear to locate and neutralize old explosives.

'Anti-weaponization fund' mobilizes Dems

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — Democrats are mounting a multipronged resistance against the Justice Department's new \$1.8 billion "anti-weaponization fund," saying the money amounts to a slush fund aimed at funneling taxpayer dollars to President Donald Trump's supporters.

The fund, which was part of a settlement in the unprecedented \$10 billion lawsuit that Trump brought against the IRS earlier this year, was also met with questions and criticism from some congressional Republicans.

Though some Republicans were sharply critical of the fund, Republican leadership did not roll out any coordinated push to sink it. Still, the fallout from the announcement continued to ricochet around Capitol Hill, with

some conservatives expressing serious concern and at least one GOP lawmaker raising possible legislative action to undo the fund or block it.

Off Capitol Hill, two police officers who defended the U.S. Capitol during the Jan. 6, 2021, attack filed a lawsuit Wednesday challenging the creation of the fund, teeing up a court battle that could open an avenue for judicial intervention.

Meanwhile, Democrats previewed their own efforts to push back against the Trump administration move.

On the Senate floor, Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said on Wednesday that Democrats were going to force Republicans to vote on the fund through the process associated with the latest GOP budget reconciliation

bill.

"Republicans will not be able to duck or to hide," Schumer said. "Republicans, are you for the slush fund? This evil, corrupt slush fund? Or are you against it?" Schumer said.

Sen. Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations subcommittee that oversees the Justice Department budget, announced Wednesday he would introduce a fund-related amendment to the GOP reconciliation bill. His office, in a news release, said the amendment would be aimed at preventing violent criminals and child molesters from receiving payouts from the fund.

The amendment announcement comes a day after acting Attorney General Todd Blanche refused to rule out money going to

people who have assaulted police officers or committed a violent crime. Instead, Blanche, appearing before Van Hollen and other lawmakers during a budget hearing, said he expects that the commissioners who control the fund will set up rules over eligibility and establish procedures for applying for compensation.

The fund will consist of a five-member commission appointed by the attorney general, the Justice Department said in an announcement. The president can remove any member, the department said.

Sen. Patty Murray of Washington, the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, said in a statement Tuesday she would try to block the fund through the bipartisan appropriations process.

Judge: Trump can't ignore Presidential Records Act

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — A Washington federal judge on Wednesday ruled that the Trump administration cannot ignore the Presidential Records Act, and held the law is likely constitutional.

The order, from Judge John D. Bates of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, directed White House staff to comply with the law, which requires the preservation of all presidential documents, even those on personal devices. The ruling came in lawsuits brought by the American Historical Association and oversight groups in response to a change in White House policy that could allow for the destruction of records.

In a more than 50-page opinion issued alongside the order, Bates defended the 1978 law passed in the wake of the Watergate scandal.

"To adopt the government's position that the Act is unconstitutional would disable Congress and future Presidents from re-

flecting on experience, in defiance of the very words engraved on the National Archives Building in Washington: 'What is past is prologue,'" Bates wrote.

Bates noted that his order did not address President Donald Trump or Vice President JD Vance, but instead White House staff. Bates gave the government until next Tuesday before his ruling would take effect.

On April 1, the Justice Department Office of Legal Counsel issued a memorandum finding the law unconstitutional, arguing it exceeded Congress' powers and intruded on the powers of the president, according to court records. The next day, White House Counsel David Warrington issued a memorandum to White House staff laying out that they no longer had to comply with the law. Shortly after that, the American Historical Association, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington and others filed lawsuits seeking to block the change.

Prediction market concerns dominate Senate hearing

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — Senators at a Commerce Committee panel hearing aired concerns Wednesday about rapidly growing prediction markets, appearing largely unswayed by industry arguments that they are not a form of betting subject to state regulation.

Members of the committee's Consumer Protection, Technology and Data Privacy Subcommittee were in agreement at a hearing that sports "event contracts" on prediction markets bear a strong resemblance to traditional sports betting. They also shared worries about all forms of betting affecting the integrity of sports.

The subcommittee heard from representatives of the sports betting and prediction market industries, as well as stakeholders focused on sports integrity, gambling regulation and gambling addiction.

Subcommittee Chair Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., expressed

her concern about betting's impact on the integrity of sports, as well as potential additional risks presented by prediction markets.

"While prediction markets represent financial innovation across many sectors, there are real concerns that they function much like traditional sports betting without the enforcement of state regulators and attorneys general," Blackburn said.

Later, Blackburn, who is running for governor in Tennessee, said that witness testimony could inform potential regulation by the committee, "and also looking at the division of what should be federal and what should be state and preserving those states' rights."

The prediction market industry says its platforms are more similar to trading in agricultural futures than traditional casino betting and are therefore under the jurisdiction of the federal Commodity Futures Trading Commission, rather than state gaming regulators.

Cuba: Castro indictment is pretext for attack

Miami Herald

The Cuban government, reacting to the indictment in Miami on Wednesday of Raúl Castro in the shoot-down of two unarmed planes over the Florida Straits in 1996, ramped up the accusatory rhetoric against the United States and called the federal charges a pretext for a military attack against the island.

"This is a political action, with no legal basis, that only seeks to beef up the case they're manufacturing to justify the folly of a military aggression against Cuba," said Cuban leader Miguel Díaz-Canel.

At the same time, Díaz-Canel seized the moment to once again blame U.S. sanctions for the severe crisis facing the island, calling them "a collective pun-

ishment" of the Cuban people.

"Now they cynically say there is no oil blockade against Cuba, that everything our people suffer is the fault of the Cuban government," he said. "The blame lies with those who ordered all access to material and financial resources to be closed. ... Remove the blockade and we'll see how we fare."

The U.S. Justice Department announced the indictments of Raúl Castro and five others on Wednesday at an event in Miami's Freedom Tower. The charges rest in part on a recording of Castro ordering the Cessna planes to be shot down; those aircraft carried U.S. citizens Armando Alejandro, Carlos Costa and Mario de la Peña, and U.S. resident Pablo Morales. They

all died in the attack.

In a further sign of the Cuban government's refusal to acknowledge its own failures, Díaz-Canel and Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez also launched fierce attacks against U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio. In a video addressing the Cuban people, Rubio, himself the child of a Miami Cuban family, pointed to the control exerted by the GAESA, the military conglomerate that runs much of Cuba's economy, as responsible for the severe crisis Cuba is undergoing.

Rubio singled out GAESA as "a state within a state, which controls all the country's profits." He also said that "the only role of the Cuban government is to demand sacrifice (from the

people) and to repress them."

Rubio said in an earlier message that the United States is prepared to offer a way out of the humanitarian crisis on the island and reiterated an offer of \$100 million in aid that would be distributed by the Catholic Church and other charitable institutions not linked to the Cuban government.

Rodríguez responded by calling Rubio "a mouthpiece for corrupt and revanchist interests" of some Cubans in South Florida.

"He keeps talking about \$100 million in aid that Cuba has not rejected, but whose cynicism is obvious to anyone given the devastating effect of the economic blockade and the energy siege," Rodríguez said.

Complaint filed against lawmaker for comments on Hegseth, execution

Boston Herald

An ethics complaint has been filed against Rep. Seth Moulton, D-Mass., for remarks he made on a recent CNN interview about Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, including a reference to Nazi U-boat captains "executed" for war crimes for shooting at boats.

The complaint, filed Tuesday by the Center to Advance Security in America, or CASA, calls for an investigation into an April 29 appearance on CNN's "Erin Burnett Outfront" program where Moulton was asked whether he thought that Hegseth was guilty of war crimes based on a series of accusations related to the war in Iran and the military's strikes in the Caribbean.

Moulton compared Hegseth's role in facilitating U.S. military actions under the Trump administration to Nazi submarine

captains who were tried for war crimes for following orders from German dictator Adolf Hitler during World War II.

"You know, it's interesting, Erin, another historical analogy: Back in World War II, the Allies tried Nazi submarine captains for doing this exact same thing. And guess what the conclusion was? They got executed. Listen to that, Mr. Secretary," Moulton told host Erin Burnett during the CNN appearance.

"In these unprecedented times of left-wing political violence, we are extremely concerned that Representative Moulton's vile comments could be used by others to justify violence against cabinet officials or other high-ranking members of the Trump administration," the complaint, dated May 18 and authored by CASA Director James Fitzpatrick, says.

Hunger strike launched at Calif. ICE facility

Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — A group of immigrants at a detention facility in Southern California launched a hunger strike this week to protest inhumane conditions, according to a coalition of immigrant rights groups.

At least 20 immigrants are taking part in the hunger strike at the Desert View Annex, next door to the Adelanto Immigration and Customs Enforcement Processing Center, where previous hunger strikes have occurred and where four people have died since it reopened last year.

The annex has a bed capacity of 750 and is holding more than 400 detainees, according to officials.

Defend Migrants Alliance of Southern California, a coalition made up of activists, labor unions and community organizations, announced the strike during a morning news conference.

The coalition said the strike

began Tuesday and read a statement from the strikers, who demanded that Geo Group Inc., the owner and operator of the facility, remove mold, improve drinking water and provide timely medical care to people with chronic health conditions who are being held at the facility.

The protesters also alleged that food rations had been reduced at the facility, forcing them to purchase costly items at the commissary.

The group said it would stop purchasing food as part of an economic boycott.

A spokesperson for Geo Group did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the situation.

The company, however, has told The Times in the past that its services are monitored by ICE and other organizations within the Department of Homeland Security to ensure compliance with federal government detention standards.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Blue crab population booming in Chesapeake

MD BALTIMORE — After a hit to the blue crab population last year, the numbers have grown by over 100 million in 2026.

The blue crab population is estimated at 349 million in the Chesapeake Bay, compared to the 238 million last year, according to results from this winter's annual dredge survey of the waterway.

Blue crab populations are highly dynamic, said the Virginia Marine Resources Commission's Director of Communications Zachary Widgeon, making it difficult to pinpoint one direct cause for the uptick.

Each winter, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science at William & Mary and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources team up to complete the dredge survey.

Disneyland sued over facial recognition effort

CA ANAHEIM — A Disneyland visitor has filed a \$5 million class action lawsuit alleging the Anaheim theme park does not properly disclose the use of facial recognition technology that violates the privacy rights of visitors.

Summer Christine Duffield, of California's Riverside County, alleges Disneyland and Disney California Adventure violated privacy, competition and consumer protection laws by collecting the biometric data of visitors in the suit filed on May 15 in U.S. District Court in New York.

Duffield visited Disneyland and DCA on May 10 with her mi-

nor children, according to the lawsuit.

"Guests should be able to expressly opt in to this type of sensitive facial recognition technology with written consent — the onus of privacy rights should not be on the victim," according to the complaint.

Disneyland and DCA rolled out facial recognition software combined with biometric technology in April at the front entrances of both parks.

Disneyland and DCA offer front entrance lanes that do not use facial recognition software. Signs notifying visitors of the option were posted inside the security screening areas at the Disneyland resort parking structures and lots during the rollout of the high-tech security measure.

Postcard urges man to vote for two candidates

CA SACRAMENTO — There was a second where Democrat Howard Hersh believed the handwritten, friendly postcard urging him to vote for two Democrats in the June 2 primary for governor when it arrived in his Nevada City, Calif., mailbox last month.

"Momentarily, anyway, until I realized it was a scam that would invalidate my vote," Hersh wrote in an email.

California voters may select only one candidate per race. The state's top two vote-getters in the primary move on to the general election. A handful of mostly local races can win outright in the primary.

It's not clear who was behind the unsigned postcard, which didn't contain any other election

disclosures.

The postcard Hersh received appears to be part of a misinformation campaign targeting Democrats who might be deceived into voting for two candidates, a move that would spoil their ballot.

"I've not seen this particular dirty trick before, but misleading voters in mailers is common," said UCLA election law professor Richard Hasen.

Ship owner, operator ask for later civil trial date

MD BALTIMORE — The owner and operator of the cargo ship that struck the Francis Scott Key Bridge two years ago is asking that a civil trial scheduled to begin next month be postponed.

In a court document filed Monday, Grace Ocean Private Limited and Synergy Marine Private Limited requested that the civil case, scheduled for June 1, be stayed until a criminal case filed against Synergy is resolved.

The companies asked that if the case is not stayed through the resolution of the criminal case, it be stayed for at least 90 days to allow time to determine if they can obtain immunity or any other protection for Synergy employee witnesses.

The civil trial will determine whether Grace Ocean and Synergy can limit their liability under a centuries-old maritime law that could cap damages at roughly \$44 million — far below the billions sought to rebuild the bridge and compensate victims.

Last week, a federal indictment charging Synergy Marine Group, Synergy Maritime and one employee in connection with the March 2024 bridge col-

lapse was unsealed. The indictment alleged the companies and an employee concealed safety problems aboard the Dali before the ship lost power and slammed into the bridge.

Pigment maker could benefit from highway bill

DC WASHINGTON — A Michigan manufacturer stands to become the U.S. government's preferred supplier of yellow pigment used in road and highway markings across the country if a provision in the House's sweeping surface transportation reauthorization bill becomes law.

Section 1328 — on Page 270 of the 1,005-page text released Sunday — would require the transportation secretary to study the "feasibility" of including yellow paint, as well as the pigment that goes into making water-based paint, among the construction materials subject to Buy America requirements enacted in the 2021 infrastructure law.

The provision, based on bipartisan legislation introduced by members of the Michigan delegation, would mean a windfall for Muskegon pigment manufacturer Sun Chemical, currently the sole domestic manufacturer of the yellow pigment for roads and other U.S. surfaces.

The yellow-paint effort has its critics, including the Taxpayers Protection Alliance, a nonprofit that advocates for free-market policies.

"Unfortunately, not even the paint used on roads is safe from the rampant cronyism and protectionism seen across the federal government," they wrote.

— From wire reports

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SGA, Thunder even series with Spurs

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — The MVP looked like the MVP again, and the Western Conference finals are knotted up.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander bounced back from a subpar series opener to score 30 points, Alex Caruso added 17 off the bench and the Oklahoma City Thunder beat the San Antonio Spurs 122-113 on Wednesday night in Game 2.

Chet Holmgren scored 13 points and reserves Jared McCain and Cason Wallace each had 12 for Oklahoma City. The Thunder finished with a 57-25 edge in bench scoring, plus a 27-10 advantage in points off turnovers.

“I thought we all played better,” Thunder coach Mark Daigneault said. “I had a quiet confidence about that. I didn’t know if we’d win or lose the game, but I was pretty sure after watching Game 1 and knowing our team that we were going to come out and play better tonight.”

Stephon Castle scored 25 points for the Spurs, who got 22 points from Devin Vassell and a 21-point, 17-rebound, six-assist, four-block night from Victor Wembanyama.

Game 3 is Friday in San Antonio.

“The guys brought it tonight,” Gilgeous-Alexander said. “Knowing what it would have meant if we lost this one, we brought the energy from the jump.”

Isaiah Hartenstein — who barely played in Game 1 — had 10 points and 13 rebounds for the Thunder, who improved to 14-5 after a loss this season — and beat the Spurs for just the second time in seven meetings.

The win was not without cost for the Thunder, who lost guard Jalen Williams — who had already missed six games in these playoffs with a left hamstring strain — in the first half with a recurrence of the hamstring issue. The Thunder said it was

tightness, but even that would figure to put his availability for Friday into doubt.

And the Spurs got banged up as well. Already without All-Star guard De’Aaron Fox because of ankle soreness, San Antonio lost his replacement in the starting lineup — Dylan Harper — to a right leg injury after he took a couple of awkward falls in the third quarter.

Spurs coach Mitch Johnson had no update on Harper after the game, though he noted that it puts “a ton” of pressure on others when his team is down two guards.

“Obviously this team is as good as anybody at turning you over, so when you’re down some of your primary creators and initiators it causes a little bit of an extra strain, whether that’s who to play, what to play, what to run, etc., etc.,” Johnson said. “We’ll just have to be sharper in that area because it’s tough fully loaded against

these guys.”

San Antonio was down by 11 at the half and trailed by eight going into the fourth quarter, then got within 99-97 off a corner 3-pointer by Harrison Barnes with 9:06 left.

The next 2½ minutes saved the Thunder. An 11-0 run by the defending champions — including a banked-in 3-pointer by McCain midway through the burst — pushed OKC’s lead to 13.

But the Spurs — on another night when turnovers plagued them and the stretch run was played without Fox and Harper — were far from done. Wembanyama scored down low to make it 118-113 with 1:25 remaining, but Gilgeous-Alexander got one last basket to settle things down and send the series to San Antonio tied.

“We’ve got to help our ball-handlers more and take care of the ball,” Wembanyama said.

Women’s flag football could have title games in two years

Associated Press

Women’s flag football is on track to gaining NCAA championship status. If all goes according to plan, a title game may even take place right before the sport makes its Olympic debut at the 2028 LA Games.

The NCAA Committee on Access, Opportunity and Impact voted Tuesday to recommend that Divisions I, II and III add a national collegiate flag football championship as soon as the spring of 2028.

Although not official yet, it’s a giant step toward NCAA championship inclusion for women’s flag football. In order to be recommended, 40 schools need to sponsor it at the varsity level. More than 100 schools have

been planning to compete during the next academic year, according to the NCAA.

“Today is a landmark day for collegiate athletics, as women’s flag football officially becomes an NCAA championship sport,” said Marion Terenzio, chair of the Committee on Access, Opportunity and Impact Emerging Sport Subcommittee and president at SUNY Cobleskill. “This step recognizes a sport whose growth, competitiveness and national momentum have been impossible to ignore. Elevating flag football to championship status affirms that progress and opens new doors for women to compete at the highest level.”

The next steps for adding an NCAA flag football title game include each division reviewing

the recommendation and sponsoring a proposal by July 1. Should that occur, the divisions will vote in January 2027, with all three divisions required to approve for a championship to be held.

Women’s flag football is looking to join a list of sports that have gained NCAA championship status through the Emerging Sports for Women program. That includes rowing, ice hockey, water polo, beach volleyball and wrestling, among others.

“The momentum behind the game reflects the passion of athletes, coaches, administrators and partners across the country who have embraced flag football and invested in creating more opportunities for female athletes,” said Izell Reese,

founder and CEO of RCX Sports, the official operator of NFL FLAG.

Jacqie McWilliams Parker, chair of the Committee on Access, Opportunity, added: “Girls want to play. Whenever you give access and opportunity to an easier way to play, the better the success and numbers in participation you see.”

More than 20 states have now sanctioned it as a girls’ high school varsity sport, and NFL clubs voted in December 2025 to support the launch of a professional flag football league.

The International Olympic Committee voted in 2023 to include flag football, along with cricket, baseball-softball, lacrosse and squash, on the Olympic program for Los Angeles.

Knights get rolling early, top Avs in opener

Associated Press

DENVER — Dylan Coghlan scored his first playoff goal to get Vegas rolling, Carter Hart made 36 saves and the Golden Knights opened the Western Conference Final by holding off the Colorado Avalanche 4-2 on Wednesday night.

Trailing 3-0 in the third period, Colorado made it 3-2 with 2:21 remaining on a power-play goal from Gabriel Landeskog. Nic Dowd sealed it for Vegas with an empty-net goal.

Pavel Dorofeyev and Brett Howden also scored for the Golden Knights, who took advantage of several defensive miscommunications by the Avalanche as they juggled their blue-line pairings with Cale Makar sidelined by an upper-

body injury.

Coghlan scored his first NHL goal since Dec. 17, 2021. The 28-year-old defenseman spent most of this season in the American Hockey League. He's played the last five post-season games because of the recent injury to Jeremy Lauzon.

"When you say Dylan Coghlan to me, I think of no fear," Vegas coach John Tortorella said. "I think he's one of our best defensemen since he's been with us and in the lineup. ... He's a bit unflappable."

It was a smothering performance most of the game by the Golden Knights as they kept the pressure on goaltender Scott Wedgewood, while controlling the Avalanche's speed

through the neutral zone. Vegas also had 23 blocked shots.

"We didn't play a flawless game by any means," Tortorella said. "We have work to do."

Valeri Nichushkin had a goal at 5:53 of the third to make it 3-1.

Hart was stellar most of the evening, making one sprawling save after another. He got some help from his post, too, when Logan O'Connor's liner clanged off it in the first period.

"We know they've got a lot of skill on their team, and we respect that," Hart said. "But you can't respect them too much, and I thought we did a good job of defending and limiting their time and space."

Mitch Marner added an assist for Vegas to give him 19

points (seven goals, 12 assists) in this postseason. It was Dorofeyev's NHL-leading 10th goal of this postseason.

Game 2 is Friday night.

The Avalanche dropped their first game at home after winning five straight through the first two rounds. Wedgewood made 24 saves.

Colorado tried some different combinations without Makar. It led to some confusion, with Coghlan sneaking into the middle of the ice and lining a shot through the pads of Wedgewood to break a scoreless game in the second period.

"There's definitely a trickle-down effect to that," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said of not having Makar. "But he's not playing. We have find a way."

Gauff enters title defense with improved mindset and serve

Associated Press

Coco Gauff has a new approach for her second time around attempting to defend a Grand Slam title.

The American's strategy heading into the French Open — the clay-court major that starts Sunday and which she won a year ago — goes something like this: Don't think about it as defending something.

"I realize that the 'defending' means nothing in a way," Gauff said. "I don't really look at it as defending anymore."

Gauff's first Grand Slam title defense at the U.S. Open two years ago ended in the fourth round with 19 double faults.

"At the U.S. Open I was like, 'I need to defend, defend.' When you're playing a tournament that you didn't win, what is it called?" Gauff said recently in Rome. "That's why I just say now it's just another tournament: 'I won it last year. I'll try again to do it this year.' I'm not going to be able to defend every year." Rafa, of course, would be Rafael Nadal, the record 14-time French Open champion.

Gauff's first Roland Garros title came with a victory over top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka in the final a year ago.

Just like last year, Gauff was the runner-up at the Italian Open — a major clay-court warmup for Roland Garros.

"There's a lot of positives I can take from

this tournament and a lot I can learn from," Gauff said after losing the final in Rome to Elina Svitolina. "This week I experienced all the ups and downs of a tournament... I've been down, had the lead, lost the lead, I've been in the final, been down match point. I think I've experienced every scenario that can prepare me for Roland Garros.

"Hopefully I can actually learn from each scenario and do better."

Gauff's improved serve

Another big lesson that Gauff will take from Rome is a positive vibe on her serve after years of struggles.

In two of her wins at the Foro Italico, she committed only one double fault. She then had seven in the final, though.

"I think it's a real improvement," Gauff said after getting 78% of her first serves in against Sorana Cirstea in the semifinals. "It's the first time in my career I feel like I'm really stable with that shot. 'It's been an up-and-down process. I obviously don't want to jinx anything, but I think we found the recipe to making it more consistent. Now it's focusing on how to make it more of a weapon, how to serve smarter.'"

Gauff also discussed what she's doing better technically on her serve.

"I'm tossing a bit more consistent. My weight is a little bit better. Also just the trust,

the confidence in it is a lot better," she said.

"Because my confidence in it is better, then I'm actually consistently tossing the ball in the right spot, having my technique be the same on each serve regardless where my target is. That's the biggest difference."

Sabalenka on clay

While Sabalenka remains unbeatable at times on hard courts — see her "Sunshine Double" this year with titles in Indian Wells, California and Miami — she is still perfecting her game on clay.

She was upset by American Hailey Baptiste in the Madrid Open quarterfinals and then the No. 1 player was beaten in the third round at the Italian Open by 36-year-old Cirstea.

Sabalenka appeared visibly bothered by lower back pain in Rome.

Elena Rybakina, ranked No. 2, is another player who excels on hard courts and has achieved mixed results on clay.

Iga Swiatek, the four-time French Open champion, lost to Svitolina in the Rome semifinals and is still reshaping her game under a new coach, Francisco Roig, who used to work with Nadal.

Swiatek's 26-match winning streak at Roland Garros ended in the semifinals last year with a loss to Sabalenka. Ukraine contenders

Rays rally late, beat Orioles to finish sweep

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Richie Palacios hit a go-ahead single, Hunter Feduccia homered and the Tampa Bay Rays used a four-run eighth inning to complete a sweep of the Baltimore Orioles with a 5-3 win on Wednesday.

Jonathan Aranda tied the game 3-3 in the eighth inning with a two-run double to center field that scored two runners. Palacios followed up with his single to take the lead before stealing second, which allowed Ryan Vilade to steal home and cap the scoring.

Feduccia had the game's first run on a 421-foot shot to center field in the second inning. It was his first career homer in 182 plate appearances.

Baltimore tied the game in the third on a Pete Alonso RBI single. Alonso then added his ninth home run of the year in the sixth, and Samuel Basallo followed with a homer of his own to put the Orioles ahead 3-1.

Twins 4, Astros 1: Joe Ryan matched his career high with 12 strikeouts over six innings, Ryan Kreidler hit a three-run home run and host Minnesota beat Houston.

Ryan (3-3) retired his last 16 batters after an RBI single by his former catcher Christian Vázquez in the second, the only hard-hit ball the Astros managed against the All-Star right-hander. The other three hits Ryan allowed were a leadoff blooper by Jeremy Peña and two infield singles. He didn't walk anybody while throwing 71 of 99 pitches for strikes.

Reds 9, Phillies 4: Nathaniel Lowe doubled twice and drove in three runs, including a pivotal two-bagger in the seventh inning, and visiting Cincinnati beat Philadelphia.

The Reds won two of three, handing the Phillies their first series loss since Don Mattingly took over as interim manager. His record since replacing Rob Thomson fell to 16-6.

Diamondbacks 6, Giants 3: Ketel Marte hit a two-run homer, Geraldo Perdomo drove in three runs and host Arizona finished a three-game sweep of San Francisco.

Merrill Kelly (4-3) gave up three runs on eight hits over six innings, striking out four, for his third straight quality start. Paul Sewald worked the ninth for his 11th save, giving the Diamondbacks their fourth straight win and fifth in their last six games.

Rangers 5, Rockies 4: Josh Jung hit a go-ahead single in the ninth inning, Jake Burger and Ezequiel Duran connected for back-to-back home runs, and visiting Texas rallied past Colorado.

Joc Pederson reached on catcher's interference with one out in the ninth. Consecutive singles loaded the bases, and Pederson scored the tying run on Brett Sullivan's passed ball. Jung then singled off Juan Mejia, putting the Rangers up 5-4.

Mariners 5, White Sox 4: Jhonny Pereda hit his first MLB homer, Randy Arozarena also went deep and scored three runs, and host Seattle beat Chicago.

Pereda, who was recalled from Triple-A Tacoma last week when AL MVP runner-up Cal Raleigh was placed on the 10-day injured list with a right oblique strain, turned on a hanging breaking ball from White Sox lefty Sean Newcomb (0-1) in the seventh inning for a 392-foot homer into the Mariners' bullpen. The backup catcher went 136 at-bats before hitting his first big league homer.

Nationals 8, Mets 4: CJ Abrams hit a three-run homer in the first inning, Jacob Young added a two-run shot in the eighth and host Washington returned to .500 for the second time since the season's first week with a victory over New York.

Andrew Alvarez earned the Nationals' first four-inning save since they relocated from Mon-

treau in 2005. Washington improved to 25-25 after getting to 23-23 on Saturday before consecutive losses.

Braves 9, Marlins 1: Austin Riley and Dominic Smith hit three-run home runs, Chris Sale (7-3) allowed just one run and struck out eight over seven innings, and visiting Atlanta beat Miami.

Ozzie Albies and Michael Harris II singled twice and Ronald Acuña Jr added a base hit for the NL-leading Braves.

Guardians 3, Tigers 2 (10): Angel Martínez hit a tiebreaking triple in the 10th inning, José Ramírez followed with an RBI double and visiting Cleveland beat slumping Detroit.

The Guardians tied it at 1 in the ninth when Daniel Schneemann scored on Patrick Bailey's groundout. Schneemann opened the inning with a single off Will Vest before advancing on Travis Bazzana's single and Steven Kwan's sacrifice bunt.

The Tigers, who have lost five straight games and 13 of 15, had an opportunity to win in the bottom of the ninth with runners on first and second and no outs. Erik Sabrowski and Colin Holderman (2-0) combined to hold Detroit scoreless with three consecutive strikeouts.

Brewers 5, Cubs 0: Kyle Harrison (5-1) struck out 11 in seven dominant innings and visiting Milwaukee beat sloppy Chicago to sweep the first series this season between the NL Central rivals.

David Hamilton had three hits and scored two runs as the division-leading Brewers improved to 14-4 in their last 18 games. Jake Bauers extended his hitting streak to a career-high 11 games with an RBI single in the third.

Chicago committed three errors during its ninth loss in 11 games. Struggling reliever Phil Maton threw a wild pitch in the seventh that brought home Milwaukee's final run.

Red Sox 4, Royals 3: Jarren Duran's opposite-field two-run

homer in the seventh inning rallied visiting Boston over Kansas City.

With one on and one out in the seventh, Duran sent reliever Steven Cruz's fastball 366 feet into the bullpen in left for his sixth homer, helping the Red Sox complete a series sweep of the faltering Royals. Boston's three-game winning streak matched its season high.

Pirates 7, Cardinals 0: Spencer Horwitz homered, Konnor Griffin had four singles, and visiting Pittsburgh beat St. Louis to snap a four-game losing streak.

Carmen Mlodzinski (4-3) allowed four hits and a walk in five innings to improve to 3-0 with a 1.75 ERA in 11 career appearances against the Cardinals.

Dodgers 4, Padres 0: Shohei Ohtani (4-2) homered on the first pitch of the game before throwing five sharp innings of three-hit ball in visiting Los Angeles' victory over San Diego.

Teoscar Hernández also homered and drove in two runs for the Dodgers, who have won seven of eight after taking two of three at Petco Park in their first series of the season against their Southern California rivals.

Blue Jays 2, Yankees 1: Trey Yesavage outpitched Cam Schlitler in a marquee matchup between young aces, and visiting Toronto edged New York.

Yesavage (2-1) allowed just two hits and walked none while striking out eight over six shutout innings. Schlitler (6-2) allowed eight hits and two walks with seven strikeouts as his major league-leading ERA rose to 1.50.

Athletics 6, Angels 5 (10): Jeff McNeil hit a tying homer in the ninth inning and Tyler Soderstrom had an RBI single in the 10th to rally the visiting Athletics past Los Angeles.

The Angels loaded the bases with two outs in the bottom of the 10th but left-hander Hogan Harris got Jorge Soler to ground out, sending LA to its 23rd loss in 29 games.