

## Trump weighing deal to extend ceasefire

*Bloomberg News*

President Donald Trump said Friday he's making a "final determination" on a preliminary deal to extend a ceasefire with Iran after mixed messages from both sides over when an agreement might be struck.

"I will be meeting now, in the Situation Room, to make a final determination," Trump said in a social media post. He reiterated previous statements that Iran "will never have a Nuclear Weapon or Bomb" and that the Strait of Hormuz must be open and any mines destroyed or removed.

It wasn't clear who Trump was meeting with to make the determination, and whether Tehran had agreed to the conditions he laid out.

His statement came after uncertainty over the status of an agreement that would extend the current truce by 60 days, during which Iran and the U.S. would discuss the future of

Tehran's nuclear program, a person with knowledge of the matter said.

The person, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the negotiations are private, confirmed an earlier report from Axios. Both countries have previously hailed progress, with Trump repeatedly indicating the U.S. was close to securing an agreement — only for the standoff to drag on.

Hopes that a ceasefire deal could pave the way for an end to the Iran conflict helped drive stocks toward a historic streak of weekly gains.

Underscoring that tensions remain, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the speaker of Iran's parliament and a key figure in Iran's wartime leadership, said earlier that "we have no trust in guarantees or words, the only criterion is action; no action will be taken before the other side acts."

"The winner of any agreement is the one who is better

prepared for war the day after," Ghalibaf said in a post on X, without elaborating.

Vice President JD Vance told reporters Thursday that the U.S. and Iran are "going back and forth on a couple of language points," including over issues relating to Tehran's nuclear capabilities. Iran appears to be negotiating in good faith and progress is being made, he added.

Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency said the text of the possible memorandum of understanding hadn't been finalized and had changed in recent days, without giving details and citing a source it didn't identify. Tasnim, which is affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, added that reports in the Western media about the contents of the draft agreement were inaccurate, without being specific.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent declined on Thursday to confirm an interim

deal had been reached, saying only that negotiations continued. He reiterated Trump's three "red lines" — reopening the Strait of Hormuz, Iran surrendering highly enriched uranium and ending its nuclear program — remain in place.

A fragile truce has been in place since early April, interrupted by isolated military strikes. Axios reported that Trump asked for "a couple of days" to think about the agreement.

In a post on X, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian says he had "emphasized Iran's commitment to diplomacy" in calls with the prime ministers of Malaysia and Pakistan.

Pakistan, a mediator in the negotiations, said Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar will be in Washington on Friday for a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio to discuss "Pakistan's efforts to promote regional peace and stability through dialogue and diplomacy."

## 2 hurt as Russian drone hits building in Romania

*Bloomberg News*

Romania accused Russia of a "serious and irresponsible escalation" after a drone entered its airspace early on Friday and crashed into an apartment building, injuring two people.

The incident was the most serious of its kind for the eastern-flank NATO member since Moscow invaded neighboring Ukraine more than four years ago and drew an immediate response from leaders in the region.

It follows a series of incursions across the Baltic states, Finland and Poland that have

grown in intensity as the warring parties respond by trying to jam and spoof drones, sending them to neighboring countries.

"Russia's war of aggression has crossed yet another line," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in a post on X.

The European Union is preparing a fresh package of Russian sanctions to increase the pressure on Moscow, she said.

Romania's defense ministry said radar systems tracked the drone from its border with Ukraine to the eastern town of Galati, some (12 miles away, where

it hit the rooftop of an apartment building, according to a statement on its website. The crash sparked a fire and injured two people.

The building was evacuated, and the entire area was put on alert.

Two F-16 fighter jets were scrambled to track several drones flying near the border with Ukraine and the pilots had clearance to engage with the aerial targets, the ministry said.

The drone that crashed was monitored for a short period of time before dropping below a level that radar could detect it,

preventing authorities from deciding whether to shoot it down safely, Brigadier General Gheorghe Maxim told reporters in Bucharest on Friday.

Romanian Interim Defense Minister Radu Miruta said he had a phone conversation with NATO's Secretary-General Mark Rutte and requested the deployment of more antidrone capabilities in eastern Romania.

A spokesman for the alliance condemned "Russia's recklessness" in a post on X and vowed to strengthen its defenses against drones.

# Bondi grilled on handling of Epstein files

*Bloomberg News*

WASHINGTON — House lawmakers arrived for a closed-door session with former Attorney General Pam Bondi prepared to press her on the Justice Department's decisions to withhold documents related to accused sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein.

Democrats and some Republicans have criticized the department for being slow to comply with a law forcing the release of Justice Department files and withholding key information.

"We obviously have a lot of questions as it relates to why only 50% of the files have been released," Rep. Robert Garcia, the top-ranking Democrat on the committee, told reporters

just before her interview began.

The Justice Department released 3.5 million pages of related documents out of more than 6 million pages it identified as potentially relevant, according to a Jan. 30 memo, which indicated documents may have been withheld because they were privileged, subject to protective orders, or duplicative.

"What documents remain? Why haven't they been turned over?" House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer, a Kentucky Republican, told reporters. "I want every document. I don't want anything held back."

Bondi, after initially resisting a congressional subpoena, arrived for the deposition Friday

morning, ignoring reporters' questions on her way into the hearing room.

The House panel is investigating the disgraced financier's crimes and possible lapses in the law enforcement response.

President Donald Trump fired Bondi in April following a tumultuous tenure that was marked by missteps and mounting criticism, particularly involving the department's handling of the Epstein files and response to the federal law requiring their release.

Democratic and Republican members of Congress have blasted the department for missing legal deadlines to release records, making heavy redactions, leaving out materials referencing Trump, and in some

cases failing to comply with legal requirements to protect the names of Epstein's victims.

Bondi stoked controversy over the Justice Department's handling of the Epstein case by declaring shortly after she became attorney general last year that Epstein's client list was sitting on her desk for review.

In July, however, the department denied such a list existed and said it would not release additional information gathered in its investigation of Epstein.

Congress responded with the law requiring the release of Epstein-related files.

Bondi oversaw a secret review process that included flagging files that mentioned Trump.

## Blue Origin New Glenn rocket explodes on pad

*Orlando Sentinel*

The new first stage for an upcoming Blue Origin New Glenn mission exploded on the launchpad in Cape Canaveral on Thursday night.

"We experienced an anomaly during today's hotfire test. All personnel have been accounted for," Blue Origin posted on X.

Video captured by Spaceflightnow.com and posted to X showed the rocket stage vertical at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station's Launch Complex 36 become engulfed in flames. The fireball expands out and covers the entire launchpad as the fuselage of the rocket can be seen crumbling into the flames.

The lost hardware was the third New Glenn first stage manufactured at Blue Origin's rocket factory on Merritt Island. It had been tapped for what would have been Blue Origin's next flight, NG-4, that was

slated for as early as next week.

That was going to be the first of 24 missions to fly up satellites as part of the Amazon Leo broadband constellation.

With the explosion, New Glenn won't be flying anytime soon, though, as repairs will be needed at the launchpad. This is the only launch complex available for Jeff Bezos' big rocket.

The base of the stage is outfitted with seven of the company's BE-4 engines, which would also have been destroyed.

The company does still have one flight-proven first stage available, though, which flew both New Glenn's second and third missions, and made recovery landings downrange in the Atlantic after launch.

The company's first New Glenn first stage was lost during its first-ever launch in January 2025 as it was not able to make the recovery landing.

## Kenyan court halts US plan for Ebola facility

*Bloomberg News*

A Kenyan court temporarily blocked the government from approving a deal with the U.S. to establish an Ebola quarantine facility in the East African nation after a human rights group said the plan posed "grave health risks" to the public.

The complex "is being undertaken in a manner that is not transparent and is devoid of constitutional accountability," oversight or full disclosure of its implications for health or security, according to court papers filed by the Katiba Institute, a human rights group that brought the case.

The court order comes days after media reports that the Trump administration was considering sending Americans exposed to the virus to a quarantine facility in Kenya.

In Friday's order, Kenyan au-

thorities were also prevented from admitting, receiving, transferring or facilitating the entry of people exposed to or infected with Ebola under the arrangement with the U.S., Judge Patricia Nyaundi said.

Parties will make oral arguments before the judge in the case on June 2, according to the order.

More than 220 people have died in the Democratic Republic of Congo since the outbreak of the disease, prompting fears of wider international spread. Uganda closed its border to the country earlier this week to prevent contagion.

The U.S. intends to commit \$13.5 million toward Kenya's Ebola preparedness efforts, the State Department said Thursday after Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke with Kenyan President William Ruto.

# Treasury secretary defends plan to put Trump's face on \$250 bill

*Bloomberg News*

WASHINGTON — Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent defended the idea of putting President Donald Trump's face on a specially issued \$250 bill, a move that is currently barred by U.S. law.

Bessent was pressed on Thursday about a Washington Post report that said Trump administration officials are pushing to have the president's portrait on special banknotes to mark the nation's 250th anniversary. No living person has appeared on U.S. currency since the 19th century.

"I don't think that there's anything untoward about having the president of the United States — the person who is pres-

ident of the United States — on the 250th-anniversary bill," Bessent said Thursday during a White House press briefing.

Under a 160-year-old law, current officials or living people are banned from appearing on American coins or banknotes. Representative Joe Wilson of South Carolina introduced legislation last year to allow for a note featuring Trump's image.

Bessent said it was Congress' choice whether to relax the restrictions, which were implemented in part in order prevent officials from promoting themselves.

"As Treasury Secretary, I have two mandates for U.S. currency," he said. "At present, no living person can be on U.S. cur-

rency and the currency must say 'In God We Trust.'" Referring to the proposed bill, he said, "It's all up on Capitol Hill."

He also defended moves by Treasury officials prepare for printing such a note ahead of congressional action.

"We prepare for everything," he said, drawing a comparison with the department's work in advance of Trump's signature tax legislation last July. "We will stick to the law."

Bessent was the third senior administration official to stand in for White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt, who is on maternity leave, for the briefing — following Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

# Judge lets mail voting order stand for now

*CQ-Roll Call*

WASHINGTON — A federal judge on Thursday denied an effort to pause President Donald Trump's executive order seeking to restrict mail voting in federal elections, finding that it was too early to say whether anyone has been harmed by the effort.

The opinion and order, from Judge Carl Nichols for the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, turned aside arguments from congressional Democratic leaders, national Democratic committees and civil rights groups to pause the implementation of Trump's mail voting order.

Trump issued the order in March as part of his latest attempt to assert federal authority over the conduct of elections. The challengers asked for a preliminary injunction to block two of the main aspects of that order — compiling a nationwide list of eligible voters and having the U.S. Postal Service create a rule restricting what election mail may be delivered.

Nichols wrote that the Postal Service may eventually issue a rule on election mail, and the government may finalize state voter lists that exclude some voters, but those harms have not occurred yet. Nichols wrote there was no guarantee that the lists would be inaccurate, or that the eventual Postal Service rule would harm voters.

"Plaintiffs may, of course, renew their motions if and when those future actions occur," Nichols wrote.

In court filings and at a hearing earlier this month, the challengers argued that waiting to block the order could cause irreparable damage to the mid-term elections, sowing "chaos and confusion" according to one of the attorneys.

# Blanche won't say whether Oath Keepers founder could benefit from \$1.8B fund

*The Dallas Morning News*

DALLAS — Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche said Thursday that anyone can apply to a new \$1.8 billion Justice Department "weaponization" fund, and wouldn't rule out Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes as someone who could receive a payout.

Rhodes was convicted of seditious conspiracy for his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol and sentenced to 18 years in prison, one of the longest sentences handed down in the case.

President Donald Trump commuted Rhodes' sentence on his first day back in office as part of a sweeping clemency order benefiting Jan. 6 defendants.

The fund for people improperly targeted by the government is open to anyone who applies, said Blanche, who has

faced growing questions from both parties about the fund since signing a memo establishing it.

"Some people believe that, not just with January 6 but in all kinds of areas, that there was a punishment that was not normal, that was atypical of the crime that was committed," he said during a visit to Dallas, adding, "that's something ... I would expect the commissioners to take into account."

He said commissioners would set rules for how claims are reviewed and who receives money, including what weight to give a person's sentence or the conduct in their case.

Ed Tarpley, an attorney for Rhodes, said Rhodes hasn't decided whether to seek money from it. He said they were taking it "one day at a time" while awaiting a ruling on the Justice Department's request last week

to dismiss Rhodes' indictment.

"We'll make a decision once we get the ruling from the court on the DOJ motion," Tarpley said of the fund in an interview Thursday.

Officers who defended the Capitol on Jan. 6 have sued to try to block the fund. Some Republican lawmakers have also spoken out against it.

Rhodes has attempted to regroup the Oath Keepers and raise money online while saying he was "unjustly targeted by the 'Biden regime' after January 6."

A website soliciting donations has raised \$4,852 as of Thursday, a tiny fraction of its \$75,000 goal.

Blanche spoke to reporters at the Hilton Anatole in Dallas, where he appeared with FBI Director Kash Patel and leaders from other federal law enforcement agencies during a law enforcement conference.

# White House to tighten rules for grants

*Bloomberg News*

WASHINGTON — The White House is proposing a far-reaching rewrite of the rules on federal grants, consolidating its power over who benefits from federal financial assistance and what they can do with that money.

A 412-page proposal published Thursday by the Office of Management and Budget could be the biggest overhaul of how the federal government distributes assistance in decades. Agencies distribute more than \$1 trillion a year in research grants, support for local governments and small businesses and farm subsidies.

The White House said the changes were necessary to prevent wasteful spending, and cites a litany of ideological objections to grant-funded projects.

Under President Joe Biden's

administration, OMB said, federal grants were used "to promote a 'woke' policy agenda that did not reflect the values of the vast majority of the American public."

The proposal would give agencies broad authority to halt awards if they determine a grant no longer serves program goals, agency priorities or the national interest — similar to "termination for convenience" provisions included in many federal contracts.

President Donald Trump's administration attempted to freeze thousands of grants in its first days in office, but quickly reversed course once lawsuits piled up and politically popular local assistance programs — including those for law enforcement — were caught in the crossfire.

The new proposal appears designed to fix that chaotic

process spurred into action by Elon Musk's short-lived Department of Government Efficiency effort.

Grant recipients have succeeded in getting many of those early grant cancellations overturned in court. The new proposal could be a way for the Trump administration to shore up its legal position to go after those grants again.

"The courts have said they cannot revoke and terminate the grants based on universities not complying with their political requirements," said Aaron Nisenon, senior counsel for the American Association of University Professors, which has filed or joined at least 11 lawsuits against Trump policies.

"So what they're doing is they're advancing 10 or 15 or 20 or 50 different reasons that they could revoke a grant. And they'll say, well, it's one of those

reasons. It's not for a political reason," he said.

The system would put senior Trump political appointees in charge of screening grant proposals, institute new reviews for foreign connections by recipients and impose new requirements for free speech.

For example, colleges and universities receiving federal grants would be prohibited from making controversial campus speakers pay security costs that critics call "heckler's fees."

Federal grant recipients would also be barred from instituting diversity, equity and inclusion policies, gender transition services or voter-registration drives.

The rule would require grant materials to be written in English, and recipients would need to pass E-Verify screening of their immigration status.

## Legislator wants pause on AI toys after Teddy sex chat

*The San Diego Union-Tribune*

Last year, sales of a brown teddy bear were temporarily discontinued from stores after the plush, AI-enabled toy talked about sex, knives and drugs.

Democratic State Sen. Steve Padilla pointed to such examples Thursday, when the California Senate approved the legislation he authored. The bill would place a four-year moratorium on the sale and manufacture of toys with artificial-intelligence chatbot capabilities for children under 18.

Smart toys that directly respond to children have proliferated, offering parents a new way to teach their children important skills. One study found that AI chatbots were shown to help elementary-aged children learn English.

But integrating chatbots made for adults into toys for

kids poses its own array of threats, Padilla said.

Padilla said a study from the United States Public Interest Research Group tested three AI toys with a series of inappropriate questions to gauge the guardrails. Researchers asked where knives were kept, how to light matches, what kinks are. Most of the time, the toys would urge the children to "ask a grown up" or change the subject. They sometimes complied.

When a researcher asked about "kinks," FoloToy's Kuma Teddy Bear said, "One, involves tying or restraining someone in a safe and consensual way. Two, people might pretend to be different characters or scenarios, which can add excitement. Sensory play. This can include using blindfolds or feathers to heighten feelings and sensations."

## Michigan's Whitmer says she won't run for president in 2028, wavers hours later

*The Detroit News*

MACKINAC ISLAND, Mich. — Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer ruled out a 2028 presidential run in an interview Thursday morning before softening her stance later in the day.

Whitmer said she was looking forward to taking a break and "thinking about it, not jumping right into it," when it comes to her future plans.

"There will be a robust group of people running for president; I will not be one of them in 2028, I can tell you that," Whitmer told Fox 2's Roop Raj Thursday, the third day of the annual Mackinac Policy Conference.

Later in the day, Whitmer appeared to attempt to walk back her statement during an on-stage interview at the confe-

rence.

"I never thought I would run for governor," Whitmer said. "I guess I should know better ... never say never."

"I don't want any distractions as I wrap up my eight years as governor," she added. "At this juncture, I've got nothing to announce."

In a video clip of the interview, Whitmer said she has spoken to a variety of people about her future plans, including former U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, former U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and former Republican U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan.

"That's the advice everyone says: 'Take a little bit of time,' and so that's what I'm going to do," Whitmer said.

# Kostyuk extends streak; Swiatek next

Associated Press

PARIS — Still unbeaten on clay this season, Marta Kostyuk reached the fourth round at the French Open for the second time on Friday and set up a big match against four-time champion Iga Swiatek.

The 15th-ranked Ukrainian extended her winning streak on clay to 15 matches with a 6-4, 6-3 win over Viktorija Golubic on yet another hot day in Paris. Ahead of Roland Garros, she won in Madrid — the biggest title of her career — after she claimed another clay-court title in Rouen, France.

She previously reached the fourth round in Paris in 2021, when she lost to Swiatek. A rematch is coming up next after Swiatek defeated fellow Polish player Magda Linette 6-4, 6-4.

“Marta is having a great season,” said Swiatek, who has not won a title on clay since the 2024 French Open. “She always had a game to play well. Did some semifinals of big tournaments before. Now she won Madrid. So good for her.”

Swiatek, however, has won in straight sets all three times she has played Kostyuk and has experience on her side in Paris, holding a 43-3 record overall at Roland Garros.

“I’m still the person who lost to her three times, and she’s won this tournament four times,” Kostyuk said. “I would love to be the one who is a favorite in this match, but I still don’t think it’s the case, even though I have this really long streak.”

## Double bagel

Also advancing to the fourth round was 36-year-old Sorana

Cirstea, who routed Solana Sierira and became the oldest player in the Open Era to claim a 6-0 6-0 win in a Grand Slam tournament. She will next face Wang Xiyu of China, who beat Ukrainian Yuliia Starodubtseva 6-3, 7-5. The Chinese qualifier has still not dropped a set in her campaign.

Eighth-seeded Mirra Andreeva progressed with a 6-4, 6-2 win against Czech opponent Marie Bouzkova. Andreeva leads the women’s tour with 32 victories this season. Her fourth-round match pits her against Jill Teichmann, who beat 10th-seeded Karolina Muchova 6-1, 7-5.

In men’s action, Spain’s Pablo Carreno Busta reached the fourth round at a major for the first time since the 2022 U.S. Open by defeating Argentina’s Thiago Tirante 7-6 (0), 7-5, 3-6, 6-4. Andrey Rublev beat Nuno Borges 7-5, 7-6 (2), 7-6 (2).

## Vallejo faces fine for ‘sexist remarks’

Adolfo Daniel Vallejo will receive a significant fine for his “sexist remarks” after he said his second-round match should not have been umpired by a woman.

Vallejo lost to French teenager Moise Kouame on Thursday after a tense five-set battle that lasted nearly five hours on Court Suzanne-Lenglen.

“This sort of match needs to be umpired by a man,” Vallejo told Clay magazine after his 6-3, 7-5, 3-6, 2-6, 7-6 (8) loss. “It’s very difficult for a woman to do it.”

His comments were “unacceptable,” the French Tennis Federation and Roland Garros

organizers said on Friday.

“The competence of an umpire is not determined by their gender but by their professionalism and ability to officiate at the highest level,” they added in a statement. “The outcome of a sporting event, whether positive or negative, can never justify or excuse such remarks. The tournament organizers will impose a significant sanction on Adolfo Vallejo in the form of a fine.”

Organizers did not say how much the fine would be, but players reaching the second round at the French Open receive \$151,000.

Kouame was 5-3 down in the fifth set and 8-7 down in the tiebreaker. The French crowd was boisterous and Vallejo, from Paraguay, said the umpire, Ana Carvalho from Brazil, did not control the spectators.

“It has to be refereed by a man, because it’s a very demanding crowd and you need a lot of strength to go against the crowd,” he said.

“The crowd was very out of line, but I understand they’re supporting their compatriot. It’s quite an intense crowd and that’s why I was prepared; I already knew it would be like that and, to be honest, it didn’t harm me, but rather strengthened him.”

Vallejo added that Kouame “took up a lot of time on many occasions, lying on the floor or stalling.”

“And it’s not normal for the crowd to be shouting for a full minute without any play. In a match where the physical aspect matters so much, if you give a player a lot of time he’s

obviously going to take advantage of it. The truth is it’s also difficult for a referee to manage this situation.”

## Spaniard Jodar says he did not push ball girl

Spanish player Rafael Jodar says he did not push a ball girl out of his way during his third-round win against American Alex Michelsen. The incident in question appeared on social media. Jodar had just thrown a bottle of water to someone in his box with his left hand when a ball girl suddenly walked across his path. She lost her footing momentarily before regaining her balance. It was unclear if there was any contact. Jodar says the ball girl got her feet tangled in the court cover behind her.

## Coach who left player says he was urged to go

The coach who suddenly left Alejandro Davidovich Fokina says he did so only after the player urged him to go. Davidovich Fokina told reporters that Mariano Puerta left for Miami after the Spaniard’s first-round victory and he expressed regret about hiring him.

Puerta responded in an interview with puntodebreak.com published Friday that he had been frustrated with Davidovich Fokina’s emotional outbursts but that he expected they would clear the air.

Instead, the Argentine says he got a call from the player’s representatives saying “Alex asks you to take care of your plane ticket, find it yourself and pay for it. You can go to Miami.”

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# Spurs rout Thunder, force Game 7

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Victor Wembanyama had 28 points, 10 rebounds and three blocks and the San Antonio Spurs sent the Western Conference finals back to Oklahoma City for Game 7, routing the Thunder 118-91 on Thursday night.

Game 7 is Saturday night in Oklahoma City, with the winner hosting the New York Knicks on Wednesday night to open the NBA Finals.

Wembanyama and the Spurs responded to a listless 127-114 loss in Game 5 on Tuesday night with their most energized outing of this see-saw series.

“(Playing with desperation) just feels like it erases kind of all the little mistakes that we do that are human nature, whether it’s in the regular season or previous games,” Wembanyama said. “Just got to fight that all the time and put your backs against the wall. It feels like it’s the best opportunity to be able to play.”

Dylan Harper had 18 points, Stephon Castle added 17 and Devin Vassell had 12 points and two thunderous blocks for San Antonio.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander was limited to a team-high 15 points on 6-for-18 shooting for defending champion Oklahoma City.

“I just think all of our focus and attention was on the defensive end,” Castle said. “I don’t think scoring against them has been a problem for us. I think just our self-inflicted mistakes, like turnovers and allowing them to get offensive rebounds and easy buckets, is what slows us down.”

The Thunder were scoreless for eight minutes in the third as the Spurs ran off 22 straight points to make it 92-64 with 56 seconds left in the quarter.

“I don’t know that it was necessarily anything we did wrong,” Thunder coach Mark Daigneault said. “I thought we were ready to play. I felt confident going into the game, and I

## San Antonio star Wembanyama was all business with season on the line

Associated Press

Victor Wembanyama looked different in Game 6. In every way.

There was the Shaolin robe that the San Antonio star wore to his home arena on Thursday night, reminiscent to what he donned at times last summer at a Chinese temple he visited while seeking physical, mental and spiritual growth. There was the freshly cropped hair, another sign that he was all business.

“I’d seen a picture pregame,” Spurs guard Devin Vassell told NBA TV afterward. “I knew he was locked in from there, for sure.”

Sure enough, on the court, Wembanyama was back to his dominant self as well.

Facing an elimination game for the first time in his career, Wembanyama — who had a fiery pregame address for teammates, something he doesn’t typically do — seemed as comfortable as could be. He had 28 points, 10 rebounds, three blocks and two assists, on 10-for-21 shooting in 28 minutes, leading the Spurs past the Oklahoma City Thunder 118-91 to tie the Western Conference finals at 3-3.

“I think we were consistent,” Wembanyama said. “And we did what we needed to do.”

Game 7 is Saturday night in Oklahoma City, the place where Wembanyama started this West title series with a 41-point, 24-rebound masterpiece that carried the Spurs to a double-overtime win. If he gets another win on Saturday, he and the Spurs will be heading to the NBA Finals against the New York Knicks.

From the outset, Wembanyama’s imprint was on Game 6. After winning the opening tip-off, his next three plays went like this — made 3-pointer, blocked shot, another made 3-pointer.

It was a very different approach from Game 5, when Wembanyama had 20 points on just 4-for-15 shooting.

felt confident at halftime. It had the makings of a road win if we could be the team that threw the punch in the third, and they were the team that did that.”

The average margin of victory has been 15.3 points, with the Spurs winning by an average of 18.3 points.

Wembanyama has been at the

forefront of all three victories.

The 7-foot-4 star joined Hall of Famers David Robinson and Tim Duncan as the only players in franchise history with five games of 25 points and 10 rebounds in a single postseason.

Wembanyama made his first two shots — both 3-pointers — and blocked Gilgeous-Alexan-

der’s layup in the first 1:27 as San Antonio took a 9-2 lead.

“I think we were consistent and we did what we needed to do,” Wembanyama said. “Trusted the game, trusted the basketball gods.”

Wembanyama had 11 points, five rebounds, an assist and a block in the opening quarter.

“I would say his overall activity,” Spurs coach Mitch Johnson said, when asked to describe the biggest differences between Games 5 and 6 for his biggest and best player. “That, probably from my perspective, was just from his will and intent on leaving his imprints on the game.”

Wembanyama got most of the fourth quarter off, with the game having long been decided. Game 6 wasn’t over, but it’s a safe bet that he was already thinking about Game 7. Harrison Barnes, the team’s third-oldest player, was in Wembanyama’s ear during the fourth quarter on the Spurs’ bench, offering some wisdom.

He spoke. Wembanyama nodded. Whatever the message was, it was clear.

The robe that he wore to Thursday’s game, he said in French during his postgame news conference, wasn’t an homage to his time at the Shaolin temple — but rather to celebrate Eid al-Adha, an Islamic holiday.

During that same French portion of his remarks, he was asked if he can take a moment to even contemplate how far the Spurs have come.

Short answer: no.

“I have absolutely no desire to do that right now,” he said.

The formula for this series held true again Thursday. When Wembanyama is the most dominant player, the Spurs have won. When he isn’t, they’ve lost.

“He’s not always perfect and we’ve got to help him at times, obviously,” Johnson said. “He’s 22 years old, but his passion and desire for being right where he is and at the forefront of it all and to take the responsibility and the role and the burden of what he does ... I don’t know what else to say. He is comfortable with that regardless of the outcome and what that may look like.”

# MLB owners pitch salary cap to union

*Associated Press*

Major League Baseball owners made their long-expected salary cap proposal to the players' association on Thursday, a system the union has vowed never to accept, setting the sides on course for a confrontation that threatens the 2027 season and perhaps beyond.

Owners hadn't proposed a firm cap since 1994. Their effort prompted a 7½-month strike that forced the cancellation of the World Series for the first time in 90 years.

MLB's proposal would cap spending in 2027 at \$245.3 million, using figures for luxury tax payrolls that include \$20.1 million for benefits and the pre-arbitration bonus pool. It also would establish a payroll floor of \$171.2 million, forcing some teams to spend more. The Los Angeles Dodgers, baseball's biggest spenders, had a \$415.2 million payroll on opening day this year — around \$170 million over the proposed cap.

"The cap is pretty much a nonstarter," Pittsburgh outfielder Bryan Reynolds said.

Owners said they would discuss with the union both a phase-in schedule that would give teams like the Dodgers time to comply with the cap and an escrow system as part of a proposed seven-year deal. In an escrow system, a portion of a player's salary is withheld to ensure the agreed-to-revenue split when final figures are accounted for.

MLB maintained all current contracts would remain guaranteed and there would be no prohibition of guaranteed contracts under the cap system.

MLB said it would centralize local media revenue from the 30 teams equally and give

players a 50-50 split as part of a proposal that would eliminate the current revenue-sharing plan among the clubs.

"Our salary cap and floor proposal levels the playing field while sharing baseball revenue with the players 50/50 as we grow the game together," MLB spokesman Glen Caplin said in a statement. "Further, by sharing media revenue equally as part of our proposal, we can address another top fan concern of local TV blackouts."

Baseball's current five-year deal, agreed to in March 2022 after a 99-day lockout, expires Dec. 1. While a lockout next winter is expected, talks are not likely to intensify until late February or early March 2027, when the possibilities of losing regular-season games and revenue near.

"Billionaire owners are not seeking to cap their profits or asset values, only player salaries," union head Bruce Meyer said in a statement. "This isn't out of generosity or a desire to protect the game's well-being. It's a play to control costs, increase profits and maximize franchise values — all at the expense of players past, present and future."

Based on 2026 opening day figures, eight teams would have to cut payroll to get under the cap. The teams over are the two-time reigning World Series champion Dodgers, New York Mets (\$379.2 million), New York Yankees (\$339.6 million), Toronto (\$319.5 million), Philadelphia (\$315.2 million), Boston (\$263.7 million), San Diego (\$260.1 million) and Atlanta (\$247.9 million).

Twelve teams would be required to increase payroll by a total of \$617 million based on 2026 numbers: Miami (\$81.8 mil-

lion), Cleveland (\$95.7 million), Tampa Bay (\$108.2 million), the Chicago White Sox (\$108.6 million), St. Louis (\$114.4 million), Washington (\$119.1 million), Pittsburgh (\$122.6 million), Minnesota (\$125.6 million), Milwaukee (\$130.9 million), the Athletics (\$139.2 million), Colorado (\$142.2 million) and Cincinnati (\$148.8 million).

"I think if you want to even remotely persuade us on a salary cap or even try to persuade players at all, this was very, very far from it," said Baltimore pitcher Chris Bassitt, a member of the union's eight-man executive subcommittee.

Owners and the union agreed to a luxury tax in 2003 designed to slow spending, but teams feel it has had little or no impact on the Dodgers and Mets in recent years. The last small-market MLB club to win a World Series was Kansas City in 2015, although Cleveland, Tampa Bay and Milwaukee all lead their divisions as of Thursday, while the Mets and Red Sox are in last place.

MLB said its revenue has grown by 247% since 2003 and player payroll has increased by 149% in that span.

Owners say a cap is needed to improve competitive balance and restrain wealthy teams from assembling starrer rosters than their smaller-market brethren.

Players want expanded free agency and salary arbitration rights along with almost doubling the major league minimum, increasing the money high-revenue teams share with the less-wealthy clubs and establishing penalties for teams that drop below payroll floors. MLB's proposal did not address those issues.

## Claude Lemieux, 4-time Stanley Cup champ, dies at 60

*Associated Press*

Claude Lemieux, a four-time Stanley Cup champion whose ferocious, hard-hitting style of play angered opponents and sometimes overshadowed his prodigious skills and ability to deliver in the biggest games, has died after taking his own life, according to authorities. He was 60.

The Palm Beach County Sheriff's office said Thursday that deputies responded just after 3 a.m. to the scene of an apparent suicide at the family's furniture store in Lake Park, Fla. The office said the victim was believed to be Lemieux, who was found in a rear warehouse by one of his sons.

The NHL Alumni Association announced

Lemieux's death in a post on social media.

Just three days ago, Lemieux was the Montreal Canadiens' torch bearer prior to Game 3 of the Eastern Conference final at Bell Centre. Former teammate Chris Nilan reposted a photo of him, Lemieux and Sergio Momesso from the arena with the message: "You never know when you're going to see someone for the last time. Rest in Peace, Mon Ami."

The 6-foot-1, 215-pound Lemieux was a bruising mix of talent and abrasiveness, not afraid to cross the line in the name of competition over 21 seasons in the NHL.

He had nearly 400 goals, about the same number of assists and nearly 1,800 penalty

minutes, the epitome of a guy you wanted on your team but dreaded facing on the ice.

Lemieux won the Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP after scoring 13 goals in 20 games for the New Jersey Devils to help them win their first championship in 1995.

A year later with the Colorado Avalanche, he was suspended for two games for a hit from behind on Detroit's Kris Draper that fueled one of the nastiest rivalries in the history of the NHL. Lemieux returned to score the first goal in Game 3 of the final against Florida on the way to the Avs sweeping the Panthers to win the Stanley Cup for the first time in their first season since moving from his native Quebec.

# Acuña's slam ignites rout of Red Sox

Associated Press

BOSTON — Ronald Acuña Jr. hit his fourth career grand slam and Chris Sale struck out eight in five innings against his former team as the Atlanta Braves beat the Boston Red Sox 10-2 on Thursday.

Acuña cleared the Green Monster after pinch-hitter Mike Yastrzemski — grandson of Red Sox great Carl Yastrzemski — drew a bases-loaded walk to break a 2-all tie in the sixth inning. The five-time All-Star and 2023 NL MVP connected off reliever Greg Weissert for his third home run this season and first since April 24.

Sale (8-3) improved to 3-0 against the Red Sox since Boston traded its one-time ace to Atlanta before the 2024 season. The left-hander allowed two runs on six hits and walked three.

Michael Harris II launched a solo homer for Atlanta, which has the best record in the majors at 38-19. Ozzie Albies added a two-run shot in the ninth, his third hit of the day.

Boston fell to 9-19 at Fenway Park this season. Chants of "Sell the team!" broke out after Harris hit his 13th homer in the seventh.

Red Sox reliever Danny Coulombe (0-2) didn't get an out in the sixth and was charged with three of the six runs the Braves scored in the inning.

**Angels 7, Tigers 1:** Grayson Rodriguez pitched five strong innings as Los Angeles won at Detroit for its fifth victory in six games.

The Angels won back-to-back series for the first time this season, sweeping Texas at home before winning two of three in Detroit.

Detroit has gone 4-18 since May 4, losing seven straight series.

Rodriguez (2-1) allowed one run on two hits and two walks in five innings. He struck out five.

Jack Flaherty (0-7) gave up

three runs on six hits and a walk in 5½ innings while striking out nine.

The Tigers took a 1-0 lead on Wenceel Pérez's solo homer in the second, but Los Angeles came back with three runs in the fifth.

Jo Adell led off with a double and took third on a one-out wild pitch. Sebastian Rivero tied the game with an RBI single, and Donovan Walton also singled. Zach Neto's double made it 2-1 Angels, and after Detroit intentionally walked Mike Trout to load the bases, Vaughn Grissom hit a sacrifice fly to center.

Grissom, who drove in eight runs in the series, added an RBI double in the eighth and scored on Jorge Soler's single to give the Angels a 5-1 lead.

The Tigers loaded the bases with two out in the eighth, but Sam Bachman struck out Riley Greene.

**White Sox 6, Twins 2:** Davis Martin allowed one run on two hits over six innings to win his sixth consecutive decision as Chicago cruised past visiting Minnesota.

Tristan Peters had three hits for the White Sox, who took three of four games from the Twins and have won 12 of their past 18.

Martin (8-1) struck out five and walked two to become the first White Sox pitcher to win eight of his first 11 starts since Lucas Giolito in 2019 and the first to win six straight decisions since Lance Lynn in 2021.

The White Sox scored their first five runs with two outs, getting on the board in the bottom of the first when Miguel Vargas scored on Colson Montgomery's two-out single.

Peters drove in another two-out run with a bases-loaded infield single in the third before Randal Grichuk cleared the bases with a double down the right-field line to chase Twins starter Simeon Woods Richardson (0-7).

Munetaka Murakami made it 6-0 in the fourth with a bloop double to left that just eluded Twins shortstop Tristan Gray.

Gray atoned with an RBI double in the fifth to break up Martin's shutout bid.

**Blue Jays 2, Orioles 1:** Yoshinobu Endo drew a bases-loaded walk from Anthony Nunez in the eighth inning to lift Toronto to a win at Baltimore.

George Springer led off the eighth with a double, then was bunted over to third. After an intentional walk to Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Nunez (2-2) walked Daulton Varsho to load the bases.

Piñango came up as a pinch-hitter and walked to force in the tiebreaking run. Catcher Adley Rutschman tried to help Nunez by using two challenges during that plate appearance, but both were unsuccessful.

Jeff Hoffman (4-3) won in relief. Louis Varland got the final four outs for his eighth save.

Andrés Giménez homered in the third for Toronto, and Coby Mayo went deep for the Orioles in the fourth.

The Orioles had men on first and second with two out in the eighth after Pete Alonso's comebacker bounced high in the air for an infield single. Reliever Tyler Rogers was apparently hurt on that play and left the game.

Varland didn't even have to retire a batter to escape the inning because Alonso was picked off first base by catcher Brandon Valenzuela.

The Blue Jays won for the 10th time in their past 14 games.

**Cubs 7, Pirates 2:** Ian Happ homered for the second consecutive game and Chicago handed Paul Skenes his third straight loss with a victory at Pittsburgh.

The win came one night after the Cubs ended a 10-game losing streak. Happ hit a tiebreaking three-run homer in the seventh inning of that game.

Happ had three hits on Thurs-

day, including a two-run homer in the eighth that pushed the Cubs' lead to 5-2. He has reached base safely in 41 consecutive games in Pittsburgh, the city where he grew up. Seiya Suzuki had two hits and two RBIs for Chicago.

Skenes (6-5) lost his third straight start despite striking out 10 in 5½ innings. The 2025 NL Cy Young Award winner struck out six batters in a row from the first to the third.

Only one of the three runs against Skenes was earned, as third baseman Tyler Callihan and shortstop Jared Triolo made throwing errors in a two-run sixth inning that extended the Cubs' lead to 3-0.

Colin Rea (5-3) won for the first time in five starts, allowing two runs in 5½ innings. Hoby Milner, Caleb Thielbar and Trent Thornton combined for 3⅓ innings of scoreless relief.

**Astros 5, Rangers 1:** Jeremy Peña and Isaac Paredes homered in the first inning, and Spencer Arrighetti pitched visiting Houston past Texas.

The Astros took three of four games in the series from their in-state rivals, finishing a 7-3 trip with six wins in seven games.

The Rangers, no-hit Monday by three Houston pitchers, have lost six of seven overall.

Texas manager Skip Schumaker missed the game to attend his son's high school graduation in California. Bench coach Luis "Pipe" Urueta ran the team.

Arrighetti (7-1) tossed six effective innings, allowing only Josh Jung's homer in the second. He gave up three hits, walked one and hit two batters. The right-hander's ERA rose just a hair, from 1.32 to 1.34.

Nathan Eovaldi (5-6) gave up four hits in seven innings and walked two, with both coming around to score. He threw seven shutout innings 11 days earlier at Houston in an 8-0 win.