

Kuwaiti base attack injures Americans

Bloomberg News

Several Americans were hurt in a missile attack on a Kuwaiti air base over the weekend as negotiations to extend the ceasefire with Iran dragged on without conclusion.

President Donald Trump had suggested in recent days that an agreement was near, but the absence of any announcement after a two-hour Situation Room meeting on Friday was the latest conflicting signal from Washington over the prospects for a deal with Tehran.

The fragile ceasefire has largely held, even as a person with direct knowledge of the attack said an Iranian missile caused minor injuries on a U.S. base and the U.S. military separately said it disabled a ship headed for an Iranian port.

Trump will only make a deal that satisfies his red lines, a White House official said Friday on condition of anonymity, referring to the president's demands that Iran must abandon

its nuclear program, give up its enriched uranium supplies and open the Strait of Hormuz.

The back-and-forth continued a pattern of both sides suggesting an agreement was near, before signaling disagreement over many of those same sticking points.

On Saturday, Iranian state TV reported the existence of a new draft agreement, which it said gives the Islamic Republic "exclusive authority to determine the nature of transiting vessels" in the strait, a negotiating point the U.S. is unlikely to accept.

Trump once said Iran and the U.S. could manage its traffic in a joint venture. Last week, the U.S. leader said emphatically no one country would control the strait but that the U.S. would "watch over" it.

The draft also said the U.S. has committed to giving Iran access to \$12 billion in frozen funds within 60 days, to be sent directly to Iranian banks without restrictions, according to

Iranian TV, which added that the document was "unofficial" and not "finalized."

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the report.

Markets have been whipsawed by the abrupt turns in rhetoric, but hopes of a ceasefire extension helped drive stocks toward a historic streak of weekly gains by week's end, even as sporadic attacks occurred.

An Iranian ballistic missile strike on a Kuwaiti air base within the past 24 hours caused minor injuries to several Americans and seriously damaged two MQ-9 Reaper strike drones, according to a person with direct knowledge of the attack, who requested anonymity to describe details that aren't public. The missile was intercepted but falling debris hurt about five people, including contractors and active-duty personnel, the person said. One Reaper was destroyed and at least one other

was damaged. The drones cost about \$30 million each.

U.S. Central Command didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Navy blockade policing the strait disabled a Gambia-flagged vessel heading to an Iranian port on Friday, the U.S. military announced on Saturday. A U.S. aircraft disabled the vessel by firing a Hellfire missile into the engine room after the crew ignored more than 20 warnings, CENTCOM said in a statement.

U.S. officials on Thursday confirmed that negotiators had reached a memorandum of understanding to extend the ceasefire by 60 days and launch further talks on the nuclear issue, pending Trump's approval.

Yet hours after that confirmation, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent declined to acknowledge a tentative deal, and Vice President JD Vance told reporters the sides were "going back and forth on a couple of language points."

Hegseth praises US ties with China and Asia allies

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON— U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth praised defense allies in Asia and hailed newly stable ties with China, while taking swipes at longstanding security partners in Europe.

The comments, made Saturday at an Asia security forum in Singapore, are the latest sign of the Trump administration shifting attention toward the Indo-Pacific while expressing antagonism toward Europe and the NATO alliance.

Hegseth singled out allies such as South Korea, Japan and the Philippines for "stepping

up" on defense while lambasting European nations that "threw open their borders and hollowed out their militaries."

He also highlighted the importance of the "interpersonal diplomacy" between President Donald Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping after their meeting earlier this month in Beijing. Notably he made no mention in his prepared remarks of Taiwan, the key flashpoint between the two superpowers.

"The default Asian lens on America has been clearer and far more pragmatic than in other regions," he said at the Shangri-

La Dialogue. "Our partners in Asia have long understood that the bedrock of a durable partnership is not based on idealistic values, but on the concrete alignment of national interest."

Taiwan is top among several friction points between the U.S. and China, with American arms sales and diplomatic support for the island generating angry responses from Beijing. Xi warned Trump during the Beijing meeting that mishandling the issue could lead to clashes, and the U.S. leader has delayed approving a \$14 billion weapons package to Taiwan, which is heavy on air defenses.

Hegseth's failure to mention Taiwan in his address marked the first such omission by a Pentagon chief at the Singapore forum in at least a decade. The self-ruled island, which the Chinese Communist Party claims as its own despite never having ruled it, remains the primary red line in the U.S.-China relationship.

Last year, Hegseth mentioned Taiwan at least five times during his address to the forum. His predecessor Lloyd J. Austin III name-checked the global chip hub once the year before, and five times in 2023, according to the official transcripts.

House bill adds hurdle to ‘Golden Fleet’

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

Concerns over the technical feasibility of the proposed Trump-class battleship are prompting lawmakers to put the brakes on construction of the warship as part of the Navy’s planned “Golden Fleet.”

The House Armed Services Committee’s draft defense policy bill authorizes \$1 billion in advance procurement funding for the battleship but bars construction until the Navy can prove it has the technology to build it.

A provision in the bill directs the Navy secretary to certify to Congress that the battleship’s planned weapons systems are at a “sufficiently mature technology readiness level” before signing a construction contract.

The committee is scheduled to debate and amend the annual must-pass legislation, which sets spending levels and policy prior-

ities for the Pentagon, this week.

The added hurdle on the construction of the Trump-class battleship, envisioned as a nuclear-powered guided-missile warship, comes after lawmakers raised questions about its complexity, timeline and cost.

Rep. Joe Courtney of Connecticut, the top Democrat on the committee’s seapower and projection forces subpanel, said in May that he was alarmed by the speed with which the Navy was moving forward with the battleship.

“We’re going from basically a poster board in December to \$1 billion requested this year, \$17 billion the following year,” he said. “Before you start cutting steel, you’ve got to make sure your design piece is done, or pretty darn close to done.”

Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware, the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee’s de-

fense subpanel, echoed those worries at a recent hearing, telling Navy officials they’re racing ahead without a design and with multiple unproven technologies.

“I am profoundly concerned that this is a \$50 billion boondoggle, where the delivery timeline is a political timeline, not a practical timeline,” he said.

President Donald Trump announced plans for the Trump-class warship in late December, saying it will revive the American shipbuilding industry, “inspire fear” in adversaries and anchor a new Navy Golden Fleet of surface combatants, auxiliary ships and unmanned vessels.

“They’ll be the fastest, the biggest, and by far 100 times more powerful than any battleship ever built,” Trump said alongside renderings of the proposed ship.

The first three Trump-class battleships are expected to cost \$43.5 billion, with the lead ship

projected to exceed \$17 billion. The Navy plans to award the contract for the lead ship, the USS Defiant, in 2028 for delivery in 2036.

As envisioned, the battleship will be armed with hypersonic missiles and an electromagnetic rail gun — two weapons that the Navy has yet to field. It will also carry conventional 5-inch guns and a range of lasers and smaller guns.

Navy leaders have defended the ship in recent congressional hearings, arguing the service needs a larger ship to accommodate more capability.

But some lawmakers remain unconvinced.

They say the costly battleship contradicts prevailing naval doctrine, which favors a dispersed fleet of manned and unmanned platforms over hulking surface combatants that are vulnerable to attack.

Navy could use unusual means to quickly boost firepower

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

The Navy’s ability to help defeat Chinese forces in a potential confrontation over Taiwan could improve if hundreds of missile launchers were added to dozens of existing and retired vessels, according to a recent study.

That unique remedy could offer the Navy a worthwhile patch for bolstering ship and missile launcher numbers while the service works to increase the size of its fleet and strengthen lethality over the coming years, the Congressional Budget Office said in a report published in May.

China’s naval power is steadily increasing and Beijing has indicated it is amassing the military power needed to invade and occupy Taiwan, which relies on U.S. military support and security commitments.

“To do that, the Navy needs to increase the fleet’s ability to sink more enemy ships at long ranges and destroy more targets on land, either by adding ships that carry offensive weapons or by putting more offensive weapons on existing ships,” the CBO said in the May 20 report, *Increasing the Size and Missile Capability of the Navy’s Fleet Within the Next Five Years*.

The report proposed three ways to grow the number of missile-carrying Navy ships by as many as 69 vessels and add as many as 640 missile launchers to the service’s inventory.

Those options include arming existing ships, such as amphibious and logistics vessels, that don’t normally carry missiles. Under such a proposal, the Navy would also reactivate other ships, such as littoral combat ships, and

arm them.

Other alternatives studied in the report include buying used merchant ships or used surface drones and equipping them with missile launchers.

Costs for each of the three options range from \$1.5 billion to \$4.3 billion over the next five years, according to the report.

“Other options, such as building more ships, even in foreign shipyards, would probably not bring additional capability to the fleet within five years,” the CBO said.

The CBO did not make a recommendation, but the Navy could choose to use any, all or none of the options.

The Navy is working to bolster its capabilities, with a renewed focus on shipbuilding and harnessing emerging technologies.

That effort includes the initia-

tive called “Golden Fleet,” which aims to preserve the Navy’s existing platforms while rapidly expanding its force of surface combatants, auxiliary ships and unmanned vessels.

But it will be years in the making. For example, the fleet will slightly decline in size before adding about eight vessels by 2031. The Navy won’t reach its projected battle force size of 398 ships until 2056, according to its shipbuilding plan released earlier in May.

Meanwhile, the service also is working to spread sensors and firepower across a larger number of ships and other platforms while ensuring they can still operate together as a coordinated force.

That work comes as the U.S. prepares for a possible Chinese invasion of Taiwan in the coming years.

Bondi testifies about handling of Epstein files

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — Former Attorney General Pam Bondi rebuffed questions about President Donald Trump’s involvement in the Justice Department’s handling of files from its investigation of accused sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein, Democratic lawmakers said.

“She refused to answer any questions about President Trump,” Rep. Robert Garcia, the top-ranking Democrat on the House panel investigating Epstein, told reporters Friday.

Bondi also pushed any blame for missteps with Epstein-related documents onto Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche,

formerly deputy attorney general, Garcia said.

He added that Democrats would seek to subpoena Blanche to testify before the panel.

Harmeet Dhillon, who heads the Justice Department’s civil rights division and acted as Bondi’s attorney at the deposition, said delegating such a responsibility “is common, and it was a very senior official, the number-two person.”

Blanche was Trump’s personal attorney before he was appointed to the post.

Democrats and some Republicans have criticized the Justice Department for being slow

to comply with a law forcing release of files and withholding information.

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 ahead of Bondi’s testimony. “I want every document.

I don’t want anything held back.”

Bondi, after initially resisting a congressional subpoena, met privately with the committee on Friday morning, ignoring reporters’ questions on her way in and out of the hearing room.

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

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.

Judge: Remove Trump’s name from Kennedy Center

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — A Washington federal judge blocked the Kennedy Center board from closing the performing arts venue and ordered President Donald Trump’s name to be removed from the building.

The board of trustees for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts may not, for now, continue with its plans to shutter the center for two years, as it voted to do in March, Judge Christopher “Casey” Cooper of

the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia held Friday.

The judge also barred the center from displaying signage indicating it “is named for any person other than President John F. Kennedy.”

Cooper ordered it to remove the current lettering referring to the building as the “The Donald J. Trump And John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts” within 14 days. The Kennedy Center also may not dis-

tribute any official materials with Trump’s or other names, the judge held.

The decision is a setback to Trump’s efforts to reshape Washington aesthetically. Other legal challenges also target the president’s efforts to construct a new ballroom on the site of the White House’s demolished East Wing, paint the granite exterior of the 19th-century Eisenhower Executive Office Building, change the color of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting

Pool and build a 250-foot triumphal arch.

“Unfortunately, Judge Cooper and the Radical Left would rather see it DIE than have President Trump transform it into something that everyone could be proud of,” Trump posted Friday on Truth Social.

He added that he would work with Congress to transfer the Kennedy Center to its control, “giving them the responsibility for its Operation, Maintenance, and Management.”

Louisiana passes map erasing 1 Black-majority district

Bloomberg News

Louisiana’s Republican legislature gave final approval to a new congressional map that eliminates one of the state’s two Black-majority districts and would likely lead to a one-seat GOP pickup in the November election if upheld in court.

The modified map the state House passed 66-36 Thursday, and the Senate cleared 28-10 Friday, dismantles Louisiana’s 6th District, which winds 250 miles from Shreveport to Baton

Rouge and elected Black Democrat Cleo Fields in the 2024 election.

The U.S. Supreme Court last month invalidated the district as an unconstitutional racial gerrymander in a major ruling that significantly limited the use of race as a factor in creating voting districts.

The changes convert the 6th District into a white-majority Republican stronghold.

The proposal also preserved four safe Republican districts

held by Speaker Mike Johnson, Majority Leader Steve Scalise, Rep. Clay Higgins and Rep. Julia Letlow, who’s leaving open the northeastern 5th District to run for the Senate.

“The map complies with traditional redistricting principles and also maximizes partisan advantage,” Republican state Rep. Beau Beaulieu, the House and Governmental Affairs Committee chair who sponsored the map changes, said during House floor debate

Thursday.

Democratic legislators pressed without success for two Democratic-leaning districts out of six total in a state that favored President Donald Trump by 60% to 38% in the 2024 election.

They said the Republican map concentrated even more Democrats and Black voters in Rep. Troy Carter’s 2nd District, a Black-majority area that, as modified, would run from New Orleans to Baton Rouge.

Russia: Ukrainian drone hit nuclear site

Bloomberg News

Ukraine and Russia traded aerial attacks on Saturday as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy held what he called a special meeting on next steps with top aides.

Russia reported that a Ukrainian drone struck a machine building of one of power units at the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southeastern Ukraine on Saturday afternoon. Interfax reported, citing Rosatom Chief Executive Officer Alexey Likhachev, that core equipment wasn't damaged.

However, Ukraine's southern military command denied any strikes, saying its military personnel "act exclusively within

the framework of international humanitarian law and are aware of the consequences of any actions against nuclear facilities." In a post on Facebook late Saturday, it added, "It is the Russian Federation that has illegally kept the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant under military control since March 2022, turning a civilian nuclear facility into an element of military infrastructure."

On Friday, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN's nuclear watchdog, said the Zaporizhzhia plant temporarily lost all off-site power for the 16th time since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. No cause was immediately identified. The plant's six reactors are in a state

of "cold shutdown" and last produced electricity in 2022.

Earlier, a Ukrainian UAV strike on Russia's Taganrog port caused a fire on a tanker, a fuel-storage tank and an administrative building, the regional governor said in a post on his Telegram channel on Saturday. No casualties or fuel leaks were reported, Yury Slyusar, governor of Rostov region, said on Telegram. The fire has been extinguished.

Robert Brovdi, Ukraine's commander of unmanned forces, confirmed the strike, and added that drones had destroyed two Tu-142 aircraft and an Iskander ballistic missile launcher at the Taganrog military air base. He also said that

an oil terminal in Feodosiya on the Crimea peninsula was hit.

Taganrog is located in southern Russia, on the northern shore of the Sea of Azov. The city also came under attack on May 27.

A fire broke at an oil depot in Armavir in Russia's southern Krasnodar region, sparked by falling drone debris in a strike confirmed by Zelenskyy. The blaze was being extinguished and no casualties were reported, according to a Telegram post of the region's authorities.

Separately, Ukraine came under attack from Russian drones and missiles. Its air defense unit said it shot down five out of seven missiles and 279 out of 290 drones fired overnight.

Trump floats rally after acts abandon initial 250th event

Bloomberg News

President Donald Trump responded to a wave of cancellations by artists who were scheduled to perform in Washington for the nation's 250th birthday by proposing himself as a better alternative.

"I am thinking about bringing the Number One Attraction anywhere in the World," Trump wrote in a social media post Saturday. The president said he would "take the place of these highly paid, Third Rate 'Artists,' and give a major speech, rallying the Country forward like I have done ever since being President!"

At least five of the nine performers pulled out of the shows on the National Mall last week shortly after they were announced, saying the event beginning June 25 was more political than they had been led to believe. Freedom 250, which is organizing the events, is a group described by Trump as a public-private nonprofit that also organized an overtly Christian

prayer meeting on May 17 that included a video from Trump.

Freedom 250 announced a few hours after Trump's post that he would indeed kick off the event on Wednesday, June 24, in an "opening ceremony," saying the president was the "visionary" behind the event. A spokesperson, Danielle Alvarez, described the event as a "World's Fair" that celebrates America through musical performances, exhibits, flyovers and other activities.

In his post, Trump said artists "are getting 'the yips' having to do with their performance on Wednesday" — though none of the performances were scheduled for Wednesdays.

"So, by copy of this TRUTH, I am ordering my Representatives to look at the feasibility of doing an AMERICA IS BACK Rally on Wednesday, Washington, D.C., same time, same location," he wrote.

The White House didn't comment further on Trump's social post.

Hantavirus quarantine to end for some passengers

Bloomberg News

Some U.S. passengers exposed to hantavirus aboard the MV Hondius cruise ship will be released from isolation this week, including two New Yorkers, as others extend their quarantine period beyond the original May 31 completion date, state public health officials said.

The U.S. has been monitoring 18 Americans at the University of Nebraska Medical Center's National Quarantine Unit in Omaha for hantavirus symptoms, including a retired doctor who initially tested positive for the virus but was later cleared.

The New York State Department of Health said two people at the facility are expected to leave this week, while another will remain in Nebraska until the full incubation period concludes on June 22. Those returning will be transported via non-commercial flights to residences outside of New York City, where they will have no contact with outsiders and will participate in daily monitoring

efforts until the quarantine is completed, the health department said in a statement.

Details about the remaining passengers haven't been released. When asked about the plans, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said it continues to work with passengers, state and local health departments during the 42-day monitoring period, without providing other details.

The Hondius began its evacuation of passengers in Spain's Canary Islands on May 10. The following day, U.S. passengers were brought to rooms at the National Quarantine Unit for monitoring.

U.S. officials wavered on whether this quarantine period was voluntary. In early May, Jay Bhattacharya, acting director of the CDC, said that most of these passengers would be given the choice to stay in Nebraska for assessment or return to their communities to quarantine "if their home situation allows it."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Waymo launches services with cheaper robotaxis

CA LOS ANGELES — Waymo is rolling out a new driverless taxi to help the company expand into more cities and tackle tougher driving conditions, including snowy roads, the company announced Wednesday.

The new vehicle, dubbed the Ojai, will begin serving select customers in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Phoenix in the coming weeks. Rides will be free of charge as the company gathers feedback.

The Ojai has sliding doors and offers riders more legroom, three screens and accessibility features such as Braille. The minivan-like taxi can carry four passengers and also has more cargo space than its current vehicles.

Waymo is launching around 100 Ojai vehicles and plans to ramp up production to supplement its fleet of Jaguar I-Pace taxis, which operate in more than 10 cities.

County expands cursive instruction in classrooms

MD BALTIMORE — Baltimore County Public Schools will bring cursive writing back to all second- and third-grade classrooms next school year following a pilot program launched this fall, Superintendent Myriam Rogers announced Wednesday.

Rogers said the rollout will not require new spending because the cursive materials are already included in the elementary English Language Arts curriculum from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's Into Reading program.

Rogers cited benefits of cursive like fine motor skill development, greater literacy and writing skills and the ability to read historical documents.

Moose attacks person walking dog in mountains

CO WINTER PARK — A moose charged a person walking dogs near Winter Park on Sunday, sending them to the hospital with serious injuries, according to Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

The unidentified person was walking two dogs on Little Vasquez Road — a nearly 10-mile hike that climbs the mountain behind the Winter Park ski resort — when a moose and her yearling appeared, according to a news release from Colorado Parks and Wildlife. A yearling is a moose between 12 and 24 months old.

The moose charged and kicked the victim several times before turning to attack the two dogs, which the victim released to allow them to run away, state wildlife officials said. Paramedics took the victim to the hospital with serious injuries to the chest and arms.

Wildlife officers returned to the area, but were unable to find the moose, according to the news release. Signs were posted at the trailhead to alert visitors to moose activity in the area.

Mpox cases up as Boston officials push vaccine

MA BOSTON — Yet another virus has caught the attention of public health officials in Boston, as mpox — formerly called monkeypox — cases jump in the city.

The Boston Public Health Commission and Massachu-

setts Department of Public Health are monitoring an uptick in mpox in the Hub, while officials urge at-risk people to get vaccinated.

There's no widespread public health threat from mpox at this time, officials stressed, but at-risk residents are encouraged to protect themselves and their communities by getting vaccinated.

At-risk individuals include gay and bisexual men, and other men who have sex with men.

The mpox vaccine is two doses given 28 days apart. It's extremely effective in preventing severe illness from mpox, and is the best tool to stop the spread of the disease.

Pandemic party mom gets maximum prison sentence

CA SAN JOSE — The former Los Gatos, Calif., woman known as the mastermind of notorious pandemic-era teen parties that pushed binge drinking and intoxicated sex on her teen son's friends was sentenced Thursday to 35 years and 10 months in prison.

At her sentencing hearing, Shannon O'Connor, 52, spoke for 20 minutes, meandering between contrition and turning attention to the effect on her and her family, and restating her denial of having any sexual fascination with the children. Her remarks were met with groans, loud exhaling and other audible exasperation from a court gallery filled with victims and their families.

In handing down the term, Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge Elizabeth Peterson said: "This sentence is intended to reflect the profound deprav-

ity of Ms. O'Connor's conduct and the lasting harm she has perpetrated on the families."

The trial of O'Connor ended in March with her conviction on 16 felonies covering child endangerment, sexual assault and witness dissuasion. That was joined by 31 misdemeanor convictions related to her efforts to keep her teen son and his friends and romantic interests readily supplied with alcohol at secret parties at her Los Gatos house and at locales like Lake Tahoe and Santa Cruz.

Rep. Frederica Wilson announces retirement

FL MIAMI — Rep. Frederica Wilson will not seek reelection this year, bringing to a close a decadeslong career in Florida politics and decreasing the number of colorful cowboy hats worn on Capitol Hill.

With her decision not to run for a ninth term, which she announced Friday at a ceremony in Miami Gardens to rename a street in her honor, Wilson joins around a dozen other Democrats over the age of 70 retiring from the House.

"This has been a journey, but it's time," Wilson said. "I know all of you are wondering, 'What is the congresswoman going to do?' Well, the congresswoman is going to not seek another term."

Wilson also said she plans to travel the country seeking to expand her signature project, the 5,000 Role Models of Excellence Project, which she started while serving on the Miami-Dade County School Board to urge men in the community to mentor at-risk youth.

— From wire reports



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Spurs defeat Thunder to reach Finals

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — The last time the New York Knicks made the NBA Finals, the San Antonio Spurs were the opponent and just happened to have a generational big man talent who was heading to the title round for the first time.

Déjà vu.

Back then for San Antonio, it was Tim Duncan. This time for the Spurs, it's Victor Wembanyama. Here they go again: San Antonio vs. New York is the matchup for the 2026 NBA Finals, a Spurs team looking to return to basketball's mountaintop for the sixth time and a Knicks team looking for its first championship in 53

years.

Game 1 is Wednesday in San Antonio.

It's an appealing matchup for so many reasons — among them, it's a rematch of this season's NBA Cup championship game won by New York. It has appeal of a global capital like New York City, it has the international element with a French superstar like Wembanyama and it extends an era of parity the likes of which the league has never before seen.

No matter who wins this series, it'll be the eighth different franchise to win a title in the last eight seasons — extending the longest such stretch in NBA history. To-

ronto won in 2019, followed by the Los Angeles Lakers in 2020, then Milwaukee in 2021, Golden State in 2022, Denver in 2023, Boston in 2024, and Oklahoma City last year.

San Antonio's win in Oklahoma City on Saturday night extended another part of the parity puzzle, that being no defending champion has even gotten back to the NBA Finals since the Warriors won in 2018 and returned in 2019.

New York is trying to do something not done since the days of Willis Reed, Walt Frazier, Dave DeBusschere, Bill Bradley, Earl Monroe and Phil Jackson — that being, win it all.

They're the talk of the town right now, after earning their first finals trip since 1999. The mood was quite different a month ago, when the Knicks trailed Atlanta 2-1 after back-to-back one-point losses in Games 2 and 3 of their first-round series.

New York is 11-0 since, winning almost all those games by blowout. And if the team didn't hear the negative noise from Round 1, it can't hear all the effusive praise coming now, Knicks guard Jalen Brunson said.

"When there's negative things being said about you, it's important to ignore them," Brunson said.

Hurricanes core savors breakthrough to Stanley Cup Final

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — The on-ice celebration was underway for the Carolina Hurricanes after securing their first trip to the Stanley Cup Final in two decades. Rod Brind'Amour hugged and congratulated his players, all while reminding them there was another series ahead.

Then came veteran forward Jordan Martinook.

"All right, Marty, you got us here," Brind'Amour told him.

"One more," Martinook replied, on cue. "Yep, one more."

It took eight seasons under Brind'Amour to punch through an Eastern Conference Final roadblock by closing out the Montreal Canadiens in five games Friday night. So this moment was one to savor particularly for five players — Martinook, captain Jordan Staal, forwards Sebastian Aho and Andrei Svechnikov, and defenseman Jaccob Slavin — who have been here through the pain of three previous exits in this round going back to 2019 in Brind'Amour's debut as head coach.

"It's hard to really describe," Staal said as he sat at his locker. "It's been a lot of grinding, a lot of ups and downs. ... I'm just so happy to be where we're at and just excited for the opportunity ahead."

Assembling a core

Carolina's rise began with Brind'Amour being elevated to head coach in 2018 after seven seasons as an assistant. At the time,

the Hurricanes were mired in a nine-year playoff drought.

They haven't missed the postseason since. And the quintet has been there throughout that Brind'Amour-led climb:

■ The Hurricanes acquired Staal from Pittsburgh during the 2012 NHL Entry Draft. He won the Cup with the Penguins in 2009, but had toiled through six of Carolina's postseason-less seasons.

■ Slavin was a 2012 fourth-round pick who had played three seasons with Carolina before becoming one of the NHL's best defense-first blue liners.

■ Aho was a 2015 second-round pick and had played two seasons with Carolina on his way to developing into the Hurricanes' top-line center.

■ The Hurricanes acquired Martinook from Arizona days after Brind'Amour took over, adding a player who would join Staal on a strong checking line.

■ And the Hurricanes drafted Svechnikov with the No. 2 overall pick a month after Brind'Amour's promotion, with Svechnikov now a physical fixture on Aho's wing.

'Scar tissue'

The Hurricanes returned to the Eastern Conference Final again in 2023, this time with home-ice advantage against the Florida Panthers. But they were swept again by four one-goal margins, including a four-overtime epic in Game 1.

Then last year, the Hurricanes returned for a rematch that quickly went awry. They

lost Games 1 and 2 in a performance that frustrated a normally rowdy and exuberant home crowd, fell into an 0-3 series hole and exited in five games. That dropped Carolina to 1-12 in that round under Brind'Amour, unable to turn years of consistent regular-season success into a breakthrough playoff moment. It's all part of "scar tissue" Martinook mentioned Friday night, shared by the quintet with Brind'Amour as well as holdovers like assistant coach Jeff Daniels and longtime video coach Chris Huffine.

Scaling the obstacle

That was never more on display than against Montreal.

The Hurricanes swept Ottawa and Philadelphia in the first two rounds, securing an 11-day between-rounds break. They emerged with a horrid start against the Canadiens, who pounced for four first-period goals in a 6-2 win that harkened back to past conference-final troubles.

Instead of stumbling, the playoff-tested Hurricanes ascended. Nikolaj Ehlers gave them a 3-2 overtime win in Game 2. They won Game 3 by the same OT score on Svechnikov's road winner, with Aho screening Jakub Dobeš at the top of the crease. And they got to their smothering game Staal likened to a "machine" from there, winning 4-0 on the road before Friday's 6-1 home win.

Now comes a date with Vegas for the Cup, a rare new experience for Carolina's holdovers in this long run.

Kostyuk stuns Swiatek at French Open

Associated Press

PARIS — There will be a first-time women's champion at the French Open this year, and two Ukrainian players are among the strongest contenders.

Undefeated this season on clay, 15th-seeded Marta Kostyuk showed her strong credentials as she reached the quarterfinals in Paris for the first time on Sunday by taking out four-time champion Iga Swiatek 7-5, 6-1 and ruining her birthday.

She will be up against her compatriot Elina Svitolina next, ensuring there will be an Ukrainian woman semifinalist at Roland Garros for the first time in the professional era (1968). The seventh-seeded Svitolina rallied past Belinda Bencic 4-6, 6-4, 6-0.

"There's going to be Ukraine in the semifinals, so it's already amazing," said Svitolina, whose country is in a 4-year-old war with Russia.

"I think it couldn't be a better, amazing achievement for Ukrainian tennis. I think in such a difficult situation right now in the war, with the invasion, it's really, really difficult, and I think it's

really inspiring for the next generation to really believe that it is possible one day to play on this court and win."

None of the players still in the draw have yet lifted the trophy in Paris, following Coco Gauff's elimination on Saturday and Swiatek's exit. It's the same in the men's draw, after the defeats of Jannik Sinner and Novak Djokovic and with Carlos Alcaraz absent because of an injury.

In men's play, Spanish teenager Rafael Jodar moved into his first Grand Slam quarterfinal after coming back from two sets down to beat Pablo Carreno Busta 4-6, 4-6, 6-1, 6-2, 6-2. Jodar, who also played five sets in the previous round, will play either Alexander Zverev or Jesper de Jong in the last eight.

Kostyuk had lost her three previous matches against Swiatek and never taken a set against the former top-ranked player, who turned 25 on Sunday.

"I'm still in shock. To beat such an unbelievable player, who won four times here," she said.

Kostyuk has been the best

player of the clay-court season. She defended extremely well, chasing Swiatek's shots all over the court, and also produced some stunning groundstroke winners while her rival was also undone by her own mistakes.

An intense baseline battle unfolded from the outset. Swiatek showed signs of nerves as she double-faulted, shanked a forehand wide and then missed a volley at the net, allowing Kostyuk to level at 5-5 in the opener. Swiatek hit two more double faults in the 12th game and the 15th-seeded Ukrainian player sealed the set with a backhand passing shot.

Swiatek then briefly left the court. Meanwhile, Kostyuk kept herself warm by stretching and hopping beside her chair, then received some applause as she did a few dance moves to the music playing in the stadium.

Following a first week marked by a suffocating heatwave, relief finally arrived in Paris on Sunday, with temperatures dropping to 70 Fahrenheit around midday. When play resumed, Swiatek broke but another double fault coupled with more un-

forced errors brought her opponent back at 1-1. Kostyuk then won the last five games.

Kostyuk, who had reached the fourth round at Roland Garros in 2021 when she lost to Swiatek, extended her winning streak on clay to 16 matches. Ahead of the French Open, she won in Madrid, the biggest title of her career, after she claimed another clay-court title in Rouen, France.

"The most important thing that I've been doing this whole time is really just trying to enjoy," she said. "It's helping. I want to keep enjoying. I try not to focus at all on winning or losing because I'm not playing tennis to win, I'm playing tennis because I love it."

Romanian veteran Sorana Cirstea, who is planning to retire at the end of the season, beat Chinese qualifier Wang Xiyu 6-3, 7-6 (4) to reach her second Roland Garros quarterfinal, 17 years after first making it to the last eight.

The gap between Cirstea's first and second Grand Slam quarterfinal appearances in Paris is the longest at a single major by any woman in the Open Era.

Ream named captain of US team ahead of World Cup

Associated Press

FAYETTEVILLE, Ga. — Tim Ream was surprised, his voice filled with emotion.

On the verge of becoming the oldest U.S. player to appear in a World Cup, the 38-year-old defender was picked by coach Mauricio Pochettino to captain the Americans next month.

"Wow," Ream said during a news conference Saturday, seated alongside Pochettino. "This is more than a dream come true. I've done everything possible to be a part of this group, to help this group along. I'm just really, really grateful to be sitting here, to have this honor."

Ream was not aware he was going to be appointed captain

until Pochettino made the announcement during a news conference on an indoor field at the new U.S. National Soccer Training Center.

"It's the highest honor for me in this group," he said, his voice echoing in the gym-like room. "I'm not going to take that for granted."

A St. Louis native who plays for Charlotte in Major League Soccer, Ream will be 38 years, 250 days on the day the U.S. plays its opener against Paraguay on June 12, older than defender Fernando Clavijo when the U.S. was knocked out by Brazil in 1994. Clavijo was 37 years, 162 days or 38 years, 162 days — his birthdate was listed at Jan.

23, 1957, when he played and Jan. 23, 1956, at the time of his death in 2019.

Ream started all four games for the U.S. at the 2022 World Cup, when Tyler Adams at 23 was the youngest captain among the 32 nations and the youngest for the U.S. since 1950.

Adams said Thursday that he didn't care whether he would return as captain.

"It's a privilege and honor, anyone that gets to wear the armband," he said. "What I represent and how I lead, I think anybody that plays with me knows that I'm a leader. That's just how I've been my entire career whether I'm wearing the armband or not."

Ream has 80 international appearances, second on the team only to Christian Pulisic's 84, and has captained the U.S. in 17 of 24 games since Pochettino took over in October 2024.

"A great captain, not only on the field, maybe more important off the field," Pochettino said. "He has the experience, he has a capacity to be the leader that we want, the positive leader."

Ream played college soccer for Saint Louis University, then joined the New York Red Bulls in 2010. He moved to England with Bolton in 2012, then signed with Fulham in 2015 and spent 10 seasons at Craven Cottage. He returned to MLS with Charlotte in 2024.

Orioles walk off Blue Jays on 5-run 9th

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Pete Alonso singled in the winning run with the bases loaded in a five-run ninth inning to give the Baltimore Orioles a 6-5 victory over the Toronto Blue Jays on Saturday.

Baltimore had four hits in the ninth inning after managing only three and hitting into a season-high four double plays in the first eight.

Vladimir Guerrero Jr. had his first four-hit game since Sept. 5 for Toronto, which had its winning streak halted at four. The Blue Jays (29-30) were attempting to move over .500 for the first time since they were 4-3 on April 3.

After Orioles designated hitter Samuel Basallo walked back to the dugout grimacing and holding his left shoulder upon striking out against Jeff Hoffman to open the ninth inning, Coby Mayo was hit by a pitch. He scored on Leody Taveras' triple, and Jackson Holliday followed with a single to right to pull Baltimore to 5-3.

Hoffman (4-4) then gave up a double to Colton Cowser before Taylor Ward worked a four-pitch walk. Gunnar Henderson followed with a walk to force in a run to end Hoffman's outing.

Adley Rutschman then walked against Connor Seabold to tie it, and Alonso singled up the middle against a drawn-in infield to win it.

Braves 5, Reds 2: Ronald Acuña Jr. homered for a third straight game — hitting a pair of solo shots — to lead visiting Atlanta over Cincinnati.

Acuña homered to right-center field off Brady Singer (2-5) to tie it at 2 in the third inning. The 2023 NL MVP capped the scoring with a two-out shot in the ninth off Lyon Richardson. He also stole two bases to help the Braves become the first team to 40 wins.

White Sox 7, Tigers 1: Edgar Quero, Colson Montgomery and Andrew Benintendi each

homered, and host Chicago topped Detroit without injured slugger Munetaka Murakami.

Montgomery and Benintendi doubled, and Quero added a hit and sacrifice fly as the White Sox won their fourth straight and climbed to four games above .500 for the first time since Sept. 20, 2022.

Nationals 9, Padres 4: Luis García Jr.'s two-run single highlighted a six-run seventh inning for host Washington as it rallied to a win over San Diego.

The Nationals hit only two balls out of the infield during their big inning, but they sent 10 men to the plate in a frame that included the first ejection for Padres rookie manager Craig Stammen.

Astros 9, Brewers 2: Christian Walker hit a three-run homer and Jeremy Peña had a home run among his three hits to help host Houston roll to a win over Milwaukee.

Peña's two-run shot made it 3-1 in the second and the Astros added three runs in the fifth to pull away after the Brewers got within 1. Walker's shot to the seats in right field made it 9-2 with two outs in the eighth.

Red Sox 9, Guardians 1: Connor Wong and Jarren Duran drove in three runs apiece, Caleb Durbin had two RBIs and Sonny Gray (6-1) allowed one run in six innings as visiting Boston defeated Cleveland for just its second win in eight games.

The Guardians — who are 2-3 on their six-game homestand — committed a season-high four errors, including one by Jose Ramirez. The All-Star third baseman also accounted for Cleveland's lone run with an RBI double in the first inning.

Rangers 7, Royals 6: Ezequiel Duran hit an opposite field RBI single to cap a three-run ninth inning as host Texas walked off Kansas City.

Joc Pederson hit a home run to start a string of five consec-

utive hits off closer Lucas Erceg (3-3). Josh Jung then singled to shortstop, Brandon Nimmo singled off Erceg's glove, Jake Burger hit an opposite field liner to right to tie the score, before Duran's hit to right.

Mets 6, Marlins 1: Christian Scott (1-0) finally earned his first big league win and batterymate Hayden Senger hit his first career home run as host New York beat Miami.

Scott's afternoon began inauspiciously when he was charged with a pitch clock violation before throwing his first pitch. But the right-hander allowed only one run and struck out a career-high eight while snapping a 15-start winless streak dating back to his debut on May 4, 2024.

Pirates 10, Twins 9: Jake Mangum went 3-for-4 with his first homer of the season and a go-ahead RBI single after Pittsburgh blew a six-run lead then held off visiting Minnesota.

Mangum went deep against Bailey Ober (6-3) in the second inning for the fourth home run of his career. He later tagged Ober with a line drive single in the fifth that scored Konnor Griffin to help Pittsburgh steady itself after the Twins erased an early deficit.

Angels 14, Rays 3: Wade Meckler hit his first grand slam in the majors for the first of visiting Los Angeles' four homers in its victory over Tampa Bay.

Mike Trout hit his 14th homer of the season in the fifth and Jo Adell and Oswald Peraza had back-to-back shots in a seven-run ninth. Trout, the major league walks leader, also walked twice and scored three of the Angels' season-high 14 runs.

Cubs 6, Cardinals 1: Pete Crow-Armstrong had four hits including a homer, Ben Brown allowed three hits in seven innings and visiting Chicago beat St. Louis.

Crow-Armstrong hit his sev-

enth homer of the season in the eighth, also doubled and scored twice, driven in both times by Michael Busch. Nico Hoerner hit an RBI single in the sixth inning, Ian Happ scored on a wild pitch in the eighth and the Cubs finished with 12 hits.

Rockies 8, Giants 3: Jake McCarthy had a two-run homer and two RBIs singles, Kyle Karros also homered and host Colorado had 14 hits in a victory over San Francisco.

Ryan Feltner (2-1) pitched six innings for the Rockies, giving up four hits in his first game back since being placed on the injured list April 24 because of right ulnar nerve inflammation.

Mariners 5, Diamondbacks 1: Luke Raley and Julio Rodríguez homered for the second straight game — two of four solo shots by Seattle in the first three innings — and the host Mariners beat Arizona behind seven shutout innings from Bryan Woo.

Woo (5-3) allowed only two fifth-inning singles while matching his season high with nine strikeouts in a fifth straight victory for Seattle.

Athletics 6, Yankees 4: Shea Langeliers and Nick Kurtz each hit two-run homers to lead the host Athletics to a victory over New York that snapped a four-game losing streak.

J.T. Ginn (3-3) allowed one unearned run in six innings to give the A's their first win by a starting pitcher since May 15 as he silenced the streaking Yankees, who had won five straight, outscoring the opposition by 30 runs.

Phillies 4, Dodgers 3: Edmundo Sosa capped a three-run eighth inning with a two-run home run and visiting Philadelphia rallied to beat Los Angeles, ending its winning streak at six games.

Bryce Harper added an RBI single in the eighth as the Phillies scored all three runs against left-hander Tanner Scott with two outs.