

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Navy fires 1st strike missile in Indo-Pacific

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

Sailors launched a Naval Strike Missile from the deck of the littoral combat ship USS Gabrielle Giffords on Tuesday, the first time such a weapon has been fired in the Indo-Pacific region, according to a Navy statement.

The precision strike weapon “can find and destroy enemy ships at distances up to 100 nautical miles away,” the statement said. It zips over the ocean “at sea-skimming altitude, has terrain-following capability and uses an advanced seeker for precise targeting in challenging conditions.”

In footage of the launch released Wednesday, the missile ignites and flies from the ship. The video shows the launch from three angles as a sailor barks orders in the background.

The launch came the same day China unveiled its supersonic Dongfeng-41 interconti-

mental ballistic missiles capable of carrying 10 nuclear warheads. The missiles appeared in a military parade in Beijing celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party’s rule. Dongfeng means “east wind” in Chinese.

At 9,400 miles, the Dongfeng 41’s range is potentially the longest of any weapon in the world, the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank in Washington told The Associated Press in a Sunday report. From that distance, China could strike the U.S. mainland in about 30 minutes, according to the AP.

The Naval Strike Missile launch was part of exercise Pacific Griffin near Guam with the Singaporean navy. It marked the second time such a missile was launched, but the first time it was fired in the Indo-Pacific region, according to the Navy.

The Navy in its statement said the weapon boosts “survivability against high-end

threats.”

In a 2014 demonstration, the littoral combat ship USS Coronado fired the weapon off the coast of Southern California, “scoring a direct hit on its intended target, a Mobile Ship Target,” said a Navy statement from September 2014.

The Navy awarded Raytheon a contract in 2018 to “manufacture and deliver” the weapons system, developed around the missile designed by Norwegian firm Kongsberg Defence & Aerospace, according to the Raytheon and Kongsberg websites.

The \$14.8 million contract purchased a first round of missiles for littoral combat ships, according to U.S. Naval Institute News in May 2018. The contract value could grow to \$847.6 million with further options, USNI reported.

China was listed as a “strategic competitor” in the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy, and tensions with the country have heightened as China boosts its

military presence in the South China Sea.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday told Stars and Stripes last month he aims to focus on new technologies and on competing with China during his tenure.

“I am interested with a sense of urgency in closing gaps that we have to either keep us in a position of advantage against the Chinese or to close gaps quickly where we can in order to put ourselves in a better position against them,” he said.

The Gabrielle Giffords is on its first deployment and made history when it joined the LCS USS Montgomery in the 7th Fleet on Sept. 16, according to the Navy statement. It is the first time two such ships have been deployed to the Indo-Pacific at the same time.

“LCS packs a punch and gives potential adversaries another reason to stay awake at night,” said Rear Adm. Joey Tynch, commander of Logistics Group Western Pacific.

N. Korea launches missile after announcing nuke talk plans

BY KIM GAMEL
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea fired a ballistic missile that appeared to have been launched from a submarine on Wednesday, South Korean officials said, hours after the communist state announced it has agreed to resume nuclear talks with the United States this weekend.

The missile flew about 280 miles from the waters off its eastern coast near the town of Wonsan and reached an altitude of 565 miles, South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

That would make it the high-

est apogee for a missile tested since the North fired an intercontinental ballistic missile toward Japan in November 2017 amid rising tensions over its nuclear weapons program.

The National Security Council in Seoul held an emergency meeting and said it “placed weight” on the likelihood that the North had “tested an SLBM” though South Korean and U.S. intelligence officials were still analyzing precise details.

The latest launch marked an escalation from the recent short-range, land-based missile tests that President Donald Trump has dismissed as small-scale and therefore not a threat

to diplomacy.

Experts say the communist state is likely trying to project strength ahead of new negotiations to wring concessions from Washington. The weapons tests also show that the North has continued to develop its weapons programs as talks have stalled.

Japan initially said there had been two missiles but later clarified that only one had been launched and likely broke into two pieces that crashed into the sea, according to the Kyodo news agency. Officials said the missile followed a “lofted trajectory,” suggesting it was launched at an angle to reach a high altitude without threaten-

ing populated areas.

“The launch of this type of ballistic missile is a violation of United Nations resolution,” Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told reporters in Tokyo. “Japan strongly protests and condemns the action.”

South Korea “expressed strong concern about Pyongyang’s action” ahead of the resumption of talks and agreed to maintain efforts to keep the diplomatic process on track, according to a national security council statement.

Military officials said the North appeared to have fired a type of Pukguksong missile, a solid-fuel missile that was last fired from the sea in 2016.

USAF's 745-officer 'Godzilla class' was born of necessity

BY JAMES BOLINGER

Stars and Stripes

The largest class in the history of the Air Force Officer Training School — 745 newly commissioned officers — recently pinned on their rank insignia at graduation ceremonies in Montgomery, Ala.

Class No. 19-07 — a group so large that course instructors and leaders referred to it as the “Godzilla class” — started with 800 students, twice the usual number, which required the school to run two training squadrons concurrently. The usual attrition trimmed the class to 745.

Of those who graduated on Friday, 116 attended a shortened five-week course for specialized career fields for qualified, degree-holding candidates like physicians, lawyers and chaplains.

Col. Peter Bailey, the school commandant, said the class size was increased to meet Air Force demands for new officers. OTS is an initial training program for commissioned officers drawn from the enlisted ranks or the civilian world. It's

held at Air University at Maxwell Air Force Base.

“Because of shortfalls in the number of commissioned officers from [the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps] and the Air Force Academy this year, we worked the Air Force manpower directorate and Air Force Recruiting Service to make this happen,” Bailey told Stars and Stripes in an email Friday.

The school made few changes in its day-to-day class routine despite the large number of students, said Capt. Kaitlin Daddona, an instructor and the assistant director of operations for training. The biggest challenge was sharing resources and locations, she said. The instructors also had only one week to prepare for this class instead of the usual two.

Of this class, 287 new officers are headed to aviation-related career fields. Another 287 are headed for jobs in engineering, operations research, intelligence, logistics, maintenance, cyber and space. The remaining 171 graduates are entering professions in the law, medicine or the chaplain corps.

Marines looking into new grenade types

BY MARTIN EGNASH

Stars and Stripes

Several new types of grenades, including one that can be stacked to create a larger explosion, have garnered interest from the Department of the Navy.

The Crane, Ind.-based Naval Surface Warfare Center issued a request for information about the modular grenades last month, along with several other early-stage procurement notices about several flash-bang grenade variants. The Marine Corps has also expressed interest in the stacking grenades.

The notices come as the military looks to expand nonlethal weapons capabilities for a modern battlefield, where troops may encounter more low-intensity conflict scenarios or situations where civilians and enemy combatants are intermixed.

“Lethality is absolutely critical in the modern combat environment that we find ourselves in, but the world's most lethal,

incredible force must also be able to compete in all the other phases of combat,” Marine Col. Wendell B. Leimbach Jr. said at this year's National Defense Industrial Association's Armament Systems Forum in Fredericksburg, Va., the association's magazine reported.

Leimbach, a tank and acquisition officer, is director of the Pentagon's joint nonlethal weapons directorate, based in Quantico, Va., which oversees the development of flash-bang devices and other weapons designed to stun, incapacitate or confuse, rather than kill.

Developed by Norwegian defense company Nammo, which designed the Marine Corps' M72 LAW single-shot rocket launcher, the stackable grenades have been dubbed the Mk 21 Mod 0. They are designed for offensive use, giving a larger shock effect with less fragmentation to protect advancing friendly troops, a description on the company's website says.

Marine veteran finds calling as US rugby team manager

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

Civilian life after a military career can be a challenge.

It wasn't easy for Oscar Alvarez, who went through four jobs before finding his calling as a manager with the U.S. Eagles national rugby team.

Alvarez, 41, of New Braunfels, Texas, and the team are in Japan this month for the Rugby World Cup, which has seen crowds of foreigners and locals alike pack stadiums all over the country.

The trip is a nostalgic one for the former enlisted aviation ordnance Marine and logistics officer who served at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni near Hiroshima for 18 months and

trained on the Japanese island of Okinawa.

Alvarez joined up in 1999 and was part of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 as a member of the Camp Pendleton, Calif.-based Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 39.

He spent 9½ months in the war zone, earned his commission and worked in logistics before leaving the service in 2014. But civilian life wasn't all smooth sailing, he said.

“Some veterans transition easily into civilian life, but some don't,” he said. “I went through four jobs [after leaving the military]. I wasn't happy. Nothing fulfilled me.”

Alvarez' path to a job in rugby began while he was still in uniform. He started playing

the sport at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C., as a back on the base team.

He worked as a liaison to the Argentinian national seven-a-side team, helping link their staff with organizers at the Las Vegas Sevens tournament. Then he did the same job for the U.S. national sevens team before joining the Eagles' staff.

Alvarez is also the manager of Major League Rugby's San Diego Legion, where his background in military logistics comes in handy.

“It's a great job for a veteran,” he said. “I have to get guys from A to B and make sure the players have everything they need.”

The Eagles were based in the city of Yomitan on Oki-

nawa ahead of the World Cup. Members of the Yomitan Beach Boys, a team made up of Marines, soldiers, sailors and airmen stationed on Okinawa, attended a welcome ceremony for the Eagles.

The Eagles had tough losses to heavyweights England and France in their first two games but they're expected to do better against Tonga and challenge Argentina in their pool match in Saitama on Oct. 9.

Alvarez' advice to troops who have never watched rugby is to give it a go.

“Almost all Americans love contact sport. If my brother-in-law, who is a die-hard Minnesota Vikings football fan, can start liking rugby, anybody can,” he said.

Dems accuse Trump of inciting violence

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Accusing President Donald Trump of “an incitement to violence,” House Democratic leaders bluntly warned Trump and his administration Wednesday not to intimidate potential witnesses in their impeachment inquiry. They said they were readying a subpoena demanding documents related to the president’s dealings with Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo acknowledged Wednesday he was on the phone call between Trump and Zelenskyy that is at the center of the impeachment inquiry. He also continued to push back against what he said was Democrats’ “bullying and intimidation.”

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Trump may not “recognize how dangerous his statements are” against a whistleblower who exposed a July phone call that Trump had with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. On the call, Trump pressed for an investigation of Democratic political rival Joe Biden and his family.

House intelligence committee Chairman Adam Schiff, accusing Trump of inviting violence against the whistleblower, said any effort to interfere with the Democrats’ investigations would be considered evidence of obstruction and could be included in articles of impeachment.

“We’re not fooling around here,” he said.

Trump showed no signs of letting up, tweeting a vulgarity during the House leaders’ news conference and saying “the Do Nothing Democrats should be focused on building up our Country.” Throwing criticism broadly, he assailed Schiff as a “low-life” and said Pelosi’s San Francisco has turned into a “tent city” of homeless.

Trump has tweeted in recent days that he wants to “find out about” the whistleblower and question him or her, though the person’s identity is protected by the Whistleblower Protection Act.

The Democrats said they will subpoena the White House on Friday for documents related to Trump’s dealings with Ukraine,

citing “flagrant disregard” of their previous requests for information. House Oversight and Reform Chairman Elijah Cummings wrote in a memo to committee members Wednesday that the action is necessary because the White House has ignored multiple requests.

Given the “stark and urgent warnings” the inspector general for the intelligence community has delivered to Congress, Cummings said, the panel has “no choice but to issue this subpoena.”

The subpoena will be directed toward acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney and request 13 separate batches of documents related to the July call and other related matters. The call unfolded against the backdrop of a \$250 million foreign aid package for Ukraine that was being readied by Congress but stalled by Trump.

White House Press Secretary Stephanie Grisham said the subpoena is “nothing but more document requests, wasted time and taxpayer dollars that will ultimately show the president did nothing wrong.”

Bernie Sanders has heart procedure, cancels events

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Bernie Sanders’ campaign said Wednesday that the Democratic presidential candidate had a heart procedure for a blocked artery and was canceling events and appearances “until further notice.”

Sanders, 78, was in Las Vegas when, according to a campaign statement, he experienced chest discomfort during a campaign event Tuesday and sought medical evaluation. Two stents were “successfully inserted” and that Sanders “is conversing and in good spirits,” according to the campaign.

Sanders’ wife, Jane O’Meara Sanders, was en route to Las Vegas on Wednesday and said in an email to The Associated Press that her husband was “doing really well.”

Tick Segerblom, a Clark County, Nev., commissioner who was at Sanders’ fundraiser Tuesday said Sanders seemed fine at the time. “He spoke well. He jumped up on the stage.

There was just nothing visible,” Segerblom said.

The Democratic field’s oldest candidate, Sanders sometimes jokingly refers to his age at town halls and other events, especially when interacting with younger participants. His aides have tried to project him as a candidate with energy levels that surpassed his 2016 presidential campaign.

He is one of three candidates over age 70 in the Democratic primary, which has spurred debate over whether the party should rally behind a new generation of political leaders. Sanders’ health issue is certain to revive that discussion in the weeks before the next presidential debate this month.

Sanders’ campaign manager, Faiz Shakir, was on a telephone call with supporters Tuesday night but didn’t mention any health concerns about the candidate. Shakir said the “state of the campaign is strong” and he played up Sanders’ strong fundraising total for the third quarter.

President and RNC raise \$125 million in 3 months

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump’s reelection campaign and the Republican National Committee raised \$125 million in the third quarter of the year, a presidential fundraising record.

The pro-Trump effort said Tuesday that it has raised more than \$308 million in 2019 and has more than \$156 million in the bank.

Republicans aim to use the fundraising haul to fight off Democrats’ impeachment effort.

Former President Barack Obama and the DNC raised just over \$70 million in the third quarter of 2011.

“President Trump has built a juggernaut of a campaign, raising record amounts of money at a record pace,” said Trump campaign manager Brad Parscale.

RNC Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel credited Democratic attacks on Trump for motivat-

ing supporters to donate in record numbers.

“We are investing millions on the airwaves and on the ground to hold House Democrats accountable, highlight their obstruction, and take back the House and reelect President Trump in 2020,” she said.

The fundraising announcement comes as the pro-Trump efforts launched their first major advertising campaign of the cycle. Trump’s team aims to devote \$1 billion to his reelection.

Last week, as House Democrats launched their impeachment effort, the Trump campaign announced it would spend \$8 million to air an ad attacking Democrats for trying to “steal” the 2020 campaign.

The RNC said it would spend \$2 million attacking Democrats for their support of impeachment.

Former President Barack Obama and the DNC raised just over \$70 million in the third quarter of 2011.

Death toll rises as protests escalate in Iraq

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — At least four people were killed and dozens were wounded in clashes in Iraq on Wednesday as security forces fired live ammunition and tear gas for the second day to disperse anti-government protesters demanding jobs, improved services and an end to corruption.

The deaths brought the overall number of protesters killed in two days of violence to six. Protests on Tuesday had left two dead — one in Baghdad and another in the city of Nasiriyah — and over 200 wounded.

The renewed clashes occurred despite a massive security dragnet mounted by the government in an effort to quash the economically-driven protests.

Hundreds of heavily armed security

forces and riot police deployed on Baghdad streets, blocking all intersections leading to a major central square Wednesday to prevent a repeat of Tuesday's protests. Parked armored personnel carriers and SUVs stood guard and by mid-afternoon, residents said authorities had shut down social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp.

Iraq has been caught in the middle of U.S.-Iran tensions in the Middle East, putting an additional strain on the weak government in Baghdad that hosts thousands of U.S. troops and powerful paramilitary forces allied with Iran.

The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad called for restraint from all sides. "The right to demonstrate peacefully is a fundamental right

in all democracies, but there is no place for violence in demonstrations from any side," it posted on Twitter.

The protests, organized on social media, started in Tahrir Square on Tuesday, initially driven by economy woes. They began peacefully, calling for an end to corruption, improved basic services and more jobs. But they soon turned violent after security forces fought back demonstrators with water cannons, tear gas and live ammunition.

Protesters responded by calling for toppling the government, throwing stones at security forces and setting tires and trash containers on fire. At least two protesters were killed and more than 200 were wounded.

Hong Kong protesters condemn police tactics

Associated Press

HONG KONG — Hong Kong office workers and schoolmates of a teenage demonstrator shot at close range in the chest by a police officer rallied Wednesday to condemn police tactics and demand accountability.

The shooting Tuesday during widespread anti-government demonstrations on China's National Day was a fearsome escalation in Hong Kong's protest violence. The 18-year-old is the first known victim of police gunfire since the protests began in June. He was hospitalized and his condition was described by the government as

stable on Wednesday.

The officer fired as the teen, Tsang Chi-kin, struck him with a metal rod. The officer's use of lethal weaponry is sure to inflame widespread public anger about police tactics during the crisis, widely condemned as heavy handed.

"The Hong Kong police have gone trigger-happy and nuts," pro-democracy lawmaker Claudia Mo said Wednesday.

After viewing a video of the shooting, Mo said: "The sensible police response should have been to use a police baton or pepper spray, etc., to fight back. It wasn't exactly an extreme situation and the use of a live bullet simply cannot be justified."

Several hundred people, including students, chanted anti-police slogans outside Tsang's school in Tsuen Wan district in northern Hong Kong on Wednesday.

More than 1,000 office workers skipped their lunch to join an impromptu march in the city's business district against the police shooting. Dozens of black-clad protesters also protested at a luxury mall in Kowloon district.

Police have defended the officer's use of force as "reasonable and lawful." Police Commissioner Stephen Lo said late Tuesday that the officer had feared for his life and made "a split-second" decision to fire a single shot at close range.

Bizarre deaths of bulls in Ore. recall 1970s mutilations

Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. — The first dead bull was found in a timbered ravine in eastern Oregon. There was no indication it had been shot, attacked by predators or eaten poisonous plants. The animal's sex organs and tongue had been removed. All the blood was gone.

In the next few days, four more Hereford bulls were found within 1.5 miles in the same condition. There were no tracks around the carcasses. Ranch management and law enforcement suspect that someone killed the bulls. Ranch hands have been advised to travel in pairs and to go armed.

Ever since the bulls were found over several days in July, Harney County Sheriff's Deputy Dan Jenkins has received many

calls and emails from people speculating what, or who, might be responsible.

The theories range from scavengers such as carrion bugs eating the carcasses to people attacking the animals to cause financial harm to ranchers. One person suggested that Jenkins look for craters underneath the carcasses, saying it would be evidence the bulls had been levitated into a spaceship, mutilated, and then dropped back to the ground.

Jenkins, who is leading the investigation that also involves state police, has run into only dead ends, with no witnesses. "If anyone has concrete information or knows of any cases that have been solved in the past, that would definitely be helpful," he said from his office in Burns.

Colby Marshall, vice president of the Silvies Valley Ranch that owned the bulls, has another theory: "We think that this crime is being perpetuated by some sort of a cult," he said.

The case recalls mutilations of livestock across the West and Midwest in the 1970s that struck fear in rural areas. Thousands of cattle and other livestock were found dead with the reproductive organs, and sometimes part of their faces, removed, in territory ranging from Minnesota to New Mexico.

Ranchers began carrying guns. Folks said helicopters had been heard around the kill sites. A federal agency canceled an inventory by helicopter of its lands in Colorado, worried that it would get shot down.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Pony on freeway clipped by hit-and-run driver

CA LONG BEACH — Authorities were searching for a hit-and-run driver who struck a pony that was loose on a Los Angeles-area freeway, leaving the small horse slightly injured.

The California Highway Patrol said a 10-year-old boy had been riding the pony at a home when he fell off and the animal ran away. The CHP said the pony got onto westbound State Route 91 in Long Beach, where it was clipped by a black SUV. The driver sped away.

The horse was evaluated by animal control officers and reunited with its owner.

Charge: Timber thieves started forest fire

WA TACOMA — Federal prosecutors said timber thieves were to blame for a fire in Washington's Olympic National Forest last year.

An indictment unsealed Monday said Justin Wilke and Shawn Williams were trying to steal a big leaf maple tree in August 2018 but it had a bees nest. They burned the nest with gasoline, and then tried unsuccessfully to douse the fire with their water bottles. The tree's wood is prized for making instruments. Nearly 5.2 square miles of public land burned.

Wilke was arrested Monday. The U.S. Attorney's Office said Williams is in custody in California.

Man with 18 DUIs gets prison time for crash

MN HASTINGS — A 60-year-old Minnesota man with 18 drunken-driving convictions will serve 20 months in prison for causing a crash that seriously injured

two people in 2017.

Marshall A. Knoll pleaded guilty to first-degree driving while impaired in exchange for the dismissal of two more-serious charges. Prosecutors said Knoll was driving with a suspended license and was high on illicit drugs.

The Star Tribune reported that Knoll received a three-year prison sentence. With credit for time served, what remains of his sentence is 20 months.

Ferris wheel opens in downtown St. Louis

MO ST. LOUIS — A new and colorful attraction is open in downtown St. Louis — a 200-foot-tall Ferris wheel.

The St. Louis Wheel opened at Union Station, a former train station complex where a new aquarium complex is expected to open in December.

The Ferris wheel lights up with 1.6 million LED lights. It includes 42 climate-controlled gondolas that can hold up to eight people each. Rides last about 15 minutes and cost \$15 for adults and \$10 for children.

Boy, 9, takes wrong turn, wins 10K race

MN SARTELL — It took 9-year-old Kade Lovell longer than expected to finish his 5K race, but only because he was busy accidentally winning a separate 10K race.

Lovell's mother became worried when he didn't cross the finish line of the Francis Franzy Flyer 5K in Sartell on Sept. 21. Kade said a woman told him to keep going when he approached the 5K turn so he did, despite his confusion.

Kade finished in first-place overall. His time of just over 48 minutes was a minute faster than the 40-year-old second-place contestant.

Most of human skeleton found on building's roof

MS BILOXI — Police said most of an adult human skeleton was found on the roof of a building in downtown Biloxi.

Investigators said no foul play is suspected.

Harrison County Deputy Coroner Brian Switzer told WLOX-TV that the bones were found Sept. 19 and are being examined by a forensic anthropologist.

Biloxi Police Maj. Chris De Back said officers have investigated cases of people reported as missing and concluded that none match what they know about the remains.

Cougar captured after escaping zoo enclosure

KS INDEPENDENCE — Officials at a south-east Kansas zoo said a cougar that got out of its enclosure was recaptured.

The cougar got loose Monday morning at Riverside Park and Ralph Mitchell Zoo in Independence. City officials later said the animal was captured and it had not left the zoo.

Officials: Man found with drugs, synthetic urine

IN HARTFORD CITY — A 49-year-old Indiana man on probation faces new drug charges including possession of synthetic urine.

The Star Press reported Kirk Allen Boughman was charged with felony possession of methamphetamine and three misdemeanors.

The Hartford City man was out on probation when authorities conducted a "compliance search" of his apartment at the request of his probation officer.

Officers allege that they

found drugs and synthetic urine, which is used by drug users in attempts to pass court-ordered testing.

Band with no team joins school with no band

MI MAPLE CITY — One northern Michigan school has a football team but no marching band. Another school has a band but no football.

So the schools made a deal — and filled the air with music.

Maple City Glen Lake invited the marching band from Forest Area to play at its home game. Forest Area, near Traverse City, lost its football season a few weeks ago due to a lack of players.

Forest Area musicians were ecstatic to play.

Glen Lake athletic director Mark Mattson said there's nothing like having a band "rocking out with our fans." He said the Forest Area band is always welcome.

Church mulls former strip club for services

FL WELLINGTON — A Florida church that currently meets at a high school is considering buying a former strip club to hold its services.

The Palm Beach Post reported officials at NewSound Church were in negotiations to purchase the Double Dee's Ranch building that was once owned by a man accused of mob ties. It closed late last year.

Pastor Josh Mauney told the Post that the church is looking to expand "whether in this location or another." The church was established in 2018 and meets at Wellington High School.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Nats rally to win NL wild-card game

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — After all the heartache, close calls and early exits, maybe it makes sense that a 20-year-old kid who never had been to the playoffs, Juan Soto, helped the Washington Nationals finally advance.

Maybe, just maybe, it makes sense that this particular edition of the Nationals, a club that went from 12 games under .500 to playoff participant, demonstrated the necessary never-give-up fortitude when things looked bleak.

Soto delivered a bases-loaded single against Milwaukee closer Josh Hader that scored three runs with two outs in the eighth inning, thanks in part to an error by rookie outfielder Trent Grisham, and the Nationals came back to beat the Brewers 4-3 in the NL wild-card game Tuesday night.

"We started off horrible, as we all know, and we vowed that we wouldn't quit," Nationals manager Dave Martinez said, talking about the year as a whole but sounding like he

could have meant this particular evening. "I told the boys, 'I promise you, stay with it, don't quit, this will turn around.' And it did. And here we are today."

The Nationals carry a nine-game winning streak into their best-of-five NL Division Series against the Dodgers, who had the National League's best record at 106-56.

Game 1 is Thursday in Los Angeles, and some in the sellout crowd of 42,993 chanted "Beat LA! Beat LA!" as the Nationals began their celebration on the infield with family members.

That included Soto's father leaping onto his back and tackling him amid the excitement.

The Nationals, who moved to Washington from Montreal before the 2005 season, had been 0-3 in winner-take-all postseason games — all NLDS Game 5 losses at home, by a grand total of four runs. Indeed, eight of their past nine playoff losses had been by one run apiece.

This time, it went the other way.

"We've been here a bunch of times. Never kind of broke

through," said Ryan Zimmerman, the Nationals' first draft pick back in 2005, who has been through all the disappointment. "Finally caught a break tonight."

It was Zimmerman's broken-bat bloop single as a pinch hitter that helped load the bases in the eighth off Hader, who took the loss.

Hader hit another pinch hitter, Michael A. Taylor, a ruling that stood up when the Brewers challenged, according to Major League Baseball, because there wasn't "clear and convincing evidence to overturn the call."

"Definitely looked like it got the bat, but it also got his hand," Hader said.

Hader, who had 37 saves in 44 attempts this season, also walked Anthony Rendon, loading the bases and bringing Soto to the plate.

What was Soto thinking right then?

"Just get a base hit up the middle," he said, "and try to help to tie the game."

The runner-up for 2018 NL Rookie of the Year did more

than that. Soto ripped a 96 mph fastball to right field, and the ball skipped under Grisham's glove for an error. That allowed the go-ahead run to cross the plate and Soto to get to second, then turn for third.

"Right guy, right spot," winning pitcher Stephen Strasburg said about Soto.

Soto was caught in a run-down to end the inning, but that didn't matter: He had turned a 3-1 deficit into a lead, and so he clapped his hands, then pounded his chest and high-fived third base coach Bob Henley, before shouting "Let's go!" and its Spanish equivalent, "Vamonos!"

"The inning was an ugly inning," Brewers manager Craig Counsell said. "Crazy things happen."

Grisham, who has appeared in only 51 games in the majors and took over in right after reigning NL MVP Christian Yelich was lost for the season three weeks ago with a broken kneecap, said the ball "came in with a little topspin, took a funny hop."

Brewers' script got flipped during eighth inning

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Trent Grisham's eyes were still red, his cheeks stained by tears, as a group of Milwaukee Brewers teammates gathered near his locker in the visitors' clubhouse at Nationals Park to offer hugs and words of encouragement.

Everything was going according to plan for manager Craig Counsell and the Brewers — get a lead, mix and match with the bullpen — until, suddenly, it wasn't. Milwaukee was undone by wildness from closer Josh Hader and an error by Grisham in right field that allowed the go-ahead run to score with two outs in the bottom of the eighth inning.

It added up to a gut-punch of a 4-3, season-ending loss to the Washington Nationals in the NL wild-card game Tuesday

night.

"It's going to sting. It's going to sting for a long time. Essentially gifting the Nationals a Divisional (Series) berth," Grisham said. "It's going to hurt. I expect it to hurt."

He is a 22-year-old rookie who debuted Aug. 1 and played in only 51 major league games this season, taking over in right primarily after 2018 NL MVP Christian Yelich went down for the year after fracturing his right kneecap on Sept. 10.

"It's going to be magnified because of the big stage, but he's a huge reason that we're even playing in this game. He has a lot to be proud of in his first taste of the big leagues," Yelich said. "I feel for him. If you play baseball long enough, you're going to be in these situations. You're going to come

up short sometimes. It's part of being a professional athlete. He'll be just fine."

Even without Yelich, Milwaukee managed to surge into the playoffs, winning 18 of 20 games during one stretch and relying on a strong bullpen.

That formula appeared set to work again.

"If you could have told me we'd hand the ball with six outs to go (to) Josh," Counsell said, "that would have fit our script really, really well. It just didn't play."

Milwaukee went to the bottom of the eighth leading 3-1, thanks to homers by Yasmani Grandal and Eric Thames. Starting pitcher Brandon Woodruff tossed four innings, Brent Suter threw one and Drew Pomeranz two.

Then it was time for Hader,

a hard-throwing All-Star lefty who saved 37 games this year. He loaded the bases with two outs, hitting one batter with a pitch, walking another and allowing a broken-bat bloop single.

That brought up Juan Soto, the Nationals' 20-year-old cleanup hitter, who smacked a 96 mph fastball into right. Two runs scored easily on the play — and that would have been it had Grisham fielded the ball cleanly. But he missed it.

That miscue let the go-ahead run score.

"Came in a little off balance," Grisham said. "Kind of took a little funky hop on me."

Soon thereafter, a Brewers team that made it all the way to Game 7 of the NL Championship Series a year ago was done.

Dodgers healing up ahead of NLDS

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Nagging injuries to Justin Turner, Rich Hill and Joe Kelly have improved enough that all three will be available when the Los Angeles Dodgers open the National League Division Series.

Manager Dave Roberts didn't reveal his roster Tuesday for the best-of-five playoff that begins Thursday at Dodger Stadium against the Washington Nationals. And he didn't announce a Game 1 starter, either.

But Roberts confirmed that two talented Dodgers rookies — catcher Will Smith and second baseman Gavin Lux — will be active. The manager also said the team will carry eight relievers.

Los Angeles worked out Tuesday while the NL wild-card game between the Nationals and Milwaukee Brewers played on the stadium videoboards. The Dodgers wrapped up before the Nationals rallied to win 4-3.

The Dodgers took the season series from the Nationals, 4-3. The clubs split four games at Dodger Stadium, and Los Angeles won two of three in Washington.

Roberts said final roster spots were dependent on Turner's status.

"That helps for solidifying the positional players' side," he explained.

Turner took some swings against Tony Gonsolin in a simulated game. The third baseman has started just three

games since Sept. 7. He initially had a sprained left ankle, then a sore back that kept him out of the final five games of the regular season.

"The ankle is healed up, it's just the back," Roberts said. "I feel very confident that he'll be able to perform at his level come Thursday."

Hill was the only starter confirmed by Roberts, and the 39-year-old left-hander will go in Game 4 on the road, if necessary. He would pitch four innings.

Hill has struggled with injuries to his forearm and left knee.

Kelly threw a 20-pitch bullpen session during the workout. The reliever has had an unspecified injury that's limited him to six pitches in the last

two weeks.

"I got the thumbs-up from him," Roberts said. "He'll be ready to go on Thursday in whatever role."

Roberts reaffirmed his confidence in Kenley Jansen as the team's closer.

The 31-year-old right-hander had 33 saves, but his ERA ballooned to a career-worst 3.71 this season.

"The goal is to get outs and he understands that," Roberts said. "I want him to have the ball at the end of the game."

The Dodgers open the playoffs on a seven-game winning streak. Their 106 wins were second only to Houston's 107 in the majors.

"Top to bottom, it's the best team we've had," Roberts said.

Rams hope first week in second place is short week

Associated Press

THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. — The Los Angeles Rams have something unfamiliar above them in the NFC West standings this week.

Another team.

The Rams (3-1) had spent their first 35 regular-season games under coach Sean McVay with at least a share of first place in their division. Los Angeles won its second straight NFC West title last season by going 6-0 against the division, and McVay is 10-2 overall against Seattle, San Francisco and Arizona — 10-1 when he isn't resting his starters.

But the Rams' 55-40 loss to Tampa Bay coupled with the 49ers (3-0) on a bye week put Los Angeles into a tie for second place for the first time. The Rams are in danger of sliding to third when they visit Seattle (3-1) on Thursday night for their first division game of the year.

Sure, it's still very early in the season. And sure, the Rams are off to a strong start regardless of what their divisional opponents have been up to.

But for a team that quickly established a culture of steady excellence and accountability after McVay's arrival, it's not necessarily a bad thing to get a wakeup call before Week 5.

"The biggest thing is to be consistent throughout the season, win, lose or draw," left tackle Andrew Whitworth said. "But an early loss really can enhance the urgency for some guys. That's not the goal, but if that loss helps you do it, that's fine. You always want to have that urgency, but maybe a loss helps."

The Rams' performance against the Buccaneers suggested they have plenty of work to do. The offense produced Jared Goff's four turnovers and a near-invisible running game behind an inconsistent offensive line performance, while the defense got sliced up for 385 yards passing and four touchdowns by Jameis Winston.

A few players acknowledged the Rams lacked a certain urgency that probably shouldn't be already diluted by Week 4, but they're not worried yet about a team that's 27-9 in the

regular season since McVay arrived.

"That's an anomaly," safety Eric Weddle said. "We won't play like that the rest of the year, so I'm not even stressed about what happened."

The Rams opened 8-0 last year in the franchise's best start to a season since 1969. They were 11-1 before they absorbed the first back-to-back losses of McVay's coaching career, but they recovered to win four straight on the way to the Super Bowl.

Los Angeles returned this fall with only a few changes to last season's roster, promoting two new starters on the offensive line and adding veteran defensive players Weddle and Clay Matthews. The Rams' overall continuity hasn't translated into smooth play, but they're confident they've still got time to figure it out.

"Sometimes it's good to get a check of where you are," cornerback Nickell Robey-Coleman said. "When you start so strong like we did last season, some things don't seem as important because you're still winning. This year we got the

reminder real quick."

The Rams had to do plenty of work in the compressed window before a Thursday night game, but they largely didn't mind the accelerated schedule — except for running back Todd Gurley, who last weekend repeated his declaration that Thursday night games are "the dumbest thing ever." Gurley, who was bored and uncommunicative in his weekly meeting with the media, is 19th in the NFL with just 219 yards on the ground after getting only 16 against the Buccaneers.

The health of Gurley's knee and his comparatively small role in Los Angeles' offense this season has been a constant topic of scrutiny around the Rams, and he's clearly tired of talking about himself. The Rams hope they'll have fewer questions to answer after Gurley leads them against the Seahawks' sturdy defense.

"What you do feel an obligation is for us to be better, be more productive," McVay said. "When Todd's doing well, that means our offense is doing well."

There's no 1 blueprint to an NHL title

Associated Press

Had the night of June 12 gone differently, maybe NHL rivals would be looking to the Boston Bruins as the model to follow to win the Stanley Cup.

"We were one game away to change the narrative of how teams should be structured," Bruins defenseman Torey Krug said.

The Bruins lost Game 7 of the final to the big, heavy St. Louis Blues, who bruised and battered their way to the Cup. In recent years, that might have led teams around the league to bulk up and try to follow the Blues' lead — but that is unlikely.

The differences in recent champions — from fast and skilled to physical and punishing — illustrate how many different blueprints there are to win a championship in today's NHL. They also show the im-

portance of tailoring style of play to personnel and perfecting team chemistry.

"There's so many different ways," Blues playoff MVP Ryan O'Reilly said. "Most of the players in the league, you're not going to change. You change little things and make adjustments, but you're not going to change the players that they are. So it's finding your group of players and getting them to play the most effective way."

Over the past decade, the Chicago Blackhawks and Pittsburgh Penguins won it all with speed, skill and talent. The Los Angeles Kings, Washington Capitals and Blues had plenty of skill, sure, but also used size to wear down opponents.

In a sport where whoever lifts the Cup tends to swing the pendulum on how to build a winner, it's become more of a race to see which team can im-

pose its will come playoff time.

"Every year is different," said Bruins goaltender Tuukka Rask, who started in two Finals and was the backup when Boston won the Cup in 2011. "The way you build your team, everybody needs to be comfortable with that. You can win many different ways as long as your team's comfortable playing that style of game."

The Blues under coach Craig Berube got comfortable playing a defense-first style predicated on taking the body and winning series by attrition. O'Reilly concedes a lot has to go right to play that way.

The 2016 and 2017 Penguins battled attrition and overcame injuries to win the Cup. They weren't the biggest team by any means but had the ingredients to go toe to toe with anyone when it mattered most.

"Playoffs is a whole differ-

ent beast, and obviously there's more hitting," Chicago winger Alex DeBrincat said. "Even if you're a skilled team, you're going to hit more."

Jonathan Marchessault, whose Vegas Golden Knights lost to the Capitals in the 2018 Final, said it's important to "stay true to the identity of your team" — whatever that is. Yet there remains a notion that when the regular season ends and the playoffs begin, the NHL trend toward speed and skill ruling the ice is no longer the case.

Battling isn't just about the Kings, Capitals or Blues finishing thundering checks and separating opposing players from the puck. It's about gutting through injuries, winning races to the puck and dictating the tempo of the game to suit a certain style.

Shero: Culture is the key to developing prospects

Associated Press

Whether it involves New Jersey rookie center Jack Hughes or any other prospect, Devils general manager Ray Shero says the most important aspects of a prospect's development must be in place before first stepping into the locker room.

Simply put, the key is culture, and how it rubs off on an impressionable 18-year-old.

"If you have a bad group of guys, if you're not in a good environment in terms of work ethic, you're like, 'OK, that's how it's done here, great. I'm not going to work, I'm going to stay out 'til 4 o'clock,'" Shero told The Associated Press.

"If there's accountability, and that's really a big thing in terms with anything whether it's business, sports, whatever ... when you walk into that it's 'Oh, that's how it's done,'" he added. "There's learning curves for everything on and off the ice. I think the better you support

those guys as young kids and teenagers, the better off they're going to be."

The start of the NHL season this week places the focus on a new crop of youngsters set to make their debuts.

In New Jersey, all eyes are on Hughes, the under-sized, play-making center who became the eighth American-born player selected with the top pick in June. He joins a team that features two other No. 1 draft picks in Taylor Hall, who was selected first by Edmonton in the 2010 draft, and Nico Hischier, selected No. 1 by the Devils in 2017.

Here's a list of other youngsters to keep an eye on this season:

RW Kaapo Kakko, Rangers

Selected second overall behind Hughes, the 6-foot-2, 194-pound forward led Finland with six goals in 10 games at the world championships. His 22 goals in the Finnish

Elite League last season were the most by a draft-eligible player.

D Cale Makar, Avalanche

After helping UMass make its first Frozen Four appearance in April, college hockey's Hobey Baker Award winner made the jump to the NHL by joining Colorado in the midst of its first-round playoff series with Calgary. He became the first defenseman to score a playoff goal in his NHL debut and finished with a goal and five assists in 10 games.

D Quinn Hughes, Canucks

A play-making defenseman, Hughes spent two years at Michigan before closing last season with three assists in five games with the Canucks.

D Erik Brannstrom, Senators

Acquired in a trade that sent

Mark Stone to Vegas in February, Brannstrom is expected to get plenty of playing time on a young Senators team.

LW Alexandre Texier, Blue Jackets

The 20-year-old is being counted upon to be part of the Blue Jackets' young core to step up following the offseason free-agency departures of Artemi Panarin and Matt Duchene. Texier had two goals and an assist in eight playoff games with Columbus last spring.

F Victor Olofsson, Sabres

Nicknamed Victor "Goal-ofsson" for his deft shooting ability, he had two goals and two assists in six games with the Sabres last year, and had a team-leading 30 goals in 65 games with AHL Rochester. A seventh-round pick, the 24-year-old rookie was a late-bloomer after playing five seasons in his native Sweden.