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Esper: Navy needs 500-ship fleet by 2045

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON— The Navy wants to double its number of submarines as part of a plan to build more than 500 ships by 2045 to maintain a competitive edge against China and Russia, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said Tuesday.

“We believe that this is the vision for the future that will ensure that we maintain the greatest Navy in the world,” he said during a speech at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, a think tank specializing in U.S. defense policy, force planning and budgets.

Esper provided an overview of “Battle Force 2045,” though the Pentagon has yet to share the Navy’s 30-year shipbuilding plan or its naval force study with Congress.

The defense secretary directed a future naval force study earlier this year to determine how the U.S. Navy can maintain its edge against the navies of other military powers.

Esper said the need to modernize the Navy is in part due to China’s own naval modernization and shipbuilding efforts. The Pentagon’s China report released Sept. 1 determined the country aims to have a “world-class” military on par with the United States by 2049. It already has the largest navy in the world at 350 ships. The United States now has 296 deployable

battle force ships, according to the Navy.

Esper said during his speech that the Pentagon has found a “credible path” to get to 355 ships within the next 15 years, which had been the Navy’s previous shipbuilding goal. However, he did not offer specifics Tuesday, other than to say they were included as part of the funding and reform efforts being created for the Battle Force 2045 plan.

The first priority of that plan is to have a large number of attack submarines, with a target of 70 to 80 submarines overall. This will require the Navy to build at least three next-generation Virginia-class submarines every year “as soon as possible,” Esper said. The Navy now has more than 40 operational attack submarines, according to Pentagon documents.

“If we do nothing else, we should invest in attack submarines, because of the lethality they can deliver under the sea and survivability that they have. A clear overmatch that we have when it comes to the undersea domain and submarines in particular,” Esper said.

Large nuclear-powered aircraft carriers also will be part of the future Navy, still considered the force’s “most visible deterrent,” he said. The Navy is also looking at “light carriers,” such as the USS America amphibious assault ship that can go to sea with vertical takeoff and landing aircraft

including the F-35B fighters and the MV-22 Osprey. These light carriers would free up the bigger carriers for more of the “critical high-end fight,” Esper said.

While there is more studying to be done on the appropriate mix of carriers, Esper said defense officials believe they will need at least eight to 11 aircraft carriers for high-end conflicts and up to six light carriers. The Navy has 11 operational aircraft carriers now and one operational America-class amphibious assault ship with another under construction, according to the service.

Unmanned naval vessels have been discussed in a number of congressional hearings about the future of the Navy and they are included in the Battle Force 2045 plan. Esper said the future force will have between 140 and 240 unmanned and “optionally manned” surface and subsurface vessels that can perform a variety of missions including surveillance, mine-laying and missile strikes.

“They will add significant offensive and defensive capabilities to the fleet at an affordable cost in terms of both sailors and dollars,” he said.

Continuing with the future of unmanned capabilities in the Navy, defense officials also want a variety of unmanned ship-based aircraft, including fighters and refuelers, Esper said.

Augmented reality goggles could be going to the dogs

BY J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

The Army is developing high-tech augmented reality goggles for dogs that eventually could allow handlers to give them directions from afar, the service said.

Military working dogs are directed via hand signals, speaking or laser pointers, which require the handler to remain close by. That can potentially endanger soldiers on missions that involve finding explosives and hazardous materials, or as-

sisting in rescue operations, the Army statement said Tuesday.

The goggles developed by the Army and the Seattle-based company Command Sight show dogs where to go using a simulated laser pointer.

Initial feedback indicates “the system could fundamentally change how military canines are deployed in the future,” said A.J. Peper, the founder of Command Sight, as quoted in the Army’s statement.

Peper founded his company in 2017 and built his first prototype augmented reality glasses

for military working dogs after conversations with current and retired handlers.

Much of the research has been conducted on his own rottweiler, named Mater, the statement said.

The goggles have a lightweight camera, which sends everything Mater is seeing to a laptop. The handler can click on a spot where Mater should go, and the simulated laser point appears to the dog.

The technology allows handlers to be very specific while directing their dogs and opens

up new possibilities for research, said Stephen Lee, a senior scientist at the Army Research Office, which managed the project.

“The research demonstrates that a dog can recognize things in an augmented reality world,” Lee said in a phone interview Tuesday.

The prototype is wired and keeps the dog on a leash, but the next step is making a wireless version that would allow the soldier to direct a dog via a handheld device, while staying far away and out of sight.

Sasebo reimposes limits after new COVID infections

BY JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — The new commander of Sasebo Naval Base in Japan has reimposed a tight set of anti-coronavirus measures following four new cases within the base community.

Capt. David Adams, who took command on Sept. 25, ordered a return to only mission-essential trips off base, according to a revised public health order posted Tuesday evening on the base Facebook page. No one affiliated with the base can travel “anywhere outside of home, work or essential stops,” a return to measures imposed early in the coronavirus pandemic.

The new round of infections occurred within the existing community and not among new arrivals or returning travelers, base spokesman Aki Nichols told Stars and Stripes by phone Wednesday.

One patient showed flu-like symptoms and tested positive after traveling outside Nagasaki prefecture and the other three are close contacts, according to a subsequent news release from Nichols.

All four are in isolation “until they recover,” according to the release. U.S. Forces Japan requires a 14-day minimum quarantine period for coronavirus patients, who must test free of the virus before leaving

isolation.

The U.S. military in Japan typically does not identify coronavirus patients as service members, civilian employees or family members.

Adams’ revised order restricts activities such as shopping at malls and other retailers in the surrounding communities, patronizing dine-in restaurants and similar establishments and stays in Japanese hotels or inns for other than official business.

The stricter measures are meant to curb the virus’ spread but also to allow contact tracers to work quickly to find other individuals who were exposed to it, according to a second post by Adams on Tuesday.

The Defense Department schools on base will remain open, according to a separate message on the base Facebook page.

In his later post, Adams said calling a halt to classroom sessions would interrupt students’ learning and unnecessarily “create additional stress and complications” for teachers already working in a complicated environment.

“So far,” he wrote, “there is no connection between identified persons who have tested positive and the school system.”

The tighter restrictions will remain in place for several weeks, Adams said.

Deployments test Marine response to virus in Japan

BY JAMES BOLINGER
Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — Two Marine fighter squadrons recently arrived at this air station for six months of duty in Japan, testing the ability of MCAS Iwakuni to keep the coronavirus at bay as new personnel streamed in.

The Marines’ Fighter Attack Squadron 312 and All Weather Fighter Attack Squadron 533, both from Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, S.C., arrived between mid-September and early October on the Unit Deployment Program. The squadrons fly different models of the F/A-18 Hornet.

The squadrons moved from South Carolina to Japan a month apart to reduce the risk of transmitting the coronavirus. Most new infections within the U.S. military in Japan and South Korea are arriving with incoming troops, civilian em-

ployees or family members.

Receiving two squadrons tested the air station’s capacity to provide quarantine areas for a large number of inbound personnel and reduce the risk of bringing coronavirus to the installation, said Capt. Marco Valenzuela, a spokesman for Marine Air Group 12, in an email Tuesday. He said Marines at Iwakuni took additional precautions to ensure the Marines from South Carolina arrived safely.

MCAS Iwakuni last reported new coronavirus patients, two new arrivals, on Sept. 27. They tested positive near the end of a 14-day quarantine period, according to a Facebook post by the base. Both patients arrived via “military-coordinated flights.”

New arrivals and returning travelers must quarantine for two weeks at minimum and test free of the virus before exiting isolation, according to U.S. Forces Japan.

Protections for GI Bill benefits extended into next school year

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Congress approved a measure last week that will ensure student veterans continue to receive full GI Bill benefits into the next school year, even as many classes have gone online-only in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Congress scrambled in March to protect GI Bill benefits for student veterans as colleges shut down in response to the pandemic. At the time, lawmakers approved an emer-

gency fix that allowed students to retain their full amount of benefits. The bill gave the Department of Veterans Affairs secretary broad authority to ensure GI Bill benefits are distributed without interruption during national emergencies.

Those protections were scheduled to end in December. However, Congress extended the protections through December 2021. The extension was part of a short-term funding bill that prevented a government shutdown at the beginning of October.

“The Senate just passed a continuing resolution, avoiding a government shutdown,” the group Student Veterans of America tweeted at the time. “More than avoiding a shutdown, the CR also extends critical housing flexibility for student veterans facing school changes from COVID through 2021.”

GI Bill recipients rely on monthly stipends from the VA to pay for housing, food and other bills. Those payments are higher for students who attend physical classes as opposed to

online coursework. As classes moved online last spring to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus, tens of thousands of student veterans faced the possibility of losing their benefits or seeing drastic cuts.

The extension approved last week also applies to protections for student veterans in work-study programs. Congress approved a measure in April to continue payments for veterans in work-study programs, even if they could no longer report to work because of the pandemic.

Trump seeks to save parts of virus relief

Associated Press

WASHINGTON—The White House on Wednesday tried to salvage its favorite items lost in the rubble of COVID-19 relief talks that President Donald Trump blew up, with his administration pressing for \$1,200 stimulus checks and a new wave of aid for airlines and other businesses hard hit by the pandemic.

In a barrage of tweets, Trump pressed for passage of these chunks of assistance, an about-face from his abrupt and puzzling move on Tuesday afternoon to abandon talks with a longtime rival, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. The California Democrat has rejected such piecemeal entreaties all along.

Trump's tweets amounted to him demanding his way in negotiations that he himself had ended.

He called on Congress to send him a "Stand Alone Bill

for Stimulus Checks (\$1,200)" — a reference to a preelection batch of direct payments to most Americans that had been a central piece of negotiations between Pelosi and the White House.

"I am ready to sign right now. Are you listening Nancy?" Trump said on Twitter on Tuesday evening. He also urged Congress to immediately approve \$25 billion for airlines and \$135 billion the Paycheck Protection Program to help small businesses.

Trump's decision to scuttle talks between Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Pelosi came after the president was briefed on the landscape for the negotiations — and on the blowback that any Pelosi-Mnuchin deal probably would have received from his GOP allies in Congress.

"It became very obvious over the last couple of days that a comprehensive bill was just

going to get to a point where it didn't have really much Republican support at all," White House chief of staff Mark Meadows said Wednesday on Fox News. "It was more of a Democrat-led bill, which would have been problematic, more so in the Senate than in the House."

The unexpected turn could be a blow to Trump's reelection prospects and comes as his administration and campaign are in turmoil. Trump is quarantining in the White House with a case of the coronavirus, and the latest batch of opinion polls shows him significantly behind Democrat Joe Biden with the election four weeks away.

Trump's withdrawal from the talks came immediately after he spoke with the GOP leaders in Congress. Many Republican senators had signaled they would not be willing to go along with any measure that topped \$1 trillion, and GOP aides had

been privately dismissive of the prospects for a deal. Any Pelosi-sponsored agreement of close to \$2 trillion raised the potential of a GOP revolt if such a plan came to a vote.

Pelosi and Mnuchin talked briefly on Wednesday morning about the chances for a stand-alone airline rescue, Pelosi spokesman Drew Hammill tweeted. Pelosi directed Mnuchin to a measure she had attempted to pass on Friday on short notice under fast-track procedures, but only after Democrats made a number of changes Republicans did not like.

Pelosi had been demanding a host of Democratic wins on food aid, unemployment benefits, help for renters and homeowners, and aid to state and local governments. Republicans charged she was dragging the talks to deny Trump a political victory before the Nov. 3 election.

Ex-jailers charged for playing 'Baby Shark' song on repeat

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Two former Oklahoma jail employees and their supervisor face misdemeanor cruelty charges after investigators found they forced inmates to stand handcuffed for hours and listen to the children's song "Baby Shark" on repeat, a prosecutor said Monday.

At least four inmates were secured to a wall with their hands cuffed behind them while the song played on a loop at a loud volume for hours, The Oklahoman reported. The separate incidents occurred in November and December, according to court records.

The misdemeanor charges were filed Monday against former Oklahoma County jail employees Gregory Cornell Butler Jr. and Christian Charles Miles, both 21, and their supervisor, Christopher Raymond Hendershott, 50.

"It was unfortunate that I could not find a felony statute to fit this fact scenario," Oklahoma County District Attorney David Prater said. "I would have preferred filing a felony on this behavior."

Butler and Miles are accused of imposing the discipline and Hendershott is accused of knowing about it but not stopping it, the newspaper reported.

Sheriff P.D. Taylor said Monday that Butler and Miles resigned during an internal investigation and that Hendershott retired.

"We don't tolerate it," Taylor said of the mistreatment. "We always did an excellent job policing ourselves."

The "Baby Shark" song gained huge popularity two years ago after the company Pinkfong released its first video online. The video has since been viewed more than 6.5 billion times.

NM House candidate discusses his work in 1980s porn films

Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. — Roger Montoya, a Democratic candidate in an open New Mexico House race, has acknowledged his participation in two pornographic films in the 1980s as a college student.

He said he is not proud of it, but believes the experience helped him to better understand exploitation and the need to provide opportunities for young people.

The revelation about Montoya of Velarde emerged as the nationally heralded arts educator runs for office in a sprawling rural legislative district with high rates of poverty that stretches from Espanola to the Colorado state line.

"I am not proud of that choice, as I was young and naive, but those experiences helped me understand the exploitation that young people face," Montoya said in a lengthy statement

posted on social media.

Montoya said in a telephone interview he remains focused on the political race and resolving issues of educational and economic inequality.

"Really for me at 60 years old, this race is about the issues of the day," he said. "I'm happy to talk about the inequalities in education, in water infrastructure access ... to health care in the time of COVID."

The state Republican Party on Monday called on Montoya to withdraw from the race against GOP candidate Justin Salazar-Torrez of Espanola. Montoya's past work in pornography was first reported by a conservative blog, Pinon Post.

"While many students find college difficult financially, very few choose this route to solve their problems," the party said in a statement. "This kind of risky and reckless behavior is unacceptable."

Protests erupt over new NY restrictions

Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — A New York City neighborhood erupted in protests after Gov. Andrew Cuomo moved to reinstate restrictions on houses of worship, schools and businesses in areas where coronavirus cases are spiking.

Videos of Tuesday night's protest on social media show hundreds of Orthodox Jewish men gathered in the streets of Borough Park, a neighborhood in Brooklyn, in some cases setting bonfires by burning masks. Video posted on social media shows a crowd swarming and knocking down a man holding a camera. Police said there were no arrests.

The new rules announced by Gov. Andrew Cuomo on Tuesday will affect parts of Brooklyn and Queens in New York City, sections of Orange and Rockland counties in the Hudson Valley and an area within Binghamton in the Southern Tier.

Most of the New York City and Hudson Valley neighborhoods are home to large enclaves of Orthodox Jews, and community leaders have complained of being singled out for enforcement.

California

SAN FRANCISCO — A Northern California county will face greater restrictions as it grapples with a surge in coronavirus cases, many of them tied to an evangelical college where more than 120 students and staff have tested positive in the last two weeks, health officials said Tuesday.

Shasta County health officials say that an outbreak of cases among students and staff at the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry contributed to a recent spike in COVID-19 cases that bumped the county on Tuesday into a new level of regulations on restaurants, bars, theaters and businesses.

In a statement the school said it shifted to online instruction last week and canceled in-person church services for Oct. 4 and Oct. 11 that have been held outdoors on a sports field.

On its website, the school describes itself as “a ministry training center” that is not an accredited university “where our students embrace their royal identity, learn the values of the kingdom, and walk in the authority and power of the King.”

Shasta County recorded more than 500 new coronavirus cases in the past two weeks, pushing its total number of cases since March to 1,158.

Kansas

WICHITA — Even as some of the state's largest districts reopen, most Kansas counties have such a high rate of new coronavirus cases that they have moved into the red zone on a key state benchmark that suggests schools consider putting the brakes on in-person classes and sports.

Seventy-five of the state's 105 counties were in the worst reopening zone for the two-week cumulative incident rate, which measures the rate of new cases per 100,000 people and is one of five school reopening indicators established by the state, The Wichita Eagle reported. That's an increase of 10 counties from a week ago, according to a Kansas Department of Health and Environment map published Monday using data through Saturday.

The KDHE case rate map also placed 11 counties in the yellow zone and 16 counties in the orange zone. Under the state's gating criteria, a blend of in-person, hybrid and remote learning is recommended in these zones. The state also urges restrictions on sports.

The number of counties in the green zone, which is the only zone that calls for all in-person classes and extracurricular activities, dropped from seven to three on the case rate map.

Kentucky

FRANKFORT — Kentucky's governor said Tuesday he extended his mask mandate for another 30 days and promised stricter enforcement as the state struggles with surging

numbers of coronavirus cases.

With the state on pace to set another record high for weekly COVID-19 cases, Gov. Andy Beshear said the mask requirement follows recommendations from President Donald Trump's administration.

The state will step up enforcement of the mask mandate, and local leaders need to do their part, Beshear said.

Businesses serving people who aren't wearing masks could be fined or temporarily shut down, the governor said.

Meanwhile, Beshear reported 1,054 new coronavirus cases statewide Tuesday, as total cases surpassed 74,100 since the start of the pandemic. He reported four more virus-related deaths, raising the statewide death toll to at least 1,218.

Michigan

LANSING — Michigan's health chief said Tuesday he has “broad” legal authority to curb the coronavirus, as he issued additional orders reinstating restrictions negated by a state Supreme Court ruling and requiring schools to notify the public of infections.

Robert Gordon, director of the Department of Health and Human Services, reinstated rules for nursing homes and other congregate-care settings. He also told local health departments to inform K-12 schools within 24 hours of learning of a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19. A school must post it on its website within 24 hours of being notified.

Michigan's seven-day average of daily new cases, 1,008, has increased by more than 200 over two weeks and has not been higher since April, according to Johns Hopkins University.

More than 7,100 residents have died with confirmed or probable COVID-19 infections.

Texas

AUSTIN — Texas health officials reported 3,872 new coronavirus cases Tuesday, but the addition of 260 previously unreported cases raised the Tues-

day total by 4,132 cases.

The newly reported cases raised to 773,435 the total case-load reported in Texas since March, the Texas Department of State Health Services reported. The 78 deaths from COVID-19 reported Tuesday raised to 16,111 the Texas death toll since early March.

Washington

SEATTLE — Gov. Jay Inslee on Tuesday didn't move any counties in his four-phase COVID-19 reopening plan, but he did say more activities would be allowed throughout the state.

At a news conference the Democratic governor said restaurants in second- or third-phase counties can now serve alcohol up to 11 p.m. and increase their table size to six in the second phase, and to eight in the third phase.

Also, for second-phase counties, movie theaters will be able to operate at 25% capacity, and in the third phase, at 50% capacity. Facial coverings and 6 feet of distance between households will be required.

Wedding receptions would also be able to have 50 guests in phase 3 counties, up from the current 30.

Hawaii

HONOLULU — The U.S. surgeon general was cited for being in a closed Hawaii park in August while in the islands helping with surge testing amid a spike in coronavirus cases, according to a criminal complaint filed in court.

A Honolulu police officer cited Jerome Adams after seeing him with two men “looking at the view taking pictures” at Kualoa Regional Park on Oahu's northeastern coast, the citation said. The park in a rural area offers a picturesque view of Mokolii island, known as Chinaman's Hat for its cone shape.

Adams told the officer he was visiting Hawaii to work with the governor for COVID-19 and didn't know parks were closed.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Cops: Devices on Trump signs were theft alarms

MD EASTON — Several “suspicious devices” were found on Trump-Pence campaign signs around a Maryland city, but when bomb squads arrived, they realized those devices were small alarm systems.

Easton Police and the State Fire Marshal Bomb Squad said they were investigating the devices, which were found taped to the political lawn signs.

Officials said the devices posed no threat to the public: They’re just audible alarms that sound when a pull pin, attached to a string, is tugged away.

The State Marshal’s office said their apparent purpose was to prevent the signs from being stolen or removed.

Police: Man with knife tried to rob streetcar

LA NEW ORLEANS — A man wielding a knife tried to rob a driver operating a New Orleans streetcar, police said.

The failed robbery attempt happened on the city’s St. Charles Avenue route, The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate reported.

New Orleans police said the streetcar was making a stop when a man outside pulled a knife and demanded the money in the fare box. The driver closed the door and pulled away as the would-be robber tried to pry the door open. The driver got away safely, police said, and the assailant got nothing.

Sandbag thrown from overpass injures driver

MI LYON TOWNSHIP — A 40-pound sandbag thrown from a freeway overpass smashed the windshield of

a car and seriously injured the driver in suburban Detroit, police said.

The man who threw the sandbag was arrested after telling someone about what he did, police said.

“The victim was very lucky she wasn’t more seriously hurt or killed,” state police said on Twitter.

The suspect was involved in a crash, left his vehicle and walked to a highway overpass that was under construction. That’s where he found sandbags and began throwing them, state police said.

City mulls nickname: ‘Hummingbird capital’

AZ SIERRA VISTA — Often called the “hummingbird capital,” the Arizona city of Sierra Vista wants to make the nickname official.

The Sierra Vista City Council is planning to consider a resolution proclaiming the city as a hummingbird hub, the Sierra Vista Herald reported. In addition, council members will ask their legislative representatives to push the same resolution at the statehouse.

Sierra Vista, about 75 miles southeast of Tucson, and surrounding nature preserves such as Ramsey Canyon Preserve and the San Pedro House are known for hosting the colorful birds. Experts say more than 15 of the known 26 species of hummingbirds in North America can be seen in the region.

New stickers honoring vets available to voters

AL MONTGOMERY — “I voted” stickers honoring veterans will be available for the first time to voters who cast ballots in the general election next month.

The stickers, which will be available at in-person voting

sites Nov. 3, feature an outline of the state with an Alabama state flag and the words “I vote in honor of a veteran.” The new civic-duty participation badge will be available to those who vote in-person on Election Day.

Explosive devices removed from home

MA MONTEREY — Dozens of explosive devices and powders were removed from a Massachusetts home, but state police do not believe there is a direct threat to the public.

The devices were removed from a home in Monterey. The state police bomb squad transported and safely detonated the devices in a secure location, according to a news release from the Berkshire district attorney’s office.

“Authorities will summons a Monterey man to court to face multiple charges on the illegal possession, manufacture, and sale of explosive devices,” the news release said. A name was not provided.

Police seek to return up to 300 stolen items

MO ST. LOUIS — After a recent theft arrest, St. Louis police are trying to find the owners of up to 300 recovered stolen goods.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that police found the items while carrying out a search warrant Sept. 10 at a suspected drug house on the city’s south side.

Detectives found four firearms and methamphetamine along with stolen goods that included three trailers, dozens of electronics, power tools, a concrete mixer and a moped.

Detective Matthew Boettigheimer said it appears that the thefts were “crimes of opportunity.”

Judge: Vanity plate law may violate amendment

RI PROVIDENCE — A Rhode Island law allowing the Division of Motor Vehicles to reject vanity license plates that are “offensive to good taste” likely violates the First Amendment, a federal judge ruled.

The judge issued a preliminary injunction in support of a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the law, which gives the DMV administrator the authority to deny vanity plates based on whether he or she thinks they “might carry connotations offensive to good taste and decency.”

The lawsuit was filed in March against Walter Craddock, state DMV administrator, by the American Civil Liberties Union of Rhode Island on behalf of Sean Carroll. Carroll, a Tesla owner, was ordered by the DMV to turn in his plate “FKGAS” or have his registration canceled after the division received a complaint about the plate. Carroll said the plate was his daughter’s suggestion, intending a meaning of “fake gas” to refer to the electric car.

Hot air balloons fly despite canceled event

NM ALBUQUERQUE — The annual Balloon Fiesta was canceled this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but Albuquerque officials decided to make parks available for pilots to keep the fall tradition alive.

Hot air balloons filled the sky over Albuquerque last weekend. KOB-TV reported that balloons launched from various sites across the city including the parking lot at Coronado Center, the site of the first Balloon Fiesta.

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Lakers one victory from 17th NBA title

Associated Press

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — LeBron James woke up from his game-day nap Tuesday and decided it was time to send his Los Angeles Lakers teammates a message.

He grabbed his phone and told the Lakers they were facing a must-win game.

“I felt that vibe. I felt that pressure,” James said. “I felt like, for me personally, this was one of the biggest games of my career.”

Message delivered.

James and the Lakers are back in control of these NBA Finals, one win away from the franchise’s 17th championship. James finished with 28 points, 12 rebounds and eight assists, Anthony Davis’ three-pointer with 39.5 seconds left finally settled matters and the Lakers beat the Miami Heat 102-96 in Game 4.

The Lakers lead 3-1 and can win the title when the series resumes Friday.

“Big-time play. Big-time moment,” James said of Davis’ three-pointer. “Not only for A.D., but for our ballclub and

for our franchise.”

Davis finished with 22 points, Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 15 and Danny Green added 10 for the Lakers, who didn’t trail at any point in the final 20-plus minutes. The Lakers are now 56-0 this season when leading going into the fourth quarter.

Jimmy Butler scored 22 points for Miami, which got 21 from Tyler Herro, 17 from Duncan Robinson and 15 from Bam Adebayo — who returned after missing two games with a neck injury.

“I just loved seeing our guys compete. I love how they respond in between those four lines,” Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. “This was a throwback game and there were some moments of truth there at the end, and probably the bottom line is they won those moments of truth.”

He’s right. Whenever Miami had something going, the Lakers snuffed it out.

James’ three-pointer with 8:18 left in the third put the Lakers up 55-54 and set the tone for the way the rest of the night was going to go; L.A. lead-

ing, Miami chasing.

“Like I always say, they’re a really, really, really good team and we’ve got to play damn near perfect to beat them,” Butler said. “We didn’t do that tonight. ... We’ll watch this, learn from it, but we can’t lose another one.”

The Lakers were up by seven with 2:27 left in the third after a three-pointer by Davis; Miami scored the next six to get within one. Herro made a three early in the fourth to get Miami within one again; the Heat promptly fouled Markieff Morris on a three-point try, and he made all three shots.

Butler scored inside to tie the game with 6:27 left; James scored the next five points himself, including a three-point play where he ended up flat on his back after spinning the ball perfectly off the glass for a score on a drive while taking contact.

“You have to credit our guys’ competitive spirit,” Lakers coach Frank Vogel said. “They were flying around and just competing at an extremely high level that end of the floor.”

A bounce here, a bounce

there. Those were the differences late, and the Lakers made their own breaks.

Butler had a corner three that would have given Miami the lead rim out with 3:05 left; Caldwell-Pope made a corner three at the other end seven seconds later and the Lakers were up 93-88. Miami then turned the ball over on a shot-clock violation; Caldwell-Pope scored on a drive for a seven-point lead.

3-1 Leads

This is the 36th time that a team has held a 3-1 lead in the NBA Finals. Of the previous 35, the team with the lead has gone on to win the title 34 times — James and the Cleveland Cavaliers in 2016 becoming the exception when they won three straight games to defeat Golden State.

In the 3-1 Finals situation, the series has ended in five games 51.4% of the time (18 instances), in six games 40% of the time (14 instances) and in seven games 8.6% of the time (three instances).

Storm capture second WNBA crown in three years

Associated Press

BRADENTON, Fla. — Breanna Stewart and Sue Bird helped Seattle finish off a dominant season with another championship.

The dynamic duo powered the Storm to their second title in three seasons. They both missed last year with injuries.

Stewart scored 26 points and Seattle completed a sweep of the Las Vegas Aces with a 92-59 rout Tuesday night. It was the biggest margin of victory in WNBA Finals history.

“It doesn’t feel real we just won and that I was able to contribute the way I did,” said Bird, who averaged 11 assists for the three finals games. “Something when it’s all said and done that I’m incredibly proud of.”

It’s the fourth title in franchise history for the Storm, who also won in 2004, 2010 and 2018. Seattle had pretty much the same core group that won the 2018 championship back for this year, led by Stewart, Bird and Jewell Loyd. The Storm joined Minnesota and Houston as the only franchises to win four championships.

Seattle has now won a record 11 games in a row in the WNBA Finals, dating to the team’s first championship in 2004. Bird has been a part of all of them. The veteran guard, who turns 40 next week, was once again a catalyst for the Storm.

Bird said she was most proud of the fact that she won it all with one franchise in three different decades.

“There are core groups that have a two-, four-, six-, maybe 10-year run,” she said. “I’ve been here for technically 19 seasons, 17 I’ve played. To be able to recreate that magic with different groups.”

Bird, who had five points and seven assists in the clincher, said she hadn’t thought about whether she’ll come back next year.

“Interestingly enough, it’s never a day of decision. I just kind of start working out and see how I feel,” she said. “I wish I could give you more. If the way I feel right now, if I go through my offseason and continue to build on that in a good way I don’t see why I won’t be playing next summer.”

The 26-year-old Stewart set a WNBA record by scoring more

than 20 points for the sixth straight finals game. She was a unanimous choice as WNBA Finals MVP. It was the second time in her young career that she won the award, becoming the fifth player with multiple finals MVPs.

Her play all season showed she had fully recovered from a torn Achilles tendon that sidelined her for the entire 2019 season.

“She’s just one of those generational players that comes through once in a while that can face adversity and even get stronger because of it and that’s what we saw of her,” Seattle coach Gary Kloppenburg said. “She missed a whole year and came back as a better player in every category on both sides of the ball.”

Rangers use No. 1 pick on Lafreniere

Associated Press

Alexis Lafreniere wanted to take the stage at Montreal's Bell Centre near his home and hear his name announced at the NHL Draft.

The playmaking forward had to settle for being selected first overall by the New York Rangers on Tuesday night.

"Obviously, it's different, and we didn't expect that a couple of months ago," Lafreniere said. "Growing up, you're dreaming of being drafted. And for me today, it's amazing to go first. I'm really honored."

Lafreniere was the NHL Central Scouting Bureau's top-ranked North American skater. The 6-foot-1 left wing becomes the first Canadian to go No. 1 since Connor McDavid was chosen by Edmonton in 2015. From suburban Montreal, he was the first to earn both Canadian Hockey League and Quebec Major Junior Hockey League MVP honors in consecutive seasons since Pittsburgh captain Sidney Crosby in 2004 and '05.

In a sign of the unusual na-

ture of this year's remote draft amid the coronavirus pandemic, Lafreniere spoke by video call from a bedroom in his home. Rather than walking up on stage and having a team official provide his new jersey, Lafreniere stood up from a living room chair, gave his sport jacket to his sister and pulled on a Rangers hat and No. 20 Rangers jersey handed to him by his father.

"Today, I woke up and I was really excited and I just got ready for the pick," he said. "I'm just a little speechless."

Rangers general manager Jeff Gorton, who spent the weeks leading up to the draft refusing to tip his hand, laughed in revealing when he knew he was going to select Lafreniere.

"I think when the ball came out of the machine, we knew he was going to be our guy," Gorton said. "It was pretty clear-cut how we felt about him."

The Rangers bucked the odds by jumping ahead of the NHL's seven nonplayoff teams to win the draft lottery after being swept by Carolina in the preliminary round in August.

The Los Angeles Kings then selected Ontario Hockey League center Quinton Byfield with the second pick. The 6-foot-4 Byfield, whose father moved to Canada from Jamaica, became the highest drafted Black player.

"My dad and mom didn't play hockey," Byfield said. "It just shows that there's a lot of opportunity for everyone in the world."

The Ottawa Senators were next and chose top-ranked international forward Tim Stuetzle, who played professionally in his native Germany last year, with their first of three first-round selections.

Detroit, which was bumped to the fourth spot despite finishing with the league's worst record, selected Swedish forward Lucas Raymond. A little over an hour before the draft, the Red Wings announced general manager Steve Yzerman had to self-isolate in overseeing the draft separate from his staff after coming into contact with a person who tested positive for COVID-19.

It was an NHL Draft like no

other, the first one held in October, with teams selecting remotely from their home cities.

"Jeopardy" game-show host Alex Trebek announced Ottawa's first pick in the form of a question. "And the answer is, Tim Stuetzle," Trebek said.

Commissioner Gary Bettman was busy putting on and pulling off his protective mask in introducing the next team's selection from the NHL Network studios in New Jersey.

North Dakota freshman Jake Sanderson, who went No. 5 to Ottawa, was joined by his family in watching the draft from a suite at the school's Ralph Engelstad Arena.

The San Jose Sharks closed out the first round by selecting forward Ozzy Wiesblatt, with scouting director Doug Wilson Jr. using sign language in a message to the player's mother, who is deaf.

The draft concluded Wednesday with rounds two through seven, before teams turn their attention to the NHL's free agency signing period, which opens Friday.

Kvitova, Kenin in French Open semis

Associated Press

PARIS — The rain finally held off at the French Open, so Petra Kvitova rained down aces instead.

Six of them, taking her tournament-leading tally to 24, as the two-time Wimbledon champion reached her first semifinal at Roland Garros since 2012 and first at any Grand Slam since her run to the final of the 2019 Australian Open.

Her semifinal opponent will be Sofia Kenin, the Australian Open champion who has been pushed to three sets in all but one of her five matches so far in Paris, including her 6-4, 4-6, 6-0 quarterfinal win Thursday over fellow American Danielle Collins.

"I like winning in three sets," said the fourth-seeded Kenin,

whose only previous Grand Slam semifinal was on her way to winning at Melbourne Park. "I'm really proud of myself."

On the other end of the easier 6-3, 6-3 victory for seventh-seeded Kvitova was Laura Siegemund, an unseeded German player in her first Grand Slam quarterfinal. The first set, especially, flashed by in a blur of left-handed serves that Siegemund couldn't reach or capitalize on and powerful groundstrokes she had no answer to.

For Kvitova, her first return to the semifinals in eight years marks another step in her recovery from a traumatic stabbing by an intruder at her home in the Czech Republic in December 2016.

All five fingers on the left had

that she uses to hold her racket were injured in the knifing and doctors told her she might never be competitive again.

"It's another miracle," she said.

Against Kenin, Collins proved to be her own enemy, double-faulting at 0-40 to give her opponent the only break of serve in the first set and again at the start of the third set, also at 0-40, having just fought furiously in the second set to level the match at a set apiece.

Collins, who'd previously not advanced beyond round two in Paris, received medical treatment as she trailed 4-0 in the final set and appeared limited in her movements.

"I was kind of praying for a miracle at the end there," she said.

Titans, Pats have more positive tests

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Tennessee did not return to the team's facility Wednesday after two more players tested positive amid the NFL's first COVID-19 outbreak, and the New England Patriots canceled practice amid reports that a third player has tested positive for the coronavirus.

Sports Illustrated reported that reigning NFL Defensive Player of the Year Stephon Gilmore tested positive for the virus on Wednesday and was added to the team's reserve/COVID-19 list. The Patriots did not give a reason for Wednesday's cancellation and did not immediately respond when asked if it was related to a third positive test.

ALDS roundup

Astros push A's to brink of elimination

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Back-to-back home runs off back-to-back pitches. The Houston Astros can't miss these days.

George Springer hit two homers and Houston kept making more noise in the playoffs, beating the Oakland Athletics 5-2 on Tuesday to take a 2-0 lead in their AL Division Series.

Martin Maldonado also went deep for the Astros, who need one win to reach their fourth straight AL Championship Series. Game 3 in the best-of-five series is Wednesday, when Houston is the home team in the neutral-site matchup.

"With every victory, the energy and the confidence grows," first-year Astros manager Dusty Baker said. "We're expecting good things to happen."

Springer put Houston ahead to stay with a two-run, two-out drive in the third on a second straight 90-degree day at Dodger Stadium.

"You don't know if you're ever going to get back here, so the times you're here you might as well try and have fun," Springer said.

The Astros went back-to-back in the fifth, extending the lead to 5-2.

Maldonado's solo shot chased loser Sean Manaea in his first appearance this postseason. Yusmeiro Petit came in, and Springer connected for his second homer of the game.

"Just a couple bad pitches," Manaea said. "I know we are going to figure this thing out and turn it around."

Springer's 17 postseason homers tied Nelson Cruz and Jim Thome for most through a player's first 54 career postseason games. Five of Springer's postseason homers have come at Dodger Stadium, where Houston beat the Dodgers in Game 7 of the 2017 World Series.

"I don't really pay attention to that stuff," Springer said.

"I'd much rather us win."

Rays 7, Yankees 5: At San Diego, Randy Arozarena, Mike Zunino, Manuel Margot and Austin Meadows hit home runs, and Tyler Glasnow struck out 10 to set a postseason record for Tampa Bay, which beat New York to even their AL Division Series at one game apiece.

The Rays had enough pop to overcome a huge game by Giancarlo Stanton, who had two home runs and four RBIs. His impressive power display included a 458-foot, three-run homer that landed under the giant video board in left field at Petco Park. It was reminiscent of the mammoth shots he hit in winning the Home Run Derby here in 2016.

Stanton has three homers this series and five in four postseason games. His grand slam in the ninth inning Monday night was the Bronx Bombers' fourth homer in the 9-3 Game 1 win. The Yankees have 13 homers in five games.

Each team has hit six home runs in two games at the downtown ballpark, where the outfield once had the reputation as a place where fly balls went to die. The fences were moved in before the 2013 season.

"Randy, it's unbelievable what he's doing right now," Tampa Bay manager Kevin Cash said. "Z came up with just a big homer for us. Meadows, it's good to see him get going; Manny just separated the game right there was good. Unfortunately we didn't get that shut-down inning we were looking for. We needed every bit of them."

Four Rays pitchers struck out 18, an MLB postseason record for a nine-inning game and a postseason record for New York's batters.

DJ LeMahieu had hit an RBI single with two outs in the ninth, and Pete Fairbanks retired Aaron Judge on a grounder with runners on the corners to end the game.

NLDS roundup

Dodgers have no trouble downing Padres in opener

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Justin Turner and the Los Angeles Dodgers had a walk in the new park to start their National League Division Series.

The patient Dodgers had already drawn nine free passes before Mookie Betts got their first hit in the sixth inning, and they went ahead to stay on Corey Seager's sacrifice fly right after that in a 5-1 win Tuesday night over the NL West rival San Diego Padres.

"We didn't get a lot of hits early, but we took great at-bats and we made those guys work," said Turner, who drew two bases on balls. "Our offense is at its best when we're walking as many times as we're getting

hits."

Mike Clevinger made it only two pitches into the second inning of his postseason debut for the Padres before leaving with the same elbow injury that sidelined him during the first round. San Diego's heavily worked bullpen couldn't keep putting up zeros — or keeping runners off base, even though the Padres gave up only four hits.

Game 2 in the best-of-five series at the Texas Rangers' new ballpark is Wednesday night.

When Chris Taylor, the No. 9 batter in the Los Angeles order, walked with one out in the sixth in a 1-1 game, it was the Dodgers' ninth walk through 27 batters and the Padres were

already on their sixth pitcher. Betts then doubled into the left-field corner to break up the no-hitter, sending Taylor to third and setting up Seager's sac fly.

Braves 9, Marlins 5: At Houston, Ronald Acuna Jr. made history with a leadoff home run to start things off for Atlanta in its NL Division Series opener against Miami.

And another hit — once more by the Marlins, this time with Sandy Alcantara's fastball to the left hip — fired up the Braves and fueled their comeback victory.

"I think it woke us up," said Travis d'Arnaud, who launched a tiebreaking homer during Atlanta's six-run rally in the seventh inning. "And we took

advantage of that momentum."

D'Arnaud also doubled and singled in driving in four runs and Dansby Swanson homered during the big comeback to help power Atlanta.

After shutting out Cincinnati for 22 innings during a two-game sweep in the wild-card round, the Braves relied on their bats.

Acuna got things going for the Braves in the bottom of the first when he sent Alcantara's second pitch into right-center for a homer. He watched it for a second before flipping his bat and rounding the bases as he became the youngest player (22 years, 293 days old) in postseason history with a leadoff home run.