

Ukraine alleges dirty bomb deception

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's nuclear energy operator said Tuesday that Russian forces were performing secret work at Europe's largest nuclear power plant, activity that could shed light on Russia's claims that the Ukrainian military is preparing a "provocation" involving a radioactive device.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu made an unsubstantiated allegation that Ukraine was preparing to launch a so-called dirty bomb. Shoigu leveled the charge over the weekend in calls to his British, French, Turkish and U.S. counterparts. Britain, France and the United States rejected it out of hand as "transparently false."

Ukraine also dismissed Moscow's claim as an attempt to distract attention from the Kremlin's own alleged plans to detonate a dirty bomb, which uses explosives to scatter radioactive waste in an effort to sow terror.

Energoatom, the Ukrainian state enterprise that operates the country's four nuclear power plants, said Russian forces have

carried out secret construction work over the last week at the occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine.

Russian officers controlling the area won't give access to Ukrainian staff running the plant or monitors from the United Nations' atomic energy watchdog that would allow them to see what the Russians are doing, Energoatom said Tuesday in a statement.

Energoatom said it "assumes" the Russians "are preparing a terrorist act using nuclear materials and radioactive waste stored at" the plant. It said there were 174 containers at the plant's dry spent fuel storage facility, each of them containing 24 assemblies of spent nuclear fuel.

"Destruction of these containers as a result of explosion will lead to a radiation accident and radiation contamination of several hundred square miles of the adjacent territory," the company said.

It called on the International Atomic Energy Agency to assess what was going on.

The U.N. Security Council was scheduled

to hold closed-door consultations about the dirty-bomb allegations later Tuesday at Russia's request.

Russia asked the council to establish a commission to investigate its claims that the U.S. and Ukraine are violating the convention prohibiting the use of biological weapons at laboratories in Ukraine.

Soon after Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine, its U.N. ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, claimed that secret American labs in Ukraine were engaged in biological warfare — a charge denied by the U.S. and Ukraine.

The Kremlin has insisted that its warning of a purported Ukrainian plan to use a dirty bomb should be taken seriously and criticized Western nations for shrugging it off.

The dismissal of Moscow's warning is "unacceptable in view of the seriousness of the danger that we have talked about," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

The White House on Monday again underscored that the Russian allegations were false.

Former secretary of defense Carter dies at 68

BY DOUG G. WARE

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Ash Carter, the 25th secretary of defense who led the U.S. military for the final two years of President Barack Obama's administration and who was responsible for some of the armed forces' most consequential social changes in recent history, died late Monday. He was 68.

Carter, who had been serving as director of Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, died of a sudden heart attack, according to Douglas Elmendorf, dean of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

"It is with deep and profound sorrow that I write to inform you that our colleague, teacher, and friend Ash Carter passed away [Monday] evening after suffering a heart attack," Elmendorf said in a statement. "This loss is so sudden and so devastating."

Carter was Obama's fourth defense secretary and succeeded Chuck Hagel in February

2015. He served in the office until Obama's final day in January 2017. During his time in the Defense Department, Carter favored increasing U.S. aid to Ukraine and opened all military roles to women, lifting the final barriers to female troops serving in every combat position.

During his tenure as defense secretary, Carter also ended the longtime ban on transgender troops serving openly. The ban was later reinstated by former President Donald Trump and again struck down by President Joe Biden.

Carter's decisions were controversial, including within the Pentagon that he ran. The Marine Corps — and the Pentagon's top officer, Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, then the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff — pushed back against his decision to open all combat roles to women in December 2015, urging him to continue the ban of female Marines from certain jobs, including the infantry and fire-support reconnaissance.

But Carter — after some three years of De-

fense Department study on the issue — could not be dissuaded. He argued those who could meet the standards to serve in a military job, despite its inherent dangers or physical difficulties, should be afforded the opportunity to do so.

Some six months later, Carter made a similar argument in ending the longstanding ban on transgender persons serving openly in the military. Announcing the ban's end on June 30, 2016, Carter said the Pentagon needed "100% access to America's population" to ensure it could recruit and retain quality service members.

Before he became Obama's Pentagon chief, Carter served in a variety of other defense roles in the department. He was an assistant secretary of defense under former President Bill Clinton in the 1990s and he was an undersecretary for technology and logistics for the first two years of Obama's presidency.

Carter is survived by his wife Stephanie and two children, Ava and Will.

Navy to start draining Hawaii fuel tanks

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii — The long-anticipated first step in emptying fuel from the Navy's massive Red Hill underground storage tanks near Pearl Harbor was set to begin Tuesday, Navy officials said.

Over the next week, the Navy will drain roughly 1 million gallons of fuel from three miles of pipelines between the facility and Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Rear Adm. John Wade, the commander of Joint Task Force-Red Hill, said during a news conference Monday at the joint base.

Wade and Capt. Shawn Triggs, the operations director for defueling, fielded questions from reporters while standing near an above-ground tank that will be used to hold some of the pipeline fuel.

"There's another 104 million gallons in the storage tanks," Wade said. "In order to defuel, the first step that we need to do is to safely remove the fuel from

those pipelines. That is called unpacking.

"The unpacking allows us to then conduct repairs, modifications and enhancements so that we can get to the larger defueling effort with the greatest risk reductions possible to make that the safe evolution."

The unpacking this week represents the first time fuel has flowed through the pipelines since Nov. 28. The facility ceased operations that day after jet fuel was discovered in one of three wells the Navy uses for its water distribution system for two dozen military communities on and near the joint base. Thousands of residents were temporarily relocated to Waikiki Beach hotels earlier this year as the Navy isolated the contaminated well and flushed water mains and pipes in homes.

Hundreds claim to suffer from long-term conditions and illnesses related to using the fuel-tainted water.

Members of four of those families filed suit in federal court in September, the first of

possibly hundreds of plaintiffs likely to seek compensation.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on March 7 ordered the facility to be permanently closed.

"The defueling of the Red Hill facility is the right thing to do for our community, for the people of Hawaii, for our environment, for national security," Wade told reporters Monday.

The unpacking process is broken into four phases, with the first two focused on safety inspection and valve checks already completed.

Phase three that began Tuesday and will last six days is expected to remove most of the fuel, Triggs said.

"Phase three will be a gravity drain of a significant portion of the fuel that's up in Red Hill. Roughly about 90% of the fuel that's in those pipelines will be removed via gravity.

"Gravity can only get us so far," Triggs said. "We're going to have to actually remove the residual fuel by pulling it out of the line, and that actually will be

done in phase four."

Triggs motioned to a fuel tank that can hold up to 400,000 gallons and said that the final fuel squeezed out will be loaded into it.

All fuel emptied from the pipelines will be used by local ships and aircraft, he said.

The three pipelines to be emptied hold differing fuels: 162,000 gallons of F-24, a commercial grade jet fuel; 216,000 gallons of JP-5, a kerosene-based jet fuel; and 691,000 gallons of F-76, a maritime diesel fuel.

Although the unpacking will happen over almost a week's time, "there will only be about 12 hours of actual fuel movement," Triggs said.

Once the pipelines are emptied, they will be repaired and upgraded over the following year so that the 104 million gallons in the tanks can be safely removed, Triggs said.

The Navy estimates that the facility will be emptied and ready for permanent closure in the summer of 2024.

Former CNO calls for a standing Quad maritime force

By **SETH ROBSON**
Stars and Stripes

The United States should combine with India, Australia and Japan to launch a standing Indo-Pacific maritime force to counter China, according to a former U.S. chief of naval operations.

The members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, combine to form an informal group seen as a strategic hedge against Beijing's rising military power and in recent years have trained together during the Malabar naval drills.

However, retired Adm. Gary Roughead, speaking at the Center for Strategic and International Studies/Nikkei Symposium in To-

kyo on Oct. 18, said the four should stand up as a permanent force.

"My belief is that to get the Quad moving, we should establish a standing Quad maritime force that's in being all the time," he said, Nikkei Asia reported. He said the command of that force "would rotate perhaps every six months among the countries."

The force would support coast guards and help protect maritime resources, said Roughead, who oversaw U.S. naval operations from 2007 to 2011. One of only two officers in the Navy's history to have commanded both the U.S. Atlantic and Pacific fleets, Roughead also suggested splitting the Indo-Pacific command

with a headquarters in Northeast Asia and another covering Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean.

The idea of a combined Indo-Pacific naval force seems akin to maritime groups of four to six frigates or destroyers employed by NATO in the Atlantic and Mediterranean, said former Navy Capt. Jan van Tol, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, a non-profit defense-policy think tank in Washington, D.C.

"These groups are intended to be NATO's standing 'immediate reaction forces,'" he told Stars and Stripes in an email Tuesday.

NATO's maritime forces, however, are composed from nations

that are formal treaty allies, van Tol said.

A permanent unit would give members a sense that they have a real-world mission rather than training together periodically before heading back to homeports, according to retired Marine Col. Grant Newsham, a senior researcher with the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies in Tokyo.

But the creation of a Quad maritime force would likely upset Beijing, Newsham said.

"I imagine there will be political reticence all around — mostly fear of angering China, and I should imagine the navies themselves will resist, citing lack of resources," he said.

Unit testing new suicide prevention policy

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

The 18th Airborne Corps is testing a policy that would prevent soldiers from being released from in-patient mental health facilities on holidays or weekends, leaders of the Army unit said.

The policy is designed to better support a soldier's recovery effort and help prevent suicide attempts, said Command Sgt. Maj. T.J. Holland, the corps' top enlisted leader. It also includes a contract on what the soldier, the soldier's leaders and the medical provider are responsible for when the soldier is released.

"What we've seen when we release a soldier before a weekend or holiday is they go back to the isolation area and they start revisiting those thoughts and practicing those same behaviors that brought them to the dark place before they sought help," he said.

The policy is one of two coming to the corps that aim to make certain that soldiers who have been hospitalized for suicidal ideations are supported as they reintegrate into their daily life, Holland said.

A second requirement will have each soldier take part in a reintegration event within 24 hours of being released from a hospital. The event could be anything that the soldier enjoys doing, such as a cooking class or another activity that the person identifies as important to him or her.

"We need to find out what drives that soldier to serve and why they enjoy life. Those are the things we should seek out as far as a reintegration event," Holland said.

The proposed policies come after the military has spent years grappling with an increasing rate

of suicide deaths among its troops amid outcry from members of Congress and others. The Defense Department has spent millions of dollars in recent years on multiple efforts to attempt to understand what causes service members to harm or kill themselves. The department has taken some steps to increase troops' access to mental health professionals, combat the longstanding stigma that seeking help was a sign of weakness and better train its troops on firearms safety, defense officials have said.

Among the efforts, the Pentagon was mandated by Congress to create an independent review committee to study the issue. The committee began work in May and is expected to produce a comprehensive report on military suicide by February.

Since 2018, the Defense Department has been required to re-

lease an annual report on suicide in the military to better understand the scope of the losses and document prevention efforts.

The latest annual report was released last week and showed the Army's efforts to prevent suicides among its ranks stagnated last year as the other service branches saw a decline in self-inflicted deaths.

The Pentagon reported an active-duty suicide rate of about 24 suicide deaths per 100,000 service members for 2021, down from about 29 self-inflicted deaths per 100,000 troops in 2020. But the Army rate remained at about 36 deaths per 100,000 soldiers, which is the same as 2020, according to the annual report.

The new policies being tested by the 18th Airborne Corps will impact roughly 92,000 soldiers who are assigned to the unit at 13 installations.

US sailor could face charges months after Japan incident

By ALEX WILSON
AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Local police are recommending criminal charges against a U.S. Navy sailor who allegedly charged into a group of people and injured several of them in a popular beach resort town near the home of the U.S. 7th Fleet.

The male sailor, 29, whose identity has not been disclosed by either the Navy or Japanese authorities, is accused of running into five people at about 8:30 p.m. July 9 in Zushi, eight miles from the naval base, a Kanagawa Prefectural Police spokesman told Stars and Stripes by phone Monday. Japanese government spokespeople are customarily required to speak to the media on the condition of anonymity.

A 58-year-old woman from Yokohama suffered several

broken bones, including a broken upper jaw and a broken nose, and a 33-year-old man from Tokyo sustained sprained cervical vertebrae, according to the spokesman. The remaining three sustained minor injuries.

Police on Friday recommended the Yokohama District Public Prosecutors Office indict the sailor on charges of bodily injury, the spokesman said. Prosecutors, not police, decide formal charges under Japan's criminal justice system.

Naval base spokesman Randall Baucom said the sailor is assigned to the base but declined to identify the service member by name, age, rank, gender or specific command.

In response to the incident, the Zushi Municipal Assembly passed a unanimous resolution Sept. 6 demanding the U.S. military apologize, compensate the victims and increase oversight on service members' actions.

Russian court rejects Griner appeal of 9-year sentence

Associated Press

MOSCOW — A Russian court on Tuesday rejected an appeal by U.S. basketball star Brittney Griner of her nine-year prison sentence for drug possession, a step that could move her closer to a possible high-stakes prisoner swap between Moscow and Washington.

The eight-time all-star center with the WNBA's Phoenix Mercury and a two-time Olympic gold medalist was convicted Aug. 4 after police said they found vape canisters containing cannabis oil in her luggage at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport.

Griner, 32, was not at the Moscow Regional Court hearing but appeared via video link from a penal colony outside the capital where she is held.

At her trial, Griner admitted to having the canisters in her luggage but testified she packed them inadvertently in her haste

to make her flight and had no criminal intent. Her defense team presented written statements saying she had been prescribed cannabis to treat chronic pain.

The nine-year sentence was close to the maximum of 10 years, and Griner's lawyers argued after the conviction that the punishment was excessive.

Griner's arrest in February came at a time of heightened tensions between Moscow and Washington, just days before Russia sent troops into Ukraine.

Reflecting growing pressure on the Biden administration to do more to bring Griner home, Secretary of State Antony Blinken took the unusual step of revealing publicly in July that Washington had made a "substantial proposal" to get Griner home, along with Paul Whelan, an American serving a 16-year sentence in Russia for espionage.

Sunak takes over as UK prime minister

Associated Press

LONDON — Rishi Sunak became Britain's third prime minister of the year on Tuesday, tasked with taming an economic crisis that has left the country's finances in a precarious state and millions struggling to pay their food and energy bills.

Sunak, who is the United Kingdom's first leader of color, met King Charles III at Buckingham Palace, where the monarch officially asked the new leader of the governing Conservative Party to form a government, as is tradition.

Sunak clinched the leadership position Monday, seen by his party as a safe pair of hands

it hopes will stabilize an economy sliding toward recession, and stem its own plunging popularity, after the brief, disastrous term of Liz Truss.

Her package of unfunded tax cuts spooked financial markets with the prospect of ballooning debt, drove the pound to record lows and forced the Bank of England to intervene — weakening Britain's fragile economy and obliterating her authority within her party.

Sunak — at 42 the youngest British leader in more than 200 years — acknowledged the scale of his challenge as well as the skepticism of a British public alarmed at the state of the

economy and weary of a Conservative Party soap opera that has chewed through two prime ministers in as many months.

"I fully appreciate how hard things are," Sunak said outside the prime minister's 10 Downing Street residence. "And I understand, too, that I have work to do to restore trust after all that has happened. All I can say is that I am not daunted."

When he was Treasury chief, Sunak became popular with the public by handing out billions in support to shuttered businesses and laid-off workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

But now he will have to oversee tax hikes and public spend-

ing cuts as he tries to bring inflation and government debt under control.

Acknowledging "difficult decisions to come," Sunak tried to draw a line under the chaos that engulfed Truss and her predecessor, Boris Johnson. He said his government "will have integrity, professionalism and accountability at every level."

Sunak's top priorities will be appointing Cabinet ministers, and preparing for a budget statement that will set out how the government plans to come up with billions of dollars to fill a fiscal hole created by soaring inflation and a sluggish economy.

Adidas ends partnership with Ye over antisemitic remarks

Associated Press

LONDON — Adidas has ended its partnership with the rapper formerly known as Kanye West over his offensive and antisemitic remarks, the latest company to cut ties with Ye and a decision that the German sportswear company said would hit its bottom line.

"Adidas does not tolerate antisemitism and any other sort of hate speech," the company said in a statement Tuesday. "Ye's recent comments and actions have been unacceptable, hateful and dangerous, and they violate the company's values of diversity and inclusion, mutual respect and fairness."

The company faced pressure to cut ties with Ye, with celebrities and others on social media urging Adidas to act. It said at the beginning of the month that it was placing its lucrative sneaker deal with the rapper under review.

Adidas said Tuesday that it conducted a "thorough review" and would immediately stop production of its line of Yeezy products and stop payments to Ye and his companies. The

sportswear company said it was expected to take a hit of up to \$246 million to its net income this year from the move.

The move by Adidas, whose CEO Kasper Rorsted is stepping down next year, comes after Ye was suspended from Twitter and Instagram this month over antisemitic posts that the social networks said violated their policies.

He recently suggested slavery was a choice and called the COVID-19 vaccine the "mark of the beast," among other comments. He was also criticized for wearing a "White Lives Matter" T-shirt to his Yeezy collection show in Paris.

Ye's talent agency, CAA, has dropped him, and the MRC studio announced Monday that it is shelving a complete documentary about the rapper.

The Balenciaga fashion house cut ties with Ye last week, according to Women's Wear Daily. JPMorganChase and Ye have ended their business relationship, although the banking breakup was in the works even before Ye's antisemitic comments.

Israeli troops raid gunmen's hideout; 5 Palestinians killed

Associated Press

NABLUS, West Bank — Israeli forces raided a stronghold of an armed group in the occupied West Bank's second-largest city, blowing up a bomb lab and engaging in a firefight, the military said Tuesday. Five Palestinians were killed and 20 were wounded, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.

The overnight raid in the old city, or kasbah, of Nablus, was one of the deadliest in the West Bank in 2022 and comes at a time of escalating tensions.

Television footage showed flames and smoke rising in the night sky over Nablus. The army said it used shoulder-launched missiles. Local residents reported a large explosion that rocked the old city and surrounding neighborhoods.

The target of the raid was a group of Palestinian gunmen calling themselves the Lions' Den. The group was responsible for the recent fatal shooting of an Israeli soldier and several attempted attacks, the army said.

The five men killed in the raid were in their 20s and 30s, the

Health Ministry said. Several of the wounded were in serious condition, the ministry said.

Israel's caretaker prime minister, Yair Lapid, confirmed that Wadie Houh, a leader of the Lion's Den group, was killed in a shootout with Israeli troops overnight. In remarks at a conference, he said the operation was "an accurate and deadly strike at the heart of terror infrastructure trying to carry out attacks."

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip staged a general strike in protest of Tuesday's killings. Stores remained shuttered throughout the day in Nablus, Ramallah, Gaza City and other Palestinian cities.

Elsewhere in the West Bank, the army said troops fired at a suspect who threw an explosive at them during an arrest raid near the village of Nebi Saleh. The Palestinian Health Ministry reported the death of 19-year-old Qusai al-Tamimi.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' spokesman, Nabil Abu Rdeneh, issued a statement in which he described the ongoing Israeli raids as a war crime.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Hunter shoots self while fighting off grizzly attack

WY PINEDALE — A hunter accidentally shot himself in the leg while trying to fight off a grizzly bear attack in west-central Wyoming — the second such attack in a week’s time, officials said.

Lee Francis, 65, of Evanston, was taken to the University of Utah Health hospital for treatment after the encounter, the Sublette County Sheriff’s Office said.

Francis was hunting with his son in an area south of Grand Teton National Park when the bear attacked him. He was able to fire several rounds from his handgun, causing the bear to run away, but one of the rounds hit Francis in the lower leg, the sheriff’s office said.

His son used a satellite phone to call for help then began providing first aid. His son was able to help his father onto a horse and they headed toward a nearby lake to meet search and rescue crews.

Couple wanted in multiple murder cases found dead

AZ KINGMAN — A couple wanted in connection with murder cases in Arizona and Nevada has been found dead in a desert area southeast of Kingman, according to authorities.

Mohave County Sheriff’s detectives said the bodies of Hunter McGuire, 26, and his girlfriend, Samantha Branek, 32, were found lying next to each other with gunshot wounds to the head.

Lake Havasu City police said it appears McGuire shot him-

self, but it’s unclear if Branek’s wound was self-inflicted. The county medical examiner’s office will determine an official cause of death.

The couple was being sought in connection with a double homicide in Kingman, according to authorities.

They said McGuire also was considered a suspect in the fatal shooting of a woman in Las Vegas.

Gunfire during illegal racing kills 3 people

IL CHICAGO — Three young men were fatally shot and two more were seriously wounded during what Chicago police called a caravan of street racers involving about 100 vehicles that took over an intersection on the city’s Southwest Side.

The shooting happened in Brighton Park after the caravan blocked streets leading to the intersection for illegal street racing, Chicago police Cmdr. Don Jerome said during a news conference. Those killed were between the ages of 15 and 20, Jerome said, adding that the two wounded are expected to survive.

Police made no immediate arrests.

Ex-officer acquitted of lying to FBI in drug raid

PA PHILADELPHIA — A federal jury has acquitted a former Philadelphia police sergeant of lying to the FBI about money seized during a drug raid.

Jurors deliberated for only one hour before clearing Michael Kennedy, 50, of eight

counts of making false statements to the FBI, obstruction and conspiracy, The Philadelphia Inquirer reported.

The 27-year police veteran was indicted last year after security camera footage was posted online that the occupants of the apartment said showed Kennedy taking money from a nightstand during the 2016 raid.

According to court documents, Kennedy told investigators he put the money into his pocket to later log it into evidence. Federal authorities alleged that he lied to investigators, and coached another officer to lie about the evidence transaction. The second officer was not charged.

Kennedy testified at trial that he gave a flawed account due to a memory lapse rather than a deliberate attempt to deceive the agents.

Arbitrator says firefighter lied about fatal crash

MO KANSAS CITY — An arbitrator ruled that a Kansas City firefighter lied to police after he drove through a red light and crashed into several vehicles, killing three people last year.

Judge Miles Sweeney said in a summary of his findings that was filed in court that the evidence from eyewitnesses, traffic cameras and the scene of the crash showed that Dominic Biscari didn’t slow down as he approached the intersection in a 40,000-pound fire engine or slam on the brakes when he saw an SUV pull in front of him like he told investigators, according to the Kansas City Star.

The fire truck collided with the SUV and pushed it through

the intersection before continuing into several parked cars and smashing into a building. Two people in the SUV and a pedestrian who was about to enter a vehicle died. And the upper floor of the brick building that the fire truck struck collapsed, burying the pedestrian in a pile of rubble.

Skydiver dies in school football pregame jump

TN JONESBOROUGH — A skydiver has died after his hard landing from a pregame jump at a Tennessee high school football stadium, officials said.

In a statement, Washington County Schools Superintendent Jerry Boyd said the diver jumped at the David Crockett High School football stadium in the northeastern Tennessee town of Jonesborough. David Crockett was facing Daniel Boone High School from nearby Gray.

Jump TN, a company in Greeneville, said in a statement that the 55-year-old man worked with the company and had performed more than 1,500 jumps during decades of experience.

In what it described as a “hard landing outside of the intended landing area,” the company said observers and witnesses did not notice anything unusual about the free fall or his parachute, saying it was deployed “without incident.” Witnesses “didn’t notice anything unusual about the parachute’s performance that would indicate any abnormality or malfunction,” the company said.

— From wire reports



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Astros keep winning in wake of scandal

Associated Press

They're in the World Series for a fourth time in six seasons, a remarkable feat of staying power for a franchise in any era of baseball history, let alone one that includes a 12-team playoff gauntlet filled with potential pitfalls.

Houston Astros pitcher Lance McCullers Jr. put it succinctly on Sunday night: "This is not easy."

Even so, the dichotomy that is this generation of Astros will probably never go away.

They left no doubt that they're the best team in the American League this season, sweeping slugger Aaron Judge and the New York Yankees in four games after Sunday's 6-5 victory.

It should be a lovable group. There's pint-sized star Jose Altuve, two-time All-Star Alex Bregman, ace right-hander Justin Verlander and a slew of up-and-coming players like ALCS MVP Jeremy Peña, Yor-dan Alvarez and Kyle Tucker.

There's also Dusty Baker, the 73-year-old manager who is still searching for his first World Series title and the oldest man to lead a team to the Fall Classic.

And yet ...

The stench of the 2017 cheating scandal — when the Astros were found to have illicitly stolen signs that season — still lingers, even though 21 of the 26 players on this year's ALCS roster were not on the 2017 team.

Only Altuve, Bregman, McCullers, Verlander and Yuli Gurriel remain. The quintet has endured a firehose of hate from fans and even fellow players since the scandal was

brought to light before the 2020 season. The catcalls were still heard at Yankee Stadium over the past few days, but as the Astros piled up the runs and wins, there was a hint of another emotion.

Grudging respect.

"They got better treatment here this time than in previous times here," Baker said. "So maybe it was a different crowd or maybe the crowd has finally forgiven things of the past."

That's probably wishful thinking.

But it's also probably time to admit that these Astros — trash cans or no trash cans — are simply really good at baseball.

"When everything happened a few years ago, we knew the one thing that we could do is we could win and we could win and win a lot," McCullers said. "I understand people are still not going to like us. They're going to boo us, but at some point you have to respect what we're doing."

It's a franchise that's kept rolling despite the upheaval the cheating scandal wrought. Manager A.J. Hinch and general manager Jeff Luhnow were suspended for a year by MLB and eventually fired before being replaced by Baker and James Click. Many of the best players from that 2017 team have retired or moved on.

Star outfielder George Springer left for the Blue Jays. Two-time All-Star shortstop Carlos Correa signed with the Twins. Right-handed pitcher Charlie Morton left for the Rays and is now with the Braves.

Altuve is among those who have witnessed it all. Now his team is back in the World Series: The Astros host the Phillies in

Game 1 on Friday.

Those who wanted the Astros to suffer a quick, embarrassing downfall in the aftermath of 2017 continue to be disappointed.

"When you talk about Springer, Charlie Morton, Carlos Correa, you're talking about all superstars, and to get players to fill that spot it's not easy," Altuve said before Game 4 on Sunday. "The fact that we're still playing really good and being in these situations, like I said, we just have to give a lot of credit to the front office group."

In a way, the Astros saga is a fitting chapter for a sport that can never seem to completely enjoy its biggest moments.

Judge set the AL record for homers with 62 this season and the debate raged about whether he should be considered the all-time single-season record holder. Barry Bonds, Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa all hit more in the National League, but for many, their accomplishments are overshadowed by links to performance-enhancing drugs.

Now the debate will rage about the Astros.

Altuve has become a pro at deflecting vitriol. He knows some in baseball would love for them to go away.

That doesn't appear to be happening any time soon.

"I do as best as I can to keep everything away and just focus on the game and just be ready to help my team," Altuve said. "Like I said, it doesn't matter where I play, I just got to be 100% focused on the game."

Tshiebwe, Timme top AP men's hoops preseason All-Americans

Associated Press

Oscar Tshiebwe was the consensus men's college basketball player of the year last season, an accomplishment usually followed by a jump to the NBA.

Kentucky's big man decided to take a different route. He's coming back — and he may be even better this season.

"He's a better passer. He's a better dribbler. He has a better feel. He talks," Kentucky coach John Calipari said. "Offensively he knows the plays better. And he's authentic."

Tshiebwe was a unanimous selection along with Gonzaga big man Drew Timme on The Associated Press preseason All-America team released Monday. They

were joined by North Carolina forward Armando Bacot, Houston guard Marcus Sasser and Indiana forward Trayce Jackson-Davis on the team selected by a 59-person media panel that votes on the weekly AP Top 25.

Tshiebwe is the ninth AP national player of the year — Bill Walton and Ralph Sampson did it twice — to return for another season, according to Sportradar, and the first since Tyler Hansbrough came back to lead North Carolina to a national title in 2009.

The fourth-ranked Wildcats are hoping Tshiebwe can do the same for them.

The 6-foot-9, 260-pound forward from the Congo led the nation in rebounding at 15.1 per game while averaging 17.4 points.

He shot 60% from the field, had 60 steals and 55 blocks, and finished the season with 16 consecutive double-doubles on the way to a school-record 28.

Instead of taking his game to the NBA, Tshiebwe opted to return when projections had him going in the second round of the 2022 draft.

Timme made a similar decision — two years in a row. The 6-10 senior was one of the nation's best big men each of the past two seasons, leading the Zags on deep NCAA runs, including a trip to the national title game in 2021. He was a second-team All-American for the second straight season a year ago after averaging 18.4 points and 6.8 rebounds.

Bears score 23 straight, beat Patriots

Associated Press

The clock was running down in the second quarter and the pocket was collapsing around Justin Fields, with one defender coming at him from the right, another circling around on his left, and a third coming straight at him.

A quick pump fake froze one of the rushers. Fields drifted left, barely eluding the outstretched arm of another, and then stutter-stepped to the right to squeeze through a hole that barely existed. And then it was a race to the sideline, picking up 20 yards on a third-and-14 and moving Chicago into field goal range.

Fields threw for 179 yards and a touchdown and ran for 82 yards and another score on Monday night, converting five third downs with his legs and five more with his arm to lead Chicago to a 33-14 victory over the New England Patriots.

"He kept the drives going," Patriots linebacker Matthew Judon said. "We would get them in third and long, and it seemed like he would just find a running lane and pick it up with his feet, or making a throw. He would just keep the chains moving. We had no answer for him."

Fields ran for a 3-yard score in the first quarter to give the Bears (3-4) a 10-0 lead. After Bailey Zappe came off the bench to replace Mac Jones and led New England to

back-to-back touchdowns and a 14-10 lead, Fields hit Khalil Herbert for a 25-yard touchdown pass to start a string of 23 unanswered points.

"I'm still growing, still getting better," Fields said. "The sky's the limit for sure."

In a matchup of quarterbacks from the 2020 College Football Playoff National Championship game, Fields outperformed Jones, who led Alabama to victory over Fields' Ohio State. Fields also outplayed Zappe, who came on after Jones managed just two three-and-outs and an interception in his return after missing three games.

With the damp Gillette Stadium crowd chanting "Zappe! Zappe!" the fourth-round draft pick from Western Kentucky led the Patriots to back-to-back touchdowns and a 14-10 lead. But the Bears scored the next 23 points.

"Just a poor showing, across the board, from beginning all the way to the end," New England safety Devin McCourty said. "If we give up 33 points, I don't care who plays quarterback. We're going to have a tough time winning the game."

Zappe was 5 of 6 for 109 yards and a touchdown in the first half. But in the second, he was 9 of 16 for 76 yards and two interceptions. Jones completed 3 of 6 passes for 13 yards, with one interception. Rhamondre Stevenson caught eight passes for 59 yards

and ran 11 times for 39 for the Patriots (3-4).

Patriots coach Bill Belichick said the plan was to play both quarterbacks, and that Jones was not benched for his performance. He declined to say who would start next week against the Jets.

"He would have gone back in (but) the score got out of hand," he said. "I didn't think that was the right thing to do."

David Montgomery ran for 62 yards and Herbert did the same for Chicago, which had lost three straight games and four of five. The Bears had lost five straight to the Patriots and eight out of nine since beating New England in the 1986 Super Bowl 46-10.

Bears kicker Cairo Santos was 4 for 4, including a 50-yarder late in the third quarter that made it 26-14. After Zappe went three-and-out, Dante Pettis returned a punt 27 yards to the Patriots' 39-yard line; Herbert and Montgomery took it the last 26 yards to give Chicago a 33-14 lead.

Bears rookies Kyler Gordon and Jaquan Brisker had their first career interceptions.

The loss deprived Belichick of a 325th career victory — regular season and playoffs — that would have moved him past Monsters of the Midway Hall of Famer George Halas on the NFL's all-time list. Belichick and Halas remain tied for second behind Don Shula, who won 347 games for the Baltimore Colts and Miami Dolphins.

Colts bench injured QB Ryan in favor of Ehlinger

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The Indianapolis Colts thought Matt Ryan would help them make a playoff run, maybe even win a championship. Instead, the bruised and battered 15-year veteran is getting benched.

Coach Frank Reich announced Monday that second-year quarterback Sam Ehlinger will make his starting debut Sunday against the Washington Commanders.

"Right now, the move is for Sam to be the starter the rest of the season," Reich said. "It's a big step, but we think he's ready. This guy's special. You all know it, everybody knows it. Just talk to anybody in that locker room."

The move comes one day after a 19-10 loss at Tennessee left Indy 1½ games behind the Titans in the AFC South. Ryan threw two interceptions and was sacked three times, the first apparently resulting in a separated throwing shoulder late in the first half.

He was 18-for-21 with 123 yards and one touchdown in the second half, but couldn't complete his fourth fourth-quarter comeback this season. Even if Ryan wasn't hurt, Reich said, the decision would have been the same.

"The shoulder injury is real, but this move was going to be made either way," he said.

Ryan did not speak with reporters Monday. He is usually available on Wednesdays.

Indy (3-3-1) sent a third-round draft pick to Atlanta for the 37-year-old Ryan.

General manager Chris Ballard thought Ryan was playing well as recently as last season and in April, team owner Jim Irsay said he thought Ryan could make the Colts a contender for up to four more years.

But this season has not gone the way many anticipated.

Ryan has thrown nine interceptions and has 11 fumbles, both league highs.

The Colts' usually strong offensive line has struggled, allowing 59 hits and 24 sacks — tied with Cincinnati's Joe Burrow for the most in the NFL entering Monday.

And with Indy's traditionally strong ground game becoming ineffective, Ryan has thrown more passes (297) than anyone other than Chargers quarterback Justin Herbert (308).

The combination has made Indy the NFL's fourth-lowest scoring team, 16.1 points per game, and in need of a change.

"Excited for Sam and the opportunity this presents him," Reich said. "We've always thought Sam had some special sauce. We feel this is the best decision for our team."

Reich said he told the quarterbacks and their teammates Monday and that Ryan responded like a pro, promising to help the Colts. The hope is Ehlinger's mobility can help him evade pass rushers, make plays down the field and make plays with his legs.

Simons, Lillard lead unbeaten Blazers

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Anfernee Simons had 29 points, including seven three-pointers, as the Portland Trail Blazers won their fourth consecutive game to start the season with a 135-110 victory over the Denver Nuggets on Monday night.

Simons had 22 points and six threes in the third quarter alone as Portland became the only 4-0 team in the league.

Damian Lillard finished with 31 points and eight assists for the Blazers, who took over in the second half after a sluggish start.

“Explosive, and fun,” Lillard said about Simons’ third-quarter outburst. “Just being able to see it — I was looking into the crowd. It was crazy, like he’s blowing the roof off this place.”

The last time Portland opened 4-0 was 1999. The Blazers are the lone undefeated team in the Western Conference.

Aaron Gordon scored 26 for the Nuggets (2-2). Nikola Jokic, who had consecutive triple-doubles in Denver’s previous two games, got into foul trouble and finished with nine points, nine rebounds and nine assists.

76ers 120, Pacers 106: James Harden had 29 points and 11 assists, and Joel Embiid scored 26 points to lead host Philadelphia to

its first win of the season.

The Sixers started 0-3, dropping the first two games to Eastern Conference contenders Boston and Milwaukee. Embiid dropped 40 points in a loss to San Antonio as the Sixers still joined Orlando as the only East teams at 0-3.

No more.

Harden made 10 of 18 shots from the floor and hit two straight threes in the fourth that pushed the lead to 109-95.

Grizzlies 134, Nets 124: Ja Morant and Desmond Bane scored 38 points each to lead host Memphis past Brooklyn.

Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving each scored 37 points for the Nets, and Nic Claxton finished with 16 points.

Rockets 114, Jazz 108: Kevin Porter Jr. scored 26 points and Jalen Green added 25 to lead previously winless Houston to a victory while handing visiting Utah its first loss of the season.

Seven players scored in double figures for the Jazz, led by Jordan Clarkson’s 17 points. Lauri Markkanen had 14, and Kelly Olynyk, Jarred Vanderbilt and Simone Fontecchio each added 13.

Raptors 98, Heat 90: Fred VanVleet scored 24 points, Pascal Siakam added 23 and visiting Toronto rallied in the fourth

quarter to beat Miami.

Jimmy Butler scored 26 points for the Heat, who got 22 points and 15 rebounds from Tyler Herro. Bam Adebayo scored 14 points and Duncan Robinson added 12 for Miami.

Knicks 115, Magic 102: Julius Randle had 25 points and 12 rebounds, Jalen Brunson scored 21 points and New York kept No. 1 pick Paolo Banchero and visiting Orlando winless.

Banchero scored 21 points to become just the third No. 1 pick to open a career with four consecutive games of 20 or more points.

Spurs 115, Timberwolves 106: Devin Vassell scored 23 points and Jakob Poeltl added 14 points and 14 rebounds to help San Antonio beat host Minnesota.

Karl Anthony Towns had 27 points and 11 rebounds for the Timberwolves.

Bulls 120, Celtics 102: DeMar DeRozan scored 25 points, Nikola Vucevic added 18 points and 23 rebounds, and host Chicago wiped out a big early deficit to defeat Boston.

Ayo Dosunmu scored 22 points for Chicago. Zach LaVine, playing his second game after missing the first two, added 19 points, helping the Bulls stop a two-game skid.

Ovechkin, Capitals top Devils with big second period

Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. — Alexander Ovechkin took a spot from the great Gordie Howe in the NHL record book and closed in on another.

Ovechkin scored his 783rd career goal in a big second period and the Washington Capitals beat New Jersey 6-3 Monday night, ending the Devils’ three-game winning streak.

Ovechkin’s third goal of the season gave Washington a 4-1 lead and it turned out to be his 122nd game winner, passing Howe (121) for second overall behind Jaromir Jagr (135).

“It’s pretty cool obviously to be in that company and pass those legends, it’s a pretty cool moment,” Ovechkin said.

The Great Eight needs four more goals to pass Howe (786) for the most goals in NHL history with one franchise.

Garnet Hathaway, Conor Sheary and Nick Jensen also scored in the four-goal period for Washington. Backup goalie Charlie

Lindgren made 37 saves in winning for the first time since signing with the Caps as a free agent.

Golden Knights 3, Maple Leafs 1: Phil Kessel matched the NHL record for consecutive games played and Chandler Stephenson scored the go-ahead goal early in the third period to lead host Vegas.

Logan Thompson made 23 saves for the Golden Knights. Stephenson’s goal 42 seconds into the third gave Vegas a 2-1 lead and held up for his 15th career game-winner.

Kessel tied defenseman Keith Yandle’s ironman record by playing in his 989th straight game. The 17-year veteran is set to break the mark Tuesday at San Jose.

Senators 4, Stars 2: Brady Tkachuk scored the tiebreaking goal in Ottawa’s three-goal third period and the host Senators won their fourth straight.

Thomas Chabot, Shane Pinto and Derick Brassard also scored for the Senators, scoring four straight over a 12:07 stretch after falling behind 1-0 in the first period. Mag-

nus Hellberg stopped 30 shots in his season debut.

Oilers 6, Penguins 3: Leon Draisaitl had a goal and two assists as host Edmonton used a four-goal second period to rally past Pittsburgh.

Evander Kane, Zach Hyman and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins each had a goal and an assist, and Tyson Barrie and Ryan McLeod also scored for the Oilers. Jack Campbell finished with 32 saves.

Jets 4, Blues 0: Mark Scheifele scored in the second period and Connor Hellebuyck stopped 25 shots for his first shutout of the season to lead host Winnipeg.

Sam Gagner, Morgan Barron and Cole Perfetti scored in the third period and Josh Morrissey had two assists for the Jets, who were without coach Rick Bowness due to an illness.

Hurricanes 3, Canucks 2: Andrei Svechnikov scored his seventh goal of the season and visiting Carolina handed winless Vancouver its seventh straight loss.