

Zelenskyy's plan includes NATO invite

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Wednesday his plan to win his country's fight against Russia's invasion could bring peace next year, but it contains a step that some crucial Western allies have so far refused to countenance: inviting Ukraine to join NATO before the war ends.

"If we start moving according to this victory plan now, it may be possible to end the war no later than next year," Zelenskyy told his country's parliament.

He has recently been trying to win approval for the plan from Western partners, who so far have stopped short of publicly voicing their support for it.

The first point in Zelenskyy's five-point plan that was presented in a speech to the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament, is perhaps the most ambitious and

the most likely to make Western allies balk: letting Ukraine into NATO while the fighting continues.

Zelenskyy said granting Ukraine membership in the alliance would be a "testament of (allies') determination" to support Ukraine.

It may, however, be too ambitious a step.

NATO's collective security guarantee — Article 5 of the military alliance's treaty — is the pillar on which its credibility is based. It is a political commitment by all member countries to come to the aid of any member whose sovereignty or territory might be under attack.

NATO makes its decisions by consensus, and many allies — including the United States and Germany — refuse to allow Ukraine in while fighting continues because they fear being dragged

into a wider war with Russia.

At their summit in Washington in July, NATO's 32 members declared Ukraine on an "irreversible" path to membership in the Western military alliance. Any decision on offering to start membership talks is probably not likely before the next summit in the Netherlands in June.

Ukraine's troops are having trouble holding back Russia's military might, especially in the eastern Donetsk region where they are gradually being pushed backward.

Though Russia's gains have been incremental, its steady forward movement is slowly adding up and Ukraine keenly feels the need for more large-scale Western help.

But there are signs that Western support may be waning, diminished by a focus on the Middle East wars and domestic polit-

ical concerns. The U.S. elections next month could bring a major shift in Ukraine's fortunes, as Washington has been the biggest provider of military aid.

Zelenskyy publicly acknowledged for the first time that in private talks with Ukraine its Western partners are increasingly talking about "negotiations" with Russia and much less frequently use the word "justice" in conversations about the war.

He also dialed up the stakes in Ukraine, repeating his recent claims that North Korea is now sending military personnel to help Russia's war effort, as well as delivering ammunition, and that Iran and China are also aiding Moscow.

Zelenskyy's "victory plan" contains confidential sections which he didn't mention in Parliament, officials said.

US general in Pacific says China on 'insidious' path

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

U.S. Army Pacific's commander took the measure of China's military during a virtual fireside chat on Tuesday, a day after Chinese ships and aircraft swarmed around Taiwan for a daylong military exercise.

China on Monday sent 153 warplanes, a one-day record, across the Taiwan Strait median, the unofficial dividing line between the island and mainland China, during exercise Joint Sword 2024B. The aircraft carrier Liaoning and another two dozen ships joined the drills, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense wrote on social platform X on Monday and

Tuesday.

The training happened four days after Taiwan marked National Day, its founding holiday, and a speech by Taiwan President Lai Ching-te. China launched a similar, two-day exercise, Joint Sword 2024A, in May after Lai's inauguration.

These exercises result from Beijing's decadelong effort to modernize and reorganize its military, which bodes ill for the Indo-Pacific, according to Gen. Charles Flynn, commander of U.S. Army Pacific.

"The incremental path that they've been on, the insidious nature of that path, in other words, the lawfare, corruption, the behavior and some of the

ways forces are operating out there — that is concerning," he said during a talk for the Center for a New American Security, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank.

On Wednesday, a spokesman for China's Office of Taiwan Affairs reiterated that force remains an option for bringing Taiwan into a union with the mainland. It regards Taiwan as a breakaway province that must be returned to the fold.

"We are willing to strive for the prospect of peaceful reunification with the utmost sincerity and endeavor," spokesman Chen Binhua said at a press briefing Wednesday, Reuters reported that day. "But we will

never commit ourselves to renouncing the use of force."

Monday's exercise was punishment for Taiwan because Lai had colluded with foreign powers, damaged Taiwan-China relations, threatened stability in the region and "stubbornly adhered to the position of Taiwan independence," China's Taiwan affairs office said in a statement.

Lai's statements on Taiwan sovereignty since his inauguration, however, differ little from those of his predecessor, Tsai Ing-wen, according to Norah Huang, director for international relations at the Prospect Foundation, a security and foreign affairs think tank in Taipei.

Army aims for 61K recruits in next year

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — After barely meeting its recruiting goal last year, the Army announced Monday the service is aiming to recruit 61,000 new soldiers in the upcoming year.

“This goal is ambitious, but we believe it is achievable,” Army Secretary Christine Wormuth said at the Association of the U.S. Army’s annual conference.

The service set a recruiting goal of 55,000 for fiscal year 2024, narrowly surpassing it Sept. 30 with 55,300 recruits.

The Army set a recruiting goal in 2023 of 65,000 and slashed it after coming up short by about 10,000 soldiers.

The turnaround follows a yearslong enlistment funk. Each military service employed various strategies, programs and enticements to overcome recruiting woes.

In recent years the problems were exacerbated by several issues, including in-person recruiting restrictions during the pandemic, a low unemployment rate and stiff competition from the private sector.

Wormuth and Gen. Randy George, the Army chief of staff, unveiled plans last October to reorganize its recruiting force under a single three-star commander and create professional job classifications for enlisted soldiers and warrant officers who specialize in recruiting.

In August, the service sent 25 noncommissioned officers to work with civilian organizations for four months to learn innovations in recruiting to help improve the service’s new training and lay the groundwork for new strategies in attracting more recruits across the country. For years, the Army has involunta-

rily selected soldiers to work temporarily in recruiting as part of career development.

Five companies — Amazon, Deloitte, Wells Fargo, the University of Louisville and Boot Camp Digital — will host the soldiers through December as part of a years-long process to overhaul how the Army finds and enlists new soldiers.

Along with the new recruiting goal, Wormuth said the Army’s Delayed Entry Program goal for next year is 10,000, twice the number it was for fiscal 2024. The delayed entry program allows enlistees to sign up but leave for initial training later, often so that they can complete high school or college.

“Our exceptional Army recruiters secured over 11,000 commitments into the DEP, setting us up for another strong recruiting year in FY25,” Wormuth said.

The service has found success with its Future Soldier Prep Course, a program that gives lower-performing recruits fitness and academic instruction to help them meet military standards and go on to basic training. More than 28,000 young people have graduated from the course with a success rate of more than 90%, Brig. Gen. Jennifer Walkawicz, who leads operations for the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command, said in September.

This year, more than 13,000 recruits — nearly 24% of the 55,000 — came through the program that started two years ago.

“For young Americans who had the desire to join the Army but not the test scores, we created the Future Soldier Prep Course to give them a path to meet our standards. These efforts paid off,” Wormuth said.

800 vets’ discharges upgraded in ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ review

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — More than 800 LGBTQ+ veterans kicked out of the military for their sexuality under the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy will have their honor restored, the Pentagon announced Tuesday.

The announcement comes one year after the Defense Department began proactively reviewing 851 records of former service members discharged during “don’t ask, don’t tell” who were believed to be eligible for a change of status but had not yet applied. Of those, 96.8% — 824 veterans across the Air Force, Army, Navy and Marine Corps — will receive an honorable discharge.

“We will continue to honor the service and the sacrifice of all our troops — including the brave Americans who raised their hands to serve but were

turned away because of whom they love,” Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a statement.

“Don’t ask, don’t tell” was signed into law in 1993 by President Bill Clinton to allow gay men and lesbians to serve in the military as long as they did not make their sexual orientation public. Those who chose to disclose were discharged.

But the policy was repealed 13 years ago by Congress after forcing about 13,500 service members out of the military during the 17 years that it was in place from 1994 to 2011. While the majority were honorably separated, nearly 2,000 were separated with less than fully honorable conditions, according to Christa A. Specht, legal policy director at the Pentagon’s Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

USS Oscar Austin arrives in Spain, boosts defense

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The first of two additional destroyers planned for a Navy base in Spain arrived this week, heralding a long-anticipated expansion of NATO firepower in Europe.

USS Oscar Austin arrived at Naval Station Rota on Tuesday, joining four other destroyers already homeported there, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet said.

The ship’s homeport switch follows a May 2023 pact with Spain to increase the U.S. destroyer presence in the country from four to six.

Oscar Austin joins USS Roosevelt, USS Arleigh Burke, USS Bulkeley and USS Paul Ignatius as part of Destroyer Squadron

60. The sixth destroyer, which hasn’t been publicly identified, is anticipated to join the squadron in 2026.

The ship’s arrival provides allies “an added layer of security and assurance,” Vice Adm. Jeffrey Anderson, commander of 6th Fleet and Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO, said.

The increased naval presence comes as U.S. military commanders in Europe warn that Russian spies and saboteurs are escalating the risk of wider conflict on the Continent.

The war in Ukraine, Russian threats in the Baltic Sea and the effects of the Israel-Hamas war in the eastern Mediterranean have brought greater focus on the European theater than at any time since the Cold War.

Harris, Trump court Black male voters

Associated Press

DETROIT — Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris warned Tuesday that Republican Donald Trump would “institutionalize” harsh policing tactics that disproportionately affect Black men, while Trump blamed Harris’ immigration policies for “devastating” Black and Latino communities.

“Any African American or Hispanic that votes for Kamala ... you’ve got to have your head examined, because they are really screwing you,” Trump said of Harris, who is African American, at an evening rally in Georgia.

Earlier, during a radio town hall moderated by Charlamagne tha God, Harris promised to work to decriminalize marijuana, which accounts for arrests that also have a disproportionate impact on Black men. And she

acknowledged that racial disparities and bias exist in everyday life for Black people — in home ownership, health care, economic prosperity and even voting.

Just 21 days before the final votes are cast in the 2024 presidential season, Harris and Trump are scrambling to win over Black voters, women and other key constituencies in what looks to be a razor-tight election. Harris, a daughter of Jamaican and Indian immigrants, hopes to maintain her party’s traditional advantage with voters of color, while Trump is showing modest signs of momentum among Black men in particular.

A small shift among any group could swing the election.

Harris told Charlamagne that despite the persistence of racial bias, no one has a pass to sit out the election.

“We should never sit back and say, ‘OK, I’m not going to vote because everything hasn’t been solved,’” she said. “This is a margin-of-error race. It’s tight. I’m going to win. I’m going to win, but it’s tight.”

Trump has called for a return to “proven crime fighting methods, including stop and frisk.” The tactic, deployed by the New York City Police Department, involved stopping, questioning and sometimes frisking people deemed “reasonably suspicious.” It disproportionately affected Black and Hispanic men, and in 2013 the policy was found to have violated the U.S. Constitution.

Harris said part of her challenge is that Trump’s campaign is “trying to scare people away because otherwise they know they have nothing to run on. Ask

Donald Trump what is his plan for Black America. Ask him.”

Trump did not respond to Harris’ criticism during multiple stops Tuesday, including a Fox News town hall with an all-female audience and a nighttime rally in Atlanta, where he railed against Democrats and the media and focused especially on immigrants in the country illegally.

He insisted that immigrants are “devastating” people of color by taking their jobs. He called President Joe Biden and Vice President Harris’ border policies a “complete and total betrayal of African American communities and Hispanic communities.”

Trump also stood by his recent description of his political opponents as “the enemy within” — rhetoric that evokes authoritarian regimes.

2 Ga. election procedures rulings favor Democrats

Associated Press

ATLANTA — A judge has blocked a new rule that requires Georgia Election Day ballots to be counted by hand after the close of voting. The ruling came a day after the same judge ruled that county election officials must certify election results by the deadline set in law.

The rulings are victories for Democrats, liberal voting rights groups and some legal experts who have raised concerns that Donald Trump’s allies could refuse to certify the results if the former president loses to Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris in next month’s presidential election. They have also argued that new rules enacted by the Trump-endorsed majority on the State Election Board could be used to stop or delay certification and to undermine public confidence in the results.

The State Election Board last

month passed the rule requiring that three poll workers each count the paper ballots — not votes — by hand after the polls close. The election board in Cobb County, in Atlanta’s suburbs, had filed a lawsuit seeking to have a judge declare that rule and five others recently passed by the state board invalid, saying they exceed the state board’s authority, weren’t adopted in compliance with the law and are unreasonable.

In a ruling late Tuesday, Fulton County Superior Court Judge Robert McBurney wrote that the hand count rule “is too much, too late” and blocked its enforcement while he considers the merits of the case. McBurney on Monday had ruled in a separate case that “no election superintendent (or member of a board of elections and registration) may refuse to certify or abstain from certifying election results under any circumstance.”

NC governor candidate sues CNN over porn site report

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — North Carolina Republican Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson sued CNN on Tuesday over its recent report that he made explicit racial and sexual posts on a pornography website’s message board, calling the reporting reckless and defamatory.

The lawsuit comes less than four weeks after a report that led many fellow GOP elected officials and candidates to distance themselves from Robinson’s gubernatorial campaign.

Robinson has denied authoring the messages.

CNN “chose to publish despite knowing or recklessly disregarding that Lt. Gov. Robinson’s data — including his name, date of birth, passwords, and the email address supposedly associated with the NudeAfrica account — were previously compromised by multiple data breaches,” the lawsuit states, referencing the

website.

Robinson, who would be the state’s first Black governor if elected, called the report a “high-tech lynching” on a candidate “who has been targeted from Day 1 by folks who disagree with me politically and want to see me destroyed.”

CNN declined to comment Tuesday, spokesperson Emily Kuhn said in an email.

The CNN report, which aired Sept. 19, said Robinson left statements over a decade ago on the message board in which he referred to himself as a “black NAZI,” said he enjoyed transgender pornography, said he preferred Hitler to then-President Barack Obama, and slammed the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. as “worse than a maggot.” The network report said it matched details of the account on the message board to other online accounts held by Robinson.

Israeli jets pummel Lebanon, Beirut suburbs

Associated Press

QANA, Lebanon — Israeli airstrikes pounded areas across Lebanon, killing at least 21 people, officials said Wednesday, including more than a dozen in a southern town where Israeli bombardments in previous conflicts are seared into local memory.

Elsewhere in the south, a city's mayor was among the dead in a strike Lebanese officials said targeted a meeting coordinating relief efforts.

The Israeli military said they were targeting a Hezbollah commander in the strikes late Tuesday on the southern town of Qana, where 15 people were killed. Associated Press photos and video of the scene showed several flattened buildings and others with their top floors collapsed. Rescue workers carried away the remains of dead people and used

a bulldozer to remove rubble, as they searched for more victims. Israel said the target was Jalal Mustafa Hariri, Hezbollah's commander in charge of the Qana area.

In 1996, Israeli artillery shelling on a U.N. compound housing hundreds of displaced people in Qana killed at least 100 civilians and wounded scores more people, including four U.N. peacekeepers.

During the 2006 war, an Israeli strike on a residential building killed nearly three dozen people, a third of them children. Israel said at the time that it struck a Hezbollah rocket launcher behind the building.

Lebanon's caretaker prime minister, Najib Mikati, meanwhile accused Israel of "intentionally targeting" a municipal council meeting to discuss relief efforts in Nabatiyeh,

where six people were killed.

"What solution can be hoped for in light of this reality?" he asked in a statement.

The Israeli military said it targeted Hezbollah command centers and weapons facilities that had been embedded in civilian areas of Nabatiyeh in Wednesday's strikes, without providing evidence.

Israel also resumed its barrage on Beirut's southern suburbs after a six-day pause, hitting what it said was an arms warehouse under an apartment building, without providing evidence. The military warned residents to evacuate before the strike, and there were no reports of casualties.

The strikes on southern Beirut came after Mikati said the United States had given him assurances Israel would curb its strikes on the capital.

Hezbollah has a strong pres-

ence in southern Beirut, known as the Dahiyeh, which is also a residential and commercial area home to large numbers of civilians and people unaffiliated with the militant group.

The Israeli military posted an evacuation warning on the social media platform X ahead of the strike in Beirut.

An Associated Press photographer saw three airstrikes in the area, the first coming less than an hour after the notice.

In Nabatiyeh, more than half a dozen strikes hit the city and surrounding areas, according to Lebanon's Health Ministry, which said at least six people were killed and 43 wounded, with rescue efforts still underway. The city's mayor, Ahmad Kahil, was among those killed, provincial governor Huwaida Turk told The Associated Press.

Italian ship with migrants docks for processing

Associated Press

SHENGJIN, Albania — An Italian navy ship Wednesday docked at the Albanian port of Shengjin to bring the first group of 16 migrants intercepted in international waters to be processed there.

The naval ship *Libra* left the port of Lampedusa on Monday with 16 men — 10 from Bangladesh and six from Egypt — who were rescued at sea after departing from Libya, a ministry

spokesperson said.

Last week, Italy formally opened two centers in Albania where it plans to process thousands of asylum-seekers outside its borders.

The centers will only house adult men, while more vulnerable people such as women, children, the elderly and those who are ill or victims of torture will be accommodated in Italy. Families will not be separated.

Italian Ambassador to Alba-

nia Fabrizio Bucci said Friday that the two centers were ready to process migrants after the opening was delayed for months to consolidate the crumbling soil at one center, in Gjader where they will be accommodated.

A small group of activists gathered at the entrance of the port to protest the arrival of the migrants, holding a banner saying, "The European dream ends here."

"This deal is against human rights, more concretely the migrants' rights," said Edison Lika, a protester.

Though the center in Gjader has the capacity for 3,000 migrants, it will start with 400 and increase to 880 in several weeks.

The number of people reaching Italy along the central Mediterranean migration route from North Africa has fallen by 61% in 2024 from 2023.

Tech companies eye nuclear power to switch to clean energy

Associated Press

Amazon said Wednesday that it was investing in small nuclear reactors, coming just two days after a similar announcement by Google, as both tech giants seek new sources of carbon-free electricity to meet surging demand from data centers and artificial intelligence.

The plans come as the owner of the shuttered Three Mile Island nuclear power plant said last month it plans to restart the reactor so tech giant Microsoft can buy the power to supply its data centers. All three companies have been investing in solar and wind technologies, which make electricity without pro-

ducing greenhouse gas emissions. Now they say they need to go further in the search for clean electricity to meet both demand and their own commitments to cut emissions.

Nuclear energy is a climate solution in that its reactors don't emit the planet-warming greenhouse gases that come from

power plants that burn fossil fuels. The demand for power is surging globally as buildings and vehicles electrify.

People used more electricity than ever last year, placing strain on electric grids around the world. Much of the demand also comes from data centers and artificial intelligence.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Juveniles face charges after hospital disruption

AR TEXARKANA — Three teenage boys have been arrested after a group of juveniles were accused of taking over a section of a hospital in Texarkana, authorities said.

The Texarkana Arkansas Police Department responded Sunday to an emergency call from the Riverview Behavioral Hospital where several patients, described as unruly, had begun a riot and taken over a part of the facility.

When several officers from the TAPD and other agencies arrived, they found that several staff members were trapped inside a nurse's station, surrounded by the unruly patients, police said.

After developing a plan to evacuate the staff and secure the patients, officers wearing riot gear entered the facility and were able to "successfully separate all parties involved and de-escalate the situation without any major injuries to the patients, staff or officers," police said.

Court maintains block on absentee ballot restrictions

AL MONTGOMERY — A portion of a new Alabama law limiting help with absentee ballot applications will remain blocked, a federal appeals court ruled on Friday, siding with voting rights groups who argued that it discriminated against voters who are blind, disabled or cannot read.

A three-judge panel on the 11th Circuit Court unanimously affirmed a lower court decision

from September that blocked a portion of the law. The measure made it illegal to distribute an absentee ballot application that is prefilled with information such as the voter's name, or to return another person's absentee ballot application. The new law also made it a felony to give or receive a payment or a gift "for distributing, ordering, requesting, collecting, completing, prefilling, obtaining, or delivering a voter's absentee ballot application."

In a two-page decision, the appeals court judges ruled that removing the lower court's injunction would "injure" voting access for disabled voters and goes against the public interest.

No charges for officer who mistook phone for gun

CO DENVER — A Colorado police officer who fatally shot a Black man holding what turned out to be a cellphone as police tried to arrest him will not be prosecuted, the district attorney announced Friday.

Officer Michael Dieck told investigators that he believed Kilyn Lewis, who was wanted in connection with a shooting in Denver, was holding a gun in his right hand and was about to fire at the officers in neighboring Aurora on May 23, District Attorney John Kellner said in a letter explaining his decision.

The other officers, who did not fire at Lewis, also described Lewis' actions as consistent with someone preparing to draw a weapon and otherwise fight with officers, Kellner said.

Lewis was shot as police, who had been surveilling him, moved in to arrest him in the parking lot of a condo building.

In portions of body camera footage previously released by police, the officers, who appear to emerge from unmarked vehicles, can be heard shouting at Lewis to get on the ground.

After taking a few steps next to his car and putting his right hand behind his back, Lewis raises his hands in the air, as if to surrender.

Daughter charged with murder after remains found

KY MOUNT OLIVET — A Kentucky woman who was arrested after police found her mother's dismembered body in her yard was indicted on a murder charge Monday.

Police were called to a home in Mount Olivet in northern Kentucky on Wednesday and found human remains inside and outside the house. After obtaining a warrant, they arrested Torilena Fields, 32, and charged her with abuse of a corpse, evidence tampering and obstruction.

A grand jury in Robertson County issued an indictment Monday that accused Fields of shooting her mother, Trudy Fields, in the head and stabbing her multiple times before dismembering her corpse. She was also indicted on a charge of killing a dog.

Pumpkin weighing 2,471 pounds wins Calif. contest

CA HALF MOON BAY — A Minnesota horticulture teacher remained the reigning champion Monday of an annual pumpkin-weighing contest in Northern California where his massive gourds have won the top prize four years in a row.

Travis Gienger, of Anoka, Minn., beat his closest competitor by 6 pounds to clinch the victory at the 51st World Championship Pumpkin Weigh-Off in Half Moon Bay, south of San Francisco.

His winning gourd came in at 2,471 pounds, falling short of the world record he set last year with a pumpkin weighing 2,749 pounds.

Gienger, 44, said that as he has done in the past, he focused on having healthy soil and well-fed plants but that a cold fall with record-breaking rain likely impacted his pumpkin's growth.

Prosecutor drops assault charge against sheriff

VT NORTH HERO — A simple assault charge has been dropped against a Vermont sheriff accused of kicking a shackled detainee twice in the groin after two mistrials in the case, prosecutors said Monday.

A judge declared a second mistrial on Oct. 7 in the case of Franklin County Sheriff John Grismore, who was accused of kicking the detainee when he was a captain with the department. A jury also deadlocked at his first trial in July.

Grand Isle State's Attorney Doug DiSabito said Monday that he reviews any case after a mistrial and decides "whether another trial is a good use of public resources and is in the interests of justice."

"I did that here and have determined that a third trial is not in the public interest. Therefore, I am dismissing the case against Mr. Grismore," DiSabito said in a statement.

— From wire reports

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Judge finally goes deep as Yanks top Guardians

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Aaron Judge sent the ball soaring toward Monument Park and Gleyber Torres tagged up at first base.

“That was disrespect out of Gleyber, man,” Judge said with a smile. “He’s seen me hit 58 of those things this year.”

Judge’s first home run of the postseason broke the tension, a two-run, seventh-inning drive that helped boost the New York Yankees over the Cleveland Guardians 6-3 on Tuesday night for a 2-0 AL Championship Series lead.

“I’m a little disappointed in Gleyber for not knowing Judge’s pop there,” Anthony Rizzo said. “We were ribbing him a lot about that. It’s a big swing for Judgey.”

Judge, who entered with just one RBI in the playoffs, hit a sacrifice fly in a two-run second that put the Yankees ahead 3-0 — af-

ter Cleveland intentionally walked Juan Soto to load the bases.

“You want to try to get a double-play ball,” Guardians manager Stephen Vogt said. “You want to try to get two outs with one pitch.”

Judge, who led the major leagues with 58 homers and 144 RBIs, was understanding.

“I would probably walk him, too,” he said.

With New York leading 4-2 in the seventh, the likely AL MVP drove a fastball at the letters from Hunter Gaddis 414 feet to center for his 14th career postseason home run.

“It was a big swing to kind of give us that cushion,” Yankees manager Aaron Boone said. “The bench was pretty pumped when that happened.”

Judge was also good-natured about Torres’ decision to tag up.

“You never know on these windy, chilly nights what that ball is going to do when you hit it to center here,” he said. “but the ghosts were pulling out there to Monument Park, that’s for sure.”

In a matchup of aces who had off nights, Cleveland’s Tanner Bibee got only four outs in the shortest start of his professional career and Gerrit Cole was chased after four walks in 4½ innings.

“Just got to do better, got to do better,” said Cole, the reigning AL Cy Young Award winner.

Winner Clay Holmes, Tim Hill and Tommy Kahnle combined for 3⅓ scoreless innings.

José Ramírez hit a ninth-inning home run off Luke Weaver, just the second earned run New York’s bullpen has allowed over 23½ innings in six postseason games.

Game 3 is Thursday in Cleveland. The Yankees lead the ALCS 2-0 for the first time since 2009 against the Los Angeles Angels.

Torres reached base leading off for the fifth time in the playoffs and had three hits. Rizzo had two hits and is 3 for 7 in two games since returning from two fractured fingers that caused him to miss the Division Series.

Rookie shortstop Brayan Rocchio and right fielder Will Brennan committed run-scoring errors for Cleveland. Rocchio dropped Judge’s first-inning pop-up, allowing Torres to score.

“No excuse, I need to make that play,” Rocchio said through an interpreter. “I thought I was under the ball and last minute I was leaning toward second base.”

No. 1 Texas’ defense will be tested by QB Beck, No. 5 Georgia

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — By any measure, from the official statistics to the informal eye test, top-ranked Texas’ defense has been dominant.

The Longhorns rank No. 1 in total defense and scoring defense. They are top 10 in first downs allowed, tackles for loss and passing yards. Much of that is built against opponents starting former walk-on quarterbacks (Michigan) and freshmen (Mississippi State and Oklahoma.)

But the level of quarterback play Texas will face, in both talent and experience, is about to get much better over the second half of the season.

Texas hosts No. 5 Georgia on Saturday night in the first matchup of top-five teams in Austin since 2006, before playing the next week at Vanderbilt. Bulldogs senior Carson Beck was a preseason first team Associated Press All-America pick, and standout Vanderbilt transfer Diego Pavia has carried the Commodores to a surprising 4-2 start, including a historic win over then-No. 1 Alabama.

Quite simply, Texas hasn’t defended this caliber of quarterback all season.

Beck is a player on the doorstep of the NFL, Texas coach Steve Sarkisian said.

“There’s nothing in the throw game (Beck) can’t do,” Sarkisian said. “He’s played enough football now, too. It’s kind of hard to confuse guys when they’ve played that much football.”

Texas (6-0, 2-0 SEC) has allowed just one team to pass for more than 200 yards this season. Beck passed for 459 yards, three touchdowns and two interceptions last week in a 41-31 win over Mississippi State. His 36 completions set a Georgia record.

Even when Beck struggled early in Georgia’s loss to Alabama, he rallied the Bulldogs to a late fourth-quarter lead. He finished with 439 yards in the loss where Georgia’s rally ended with an Alabama interception in the end zone in the final minute.

Sarkisian recruited Beck when the Texas coach was an assistant at Alabama. Beck had initially committed to the Crimson Tide before switching to Georgia.

Beck is 18-2 in his career as a starter, and 6-2 against top-20 opponents.

The Bulldogs (5-1, 3-1) will need another exceptional game from him Saturday. A second SEC loss could threaten any chance of playing for the SEC championship, and raise the alarms on the College Football Playoff as well.

Texas has all but overwhelmed opposing

quarterbacks so far.

In last week’s 34-3 thrashing of rival Oklahoma, the Longhorns sacked Sooners freshman quarterback Michael Hawkins Jr. five times, and held him to 27 yards on 20 carries. Texas allowed just 225 total yards.

Hawkins was the first Sooners freshman to start at quarterback against the Longhorns in the 120-year history of the rivalry and was quickly swallowed up by a relentless pass rush.

By the numbers, the Longhorns program is on pace for a historic season. Sarkisian has said his favorite stat is points allowed, which is not many.

Texas has surrendered only three touchdowns all season. Opponents have snatched four turnovers inside Texas territory, but none have produced points.

That ability to snuff momentum can drain an opponent, Sarkisian said.

“We’re so composed as a defense,” Texas safety Michael Taaffe said. “We’re so confident, that no matter what happens, everything is going to be alright.”

The only time Texas has trailed this season was a 3-0 early deficit against Oklahoma. Several Longhorns starters were still on the field when the Sooners’ final drive stalled at the Texas 6-yard-line as the game ended.

Suddenly, Logano back in NASCAR playoffs

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Joey Logano hoped he'd done enough to advance in NASCAR's playoffs with an eighth-place finish at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

But when he left the track Sunday night, he was four points below the cutline and eliminated from any shot at winning a third Cup Series title.

Then came the phone calls: inspection was taking a long time and there could be a problem with one of the playoff cars. All Logano could do was wait and wonder if there was something amiss with Alex Bowman's car and if it was egregious enough to push Logano into the round of eight.

"NASCAR, man. Expect the unexpected," Logano said Tuesday. "You just roll with the punches and go with the flow and just continue on. I feel like these days, more and more, there are just crazy things that can happen. I just go with it."

Bowman's car was found to be underweight and he was disqualified. The penalty dropped Bowman in the standings, and as soon as Hendrick Motorsports declined Monday night to appeal, Logano was back in title contention.

"I was honestly surprised. I had heard rumors there was a delay in tech, some of those things going on. But usually nothing happens," Logano said. "Would I be in? That's the first question you have to ask. And then you are still cautiously optimistic, so you just keep going on with your life and prepare for the next race."

That next race is Sunday at Las Vegas Motor Speedway, where Logano is a three-time race winner and has started from the pole three different times.

Logano will race over the next three weeks with Team Penske teammate and reigning Cup Series champion Ryan Blaney, the Hendrick Motor-

sports trio of William Byron, Chase Elliott and Kyle Larson, Joe Gibbs Racing drivers Christopher Bell and Denny Hamlin and Tyler Reddick of 23XI Racing for the four spots in the championship-deciding finale.

Should he emerge as the title winner at Phoenix Raceway in November, Logano will be the only active three-time Cup Series champion in NASCAR. Kyle Busch, who did not make the playoffs, is the only active driver alongside Logano with two titles.

Logano said his No. 22 Ford team will not make any changes to its approach as the team heads to Las Vegas, Homestead-Miami Speedway and Martinsville Speedway in Virginia vying for a spot in the finals.

"Same way if we made it any other way, you go out there and attack the positives," Logano said. "I feel that we've been steadily getting better and im-

proving throughout the season to where we are now. The speed we had at The Roval looked pretty solid to me, to where we are a championship four-caliber race team.

"The stats may not look like it. We may look like we're underdogs from the outside looking in, but internally we feel very confident in our race team that we can make a run at this thing and get us into the championship four," Logano continued. "And we've seen in the past where if you can get in there, anything can happen at Phoenix."

It starts Sunday at Las Vegas, where Logano won the 2022 playoff race that pushed him to his second Cup title. Larson won last year's playoff race at Las Vegas, as well as the spring race there earlier this season.

But Logano likes his odds now that he's been given this second chance.

"We've done it before," he said, "we can do it again."

Bills acquire WR Cooper from Browns for draft picks

Associated Press

Looking to add a playmaker for quarterback Josh Allen, the Buffalo Bills acquired wide receiver Amari Cooper on Tuesday in a trade with the skidding Browns, whose season seems to be unraveling by the week with the NFL's worst offense.

Just hours after the New York Jets acquired Davante Adams to pair with Aaron Rodgers, the Bills pulled off their own big deal, one they hope will keep them ahead of their AFC East rivals and on track to make a deep postseason run.

Cooper is a five-time Pro Bowler and his arrival will give Buffalo's patchwork receiving group a boost. The Bills have needed a player of Cooper's stature since trading Stefon Diggs to Houston during the off-season.

"Any time you feel like you're improving as a football team, I would say yes," coach Sean McDermott said when asked if the trade gives the team a jolt of energy.

"But on paper is one thing, right? At the end of the day, can the person play and help us? That's really what we're here to see over the next couple of days," he added. "And I would hope that the answer to all of that is yes."

Cooper was scheduled to practice Wednesday as Buffalo prepares to host Tennessee this weekend.

The Bills sent a third-round pick in the 2025 draft and a seventh-rounder in 2026 to Cleveland for Cooper and a sixth-round pick in 2025. The swap came a day after the Bills (4-2) beat the Jets 23-20.

For Cooper, the deal ends a disappointing and disjointed third season with Cleveland.

The 30-year-old, who was in his final year under contract, has made numerous uncharacteristic drops that didn't help struggling Browns quarterback Deshaun Watson get his game on track.

"Move or rust," Cooper posted on Instagram.

Vikings trade for Akers for second straight year

MINNEAPOLIS — The Minnesota Vikings have acquired running back Cam Akers in a trade for the second straight year, agreeing Tuesday to send a late draft pick to the Houston Texans for more depth at the position.

The deal, which was contin-

gent on Akers passing a physical exam, has the Vikings sending a conditional sixth-round pick in the 2026 draft to the Texans for Akers and a conditional seventh-round pick in the 2026 draft.

Akers, who was a second-round draft pick by the Los Angeles Rams in 2020 when current Vikings coach Kevin O'Connell was the offensive coordinator there, came to the Vikings in a deal with the Rams on Sept. 20, 2023. He had 138 rushing yards and 70 receiving yards in six games before suffering a season-ending Achilles tendon tear.

Akers signed with the Texans this year after considering a return to the Vikings. He had 147 rushing yards and 16 receiving yards in five games, helping fill in for the injured Joe Mixon.

Ovechkin gets 700th assist in Caps' win

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Alex Ovechkin assisted on goals by Tom Wilson and Aliaksei Protas, Logan Thompson made 24 saves against his former team and the Washington Capitals ended the Vegas Golden Knights' season-opening winning streak at three with a 4-2 victory on Tuesday night.

Ovechkin, who is chasing Wayne Gretzky's career goals record, became the 60th player in league history to record 700 assists. He has three assists through Washington's first two games of the season and remains 42 goals away from breaking Gretzky's mark.

Jakub Vrana scored on his first shot in his return to the Capitals, with whom he won the Stanley Cup in 2018 when they beat Vegas in the final.

Victor Olofsson and Jack Eichel scored for the Knights.

Hurricanes 4, Devils 2: Rookie Jackson Blake scored his first NHL goal and Pyotr Kochetkov made 23 saves in his season debut as host Carolina beat New Jersey.

Seth Jarvis, Shayne Gostisbehere and Sebastian Aho also scored for the Hurricanes, who played their second game of the season after an opening loss to Tampa Bay on Friday.

Jake Hughes and Nico Hischier scored for the Devils, who had a two-game winning streak halted.

Lightning 4, Canucks 1: Nikita Kucherov scored his fourth goal of the season, and host Tampa Bay defeated Vancouver in their hurricane-delayed home opener.

The Lightning were scheduled to open the home season Saturday night against the Carolina Hurricanes, but the game was postponed due to the aftermath of Hurricane Milton.

Panthers 4, Blue Jackets 3: Sam Reinhart had a goal and two assists, Anton Lundell had a goal and an assist, Spencer Knight made 35 stops and visiting Florida beat Columbus, spoiling its home opener steeped in tributes to Johnny Gaudreau.

The 31-year-old Gaudreau and his brother Matthew were

killed Aug. 29 when police said they were struck by a suspected drunken driver while they were riding their bicycles.

Wild 4, Blues 1: Filip Gustavsson made 27 saves and scored an empty-net goal as visiting Minnesota snapped a two-game losing streak with a win over St. Louis.

Ryan Hartman scored a power-play goal in the first period and Jakub Lauko scored a short-handed goal in the second for the Wild.

Kraken 7, Predators 3: Oliver Bjorkstrand, Jaden Schwartz, Jared McCann and Adam Larsson each had a goal and an assist to lead visiting Seattle to a victory over Nashville.

Brandon Tanev, Ryker Evans and Jordan Eberle also scored, and Chandler Stephenson added two assists for Seattle. Joey Daccord made 31 saves.

Stars 3, Sharks 2 (SO): Wyatt Johnston made his team's third consecutive shot in a shootout, and host Dallas remained undefeated with a win over San Jose.

The shot by Johnston ended the game since Jake Oettinger had stopped San Jose's first shootout attempt. Jason Robertson and Matt Duchene also made their shots for Dallas (4-0) in the shootout.

Flames 3, Blackhawks 1: Matt Coronato scored two goals, Dustin Wolf made 31 saves and host Calgary stayed undefeated with a victory over Chicago.

Andrei Kuzmenko also scored for Calgary, which improved to 4-0 to match the best start in franchise history. The Flames also opened with four consecutive wins in the 2009-10 and 1993-94 seasons.

Oilers 4, Flyers 3 (OT): Leon Draisaitl scored 56 seconds into overtime and host Edmonton came from behind to secure its first win of the season by beating Philadelphia.

Connor McDavid, who had two assists, had a breakaway in overtime, but was stopped by Flyers goalie Samuel Ersson. But he picked up the rebound and sent it in front to Draisaitl, who scored his second of the season.

Jiménez, Huerta goals help Mexico roll past US men

Associated Press

GUADALAJARA, Mexico — Raúl Jiménez scored on a 22nd-minute free kick and set up César Huerta's goal in the 49th as Mexico stopped a seven-game winless streak against the United States with a 2-0 victory Tuesday night in Mauricio Pochettino's second game as the American coach.

Mexico had five losses and two draws against the U.S. dating to a 3-0 win in September 2019 at East Rutherford, N.J.

With nearly a dozen regular players missing that included Christian Pulisic, the U.S. failed to have any first-half shots for the first time since an April 2023 exhibition against El Tri that ended 1-1.

American players not at the game included defenders Sergio Dest, Chris Richards and Cameron Carter-Vickers; midfielders Tyler Adams, Weston McKennie and Luca de la Torre; and attackers Tim Weah, Folarin Balogun, Gio Reyna and Ricardo Pepi.

Defender Mark McKenzie was in the original starting lineup but due to soreness in his left groin was replaced by Miles Robinson just before kickoff.

"Overall Mexico was a little bit better and fully deserve the victory," Pochettino said. "For us it is a process. It was a great opportunity for our players to visit a very difficult place to play. We can only improve and

learn from this experience."

Jiménez curled a 25-yard-plus shot past Matt Turner for his 34th international goal. Jiménez created the second goal after he ran onto a through pass, had Tim Ream knock the ball away, then regained possession from the defender and centered to Huerta.

Huerta slid around Robinson and beat Turner from near the penalty spot for his third international goal.

Pochettino, hired last month to replace Gregg Berhalter, led the Americans to a 2-0 win over Panama in his debut Saturday.

His first competitive matches will be next month in a two-leg CONCACAF Nations League quarterfinal, likely against Ja-

maica. After that, Pochettino has just six international windows before players report ahead of the 2026 World Cup.

"We need to play more games like this in order to compete," Pochettino said.

Javier Aguirre won his second game since replacing Jaime Lozano as Mexico coach in August. El Tri was coming off a 2-2 draw against the Spanish club Valencia last weekend.

"I think that the team was aware of the bad performance in Puebla, they wanted to prove themselves that they were capable of playing better," Aguirre said.

Fans at Akron Stadium yelled the homophobic chant that led to fines imposed by FIFA.