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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Philippines deports US Marine in killing

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — A U.S. Marine convicted of killing a Filipina transgender woman was deported Sunday after a presidential pardon cut short his detention in a case that renewed outrage over a pact governing American military presence in the Philippines.

Lance Cpl. Joseph Scott Pemberton said in a farewell message that he was “extremely grateful” to President Rodrigo Duterte for pardoning him and expressed his “most sincere sympathy” to the family of Jennifer Laude, whom he was convicted of killing in 2014 after finding out that she was a transgender woman in a motel outside the former U.S. Subic Bay naval base west of Manila.

In his nearly six years of confinement, Pemberton, 25, said he spent “much time contemplating the many errors” he committed the night Laude died. “He wishes he had the words to express the depth of his sorrow and regret,” according to Pemberton’s message, which was issued by his lawyer, Rowena Garcia-Flores.

Virginia Suarez, the Laude family’s lawyer, said in a statement that she wishes Pemberton “peace of mind,” and hopes that he has learned “the value of life and dignity regardless of gender and nationality.”

Philippine immigration officers and

American personnel escorted Pemberton, who was in handcuffs and wearing a face mask, from his cell in the main military camp in Manila to the airport, where he boarded a military aircraft. He was put on an immigration blacklist and will be banned from returning to the country, said immigration spokesperson Dana Sandoval.

The U.S. Embassy said that “all legal proceedings in the case took place under Philippine jurisdiction and law,” and that “Pemberton fulfilled his sentence as ordered by Philippine courts.”

Last Monday, Duterte granted an “absolute and unconditional pardon” to Pemberton in a move that caught many by surprise. The Philippine leader has long been a vocal critic of U.S. security policies while reaching out to China and Russia.

Duterte’s pardon was condemned by left-wing and LGBTQ groups.

Debate has brewed over whether the Marine, whose detention was arranged under the treaty allies’ Visiting Forces Agreement, or VFA, can be covered by a Philippine law that grants shorter jail terms to ordinary prisoners for good conduct.

The Regional Trial Court in Olongapo city, which handled Pemberton’s case, ruled that the law covers Pemberton and ordered authorities Sept. 1 to release him early for good conduct. But Laude’s family

and the Department of Justice separately appealed, blocking his early release from a maximum prison term of up to 10 years.

The court order rekindled perceptions that American military personnel who run afoul of Philippine laws can get special treatment under the VFA, which provides the legal terms for temporary visits by U.S. forces to the country for large-scale combat exercises.

Pemberton, an anti-tank missile operator from New Bedford, Mass., was one of thousands of American and Philippine military personnel who participated in joint exercises in the Philippines in 2014.

He and a few other Marines were on leave after the exercises and met Laude and her friends at a bar in Olongapo, a city known for its nightlife.

Laude was later found dead, her head slumped in a toilet bowl in a motel room, where witnesses said she and Pemberton had checked in. A witness told investigators that Pemberton said he choked Laude after discovering she was transgender.

In December 2015, a judge convicted Pemberton of homicide, not the more serious charge of murder that Philippine prosecutors sought. The judge said at the time that factors such as cruelty and treachery had not been proven.

Chinese military: US biggest threat to world peace

Associated Press

BEIJING — China’s Defense Ministry on Sunday blasted a critical U.S. report on the country’s military ambitions, saying it is the U.S. instead that poses the biggest threat to the international order and world peace.

The statement follows the Sept. 2 release of the annual Defense Department report to Congress on Chinese military developments and goals that it said would have “serious implications for U.S. national interests and the security of

the international rules-based order.”

Defense Ministry spokesman Col. Wu Qian called the report a “wanton distortion” of China’s aims and the relationship between the People’s Liberation Army and China’s 1.4 million people.

“Many years of evidence shows that it is the U.S. that is the fomentor of regional unrest, the violator of the international order and the destroyer of world peace,” he said.

“Rather than reflecting on it-

self, the U.S. issued a so-called report that made false comments about China’s normal defense and military construction,” he said in the statement.

The Defense Department report examined the PLA’s technical capabilities, doctrines and the ultimate aims of China’s military buildup.

Much of the report was devoted to analyzing China’s strategy toward Taiwan, a U.S. ally which China considers a part of its territory to be annexed by force if necessary.

It also looked at areas where the 2 million-member PLA, the world’s largest standing military, has overtaken the U.S., including in the size of its navy, now the world’s largest with approximately 350 ships and submarines compared to around 293 for the U.S.

China has also built a considerable arsenal of land-based ballistic and cruise missiles and has one of the world’s largest forces of advanced long-range surface-to-air systems, the report said.

US looks to resolve tax dispute with Germany

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Germany is violating an international treaty when it asks U.S. military personnel to pay taxes in the country, the U.S. Embassy in Berlin said as it jumped into a long-running fiscal dispute that has affected hundreds of U.S. troops and civilians.

The U.S. Embassy and military commands “are aware of this long-standing issue and working closely in concert to address what we believe to be a misinterpretation of the NATO Status of Forces Agreement,” embassy spokesman Joseph Giordono-Scholz said in a statement last week.

“The Department of Defense and Department of State are engaged to try and reach a resolution,” Giordono-Scholz said, giving the first indication that the issue is being tackled at a

higher level than military commands in Germany, which have been unable to resolve it after years of trying.

State and Defense Department lawyers are hashing out the details of a plan that will be turned over to the embassy for action in the weeks ahead, a State Department official told Stars and Stripes.

The involvement of senior U.S. officials comes after Stars and Stripes earlier this year spotlighted how Germany has threatened to impose hefty tax penalties — some in six figures — on troops and civilians who it says have special ties to the country. It’s aimed at getting the German federal government to issue guidance that would stop regional tax offices from levying taxes on Americans living in the country with SOFA protections, military officials have said.

The NATO Status of Forces Agreement is intended, among

other things, to protect military personnel, who already pay taxes in the U.S., from having to also pay it in Germany on their military pay.

But some local fiscal offices in Germany maintain they have a right to tax personnel who aren’t in the country “solely” for their jobs.

They have argued that a service member or Defense Department civilian who extends their tour, marries a local person or does anything else that suggests special ties to Germany could be liable for taxes on all military pay they’ve received while in Germany, including back pay. Benefits such as housing allowance have been factored into the tax bills, said tax experts and a German defense attorney who has taken on some military cases.

To avoid being taxed, service members and civilians must prove to German authorities a “willingness to return” to the

U.S. But there is no established legal standard that defines what constitutes a willingness to return and German tax offices decide on a case-by-case basis if they will waive or impose taxes on someone.

The ultimate proof of intent to leave — actually returning to the U.S. — doesn’t necessarily offer protection from German regional finance offices, which have sought taxes dating back 10 years and pursued U.S. personnel after they have returned home.

U.S. Army Europe, which manages SOFA matters in Germany, has known about the severity of the problem since at least 2014, when an Army PowerPoint presentation about host-nation relations noted that around 100 civilians and active-duty troops were in financial difficulty after receiving tax bills from the Germans.

Military resort in Germany to close amid pandemic

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The U.S. military’s hotel in the Bavarian resort town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen was to close starting Monday after a coronavirus-infected American staying there sparked a wider outbreak following a night of bar hopping, German and U.S. military officials said.

The 26-year-old woman, who had virus symptoms, visited multiple bars Tuesday, infecting numerous people and prompting Garmisch on Friday to shut down nightlife establishments, district officials told Germany’s Bild newspaper.

U.S. Army Garrison Bavaria on Friday confirmed that it has experienced an outbreak inside the hotel, which will close for at least two weeks as a precaution.

Edelweiss said anyone who

has visited the resort since Sept. 3 should self-monitor for any symptoms and seek medical care if any develop.

The Army’s statement did not address the American accused of being responsible for a wider outbreak in Garmisch. On Saturday, the garrison also declined to comment on the status of the American or whether she had tested positive before going out.

Bild reported that 33 people on Friday tested positive for the virus in Garmisch and that those infections were linked to contact with the one American. Bild also reported that there were another 23 infections connected to Edelweiss.

Edelweiss Lodge and Resort, about 50 miles from Munich, is a popular vacation destination for military personnel based in Germany.

Airmen at Edwards get scooter service

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

Airmen at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., have been whizzing around on two wheels since Sept. 2, when the facility became the first in the Air Force to offer electric scooters for rent.

The San Francisco-based company that provides them — Spin — hopes to roll out its service on other bases, including overseas and deployed locations, company director Ben Fong, 34, said in a telephone interview Friday.

“We are open to [providing scooters] wherever we can serve the service members,” he said, noting that Spin already has operations in a number of cities in Germany, where there’s a large U.S. military

community.

Electric scooters are a transportation option for airmen who are new to a base or on temporary duty and don’t have a vehicle, said Fong, who learned about troops’ needs from liaison officers during a previous career as a foreign service officer at embassies in Mexico and India.

The company charges a dollar to unlock the devices and 15 cents a minute after that.

Many of the rules for using the scooters at Edwards mirror those for bicycles, Eishen said. People must wear helmets, obey road rules and not ride while impaired.

The scooters on Edwards have a top speed of 15 mph and a battery range of 38 miles, according to Spin.

Bermuda bracing for Paulette as Sally takes aim at Gulf Coast

Associated Press

MIAMI — Residents of Bermuda were urged to prepare to protect life and property ahead of Hurricane Paulette, while Tropical Storm Sally threatened to intensify into a hurricane as it approached the U.S. Gulf Coast.

Paulette gained hurricane status late Saturday and was expected to bring storm surge, coastal flooding and high winds to Bermuda, according to a U.S. National Hurricane Center advisory.

Bermuda's government announced that L.F. Wade International Airport would close Sunday evening, and government buildings would be closed on Monday and Tuesday. It opened several shelters for evacuees.

Paulette had maximum sustained winds of 80 mph as the system moved along a curved course toward Bermuda,

forecasters said. The biggest threats were strong winds, storm surge, up to 6 inches of rain and life-threatening surf and rip currents.

The storm was 240 miles southeast of the territory Sunday and was moving northwest at 14 mph. It's the strongest in terms of winds of six disturbances the center was tracking in the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico.

New Orleans and surrounding areas, meanwhile, were in the crosshairs of Sally, which was expected to become a hurricane on Monday and reach shore by early Tuesday — bringing hurricane conditions to a region stretching from Morgan City, La., to Ocean Springs, Miss. Tropical storm conditions were expected in the region by Monday.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards declared a state of emergency Saturday, and officials in the New Orleans area

issued a mandatory evacuation order for areas outside of levee protection.

The tropical storm had maximum sustained winds of 60 mph with higher gusts, forecasters said.

Storm surge from Sally was forecast to reach dangerous levels, due in part to the tide. Up to 11 feet of water was predicted from the mouth of the Mississippi River to Ocean Springs, including Lake Borgne.

A slow moving storm, Sally could produce rain totals up to 20 inches by the middle of the week, forecasters said. The system was moving west-northwest at 13 mph early Sunday. It was centered 135 miles west of St. Petersburg, Fla., and 280 miles east-southeast of the mouth of the Mississippi River. Heavy rain was battering the southwest coast of Florida, the Hurricane Center said in its 11 a.m. advisory.

S. Korea eases restrictions on restaurants, coffee shops

By KIM GAMEL

Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea will ease coronavirus restrictions on restaurants and coffee shops for two weeks beginning Monday to reward a declining number of confirmed cases.

In August, restaurants in the metropolitan area had been ordered to close for dining in at 9 p.m., while large coffee chains, bakeries and ice cream shops had to offer takeout and delivery only as part of a push to curb a new outbreak of COVID-19.

Health authorities said Sunday that the effort, dubbed social distancing level 2.5, has succeeded in driving down the number of infections enough to lift the extra restrictions.

However, officials cautioned that the facilities must strictly maintain entry logs of customers and limit the number of customers inside.

Other measures also remain, including city mask mandates and calls to continue other standard prevention measures such as thoroughly washing hands and maintaining safe distances from others.

South Korea reported 121 new cases Sunday, the 11th consecutive day the daily toll was below 200.

The death toll increased by three to 365, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, or KDCA.

Health Minister Park Neung-hoo welcomed the declining numbers but noted that it was taking longer to stop the latest outbreak compared to an initial wave of infections that occurred in the spring. Last month, U.S. Forces Korea also reimposed stricter conditions on the 58,000-strong military community in South Korea, including a ban on nonofficial travel and most off-base recreational activities including dining at local restaurants or going to bars.

West Coast residents ask, 'What's next?' as fires continue to rage

Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. — The path of devastation spans thousands of miles where flames have consumed people, homes and cars while leaving a barren, gray landscape.

But the massive wildfires aren't done chewing through the West, shrouding the skies with choking smoke or driving residents from their homes.

"What's next?" asked Danielle Oliver, who had to flee her home southeast of Portland ahead of the deadly flames. "You have the protests, coronavirus pandemic, now the wildfires. What else can go wrong?"

She's one of tens of thousands of people displaced by wildfires in Oregon, California and

Washington state. Many more are living with air contamination levels at historic highs. The region's death toll has topped 30 and could increase sharply, with Oregon officials saying they are preparing for a possible "mass casualty event" if more bodies are found in the ash.

Among the people killed was Millicent Catarancuic, who was found near her car on her 5-acre home in Berry Creek, Calif. At one point she was ready to evacuate with her dogs and cats in the car. But she later changed her mind as the winds seemed to calm and the flames stayed away.

Then the fire changed direction, rushing onto the property too quickly for her to leave. She

died, along with her animals.

George Coble lost everything just outside Mill City, Ore. — his fence-building business, five houses where his family lived and a collection of vintage cars, including a 1967 Mustang.

In a town nearby, Erik Tucker spent the day coated in ash and smudged with charcoal, hauling buckets of water through what remained of his neighborhood to douse hot spots.

Charred landscapes looked like the bombed-out cities in Europe after World War II, with buildings reduced to rubble piled atop blackened earth. People caught in the wildfires died in an instant, overcome by flames or smoke as they desperately tried to escape.

Peeps production paused due to virus

From wire reports

BETHLEHEM, Pa. — Peeps treats are going on hiatus for several months — another consequence of the coronavirus pandemic.

Just Born Quality Confections said it won't be producing the popular marshmallow sweets for Halloween, Christmas or Valentine's Day as the Bethlehem-based company prepares for next Easter, PennLive.com reported.

Production of the holiday-shaped candies was suspended in the spring as the coronavirus spread across the state. Limited production resumed in mid-May with protocols in place to protect employees, Just Born said.

"This situation resulted in us having to make the difficult decision to forego production of our seasonal candies for Halloween, Christmas and Valentine's Day in order to focus on meeting the expected overwhelming demand for Peeps for next Easter season, as well as our everyday candies," the company said.

Just Born, which has been in business since 1923, said its other seasonal confections are expected to return to store shelves by Halloween 2021.

New Mexico

New Mexico officials Saturday reported 100 additional confirmed COVID-19 cases, including the second in a rural county that went months without any reported cases.

The cases reported Saturday raised the statewide total to 26,661. Three additional deaths raised the death toll to 821.

De Baca County, in the thinly populated cattle country of east-central New Mexico, last week lost its status as the only county in the state without a reported COVID-19 case.

As of Saturday, only two other counties, both in rural northeastern New Mexico, still had case totals in the single digits: Harding with two and Mora with seven.

Michigan

DETROIT — A Detroit man has pleaded guilty for his role in weaving a \$590,000 coronavirus fraud scheme, according to a release from the Department of Justice.

Darrell Baker, 56, pleaded guilty to counts of bank fraud and money laundering after intentionally attempting to defraud a Pennsylvania bank under the guise of a loan under the Payroll Protection Program, which was established to help small businesses weather the pandemic.

Baker was approved for a \$590,000 loan for his company, "Motorcity Solar Energy, Inc.," through Customers Bank in Pennsylvania. In his application documents, Baker claimed the business employed 68 workers and had \$2.8 million in wages, tips and other compensation in 2019, according to the release.

An investigation by the FBI and the Small Business Administration found that Motorcity Solar Energy was not an operational business and as such had no employees or payroll expenses.

Kentucky

FRANKFORT — A prominent Kentucky infectious disease specialist who was hailed by the governor as a "front line hero" has died after a nearly four-month battle against COVID-19.

Dr. Rebecca Shadowen, who tested positive for the virus on May 13, died Friday, Med Center Health in Bowling Green said. Gov. Andy Beshear tweeted Saturday that he was "heartbroken" to hear of her death and urged people to follow her advice and "wear a mask in her honor."

Also Saturday, Beshear reported 721 new coronavirus cases in Kentucky, including 81 people who are 18 and younger. The state's total number of cases surpassed 56,410 since the start of the pandemic.

Arizona

PHOENIX — Navajo Nation officials said they will partici-

pate in the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine trials amid a steady decline in coronavirus cases.

The American Indian territory once had the highest coronavirus infection rate in the country, but has since seen a substantial decrease in community spread, the Arizona Republic reported. Navajo officials reported zero new confirmed cases Sept. 8 for the first time.

As of Friday, there have been 9,952 confirmed cases and 530 confirmed deaths from the coronavirus in the Navajo Nation since the pandemic began, according to their Department of Health.

The vaccine trials will be conducted at health care centers across the Navajo Nation. Participation is entirely voluntary.

New Hampshire

NASHUA, N.H. — Students in two New Hampshire school districts were subjected to pornography and other inappropriate behavior during remote classes last week, authorities said.

A teacher in Nashua reported a pornographic image being shown to the entire class during a remote lesson, Gregory Rodriguez, Nashua's director of technology told WMUR-TV.

The teacher closed down the class right away, he said.

"We're working with the Nashua Police Department, trying to figure out ways to investigate this," Rodriguez said.

In Concord, there have been several reports of inappropriate behavior during remote high school lessons.

Virginia

Dozens of workers at Reagan National Airport may have been exposed to the novel coronavirus after attending services at an Alexandria church last month.

The possible exposures took place at the Kidane Mehret Church in Alexandria between

Aug. 14 and Aug. 17, but it wasn't until a week later, on Aug. 21, that city health officials were notified of a confirmed case of the virus linked to the church.

The delay meant church members who work at the airport may have continued going to their jobs because they were unaware they'd been exposed — potentially exposing co-workers and airport customers.

Officials at the church, which serves the Ethiopian Orthodox community, did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Officials with the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority, which manages National and Dulles, said they were not aware of any positive cases among their employees affiliated with the church, nor were any MWAA employees self-quarantining because they had been at the church on those days.

Connecticut

STORRS — University of Connecticut and local health officials have ordered about 700 students living in an off-campus apartment complex to quarantine for two weeks after tracing several COVID-19 cases to homes there.

Students living in The Oaks on the Square, which is located just off campus in Storrs, are being asked to remain inside their apartments except for "solitary activity" or to pick up food, according to the letter sent to Oaks residents.

Non-students living in the complex are not subject to the quarantine, which was agreed to by officials from UConn, the Eastern Highlands Health District and the town of Mansfield.

The quarantined students will be required to switch any in-person classes to online for an indefinite period of time.

As of Saturday, the school has reported 121 positive tests for the new coronavirus on campus since about 5,000 students returned in August and 92 cases among those living off-campus.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Missing exotic African cat found safe

NH MERRIMACK — An exotic African serval cat that escaped from its New Hampshire home earlier was found safe and sound, police said.

A 40-pound creature named Spartacus “was trapped near its home and is in good health,” Merrimack police posted on Facebook. The animal has been returned to its owner, Dean King.

King adopted Spartacus from a Florida zoo four years ago. The family owns the cat legally and has a permit from the state’s department of fish and game, police said.

Spartacus ran away after apparently getting spooked by the family dog, King said.

Porta-potty seen rolling down Route 66

NM ALBUQUERQUE — A portable toilet in Albuquerque fell victim to another kind of whiff this week after strong winds gave it a trip along Route 66.

A virtual video showed the porta-potty rolling down a busy intersection of the Mother Road as curious motorists looked on.

Severe gusts appeared to have dislodged the mobile toilet and forced it down a journey through a road that once connected Chicago to Los Angeles.

Several motorists and passengers caught footage of the traveling portable toilet.

Woman hospitalized after alligator attack

FL NORTH FORT MYERS — A woman was attacked by an alligator while trimming trees near a lake in Florida, officials said.

The 27-year-old woman had been working near the water in North Fort Myers when the 10-foot reptile ambushed her, according to a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission news release.

Rescue workers took the woman to a Fort Myers hospital, where she was treated for injuries to both legs, officials said.

Car of missing man found 9 years later

MI CLARE — A simple Carfax report has led to the discovery of a car that belonged to a man who has been missing from the Saginaw area since 2011.

Eric Franks’ family had figured that the 2001 Chevy Malibu was destroyed or at the bottom of a lake. Instead, it was recently tracked to an owner in Clare, who said he bought the vehicle from someone who had acquired it at an estate sale.

“It’s going to be processed,” Sgt. Joseph Rowley said. “Hopefully, that will unveil some sort of investigation lead for us.”

Teen honored for pulling family from burning car

CT WATERBURY — An 18-year-old Waterbury man is being honored as a hero after pulling a family of four from a burning motor vehicle.

Justin Gavin told the Republican-American newspaper that he stepped off a bus when the SUV passed him with flames shooting from underneath.

The vehicle, which had lost its brakes, came to rest in a nearby parking lot, and Gavin ran to the scene and pulled a 1-year-old, a 4-year-old and a 9-year-old from the backseat.

He then helped the driver unfasten her seat belt and escorted her away from the fiery vehicle as it burst into flames.

City restores juvenile curfew after crime spike

MS VICKSBURG — A recent spike in juvenile crime has prompted a Mississippi city to reinstate a juvenile curfew effective immediately.

The City of Vicksburg moved to re-emphasize the curfew that has been in place as part of the city’s shelter-in-place COVID-19 civil emergency, which is set to expire Oct. 5. The latest order will run from 7:30 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. daily.

Exceptions for youth 17 and under include those youth accompanied by an adult and those youth participating in high school activities or organized youth sports.

Deputy arrested in probe of home burglary

CA YORBA LINDA — A Southern California sheriff’s deputy was arrested on suspicion of burglarizing a home after the resident died.

The Orange County Sheriff’s Department said that Deputy Steve Hartz had responded to a July 20 call at the Yorba Linda home when a man in his 70s died of natural causes.

An attorney representing the family estate reported items were missing from the home and provided surveillance video showing Hartz entering the home at least three times and leaving with stolen property, the department said in a statement.

Hartz, a 12-year veteran of the department, returned to the home in uniform July 27 and broke in through the rear. He returned twice in August in civilian clothes and at that time was seen removing the items, the statement said.

12-year-old charged with taking 3 guns to school

FL CALLAHAN — A 12-year-old Florida boy was arrested after bringing three handguns to school, officials said.

The boy was taken into custody at Lighthouse Christian School in Nassau County, the Florida Times-Union reported. He was charged with possession of a firearm on school property, and the case was reported to the Florida Department of Children and Families.

A teacher found two guns, a .38-caliber revolver and a small semi-automatic handgun, and two boxes of ammunition in the boy’s lunch box after noticing it appeared heavy, according to a Nassau County Sheriff’s Office arrest report. A loaded semi-automatic was found on the boy later after he was moved to another area, officials said.

Nina Simone’s home gets permanent protection

NC TRYON — The childhood home of iconic musician and civil rights activist Nina Simone will be indefinitely preserved in North Carolina.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation’s African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, in partnership with World Monuments Fund and Preservation North Carolina, recently secured permanent protection of the singer-songwriter’s childhood home in Tryon, the trust announced.

The legal agreement binds all current and future owners to permanently protecting the building’s “authentic character.” The house can be renovated, but it cannot be demolished.

From wire reports

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Osaka prevails for 2nd US Open title

Associated Press

NEW YORK — After one errant forehand in the first set of the U.S. Open final, Naomi Osaka looked at her coach in the mostly empty Arthur Ashe Stadium stands with palms up, as if to say, “What the heck is happening?”

In response to another wayward forehand against Victoria Azarenka seconds later, Osaka chuckled her racket. It spun a bit and rattled against the court.

Surprisingly off-kilter in the early going Saturday, Osaka kept missing shots and digging herself a deficit. Until, suddenly, she lifted her game, and Azarenka couldn’t sustain her start. By the end, Osaka pulled away to a 1-6, 6-3, 6-3 victory for her second U.S. Open championship and third Grand Slam title overall.

“For me, I just thought,” said Osaka, who trailed by a set and a break, “it would be very embarrassing to lose this in an under an hour.”

This, then, is what she told herself with a white towel draped over her head at a changeover when things looked bleakest: “I just have to try as hard as I can and stop having a really bad attitude.”

It worked. A quarter-century had passed since a woman who lost the first set of a U.S. Open final wound up winning: In 1994, Arantxa Sanchez Vicario did it against Steffi Graf.

“I wasn’t really thinking about win-

ning. I was just thinking about competing,” Osaka said. “Somehow, I ended up with the trophy.”

Osaka is a 22-year-old who was born in Japan to a Japanese mother and Haitian father; the family moved to the U.S. when she was 3.

Osaka, now based in California, arrived for the U.S. Open intent on claiming the championship, to be sure, but with another goal in mind, as well: continuing to be a voice for change by calling attention to racial injustice.

She showed up for Saturday’s match wearing a mask with the name of Tamir Rice, a Black 12-year-old boy killed by police in Ohio in 2014. That was the seventh mask she’d used during the tournament, after honoring other Black victims of violence: Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, Trayvon Martin, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and Philando Castile.

“The point,” Osaka explained, “is to make people start talking.”

Last month, Osaka refused to compete after the police shooting of a Black man, Jacob Blake, in Wisconsin — she said she would withdraw from her semifinal at the Western & Southern Open, although decided to play after the tournament took a full day off in solidarity.

Osaka and her coach, Wim Fissette — who used to work with Azarenka — have said they think the off-court activism

has helped her energy and mindset in matches.

“I wanted,” Osaka said, “more people to (see) more names.”

So perhaps it was no coincidence that this win over Azarenka, a 31-year-old from Belarus also seeking a third Grand Slam title but first in 7½ years, made Osaka 11-0 since tennis resumed after its hiatus because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Osaka added to her triumphs at the 2018 U.S. Open — earned with a brilliant performance in a memorably chaotic and controversial final against Serena Williams — and 2019 Australian Open.

Azarenka carried an 11-match winning streak of her own into Saturday, including a stirring three-set victory over Williams in the semifinals, stopping the American’s bid for a 24th Grand Slam title.

Azarenka won the 2012 and 2013 Australian Opens and lost to Williams in the U.S. Open finals each of those years.

“I thought the third time was the charm,” Azarenka said, “but I guess I’ll have to try again.”

Even after Osaka surged ahead 4-1 in the third set, the outcome was unclear. Azarenka drew to 4-3, then stood and stretched during the ensuing changeover.

“Had a little bit of a energy dip,” Azarenka said.

Osaka regained control, then laid down on the court when the final was over.

Lakers eliminate Rockets in Game 5

Los Angeles Times

Five minutes and 31 seconds remained in the game when LeBron James left the court to watch the rest of it from the bench.

His work was done — for now.

Ten years after the last time they did it, the Los Angeles Lakers are headed to the Western Conference finals.

The Lakers defeated the Houston Rockets 119-96 on Saturday to win their second-round series four games to one. They did so dominating a team that beat them in Game 1 and challenged them at other points in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

“I understand the Laker faithful and what they felt or maybe were going through over

... the last decade of not being in the postseason, or not competing for championships,” James said. “I took that responsibility as well. I’m happy I’m able to do a little bit of a part of it and the rest of my ballclub and the coaching staff and everybody who’s (made) the sacrifice of trying to get us back, getting this franchise back to competing for a championship, which we’ve done all year.”

James finished with 29 points and 11 rebounds, while Kyle Kuzma was the Los Angeles’ second-leading scorer with 17 points, making five of nine shots and three three-pointers. Anthony Davis finished with 13 points and 11 rebounds and all five Lakers starters scored in double figures.

Houston star James Harden

scored 30 points for the Rockets, making 12 of 20 shots two nights after making only two shots in Game 4. But he was the only Houston player to score more than 13 points and the team shot only 37.1% overall, 26.5% on three-pointers.

“James and Russ (Russell Westbrook), both MVP-caliber players, great three-point shooting support system and we really, really committed to the defensive end,” Los Angeles coach Frank Vogel said. “Even though they have a three-point attack, it was a paint-first mind-set. Our verticality and rim protection was just special tonight.”

The Lakers meanwhile shot better than 50% from the field and from three-point range, making 19 of 37 from beyond

the arc.

At the start of Game 5, there appeared to be little Houston could do well. Los Angeles had a 13-2 lead at the first break, and it grew to 22 in the first quarter.

While the Rockets fought back and got to within seven, they couldn’t get much closer. Even though Anthony Davis had barely made his presence felt, the Lakers led by 11 heading into the break.

After halftime, Houston cut it to six points, but a 15-0 run by Los Angeles took any question out of the outcome. The Lakers led by as many as 30 points.

James has been to the conference finals, though not the Western Conference finals until now. He has won championships in Miami and Cleveland.

Stars take 3-1 lead over Golden Knights

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Anton Khudobin gloved the puck out of the air on Shea Theodore's shot at the most intense moment of the game like it was part of a leisurely morning practice.

"I just tried to find the puck and react to it," Khudobin said with the same nonchalance. "I don't know if it's luck or whatever. Let's call it luck."

It's not luck. It's a goaltender so locked in that he has the Dallas Stars one victory away from the Stanley Cup Final.

Khudobin made three of his 32 saves on a crucial 5-on-3 penalty kill late, Joe Pavelski and Jamie Benn scored in the second period and the Stars locked down on the Vegas Golden Knights in the final minutes to win Game 4 of the Western Conference final 2-1 Saturday night.

The Stars won despite being outshot 33-20 and don't seem to mind that they trail Vegas 130 shots to 92 because Khudobin has

stopped so many of them.

"He's going to battle right till the end," coach Rick Bowness said. "That's why the guys love playing in front of him. When he was reading the play like he was tonight, he's making a lot of tough saves look easy. But that's what he is: He's a battler, he's a competitive guy and he's keeping us in every game."

Khudobin also is keeping himself in the heads of the Golden Knights, who ran into the same sort of problem last round against Vancouver's Thatcher Demko. Vegas could be dominating the West final, but instead there's head-shaking at creating high-quality scoring chances and emerging with nothing to show for them.

"All we need is to finish," Vegas coach Peter DeBoer said. "I think the effort's there. I think we're creating a lot of really good looks."

Khudobin has turned aside a few of those good looks, like when he spun his body to prevent a goal by William Karlsson in the

second or dived to deny Brayden McNabb early in the third. The save on Theodore and two others during 1:10 of Vegas 5-on-3 power-play time provided the emotional lift the Stars needed while clinging to the lead.

"We put ourselves in a tough situation there," said Pavelski, whose tripping penalty set up the 5-on-3 with 6:44 left. "It's a moment in the game that was huge for our killers to get the job done."

On the penalty kill and at even strength, Dallas has also done a masterful job of copying the way the Canucks almost beat Vegas last round, by collapsing defensively and giving their goaltender the chance to see a vast majority of the shots from the outside.

"The way the guys are battling, the way they're blocking the shots, they have bruises and they have bumps and they still sacrifice their bodies to go and block the shots," Khudobin said. "Unbelievable team effort, I would say. I really appreciate that. It's huge, huge, huge."

College football roundup

Williams leads No. 10 Notre Dame past Duke

Associated Press

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — Kyren Williams ran for 112 yards and two touchdowns in his first start, grad quarterback Ian Book threw for 263 yards and No. 10 Notre Dame beat Duke 27-13 on Saturday at rainy Notre Dame Stadium in the season and Atlantic Coast Conference opener for both teams.

The speedy Williams, who saw limited action last season as a freshman, had 19 carries and also was the Fighting Irish's leading receiver with two receptions for 93 yards, one a 75-yarder in the first half.

The victory was Notre Dame's 19th straight at home and the first for the Fighting Irish in a conference after 132 years as an independent. Because of COVID-19, Notre Dame is playing this season as a member of the ACC. The school announced a crowd of 10,097, 90% of them students, attended the game in the 77,622-seat stadium where fans were wearing masks and

socially distanced because of the pandemic.

No. 1 Clemson 37, Wake Forest 13: Trevor Lawrence threw for 351 yards and combined for three touchdowns and the visiting Tigers continued their domination of the Demon Deacons in the season opener for both teams.

Trevor Etienne ran for 102 yards and a touchdown for Clemson, which improved to 70-5 since the start of the 2015 season under coach Dabo Swinney.

The Tigers have outscored Wake Forest 152-19 over the last three seasons, holding the Demon Deacons to just one touchdown.

No. 5 Oklahoma 48, Missouri State 0: Spencer Rattler threw for 290 yards and four touchdowns in his first start for the host Sooners.

Rattler, the highly touted redshirt freshman from Phoenix, only played the first two quarters and helped Oklahoma take a 41-0 lead. The Sooners led 31-0 at the end of the first

quarter.

No. 14 Texas 59, UTEP 3: Sam Ehlinger threw a 78-yard touchdown to Joshua Moore on the first play and had career-high five scoring passes in the first half for the Longhorns in the opener.

Ehlinger finished with 426 yards. He left the midway through the third quarter with Colt McCoy's Texas records for yards (470) and touchdowns (six) easily within reach.

No. 18 North Carolina 31, Syracuse 6: Javonte Williams ran for three fourth-quarter touchdowns and the host Tar Heels overcame a mistake-filled performance to beat the Orange in the season and Atlantic Coast Conference opener for both teams.

Michael Carter added 138 yards of total offense for North Carolina in an empty home stadium after the school opted to open with no fans in attendance.

Syracuse's Tommy DeVito completed just 13 of 31 passes for 112 yards.

Louisiana-Lafayette 31, No. 23 Iowa State 14: The visiting Ragin' Cajuns got kick and punt returns for touchdowns to help secure one of their biggest wins in program history.

In the opener for both teams, Louisiana-Lafayette was ignited by Chris Smith's 95-yard kickoff return in the second quarter and Eric Garror's 83-yard punt return in the third.

Army 37, Louisiana-Monroe 7: Christian Anderson and Jakobi Buchanan ran for two touchdowns apiece and the host Black Knights rolled past the Warhawks.

Sandon McCoy, who scored three touchdowns in a season-opening 42-0 victory over Middle Tennessee State last weekend, added the 14th of his career with a 2-yard dive for a 14-0 first-quarter lead.

Anderson scored on a 5-yard keeper for the game's first score. He added a 6-yarder for a 24-7 third-quarter lead. Buchanan scored on a 25-yard run in the third quarter and added a 40-yarder in the fourth.

Astros rally in 9th to shock Dodgers

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Alex Bregman singled in the go-ahead run during a five-run ninth inning, and the Houston Astros rallied past the Los Angeles Dodgers 7-5 under smoky skies Saturday night in the Astros' first visit to Los Angeles since the infamous 2017 World Series.

The Dodgers blew a three-run lead in the ninth when closer Kenley Jansen (3-1) got knocked around, giving up four consecutive hits without an out.

Carlos Correa and Aledmys

Diaz singled, Josh Reddick hit a two-run double and Martin Maldonado added another single. George Springer then grounded into a fielder's choice to third baseman Max Muncy, who committed an error while Reddick scored to tie the game at 5.

Bregman followed with a single to center that made it 6-5. Bregman scored on Yuri Guriel's sacrifice fly to center off Adam Kolarek for a 7-5 lead.

Houston improved to 7-17 on the road after coming in with losses in eight of its previous nine games.

Josh James (1-0) got the victory with 1¹/₃ innings of relief. Ryan Pressly earned his ninth save.

The game lacked the fiery emotion of the teams' matchup on July 29. But there were multiple reminders that Los Angeles fans haven't forgotten the Astros' cheating scandal from their championship three years ago.

A plane towed a banner reading "Houston Cheats Bang Bang" over the stadium.

Fans aren't allowed inside this season because of the coronavirus, but a group of Dodger

supporters greeted the Astros' bus as it pulled in. They shook large plastic and metal garbage cans in the air, a reference to the Astros' sign-stealing scheme that involved signaling pitches by banging on garbage cans.

"I loved it," Los Angeles manager Dave Roberts said before the game. "They have every right to do whatever they feel to express their feelings. Just shows the passion that Dodger fans have."

Pitcher Joe Kelly honked in support as he drove his black Porsche into the stadium.

MLB roundup

Walsh's 3-run HR leads Angels past Rockies in 11th

Associated Press

DENVER — Rookie Jared Walsh homered for the fourth straight game, hitting a three-run drive with two outs in the 11th inning to lift the Los Angeles Angels to a 5-2 win over the Colorado Rockies on Saturday.

Walsh lined a slider from Tyler Kinley (0-2) over the wall in right-center.

Ty Buttrey (2-3) pitched out of a jam in the 10th to earn the win. Matt Andriese picked up the save by throwing an efficient 11th as the Angels improved to 3-5 in extra innings.

White Sox 14, Tigers 0: Jose Abreu hit two three-run homers and matched a career high with seven RBIs, and host Chicago roughed up the Detroit.

Abreu went 4-for-4 a day after his career-best 22-game hitting streak ended. It was the longest streak in the majors this season. Reynaldo Lopez (1-2) pitched five shutout innings for the AL Central-leading White Sox, who have won seven of eight overall.

Cubs 4, Brewers 2: Jason Heyward hit a three-run homer off Josh Hader in the ninth inning, sending Chicago to a win at Milwaukee.

The NL Central-leading Cubs had gone scoreless for 17 straight innings before breaking through against Hader (1-2), who hadn't allowed a homer all season long.

Twins 8, Indians 4: Byron Buxton homered for the second straight night for host Minnesota, and Rich Hill got his first win

since July.

The Twins won for the ninth time in 11 games since they closed August with a six-game slide. They remain a game back of the AL Central-leading White Sox.

Yankees 2, Orioles 1 (10): Luke Voit hit a game-ending sacrifice fly leading off the 10th inning, and host New York strengthened its hold on the American League's eighth and final playoff berth.

With DJ LeMahieu starting the inning as the automatic runner on second, Hunter Harvey (0-2) bounced a wild pitch that advanced LeMahieu. Baltimore brought the field in.

Voit worked the count to 2-2, fouled off three pitches and hit a fly ball to center fielder Cedric Mullins for his 37th RBI.

Blue Jays 3, Mets 2: Bo Bichette singled and scored in a successful return to the Toronto lineup and Alejandro Kirk also got a hit and scored in his big league debut in a win over visiting New York.

Bichette, who missed 27 games with a right knee sprain, was activated from the injured list and extended his hitting streak to 10 games. Kirk, a 21-year-old catcher who hadn't played above Single-A, singled in the sixth inning.

Braves 2, Nationals 1: Rookie Ian Anderson pitched seven scoreless innings, and NL East-leading Atlanta held on for the win at Washington after Mark Melancon escaped a bases-loaded jam in the ninth.

In his fourth career start, Anderson (3-0) allowed one hit, struck out nine and walked three. Melancon earned his 10th save, get-

ting Victor Robles to pop out to right field with the bases loaded.

Rays 5, Red Sox 4: Brandon Lowe and Austin Meadows homered, powering AL East-leading Tampa Bay to a win at home.

Lowe hit a solo drive off Marcus Walden (0-2) in the seventh for a 5-4 lead.

Rangers 5-1, Athletics 2-10: Marcus Semien drove in four runs, Chris Bassitt struck out eight over six innings and Oakland earned a doubleheader split at Texas.

Bassitt (4-2) permitted one run and eight hits. Semien's three-run homer made it 10-0 in the fifth inning in the second game.

In the opener, Rougned Odor and Ronald Guzman homered during the Rangers' five-run first inning, and Texas spoiled Daulton Jefferies' major league debut.

Phillies 12, Marlins 6: Bryce Harper homered, doubled and reached five times, leading Philadelphia to the victory at Miami.

Royals 7, Pirates 4: Kansas City's Adalberto Mondesi homered and stole a base for the third consecutive game, and Kyle Zimmer got his first career win.

Mariners 7, Diamondbacks 3: Ty France and Jose Marmolejos homered, Justus Sheffield pitched seven quality innings and Seattle snapped a three-game losing streak with a win at Arizona.

solo homer, his second in two days.

Cardinals 7, Reds 1: Dakota Hudson allowed just one hit in six innings, and host St. Louis backed the right-hander with four home runs.