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Supreme Court Justice Ginsburg dies at 87

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a towering women's rights champion who became the court's second female justice, died Friday at her home in Washington. She was 87.

Ginsburg died of complications from metastatic pancreatic cancer, the court said.

Her death just over six weeks before Election Day is likely to set off a heated battle over whether President Donald Trump should nominate, and the Republican-led Senate should confirm, her replacement, or if the seat should remain vacant until the outcome of his race against Democrat Joe Biden is known. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said late Friday that the Senate will vote on Trump's pick to replace Ginsburg, even though it's an election year.

Trump called Ginsburg an "amazing woman" and did not mention filling her vacant Supreme Court seat when he spoke to reporters following a rally in Bemidji, Minn.

Biden said the winner of the November election should choose Ginsburg's replacement. "There is no doubt — let me be clear — that the voters should pick the president and the president should pick the justice for the Senate to consider," Biden told reporters after returning to his hometown of Wilmington, Del., from campaign stops in Minnesota.

Chief Justice John Roberts mourned Ginsburg's passing. "Our Nation has lost a jurist of historic stature. We at the Supreme

Court have lost a cherished colleague.

Today we mourn, but with confidence that future generations will remember Ruth Bader Ginsburg as we knew her — a tireless and resolute champion of justice," Roberts said in a statement.

Ginsburg announced in July that she was undergoing chemotherapy for lesions on her liver, the latest of her several battles with cancer.

Ginsburg spent her final years on the bench as the unquestioned leader of the court's liberal wing and became something of a rock star to her admirers. Young women especially seemed to embrace the court's Jewish grandmother, affectionately calling her the Notorious RBG, for her defense of the rights of women and minorities, and the strength and resilience she displayed in the face of personal loss and health crises.

Those health issues included five bouts with cancer beginning in 1999, falls that resulted in broken ribs, insertion of a stent to clear a blocked artery and assorted other hospitalizations after she turned 75.

She resisted calls by liberals to retire during Barack Obama's presidency at a time when Democrats held the Senate and a replacement with similar views could have been confirmed. Instead, Trump will almost certainly try to push Ginsburg's successor through the Republican-controlled Senate — and move the conservative court even more to the right.

Her appointment by President Bill Clinton in 1993 was the first by a Democrat in 26 years. She initially found a comfortable

ideological home somewhere left of center on a conservative court dominated by Republican appointees. Her liberal voice grew stronger the longer she served.

Ginsburg was a mother of two, an opera lover and an intellectual who watched arguments behind oversized glasses for many years, though she ditched them for more fashionable frames in her later years. At argument sessions in the ornate courtroom, she was known for digging deep into case records and for being a stickler for following the rules.

"Ruth Bader Ginsburg does not need a seat on the Supreme Court to earn her place in the American history books," Clinton said at the time of her appointment. "She has already done that."

Following her death, Clinton said, "Her 27 years on the Court exceeded even my highest expectations when I appointed her."

On the court, where she was known as a facile writer, her most significant majority opinions were the 1996 ruling that ordered the Virginia Military Institute to accept women or give up its state funding, and the 2015 decision that upheld independent commissions some states use to draw congressional districts.

Ginsburg authored powerful dissents of her own in cases involving abortion, voting rights and pay discrimination against women. She said some were aimed at swaying the opinions of her fellow judges while others were "an appeal to the intelligence of another day" in the hopes that they would provide guidance to future courts.

US carrier transits Strait of Hormuz amid Iran tensions

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The USS Nimitz aircraft carrier safely transited on Friday through the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most important chokepoint for oil shipments, the U.S. Navy said, as tensions with Iran continue to simmer.

In a "scheduled" maneuver, the U.S. sent the carrier and several other warships through the strait, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf, according to the U.S. Navy's Bahrain-based 5th fleet. The Nimitz, America's oldest carrier in active service,

carries some 5,000 sailors and Marines.

American aircraft carriers have for decades sailed through the international oil shipping route in what the U.S. describes as "defensive" operations aimed at keeping the strait open.

The show of force follows months of escalating incidents in the crucial waterway, which led earlier this year to an American drone strike that killed a top Iranian general in Baghdad. Tehran responded to that strike by firing ballistic missiles that wounded dozens of American troops in Iraq.

The Nimitz's arrival in the Mideast saw Iran conduct a live-fire drill targeting a mockup aircraft carrier resembling it, underscoring the lingering threat of military conflict between the countries.

The Nimitz strike group "is at the peak of readiness," said Rear Adm. Jim Kirk, its commander.

The Nimitz, whose homeport is Bremerton, Wash., has patrolled the Arabian Sea since late July. It replaced the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, which had spent months in the Arabian Sea on its deployment, breaking the Navy's previous at-sea record.

Dismissed captain knowingly risked career

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The dismissed captain of a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier knew he was jeopardizing his military career when he broke protocol and sent a now-famous email warning of possible sailor deaths due to a coronavirus breakout on board,

But Brett Crozier says in a witness statement obtained by the San Francisco Chronicle that he did so in an urgent effort to help avoid a “larger catastrophe.”

Crozier’s witness statement, recorded in May during the Navy’s investigation into the han-

dling of the outbreak aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt, provides a look at his thinking when he sent the March email that upended the military world and brought condemnation from the top Navy admiral overseeing the carrier. President Donald Trump also criticized Crozier.

Crozier, a native of Santa Rosa, Calif., was stripped of his position but received a rousing hero’s send-off from his crew, who credited him with saving their lives.

A frustrated Crozier sent the letter March 30, saying that more needed to be done to remove 5,000 sailors from

the carrier docked in Guam. More than 1,200 sailors eventually tested positive for the virus, including Crozier, who spent a month in Guam in isolation. Several were hospitalized and one died from COVID-19 complications.

Crozier said he sent the email through unclassified channels because of quickly worsening conditions that demanded urgent action. Navy officers said that led to the memo being leaked and jeopardized sensitive talks with Guam officials to house sailors in hotel rooms.

They said he was removed for poor handling of the breakout and for going outside the

chain of command.

“My intent in sending the email ... was to bring a sense of urgency to a rapidly deteriorating and potentially deadly situation onboard the (Theodore Roosevelt) and avoid a larger catastrophe and loss of life,” Crozier said in the witness statement.

“From my perspective, even just one more week of routine planning would have resulted in another week of exponential growth in positive cases and greater risk to more Sailors. We wanted to stop the administrative bureaucracy... so I sent up a red flare,” he said.

US deploys combat vehicles to eastern Syria

By CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. is positioning M2A3 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles in eastern Syria to bolster security for troops there nearly four weeks after seven American troops were injured in a crash with a Russian military vehicle there.

The combat vehicles will “ensure the protection of Coalition forces and preserve their free-

dom of movement” in the fight against the Islamic State, said Col. Wayne Marotto, a spokesman for the U.S.-led Operation Inherent Resolve, in a statement Friday.

“Despite the territorial defeat of ISIS, the degradation of its leadership, and the widespread refutation of its ideology, this violent Islamist extremist group still poses a threat,” Marotto said in the statement, posted on Twitter.

Several Pentagon photos showed the Bradleys being offloaded from a C-17 on Friday night in northeastern Syria.

The mechanized forces are from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, deployed to Kuwait from Fort Bliss, Texas, Inherent Resolve said in a separate statement.

U.S. Central Command has also deployed Sentinel radar and increased the frequency of fighter patrols over U.S. and

allied forces in the area, command spokesman Capt. Bill Urban said in an email.

“These actions are a clear demonstration of U.S. resolve to defend Coalition forces in the [Eastern Syria Security Area], and to ensure that they are able to continue their Defeat-ISIS mission without interference,” Urban said.

The U.S. statements made no mention of encounters between U.S. and Russian soldiers.

Iran vows ‘hit’ on all involved in killing of Soleimani

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — The chief of Iran’s paramilitary Revolutionary Guard threatened Saturday to go after everyone who had a role in a top general’s January killing during a U.S. drone strike in Iraq.

The guard’s website quoted Gen. Hossein Salami as saying, “Mr. Trump! Our revenge for martyrdom of our great general is obvious, serious and real.”

U.S. President Donald Trump warned this week that Wash-

ington would harshly respond to any Iranian attempts to take revenge for the death of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, tweeting that “if they hit us in any way, any form, written instructions already done we’re going to hit them 1000 times harder.”

The president’s warning came in response to a report that Iran was plotting to assassinate the U.S. ambassador to South Africa in retaliation for Soleimani’s killing at Baghdad’s airport at the beginning of the year.

“We took out the world’s number one terrorist and the mass murderer of American troops and many, many troops and many people all over the world,” Trump said. “Qasem Soleimani is dead. He’s dead. Bad guy. Bad guy. Very bad guy.”

Salami rejected the report of an Iranian plot to assassinate Ambassador Lana Marks, but made clear that Iran intends to avenge the general’s death.

“Do you think we hit a female ambassador in return to

our martyred brother?” the general said.

“We will hit those who had direct and indirect roles. You should know that everybody who had role in the event will be hit, and this is a serious message. We do prove everything in practice,” he said.

In January, Iran launched a ballistic missile attack targeting U.S. soldiers in Iraq in response to the fatal drone strike.

Trump shifts on Puerto Rico, releases aid

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump announced the release Friday of \$13 billion in assistance to repair years-old hurricane damage in Puerto Rico and pledged to restore its economy, setting aside his past bitter treatment of the island and its leaders as he courts Puerto Rican voters in the U.S., particularly in the crucial swing state of Florida.

Trump has spent much of his administration blasting Puerto Rican officials as corrupt and inept, and he has opposed spending to rebuild a power grid and other infrastructure that was wiped out by the Hurricane Maria in September 2017. He's now portraying himself as the territory's best friend.

"I'm the best thing that ever happened to Puerto Rico," he said at a White House press conference, "no one even close."

Residents of Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory of more than 3 million people, cannot

vote in the general election. But there are more people of Puerto Rican descent on the mainland than on the island, and they could play a key role in the Nov. 3 vote.

Former Vice President Joe Biden has also sought support from Puerto Ricans, recently releasing a recovery plan for the territory and visiting central Florida. The region has one of the largest concentrations of people from the island on the U.S. mainland, including many who fled the devastation of Hurricane Maria.

The hurricane slammed into the island with winds of 155 mph, causing an estimated \$100 billion in damage and killing nearly 3,000 people, according to an official death toll that Trump has said was exaggerated to make him look bad.

The grant announced Friday includes nearly \$10 billion to rebuild an electrical grid that was wiped out by the storm and resulted in the longest blackout in U.S. history.

Asked why the aid was coming now, less than 50 days before the election, Trump insisted his administration had been working on getting it done but it was held up by Democrats in Congress. In fact, they approved the funding and pushed for its release.

Rep. Nydia M. Velazquez, a New York Democrat, took note of the timing of Trump's assistance so close to the election.

"The Trump Administration delayed, dragged its feet and resisted allocating these badly needed funds," said Velazquez, who was born in Puerto Rico. "Now, forty-six days before the election, the administration has finally seen fit to release these funds."

Trump in the past has opposed providing additional aid to Puerto Rico, arguing it had received too much already and expressing concern that the money would be wasted or misspent.

Hurricane watch in effect as storm approaches Texas

Associated Press

MIAMI — An exceptionally busy Atlantic hurricane season was churning along Saturday morning as the Texas coast prepared for a tropical storm that's forecast to strengthen into a hurricane before breaching its shores in the week ahead.

Tropical Storm Beta was brewing in the Gulf of Mexico, 290 miles east of the mouth of the Rio Grande, the U.S. National Hurricane Center said in an advisory. The system was forecast to become a hurricane on Sunday and had already triggered a hurricane watch from Port Aransas, Texas, to High Island, Texas.

Also in effect were a storm surge watch from Port Mansfield, Texas to Cameron, La.; and a tropical storm watch from south of Port Aransas to the mouth of the Rio

Grande, and east of High Island to Morgan City, La.

Beta had maximum sustained winds of 60 mph and was moving north at 8 mph.

Forecasters were predicting up to 4 feet of storm surge along parts of the Texas coast that included Baffin Bay, Corpus Christi Bay, Galveston Bay and more. Wind, heavy rainfall and life-threatening surf and rip current conditions were also expected with the storm.

Forecasters ran out of traditional storm names on Friday, forcing the use of the Greek alphabet for only the second time since the 1950s.

Meanwhile, Hurricane Teddy remained a powerful hurricane Saturday, with maximum sustained winds at 125 mph. Teddy was centered 605 miles southeast of Bermuda less than a week after Hurricane

Paulette made landfall in the wealthy British territory.

A tropical storm warning was in effect for Bermuda. Large swells from Teddy were forecast to impact the Lesser Antilles, the Greater Antilles, the Bahamas and Bermuda, and were expected to impact the U.S. East Coast.

Parts of the Alabama coast and Florida Panhandle were still reeling from the effects of Hurricane Sally, which roared ashore on Wednesday. At least two deaths were blamed on the system, and hundreds of thousands of people were still without power late Friday.

Alpha dissipated Friday night after bringing rain to Portugal. Tropical Storm Wilfred remained at sea but was not expected to impact land.

CDC reverts to old testing advice after rash of criticism

Associated Press

NEW YORK — U.S. health officials on Friday dropped a controversial piece of coronavirus guidance and said anyone who has been in close contact with an infected person should get tested.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention essentially returned to its previous testing guidance, getting rid of language posted last month that said people

didn't need to get tested if they didn't feel sick. That change had set off a rash of criticism from health experts who couldn't fathom why the nation's top public health agency would say such a thing amid the pandemic.

It was "not consistent with the basic principles of controlling an epidemic," said Dr. Silvia Chiang, a pediatric infectious diseases expert at Brown University who

applauded the change announced Friday.

The CDC now says anyone who has been within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes should get a test. In a statement, the agency called the changes a "clarification" that was needed "due to the significance of asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic transmission."

Agency officials declined additional comment.

Ohio discourages traditional Halloween

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Traditional trick-or-treating should be avoided this year and haunted houses and hayrides should be canceled, the Ohio Department of Health said Friday as it released a series of non-binding recommendations.

Communities should consider alternatives such as drive-through events with children in cars collecting treats from individuals spaced at least six feet apart or decorating houses and hiding treats outside, according to the guidelines.

"It is strongly recommended that Ohioans exercise caution when deciding to participate in trick-or-treating and events that put them in close contact with people outside their households," said the recommendations from interim Health Director Lance Himes.

The Health Department also says large in-person parties shouldn't be held.

Republican Gov. Mike DeWine has said that decisions to allow trick-or-treating will be up to local communities. Some in Ohio have already canceled trick-or-treating this year, while other municipalities are waiting to make decisions closer to the end of October.

Iowa

DES MOINES — Iowa coronavirus infections grew by 1,259 confirmed cases on Friday with 10 additional deaths.

The state now has more than 78,000 confirmed cases, and the total number of death since March has risen to 1,258.

While trends have generally been improving in many locations, and Iowa dropped from the state with the fastest rate of virus spread to the third in the nation last week, data indicates that coronavirus infections still are occurring at a fast pace.

Gov. Kim Reynolds earlier in the month ordered that bars be closed in Story and Johnson counties, which are home to Iowa State Universities and the University of Iowa. With infections rates remaining high in

those areas, Reynolds on Friday signed a new proclamation that keeps those bars closed at least through Sept. 27.

State data also shows 55 people were hospitalized in the last 24 hours as of Friday morning, the third-highest daily hospitalization number since Iowa began seeing cases in March.

Maryland

COLLEGE PARK — Residents of a dormitory at the University of Maryland are being asked to restrict their movements for the next two weeks after a coronavirus outbreak there.

News outlets report that the restrictions affect more than 200 students living in Denton Hall, a traditional high-rise dormitory located near the campus football stadium.

Campus officials say the restrictions are not an official quarantine but students have been told not to attend in-person classes and asked to restrict movements as much as possible. Communal bathrooms can only be used two at a time.

In the past two weeks, 23 Denton students have tested positive for coronavirus.

The restrictions went into effect at 5 p.m. Friday. Students also had the option of returning home before the restrictions went into effect.

Mississippi

JACKSON — Mississippi is planning to go ahead with its annual state fair in early October with new rules to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

New cases of COVID-19 have declined in the state in recent weeks, and officials said they have been working hard to design a fair that will keep attendees safe, despite the risk of the virus spreading in large crowds. The event draws thousands of visitors to the state capital each year for food, carnival rides, music and agricultural expositions.

"We understand that we've got to live a little bit, and if it's something outdoors that we

can do safely, we are prepared to try and make that happen," State Health Officer Dr. Thomas Dobbs said during a Friday press briefing.

Masks will be required for all guests, and temperatures will be screened at the fair entrance. There will be a safety marshal in charge of enforcing social distancing.

Montana

HELENA — Montana health officials reported a record number of COVID-19 cases on Friday, a day after breaking a record that has stood since July. But a state health official said that cases aren't necessarily on the rise.

The state confirmed 224 cases of COVID-19 on Friday, a day after setting a record of 221 cases.

Jim Murphy, chief of Montana's Communicable Disease and Prevention Bureau, said some of the increase in cases in recent days came from a reporting backlog from local health departments, including in Flathead County, which reported 39 cases on Friday.

The beginning of the school year has caused what Murphy called a "mild bump" in cases throughout the state. Cases identified in school settings are "nothing really alarming so far," he said. Some clusters in congregate settings, including nursing homes and detention centers, also have contributed to the mild bump in cases.

Oklahoma

OKLAHOMA CITY — The University of Oklahoma announced a number of changes on Friday to its student seating section for next week's football game after what it described as "disappointing behaviors" by students during last week's season opener in Norman.

OU announced in a press release it plans to increase security personnel to help enforce a mask mandate, tape off prohibited sections and establish seating clusters for groups of up to 10 students beginning with the

Sooners' Sept. 26 game against Kansas State.

During Saturday's game against Missouri State students were seen packed together and not wearing masks in the student section of the stadium, where capacity has been limited to about 25%.

Rhode Island

The president of Providence College announced that the school is moving to remote-only learning for at least two weeks after a surge of new coronavirus cases among students, saying "we are out of options."

The private Roman Catholic university's president, Rev. Kenneth Sicard, wrote to the school community Thursday that more than 80 students tested positive for the virus in just two days, but the state Department of Health said Friday that the number was actually 120.

School spokesperson Steven Maurano explained the discrepancy in an email Friday. The school reported just the people who had tested positive at a campus testing site, he said, but some students were tested at off-campus sites and the school was not made aware of them.

Most students who tested positive live off campus. The school has about 4,800 students.

Texas

AUSTIN — More than 3,978 new cases were reported Friday of the coronavirus, as well as 123 new deaths, according to Texas health officials.

Hospitalizations from COVID-19 also continued to fall with 3,172 beds filled Friday, 74 fewer than the day before.

The trend encouraged Republican Gov. Greg Abbott to loosen restrictions on how many customers restaurant and fitness club could accommodate, although bars remain closed despite pressure from owners and some conservative GOP activists. Texas bars have been shut down since June when a surge in cases, hospitalizations and deaths occurred.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Ex-cemetery caretaker charged with larceny

CT BRIDGEPORT— A former caretaker of a Connecticut cemetery where police found bones strewn about and new graves placed over old ones is facing a new charge of embezzling more than \$60,000 from the cemetery.

Dale LaPrade, 66, was charged with first-degree larceny on Sept. 10 after a forensic audit discovered the theft of funds from Park Cemetery in Bridgeport between 2016 and 2018.

“A forensic fraud examiner who assisted detectives determined that LaPrade made several cash withdrawals a day in some instances, and utilized over \$60,000 of cemetery funds for personal expenses that were earmarked for burials and perpetual care,” Bridgeport police said in a statement.

FBI tie 3 Asian gangs to illegal drugs, guns

CA LOS ANGELES— Authorities arrested 18 people who have ties to Asian gangs operating in Southern California that illegally sold drugs and guns as part of an 18-month investigation, federal officials said.

The probe into the Black Dragons, Wah Ching and Asian Boyz gangs was based on their activity in the San Gabriel Valley, said Jack Bennett, acting assistant director in charge of the FBI’s Los Angeles field office.

Officials say they seized hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash, an illegal marijuana growing operation, 28 pounds of methamphetamine and 4 ounces of cocaine and crack cocaine, as well as 16 firearms. Several of the guns were described as

so-called “ghost guns” that do not have manufacturing or serial number identifications.

Fire destroys about 20 trucks on lot

IN INDIANAPOLIS — A fire that damaged or destroyed about 20 trucks on an Indianapolis lot is being investigated as arson.

The blaze was reported Thursday at M&K Truck Center.

Fire officials said smoke from the fire was visible for miles from nearby Interstate 465. Hundreds of gallons of diesel fuel spilled from truck tanks.

Semitrailers and dump trucks were among the vehicles that burned. The company said 12 of the vehicles are a total loss and seven others suffered significant damage.

Auditor: Town clerk stole taxpayer money

MO O’FALLON — The former clerk of a tiny town in remote northeast Missouri spent more than \$300,000 in taxpayer money on concerts, vacations and other personal needs, State Auditor Nicole Galloway said.

Tracey Ray, the former clerk of Center, was not criminally charged with financial crimes, but an investigation continues.

Meanwhile, Ray is facing four felony charges for an exchange of gunfire that injured the Ralls County sheriff and a deputy on July 2, 2019, the day city officials questioned her about financial concerns. Ray also was injured in the shooting. She was fired the next day.

Since then, her house has been sold to recoup some of the money she allegedly stole, and the small town of 500 residents is working to get the rest back,

too, Mayor Dennis McMillen said.

Resort to ban smoking after COVID reopening

NV LAS VEGAS — One of the last Las Vegas Strip resorts to reopen after coronavirus closures will be the first to be smoke-free, MGM Resorts International announced.

Park MGM will prohibit tobacco smoke inside when it opens Sept. 30, said Anton Nikodemus, president and chief operating officer of the 3,000-room property that many remember as the Monte Carlo casino-hotel.

“We’re making the facility completely non-smoking because of continued guest requests,” he said. The property also includes the upscale NoMad hotel, which will open, and the 5,200-seat Park Theater, which remains closed due to a COVID-19 ban on crowds.

Nikodemus noted that smoking areas will be provided outside Park MGM, and tobacco smoking is still allowed at other MGM Resorts properties including New York-New York and Aria.

Man inspecting world’s tallest swing dies

FL ORLANDO— A worker doing an inspection on a popular central Florida thrill ride was killed after falling more than 50 feet.

Orange County Fire Rescue tweeted that firefighters responded to the Orlando StarFlyer ride after receiving a report that a man had fallen. The unidentified worker was taken to a hospital where he was pronounced dead.

The ride wasn’t moving at the time. At 450 feet, the Orlando StarFlyer is billed as the world’s tallest swing ride.

Suspect hits deputy with his squad car

IA EAGLE GROVE — A deputy fired his weapon after being hit by his own squad car that had been commandeered by a handcuffed suspect, police in north-central Iowa said.

The incident happened near Eagle Grove when a Wright County sheriff’s deputy stopped a car being driven by Sean McMillan, 31, of Fort Dodge, the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation said in a news release. The deputy arrested him on suspicion of driving while suspended and being a felon in possession of a handgun.

While the deputy was questioning a passenger, investigators said, McMillan jumped the center console of the squad car, punched the accelerator and hit the deputy before speeding off in the officer’s car. The deputy fired a single shot that hit the squad car’s windshield, but did not injure anyone.

Alleged gang suspects trafficked drugs at mall

CA SAN FRANCISCO — At least 15 suspected gang members have been charged with trafficking drugs and firearms in the San Francisco Bay Area where they used the parking lot of a strip mall for numerous transactions, federal officials announced.

The alleged Sureno gang members used a mall in Concord to sell methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin, and firearms.

Authorities served 34 search warrants across the Bay Area in recent weeks and seized illegal drugs and 42 guns, he said.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

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Lakers take opener of Western finals

Associated Press

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — Slow starters in the first two rounds, the Los Angeles Lakers appeared to be in a hurry to put away the Denver Nuggets.

It was a strong statement to their opponent — and maybe to the NBA's MVP voters.

Anthony Davis had 37 points and 10 rebounds, LeBron James added 15 points and 12 assists hours after finishing a distant second in the MVP voting, and the Lakers rolled to a 126-114 victory on Friday night in Game 1 of the Western Conference finals.

The top-seeded Lakers opened a double-digit lead in the first half that they easily extended in the third quarter.

"It took a quarter for us to kind of figure it out," James said. "Not saying we fully figured them out because it's too early in the series to say that, but we started to get a better feel. Just started to get in a better rhythm defensively and we started to get some stops in that second quarter and we were able to build that lead up going into halftime."

James acknowledged being "pissed off" at receiving just 16 first-place votes to winner Giannis Antetokounmpo's 85 from a panel of global sports writers and broadcasters who cover the league, and the Nuggets may have felt the wrath of that.

"It definitely sparks him and, like, he got a chip on his shoulder like he's got something to prove," Davis said.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 18 points and Dwight Howard rejoined the rotation with 13 in a powerful return to the conference finals for the Lakers, who hadn't been to the NBA's final four since winning their last championship in 2010.

Los Angeles dropped Game 1 against both Portland and Houston before winning the next four games. The Lakers quickly knocked off any rust for another long layoff in the bubble against a Denver team that's had things much tougher.

Nikola Jokic and Jamal Murray each scored 21 points for the Nuggets, playing in the conference finals for the first time since the Lakers beat them in

2009.

Denver overcame 3-1 deficits against Utah and the Clippers, becoming the first team to do that twice in a postseason. The Nuggets immediately fell behind again, digging themselves a big hole when Jokic and Murray each picked up three fouls in the first half that just got deeper in the second half.

"We know how it's going to be. We know we're the younger team. We're just going to play through it," Murray said about the fouls discrepancy. "We're going to find a way and we're not going to go away so easy."

Davis scored 14 points in the first quarter, but the Nuggets shot nearly 64 percent, with Murray's three-pointer as time expired giving them a 38-36 lead.

Alex Caruso converted a three-point play to open the second and start a 17-1 run by the Lakers to start the period and make it 53-39 before the Nuggets made their first field goal after more than five minutes.

Tip-ins

Nuggets: Michael Porter

Jr. had 14 points and 10 rebounds. ... The Nuggets fell to 7-22 against the Lakers in the postseason. ... Denver's 16 fouls in the second quarter tied the most by any team in a quarter this season. It was the first time this season that Murray and Jokic both had three fouls before halftime.

Lakers: Rajon Rondo had nine assists to give him 1,025 in the playoffs, passing Michael Jordan (1,022) for 10th on the NBA's career list. ... Howard sat out three games and played only 4½ minutes in the last four minutes against the small-ball Rockets.

Mile-high Michaels

Nuggets coach Michael Malone said he had been in touch with Denver Mayor Michael Hancock, who told him about the passion back home.

"He's told me that it's just so great to see the city all come together and unite behind a feel-good story in the Nuggets and we still have a lot of work to do," Malone said. "So we appreciate all the love and support back home, no doubt."

Antetokounmpo wins second straight NBA MVP award

Associated Press

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — Giannis Antetokounmpo's historic year earned him a historic awards sweep.

The Milwaukee forward is the NBA's Most Valuable Player for the second consecutive season, receiving that award Friday. He got the Defensive Player of the Year award earlier in these NBA playoffs.

The 25-year-old Antetokounmpo becomes just the third player in league history to win MVP and Defensive Player of the Year in the same season, joining only Hall of Famers Michael Jordan and Hakeem Olajuwon.

"Michael Jordan, one of the best players who's ever done it, if not the best," Antetokounmpo

said. "Hakeem, a guy that I look up to, he came from where I'm from, Nigeria, where I have roots. ... Just being in the same sentence with them, that means a lot to me."

Antetokounmpo — who was in his native Athens, Greece, with his family when the award was announced — received 85 votes. There were 101 votes available; 100 from a panel of global sports writers and broadcasters who cover the league, plus one additional vote through fan balloting.

"It feels good to get this award announced when I'm back home," Antetokounmpo said, after telling NBA Commissioner Adam Silver — who was in possession of the trophy Friday — to hang on to the hardware until he returns to

the U.S.

"I'm going to ship it to Greece," Silver said during the televised announcement show on NBA TV.

"No, don't do that," Antetokounmpo replied. "I'll come get it when the season starts."

LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers got the other 16 first-place votes and finished second, and James Harden of the Houston Rockets finished third. James has been first, second or third in the MVP voting 11 times in his career. Harden has been top-three in each of the last four seasons.

James, a four-time MVP, said he was not pleased initially when he saw that he finished second by such a wide margin.

"Not saying that the winner wasn't deserving of the MVP,

but that (ticked) me off," James said.

He later said Antetokounmpo "had a hell of a season," but said he has some doubts about how awards get decided.

"I don't know how much we are really watching the game of basketball, or are we just in the narration mode, the narrative," James said.

Antetokounmpo's numbers this season were unprecedented, with averages of 29.5 points, 13.6 rebounds and 5.6 assists per game. Nobody had ever averaged those numbers over a full season; Wilt Chamberlain and Elgin Baylor both had seasons where they topped Antetokounmpo's averages for points and rebounds, though both fell just shy of matching his assist average.

MLB roundup

Pujols passes Mays on career HR list

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Albert Pujols needed nearly five weeks to tie Willie Mays for fifth place on the career home run list. It took only five days for the Los Angeles Angels slugger to pass him.

Pujols hit No. 661 in the fifth inning on Friday night against the Texas Rangers to break the tie with Mays, then connected again in his next at-bat in the 6-2 victory.

"I knew that whenever it happens, whether it was going to be this year or next year, it was going to happen," he said. "I definitely wasn't thinking about trying to hit one out. It happened tonight and look how perfect it worked out. I not only got one, but two on the night."

The 40-year-old Pujols now trails only Barry Bonds (762), Hank Aaron (755), Babe Ruth (714) and Alex Rodriguez (696).

Athletics 6, Giants 0: Oakland clinched its third straight

playoff berth with Seattle's loss to San Diego and a win against San Francisco.

Reds 7, White Sox 1: Slumping Jesse Winker hit a three-run homer — one of four off Chicago starter Jonathan Stiever — and host Cincinnati extended its surge into playoff contention with its season-high sixth straight win.

Cardinals 6-7, Pirates 5-2: Rookie Dylan Carlson's three-run homer capped a six-run outburst in the sixth inning against host Pittsburgh, helping St. Louis to a doubleheader sweep.

Phillies 7-8, Blue Jays 0-7: Bryce Harper hit a tying, two-run double and scored the go-ahead run on an error following Alec Bohm's infield single, helping Philadelphia rally to beat visiting Toronto and earn a rare doubleheader sweep.

Nationals 5-3, Marlins 0-14: Brian Anderson tied a franchise record with three homers and drove in seven runs to help

host Miami earn a doubleheader split.

Rays 2, Orioles 1: Tyler Glasnow struck out 10 over five innings to help Tampa Bay beat Alex Cobb and host Baltimore.

Indians 1, Tigers 0: Zach Plesac pitched impressively into the eighth inning, and Brad Hand worked out of a jam in the ninth to send visiting Cleveland past Detroit.

Braves 15, Mets 2: Freddie Freeman added three more hits to his burgeoning MVP campaign, Ozzie Albies hit two of his team's six homers and host Atlanta battered the Mets in a rout that thrust them closer to a third straight NL East title.

Cubs 1, Twins 0: Kyle Hendricks tossed eight innings of three-hit, shutout ball to outduel Rich Hill, and host Chicago edged Minnesota for its fifth straight win.

Diamondbacks 6, Astros 3: Kole Calhoun hit two home runs to lead visiting Arizona over former teammate Zack Greinke and Houston.

Brewers 9, Royals 5: Jacob Nottingham hit a grand slam and Orlando Arcia added a three-run shot as host Milwaukee rallied from an early four-run deficit and beat Kansas City.

Dodgers 15, Rockies 6: Cody Bellinger, Mookie Betts and Gavin Lux homered and Los Angeles set a season high for runs, romping past host Colorado.

Yankees 6, Red Sox 5 (12): Gary Sanchez hit a tying home run with two outs in the ninth inning, DJ LeMahieu had a go-ahead double in the 12th and visiting New York rallied past Boston for its ninth straight win.

Padres 6, Mariners 1: Manny Machado homered twice and drove in four runs, Chris Paddack one-hit Seattle for six shutout innings and host San Diego reduced its magic number to two for clinching its first playoff berth in 14 seasons.

Par good enough for Reed to take 1-shot US Open lead

Associated Press

MAMARONECK, N.Y. — Every shot required full attention. Every hole was a test. Every par was valued.

Patrick Reed embraced every aspect of it Friday when the U.S. Open lived up to its reputation as the toughest test in golf, and so did Winged Foot.

"I love the grind," Reed said, barely unable to contain a grin.

From the bunker, he twice saved par. From ankle-deep rough behind the green to back pins, he walked off with two more pars. Throw in five birdies to offset the inevitable mistakes, and Reed had an even-par 70 that gave him a one-shot lead going into a U.S. Open that feels as though it's just getting started.

"It's almost like they set it up

to ease our way into it, and then showed us what it's supposed to really be like," Reed said.

So does Bryson DeChambeau, the former U.S. Amateur champion and current muscleman who powered and putted his way to a 68, the lowest score on a day Winged Foot played to an average score of 75.25.

After an opening round in which 21 players broke par, Winged Foot allowed only three players under par. Nine others shot even. Everyone else was hanging on for dear life.

Reed was at 4-under 136, and only five other players remained in red numbers. DeChambeau is the only player to be under par in both rounds, the easier one and the brutal one.

"When I play well in these

conditions, it's a lot more enjoyable," he said. "If I had to look back on it, I would say that this today is a more enjoyable test after I'm done because it shows who executed the shots the best, for sure."

This was the Winged Foot everyone has heard about. This is the U.S. Open everyone expected.

Rafa Cabrera-Bello of Spain and Harris English each had a 70 and were at 2-under.

They were joined by Justin Thomas, who opened with a 65 — the lowest ever at Winged Foot for a U.S. Open — and lost all those shots to par after 10 holes. Thomas then delivered a 5-wood from 228 yards into the wind on the par-3 third hole and made a slick, 15-foot, double-breaking birdie putt to steady himself. He scratched

out a 73 and is right in it.

Jason Kokrak (71) was the only other player under par at 1-under 139.

There's still 36 holes to go, and no indication that Winged Foot is going to get any easier.

"The rough is still really thick. I don't think they're planning on cutting it," Matthew Wolff said after salvaging a 74 that left him four shots behind. "The greens are only going to get firmer, and the scores are only going to get higher."

Tiger Woods is among those who won't be around to experience it. He had a pair of double bogeys at the end of the back nine, and two birdies over his last three holes gave him a 77. He missed the cut by four shots, the eighth time in his last 15 majors he won't be around for the weekend.

Empty stadiums equal empty feelings

Associated Press

DENVER — Broncos quarterback Drew Lock felt like he was at the library, whispering in the huddle at empty Empower Field so the Tennessee Titans couldn't eavesdrop.

All the vacant seats at Gillette Stadium had Patriots star Julian Edelman reminiscing about his time in junior college.

Aaron Rodgers capitalized on the silenced Gjallarhorn in Minneapolis to repeatedly draw defenders offside with his signature hard count, something that's next to impossible in the normal din of a packed US Bank Stadium, which was unoccupied last weekend.

The coronavirus pandemic that has altered the sports landscape from youth leagues to the pros resulted in just two teams permitting spectators on the NFL's opening weekend.

The Super Bowl champion Chiefs allowed 16,940 fans into 77,000-seat Arrowhead Stadium for their season kickoff against Houston, and the Jaguars allowed 16,800 fans for their game against the Colts on Sunday, although only 14,100 fans showed up.

The 16 teams who opened on the road have their home openers in Week 2 that began with the Browns allowing 6,000 fans into FirstEnergy Stadium for their game against the Bengals on Thursday night.

Three more teams are letting fans in this weekend: the Colts (2,500), Dolphins (13,000) and Cowboys, who are expecting to allow a league-high 20,000 fans into 80,000-seat AT&T Stadium in Arlington for their game against the Falcons.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott is allowing 50% capacity at sporting events but Cowboys coach Mike McCarthy indicated

Wednesday that the crowd will be about half of that.

The Broncos actually allowed 500 spectators Monday night, guests of players and coaches who sat separated in the lower bowl as a sort of test run for Week 3 when 5,700 fans get to watch Tom Brady and the Buccaneers.

Lock and his teammates sorely missed the usual crowd buzz when they were futilely trying to fend off a last-minute comeback by the Titans, who won it on a field goal in the waning seconds.

"Yeah, that would have been sweet," Lock said. "It was really weird out there. No noise, the timeouts, it was quiet. I wanted to call the play quietly in the huddle because I didn't know if they could hear us calling plays. It was weird."

McCarthy isn't sure having the largest crowd on hand over the first two weeks of the sea-

son will matter when the Cowboys host the Falcons.

"We'll find out," he said. "I think the word different, unusual, however you want to describe it."

McCarthy was taken aback by the atmosphere last weekend when the Cowboys helped christen the new \$5 billion SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles with a thriller against the Rams.

Fans watching from afar had two advantages, including artificial crowd noise culled from previous games by NFL Films that was different than the noise piped into the stadium. That gave viewers a more natural audio experience and at least those streaming or watching the game could hear the referee explain calls.

Some teams will start allowing fans into the stands this month but others like the Rams and Raiders won't allow crowds at all this season.

Stars, Lightning have offensive defenders in Final

Associated Press

This was already going to be an unusual Stanley Cup, and it now has a matchup for all of those who like their games to be a bit defensive.

The Dallas Stars and Tampa Bay Lightning, two of the league's southernmost teams playing for the title in a bubble in the NHL's northernmost arena in Edmonton, have defensemen who provide plenty of points.

Is that defensive offense or offensive defense? Either way, they've done that and also been pretty good at what blueline players are primarily expected to do in shutting down the opponent.

"In today's NHL you need that for your team to be successful," Lightning defenseman Ryan McDonagh said Friday. "You need that second wave of players joining the rush. ... It's something that we stress."

Tampa Bay veteran Victor Hedman, a fourth-time final-

ist for the Norris Trophy that goes to the league's best all-around defenseman, is scoring postseason goals at a record pace. The Stars have Miro Heiskanen, who at barely 21 is already the highest-scoring defenseman ever in a postseason for his franchise.

"We're not surprised," Stars defenseman John Klingberg said. "Let Miro be Miro, and he's going to take over games."

Only Lightning forwards Nikita Kucherov (26 points) and Brayden Point (25 points), and Colorado center Nathan McKinnon (25 points in 15 games), have more postseason points than the 22 (five goals, 17 assists) by Heiskanen, the third overall pick in the 2017 draft.

Heiskanen and Klingberg (three goals, 13 assists), who has two game-winning goals, have outpointed some standout teammates: Tyler Seguin and Alexander Radulov, who are primarily on the top line with captain Jamie Benn, and play-off veteran Joe Pavelski, who is

in his first season with Dallas.

"It's way easier to play with five guys on the ice than three or two," said Heiskanen, whose birthday was during the NHL's 4½-month pause because of the pandemic. "So it's great to have the good D core, and let's try to use it as much as we can, and just keep going there."

Dallas defensemen have combined for 53 points (13 goals, 40 assists), the most during a postseason in the history of the franchise in its first Stanley Cup Final since 2000. The previous mark was 47 (nine goals, 38 assists) in 1981 when the Minnesota North Stars lost in the final.

"Modern hockey, you create a lot of offense from the back end as well and you want to be able to have your Ds join the rush," Klingberg said.

Tampa Bay defensemen have 46 points, and helped the Lightning go 10-2 in one-goal games this postseason. Since falling behind 1-0 in Game 4 against New York, they have allowed

only three goals in more than 195 minutes.

"They have some big D, guys that can move and score," Pavelski said. "You see what Hedman's doing right now."

The Stars are 1-0 in one-goal games, and held Vegas to two goals or fewer in each of their wins in the West final. They scored five goals in each of their four wins against Colorado.

Hedman, the 6-foot-6 Swede who was the second overall pick in the 2009 draft, had the only goal in regulation for the Lightning in their East-clinching 2-1 victory over the Islanders.

It was Hedman's sixth goal in eight games and part of his NHL-best plus-19 rating since the season resumed. His nine goals are the most in a postseason for a Tampa Bay defenseman, the most in the NHL since Brian Leetch of the New York Rangers had 11 in 1994 and only three shy of the league record 12 by Edmonton's Paul Coffey in 1985.