

Experts downplay US carrier gap in Indo-Pac

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The absence of a U.S. aircraft carrier in the Indo-Pacific poses no immediate risk to regional security but exposes the U.S. Navy's inability to project a complete global presence, a defense expert said.

With the USS Ronald Reagan back in Washington state and its replacement, the USS George Washington, yet to deploy from San Diego, the 7th Fleet is temporarily without a carrier homeported at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan.

"The lack of deployed carriers in the Pacific is not a security threat today," Mark Cancian, a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said Thursday. "However, it does mean that the U.S. has fewer tools available if a crisis or conflict occurs."

The Pentagon on Aug. 2 ordered the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, making its way across the Pacific, to re-

lieve the USS Theodore Roosevelt in the Persian Gulf. Three weeks later, the Pentagon decided to keep both carriers and their strike groups in that area as conflict intensified between Israel and Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

Meanwhile, the Ronald Reagan, operating from Japan for nearly a decade, returned to the United States for scheduled maintenance on Aug. 13.

Its replacement, the George Washington, began operations in the Eastern Pacific on Aug. 25, but was back in port at Naval Air Station North Island on Wednesday, according to information posted on the Defense Visual Information Distribution Service.

The U.S. 3rd Fleet did not respond to emails requesting comment on Wednesday and Friday.

U.S. aircraft carriers have been a regular presence in the region since the USS Midway first deployed to Japan in 1973,

but the current situation highlights the difficulty in projecting naval power on a global scale.

"Some strategists would have the United States withdraw from Europe and the Middle East to focus on the Pacific," Cancian said. "That might be attractive in theory, but recent events in Ukraine and the Middle East show that it is just not possible."

The Navy is too small to cover the Pacific, the Middle East and Europe simultaneously, Cancian added.

"It needs to be bigger," he wrote. The Navy is plagued with recruiting and manpower shortages, maintenance backlogs, delays in shipbuilding and a shrinking fleet, but hopes to grow its fleet from 296 to 381 ships over the next 30 years, according to an Aug. 8 report from the Congressional Research Service.

The Navy has declined to comment on when the George Washington would arrive at Yo-

kosuka, but until then the Indo-Pacific isn't completely exposed.

USS America, homeported at Sasebo Naval Base, and USS Boxer and their amphibious ready groups, as well as numerous guided-missile destroyers and cruisers, are in the area. Those ships, along with allied military forces, demonstrate "our collective resolve to ensure security and stability in the region," Pacific Fleet spokeswoman Lt. Cmdr. Christina Hough said Friday.

An amphibious ready group is typically composed of an amphibious assault ship, amphibious transport dock and a dock landing ship and carry over 4,000 sailors and Marines and numerous aircraft, tanks and other vehicles. The "large, powerful ships" show that the U.S. has not abandoned the region, and their capabilities are great for humanitarian assistance and the protection of U.S. facilities in the region, Cancian said.

Protesters in Turkey assault 2 Wasp service members

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

Two U.S. service members from an amphibious assault ship visiting a city in western Turkey are safe after they were assaulted Monday by a group of protesters who have attacked American military personnel in previous years.

Turkish authorities said they detained 15 members of the Youth Union of Turkey, also known as TGB, in the physical assault of the service members in the city of Izmir, the Associated Press reported on Monday, citing the Turkish news

agency Anadolu.

Video posted by TGB to its X account on Monday shows several men holding another man while putting a bag on his head as a crowd yelled, "Yankee go home." The video also shows a second man coming to the aid of the man held by the group.

"US soldiers, who carry the blood of our soldiers and thousands of Palestinians on their hands, cannot defile our country," the group said in the post.

U.S. service members have not been part of the fighting in Gaza since the war between Israel and Hamas began in Octo-

ber 2023.

USS Wasp, which includes embarked elements of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, arrived in Izmir on Sunday as part of a scheduled port visit. The ship recently trained with the Turkish navy.

The Wasp Amphibious Ready Group has been on duty in the Mediterranean since late June. The ARG is part of a naval buildup in the eastern Mediterranean, as the Pentagon works to deter Iran from attacking Israel in retaliation for the assassination of a top Hamas official in Tehran in

July.

Iran blames the killing on Israel, which has not acknowledged responsibility for the bombing that killed Ismail Haniyeh.

U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa said it had seen social media reports of service members assaulted in Izmir and was working to confirm the details of what happened.

The U.S. Embassy in Ankara, in a post to its X account, confirmed that an assault of U.S. service members had occurred but did not provide additional details.

Navy touts results of positive strides in recruiting efforts

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

Navy officials said Thursday that they are seeing significant results in recruiting after years of loosening requirements to combat missed enlistment goals, putting the service on track to boost its force by more than 40,000 sailors by the year's end.

"I am very proud to announce the Navy has had its best stretch of recruiting results since 2020," Rear Adm. James Waters, commander of Navy Recruiting Command, told reporters.

More than 36,700 individuals have joined the Navy since October 2023, with about 4,000 new recruits committing to the sea service each month.

The Navy is on schedule to meet its goal of 40,600 recruits for fiscal 2024, though the service won't be able to put them all through boot camp before the fiscal year ends Sept. 30.

"I have got one boot camp," said Rear Adm. Jeffrey Czerewko, commander of Naval Education and Training Com-

mand in Pensacola, Fla.

The service set its recruiting goal of active-duty sailors for fiscal 2024 to attempt to make up for shortfalls of years prior. In 2022 and 2023, the Navy only contracted 22,000 and 30,000 sailors, respectively.

Those same years, the Navy also emptied its delayed-entry pool, a program that allows people to sign up for the armed forces up to one year before they start basic training.

"But the real 'what' behind the bend in the curve for Navy recruiting is multifaceted," Waters said.

Waters ticked off several factors he said contributed to the recruiting surge, such as making it easier to join the Navy, focusing on meeting recruiter needs and removing barriers or friction that hindered enlistment efforts.

The Navy felt pressured to loosen requirements, including accepting recruits with lower test scores and bringing in recruits who didn't have high school diplomas or a GED diploma or certificate.

The loosened requirements allowed the service to accept up to 20% of prospective sailors who receive a category 4 score — the second-lowest score level — on an entrance test that measures cognitive ability. The military has traditionally accepted very low numbers of category 4 scorers, and candidates with category 5 scores are ineligible to serve.

Vice Adm. Rick Cheeseman told The Associated Press that roughly 17% of its recruits this year are category 4.

Many of those sailors, the rear admirals said, are then put through the Future Sailor Preparatory Course, modeled after one set up two years ago by the Army, which has been successful. The Navy began its program in April 2023 and so far about 2,900 recruits have taken the academic course and at least 1,850 have completed it.

"We are helping these human beings move on to the next level and showing them what the Navy has to offer them," Czerewko said.

Pier effort in Gaza offers some lessons for US Army

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — It was their most challenging mission.

U.S. Army soldiers in the 7th Transportation Brigade had previously set up a pier during training and in exercises overseas but had never dealt with the wild combination of turbulent weather, security threats and sweeping personnel restrictions that surrounded the Gaza humanitarian aid project.

Designed as a temporary solution to get badly needed food and supplies to desperate Palestinians, the so-called Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore system, or JLOTS, faced a series of setbacks over the spring and summer.

The Army is now reviewing the \$230 million pier operation and what it learned from the experience.

One of the takeaways, according to a senior Army official, is that the unit needs to train under more challenging conditions to be better prepared for bad weather and other security issues it faced.

In a report released last week, the inspector general for the U.S. Agency for International Development said Biden ordered the pier's construction even as USAID staffers expressed concerns that it would be difficult and undercut a push to persuade Israel to open "more efficient" land crossings to get food into Gaza.

The Defense Department said the pier "achieved its goal of providing an additive means of delivering high volumes of humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza to help address the acute humanitarian crisis."

DOD withholding \$5M for each F-35 lacking hardware, software upgrades

Bloomberg

The Pentagon is withholding \$5 million from Lockheed Martin Corp. for each F-35 aircraft that doesn't yet have advanced hardware and software to meet specifications, the Defense Department's F-35 program office and the company said.

"We have coordinated the terms and conditions with Lockheed Martin," the program of-

fice said in a statement Thursday to Bloomberg News. "Approximately \$5 million per aircraft is being withheld and will be released as combat capability is delivered."

The announcement gives investors, analysts and taxpayers a sense of the cash incentive at stake for the No. 1 defense contractor as it seeks to move beyond a yearslong saga of prob-

lems involving its top defense program. Neither Lockheed nor the Pentagon revealed how many planes are subject to withholding.

Lockheed has projected delivering 75 to 110 of the aircraft by Dec. 31. Still, the \$5 million per plane won't be released until the fully compliant software is ready, according to the Pentagon.

Possessing hard drugs illegal again in Oregon

The Washington Post

As of Sunday it is, once again, illegal to possess small amounts of hard drugs in Oregon. A first-in-the-nation law decriminalizing drugs expired, as communities across America struggle to curb fentanyl use and overdose deaths.

Sunday marked the end of an experiment that drug-reform advocates called a pioneering and progressive measure to better help people. Oregon legislators reassessed Measure 110 this year and decided to again make it a misdemeanor to possess a minor amount of drugs — essentially anything besides marijuana. Selling and manufacturing illicit drugs was and is still illegal in Oregon.

Those who supported the measure said it sought to help instead of simply handcuff, by offering services as opposed to the stigma of an arrest, which can make it

harder to find a job or place to live. The most vocal advocate was the Drug Policy Alliance, which spent more than \$4 million on the campaign.

The measure required officers to hand out \$100 citations instead of jail time, and that citation could be waived if the person called a state-funded hotline and enrolled in an assessment for treatment. Those services were funded by hundreds of millions of dollars in marijuana tax revenue. (Marijuana has been legal in Oregon since 2015.)

The alliance and others used Portugal, which decriminalized certain hard drugs in 2001, as a model — despite Portugal mulling changes of its own to the law.

The Oregon campaign emphasized a study showing that Black and Native American people were more likely to be convicted of drug crimes than white people

and must deal with the consequences for decades.

The vote came in November 2020 during a wave of calls for criminal justice reform that crested after the murder of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, by police in Minnesota.

The measure passed with support from 60% of voters. But the program's problems were clear right away. Because of decades of underinvestment in behavioral health services, there weren't enough providers to care for drug users, experts said. The health care system was already stretched thin by the COVID-19 pandemic. When the measure passed, state officials said Oregon ranked last in the nation for providing access to substance-use disorder treatment. Then state auditors raised concerns about the way the Oregon Health Authority managed grants meant for

substance-abuse programs.

Then there was fentanyl. Up to 50 times stronger than heroin, fentanyl in 2021 was just hitting its peak on the West Coast after wreaking havoc elsewhere in the nation. This past January, the soaring number of fentanyl overdoses prompted state and local leaders to declare a 90-day state of emergency in Portland.

Supported by polling that showed citizens no longer backed decriminalization, The Post reported, politicians and business leaders filed initiatives to let voters to "fix and improve" the law. Soon after, Oregon legislators convened. On Feb. 29, the Oregon House of Representatives voted 51-7 to recriminalize drugs, with bipartisan support. The Oregon Senate did the same by a vote of 21-8 the next day. Gov. Tina Kotek, a Democrat, signed recriminalization into law April 1.

Publishers sue Florida over school book bans

The Washington Post

A group of major publishers, authors and parents have sued Florida education officials over a law that allows parents and local residents to limit what books are available in school libraries if they depict or describe "sexual conduct."

The lawsuit filed by Penguin Random House, Simon & Schuster, HarperCollins and others alleges that the state law, enacted last year, brought about hundreds of book removals and is violating First Amendment rights to free speech. According to the lawsuit, some of the books Florida has required be removed from school libraries under House Bill 1069 include: Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" and Kurt Vonnegut's "Slaughterhouse-Five."

The lawsuit challenges a section of the bill that requires school districts to remove a book that

"depicts or describes sexual content" or is "pornographic." One process to remove books from school libraries under the law allows parents to read out loud the controversial passages during a school board meeting, and if the board halts the reading due to explicit content, the school must "discontinue use of the material."

Florida officials have described the lawsuit as a "stunt."

"There are no books banned in Florida," said Nathalia Medina, a spokeswoman for the state's Department of Education. "Sexually explicit material and instruction are not suitable for schools."

Thursday's lawsuit, filed in federal court in Orlando, argues that publishers and authors have the right to have their books read while students have the right to "read constitutionally protected books, free from unconstitutional content-based restrictions mandated by the State of Florida."

Candidates' contrast sharp on climate change, energy

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As the Earth sizzled through a summer with four of the hottest days ever measured, Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump have starkly different visions on how to address a changing climate while ensuring a reliable energy supply. But neither has provided many details on how they would get there.

During her acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, Harris briefly mentioned climate change.

As vice president, Harris cast the tiebreaking vote on the Inflation Reduction Act, President Joe Biden's landmark climate law that was approved with only Democratic support. As a senator from California, she was an early sponsor of the Green New Deal, a sweeping series of proposals meant to swiftly move the

United States to fully green energy that is championed by the party's most progressive wing.

Trump, meanwhile, led chants of "drill, baby, drill" and pledged to dismantle the Biden administration's "green new scam" in his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention. He has vowed to boost production of fossil fuels such as oil, natural gas and coal and repeal key parts of the 2022 climate law.

"We have more liquid gold under our feet than any other country by far," Trump said at the convention. "We are a nation that has the opportunity to make an absolute fortune with its energy."

Republicans say Biden and Harris have spent four years adopting "punishing regulations" that target American energy while lavishing generous tax credits for electric vehicles and other green priorities that cost taxpayers billions of dollars.

US plans 'take it or leave it' Gaza deal

The Washington Post

U.S. officials said President Joe Biden's months-long push for a cease-fire and hostage-release deal faced renewed urgency on Sunday after Israeli forces recovered the bodies of six hostages, including Israeli American Hersh Goldberg-Pollin.

The United States has been talking to Egypt and Qatar about the contours of a final "take it or leave it" deal that it plans to present to the parties in the coming weeks — one that if the two sides fail to accept could mark the end of the American-led negotiations, according to a senior administration official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss private and sensitive deliberations. Biden officials said it was not immediately clear whether the

discovery of the six hostages would make it more or less likely that Israel and Hamas could come to an agreement in the coming weeks.

"You can't keep negotiating this. This process has to be called at some point," said the senior official, who said the U.S., Egypt and Qatar had been working on the final proposal before the six hostages were found dead in a tunnel beneath the southern Gaza city of Rafah. "Does it derail the deal? No. If anything, it should add additional urgency in this closing phase, which we were already in."

The Israel Defense Forces said the six hostages were killed by their captors "shortly before" they were discovered. The senior administration official said the United States holds a

similar assessment, believing that all six hostages were shot in the head and executed not long before their bodies were discovered.

Biden and his top aides have spent several months relentlessly trying to bring Israel and Hamas to an agreement that would see the release of the remaining living hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners and a temporary cease-fire in Gaza that they hoped would lay the groundwork for a permanent end to the war. CIA Director William Burns, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and White House Middle East Coordinator Brett McGurk are among those who have flown to the region numerous times and worked with Qatari and Egyptian negotiators to try to find an agreement.

Inside Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is facing fury and increased pressure from the hostage families, who are demanding that he address the nation. Hundreds of thousands of protesters took part in nationwide protests Sunday night, and Israel's largest labor union called for a general strike on Monday — threatening to shut down the country until Netanyahu agreed to a deal with Hamas to return the remaining captives.

The rare general strike led to disruptions around the country on Monday, while Biden added to the pressure by saying Netanyahu isn't doing enough to reach a deal for a cease-fire.

The strike was ignored in some areas, reflecting deep political divisions in Israel after nearly 11 months of fighting.

German leaders pressured by far-right election wins

Associated Press

BERLIN — The Alternative for Germany party's success in two state elections piled new pressure on Chancellor Olaf Scholz's fractious government and left the country's conservative opposition facing political contortions on Monday to find a way to govern a pair of eastern regions without involving the far-right party.

Alternative for Germany, or AfD, became the first far-right party to win a state election in post-World War II Germany in Thuringia on Sunday under one of its hardest-right figures,

Björn Höcke. In neighboring Saxony, it finished only just behind the mainstream center-right Christian Democratic Union, which leads the national opposition. Voters punished the three parties in Scholz's governing coalition, which took well under 15% of the vote between them.

Deep discontent with a national government notorious for infighting, inflation and a weak economy, anti-immigration sentiment and skepticism toward German military aid for Ukraine are among the factors that contributed to support for popu-

list parties in the formerly communist east, which is less prosperous than western Germany. A new party founded by a prominent leftist was the second big winner on Sunday — and will probably be needed to form state governments since no one is prepared to govern with AfD.

The debacle for the governing parties added to awful performances in the European Parliament election in June for Scholz's coalition, and it's not obvious that they have any recipe to rebound with Germany's next national election due in a bit over a year. Another state election on

Sept. 22 in Brandenburg — which unlike the two that voted Sunday is currently led by Scholz's center-left Social Democrats — could add to their embarrassment.

Voters "want to send a signal to the (coalition) that the chancellor no longer has their confidence. Olaf Scholz is the face of failure in Thuringia and Saxony too," Jens Spahn, a senior CDU lawmaker, told ZDF television.

Scholz wrote on Instagram that Sunday's results are "bitter" and that "our country cannot and must not get used" to such AfD victories.

Weather led to helicopter crash that killed Iran's leader

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — An official investigation into the helicopter crash in May that killed Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi and seven other people found it was caused by challenging climatic

and atmospheric conditions, Iranian state TV reported Sunday.

The final report of the Supreme Board of the General Staff of the Armed Forces said the main cause of the helicopter crash was the complex climatic

conditions of the region in spring, state TV said.

The report cited the sudden appearance of a thick mass of dense fog rising upwards as the helicopter collided with the mountain.

According to the report, there were no signs of sabotage.

Raisi died alongside seven others including his foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in the crash in northwestern Iran.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Insane Clown Posse hat helped track man in Jan. 6

M DETROIT — Prosecutors Thursday unsealed a criminal complaint accusing an Upper Peninsula man of breaking into the U.S. Capitol during the Jan. 6, 2021, attack while wearing a distinctive hat linked with the rap duo Insane Clown Posse that helped FBI agents track his movements.

On Jan. 12, 2021, six days after the attack, FBI agents received a tip that Laurium resident Adam Mancuso, 45, had posted images on Facebook showing him inside and outside of the U.S. Capitol during the attack. The photos showed Mancuso wearing the black hat with a red “Hatchetman” logo.

Investigators next started surveilling Mancuso at his home and spotted him outside what appears to be a home in Royal Oak. They concluded he is the same person shown inside the U.S. Capitol during the attack.

Conviction stays in case detailed on ‘Serial’

MD ANNAPOLIS — A 2022 court hearing that freed Adnan Syed from prison violated the legal rights of the victim’s family and must be redone, Maryland’s Supreme Court ruled Friday, marking the latest development in the ongoing legal saga that gained global attention years ago through the hit podcast “Serial.”

The 4-3 ruling means Syed’s murder conviction remains reinstated for the foreseeable future. It comes about 11 months after the court heard arguments

last October in a case that has been fraught with legal twists and divided court rulings since Syed was convicted in 2000 of killing his high school ex-girlfriend Hae Min Lee.

Syed has been free since October 2022, and while the Supreme Court’s ruling reinstates his convictions, the justices did not order any changes to his release.

The court concluded that in an effort to remedy what was perceived to be an injustice to Syed, prosecutors and a lower court “worked an injustice” against Lee’s brother, Young Lee. The court ruled that Lee was not treated with “dignity, respect, and sensitivity,” because he was not given reasonable notice of the hearing that resulted in Syed being freed.

Chris Christie to teach campaign course at Yale

CT NEW HAVEN — Former New Jersey Gov. and unsuccessful Republican presidential candidate Chris Christie will teach a course on running for office at Yale University this semester.

The weekly seminar taught by Christie is titled “How to Run a Political Campaign” and is open to undergraduates as well as graduate students at Yale’s Jackson School of Global Affairs.

The course description said it will examine issues such as communications, fundraising “and the most important question of all: If I do win, what do I want to accomplish and what kind of leader do I want to be?”

Christie, 61, served as governor of New Jersey from 2010 to 2018 and was the U.S. attorney

for New Jersey from 2002 to 2008.

He sought the Republican presidential nomination in 2016 but dropped out of the race and endorsed Donald Trump.

3 dead after small plane crashes into townhouses

OR PORTLAND — Three people were dead after a small plane crashed into a row of townhouses Saturday morning in a neighborhood east of Portland, setting the homes ablaze, authorities told KATU-TV.

Officials had said the plane was carrying two people and that at least one resident is unaccounted for.

Photos and videos published by KGW-TV in Portland showed one of the townhomes engulfed in flames while black smoke poured out of the adjoining houses. Gresham Fire Chief Scott Lewis said the fire had spread to at least four of the homes, displacing up to six families. He said two people were treated at the scene, but he didn’t describe the injuries.

As the plane went down, it knocked over a pole and power lines, causing a separate brush fire in a nearby field, according to the Multnomah County Sheriff’s Office. The plane was split into multiple parts as it crashed in the residential area in the city of Fairview, which is home to about 10,000 people.

State annuls 67-year-old ban on switchblades

MA BOSTON — Residents of Massachusetts are now free to arm themselves with switchblades after a

67-year-old restriction was struck down following the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2022 landmark decision on gun rights and the Second Amendment.

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court decision applied new guidance from the Bruen decision, which declared that citizens have a right to carry firearms in public for self-defense. The Supreme Judicial Court concluded that switchblades aren’t deserving of special restrictions under the Second Amendment.

The case stemmed from a 2020 domestic disturbance in which police seized an orange firearm-shaped knife with a spring-assisted blade. The defendant was charged with carrying a dangerous weapon.

Children’s book button to blame for fire inside car

NC BURKE COUNTY — North Carolina officials determined the cause of a fire inside a car in Burke County was a children’s book.

A child’s car seat was set ablaze when a “button battery” in a children’s book caught fire after being left in the vehicle on Sunday, according to the George Hildebran Fire & Rescue Department. The family had left the car before the fire started, officials said.

A neighbor eventually put the fire out with a garden hose, WSOC reported.

One of the books near the scorched car seat was suspected of having a lithium battery, which are susceptible to catching fire if they overheat, according to the Burke County Fire Marshal’s Office.

— From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Reigning US Open champ Gauff loses to Navarro

Associated Press

NEW YORK — This is pretty much all anyone needs to know about defending champion Coco Gauff's 6-3, 4-6, 6-3 loss to Emma Navarro in the U.S. Open's fourth round on Sunday: Gauff wound up with more double-faults, 19, than winners, 14.

It was the latest in a series of early-for-her exits in recent weeks, including bowing out in the third round at the Paris Olympics, then going 1-2 at hard-court tuneup events before arriving in New York.

"I feel like there's 70 other players in the draw that would love to have the summer that I had, even though it's (the) least, probably, (I've) done well during this time of the year," said the No. 3-seeded Gauff, who went 18-1 during the North American swing on hard courts 12 months ago, including the run to her first Grand Slam title. "So many people want to be in the fourth round. So many people want to make the Olympics. So many people want to be flag

bearer. It's perspective."

The 20-year-old from Florida did fight her way back into the match with a four-game run in which she claimed 14 of 17 points and grabbed the second set.

"Had a little bit of a lull there," said the 13th-seeded Navarro, an American who was 0-2 at the U.S. Open until this year, "but I was able to regroup."

After each of her past two contests in New York, Gauff headed back out onto the practice courts to work on her serve. That didn't help much Sunday, when she tied her career high for double-faults: She also had 19 in a loss at the 2020 French Open. Against Navarro, Gauff delivered a trio of double-faults in four different games. Eleven of the double-faults came in the final set alone.

Gauff attributed her problems to a mix of issues with her mechanics — "I go down on my left side a lot on my serve, and it's something I'm aware of, but it's tough in the moment to, I guess, try not to do it," she explained — and in her mind.

"It's sometimes more of an emotional, mental thing, because if I go out on the practice court right now, I would make, like, 30 serves in a row. I've done it before," Gauff said. "I think it's also just kind of a mental hurdle that I have to get over when it comes. ... But I definitely want to look at other things, because I don't want to lose matches like this anymore."

She finished with a total of 60 unforced errors — a whopping 29 on her forehand side.

The 23-year-old Navarro, who also eliminated Gauff in the fourth round at Wimbledon in July, was far steadier Sunday, although she still did have 35 unforced errors.

"It was a little bit of a battle of will there for a bit. But proud of just my effort today," said Navarro, a U.S. teammate of Gauff's at the Paris Games. "I was able to stick in there through some tough moments."

This result follows a third-round loss by defending men's champion Novak Djokovic on

Friday, meaning the lengthy droughts without anyone winning consecutive titles in New York will continue. The last woman to win at least two in a row was Serena Williams with three from 2012-14; the last man to do so was Roger Federer with five from 2004-08.

American Frances Tiafoe eliminated No. 28 seed Alexei Popyrin, the player who stunned Djokovic, with a 6-4, 7-6 (3), 2-6, 6-3 victory Sunday night. The No. 20 seed advanced to his third straight U.S. Open quarterfinal and will play No. 9 Grigor Dimitrov, who held off Andrey Rublev 6-3, 7-6 (3), 1-6, 3-6, 6-3 with 23-time Grand Slam champion Williams watching and offering a thumbs-up at match's end.

Also moving on Sunday was No. 12 Taylor Fritz, who beat three-time Grand Slam finalist Casper Ruud 3-6, 6-4, 6-3, 6-2. The American's quarterfinal opponent will be 2020 U.S. Open runner-up Alexander Zverev, who got past Brandon Nakashima 3-6, 6-1, 6-2, 6-2.

USC scores with 8 seconds left to knock off LSU

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Lincoln Riley had a flashback to three years ago when he coached Oklahoma.

The Sooners were driving against archrival Texas in a tie game when a 33-yard run into the end zone with 3 seconds left beat the Longhorns.

Knowing that a field goal was all No. 23 Southern California needed Sunday night, Riley thought back to that play. A run was called for Woody Marks, who rushed 13 yards up the middle to score with eight seconds left and beat No. 13 LSU 27-20.

"I told someone on the headset, 'It wouldn't surprise me if he creases this,'" Riley said. "And, of course, it happened."

Miller Moss passed for 378 yards and a touchdown and his 20-yard completion to Kyron Hudson and a subsequent targeting penalty on LSU with 18 seconds to go set up the winning score by Marks in the season opener for both teams. It was

Marks' second TD run.

"We worked really hard throughout the offseason to build the identity of a tough team that really cares about each other," Moss said.

Moss outdueled LSU's Garrett Nussmeier, who completed 29 of 38 passes for 304 yards with two touchdowns and an interception on the final drive. Moss was similarly efficient in going 27-for-36 in a battle of QBs who waited their turns after sitting behind the two most recent Heisman Trophy winners, LSU's Jayden Daniels and USC's Caleb Williams.

USC, in its first season of Big Ten Conference play, sent a message with this victory in the teams' first meeting in 40 years that the Trojans could be a factor after going a disappointing 8-5 last year.

"That was some pretty good Big Ten football today," Riley said with a smile.

And it came against a Southeastern Conference opponent hoping to show it belongs in the College Football Playoff.

LSU will still have its chances to make that case, but this is the Tigers' third consecutive season-opening loss under coach Brian Kelly and fifth straight overall. LSU also had its four-game winning streak going back to last season snapped.

"We didn't play complementary football," Kelly said. "But the thing that is most concerning for me are the personal fouls, the penalties that are selfish. They're undisciplined penalties. That falls back on me. We take pride in running a disciplined program, but we have clearly not done a good enough job there because it impacted the game."

The Tigers represented about 60% of the crowd, an Allegiant Stadium announced record gathering of 63,969 that sometimes felt like Baton Rouge West. There was some star power, too, with LSU greats Shaquille O'Neal and Daniels with his Heisman Trophy in tow. Former USC Heisman winners Marcus Allen and Matt Leinart were also on hand.

Briscoe holds off Busch for playoff slot

Associated Press

DARLINGTON, S.C. — Chase Briscoe knew he carried the full weight of everyone at Stewart-Haas Racing into the final laps Sunday night at Darlington Raceway. And he couldn't have been happier.

"I feel like I run better under heavy pressure," Briscoe said. "I love the Game 7, pressure-heavy moment."

He made a dramatic, three-wide, late-race pass and held on to win the Southern 500 and qualify for the playoffs, giving Stewart-Haas Racing a final chance to add to its championship legacy before it shuts down after the season.

Briscoe and his team head to the postseason reveling in that pressure in the final days of the program that won NASCAR titles with Tony Stewart in 2011 and Kevin Harvick in 2014.

Briscoe got a call from Stewart, his owner, and drivers came up to congratulate him on the win.

Briscoe took the lead with the three-wide pass over Kyle Larson and Ross Chastain for the lead, then outran two-time series champion Kyle Busch at the end.

Briscoe pulled away on a final restart with 17 laps and held off Busch, who like Briscoe needed a victory to reach the postseason.

"We just won the Southern 500!" an emotional Briscoe said on the car radio.

Briscoe is prepared for more milestones with Stewart-Haas.

"Yeah, this group, the day we found out that the team wasn't going to exist anymore, we went over to the shop board, looked at each other and said, 'We're in this to the end,'" Briscoe said. "I was saying all week, 'We've got one bullet left in the chamber.' That bullet hit."

Joe Gibbs Racing drivers Ty Gibbs and Martin Truex Jr. got the final two postseason spots on points, while Bubba Wallace and Chastain, both within 27

points of the cutoff line when the race began, came up short.

Briscoe's dramatic move spoiled another dominant Darlington run by Kyle Larson, who led 263 laps but was not the same after getting passed by the winner. Larson was trying to overtake Tyler Reddick for the regular-season points title — and the 15 bonus points the leader receives — but came up a point short.

Christopher Bell was third, followed by Larson, Chastain, Denny Hamlin, Joey Logano, Corey LaJoie and Reddick.

Truex, racing his last season before retirement, just needed a solid, problem-free run at the track "Too Tough To Tame" to advance. Instead, he left his fate in others' hands when he crashed out on Lap 3 as his car slid up and hit defending NASCAR champion Ryan Blaney.

But following Larson's victory in the second stage — he also won the first stage — NASCAR announced that Truex had

wrapped up a spot in the 16-driver playoff field.

Bubba Wallace entered the weekend as the first man out of the playoffs and got a boost when he won his first Darlington pole Saturday. But with 23XI co-owner Michael Jordan in his pit box to watch, Wallace got caught up in a six-car wreck 24 laps from the finish.

Jordan threw his hands up and bowed his head.

"Wasn't good enough for 16th this year, hate that," Wallace said. "Stinks saying that, but wasn't for a lack of effort."

Busch came up short a second straight week, losing to a fellow winless driver this season. He was beaten by Harrison Burton last week at Daytona.

"Hate it for our guys," said Busch, who won titles in 2015 and 2019. "Something to build on and get better for. We just missed a lot early in the year, the middle part of the year to be in this spot, on the outside looking in."

Scheffler caps off record season with FedEx Cup title

Associated Press

ATLANTA — A Masters green jacket and an Olympic gold medal. A first-time father and his first time being arrested. A year Scottie Scheffler won't forget ended the best way possible Sunday when he won the FedEx Cup to cap off golf's best season in nearly two decades.

"If you can describe it in words, more power to you," Scheffler said after his four-shot victory in the Tour Championship for his eighth win of the year. "Because I don't think I can."

As always, his clubs spoke volumes.

Scheffler, who led by as many as seven shots at East Lake early in the final round, nearly hit a tee shot out-of-bounds on No. 7 for bogey. He followed

that with a shank from the bunker on the reachable par-4 eighth that led to another bogey. His lead was down to two shots over Collin Morikawa.

Facing the par-3 ninth, a hole that had yielded only nine birdies all week, Scheffler hit 4-iron to 5 feet for the first of three straight birdies that sent him to a 4-under 67 and the FedEx Cup trophy with its \$25 million prize, the richest in golf.

"All I'm trying to do is hit a good shot," he said. "This year, I've been able to do that a lot."

The victory pushed his season earnings, including bonuses, to just under \$62.3 million.

It was the greatest year since Tiger Woods won eight times in 2006, including six in a row and two majors, all while dealing with the death of his father. Scheffler's eight wins included

the Masters, The Players Championship, an Olympic gold medal and the Tour Championship that enabled him to finally claim the FedEx Cup.

His seven PGA Tour titles are the most since Woods in 2007.

"We'll look back on 2024 and it's obviously one of the best individual years that a player has had for a long time," Rory McIlroy said.

Adam Scott, who tied for fourth in the FedEx Cup, turned pro during the peak of Woods in 2000 and did not shy away from the comparisons Scheffler has created because of his consistent level of contending.

"I think it is on par with those great years of Tiger's," Scott said. "I think it's very hard today for anyone to separate themselves as much as Scottie has. I don't think we've seen that

in a long time. I think it's harder to do it today."

Scheffler took the drama out of the final hour — four of his wins this year were by three shots or more — and finally let out a shout of celebration as he stepped inside to sign his card. He hoisted two big trophies, the silver FedEx Cup and his 4-month-old son, Bennett.

But it was hard work.

This was the third straight year Scheffler has been the PGA Tour player of the year the last two seasons, leaving without the FedEx Cup trophy.

Scheffler was determined for that not to be the case.

And then it was over.

After his birdie on the ninth, Scheffler hit wedge to 3 feet on No. 10 for birdie, and then swirled in a 15-foot birdie putt on the par-3 11th.

Castellanos, Phillies walk off Braves in 11

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Nick Castellanos hit a game-winning single in the 11th and Philadelphia's bullpen pitched five scoreless innings in relief of Aaron Nola to lead the Phillies past the Atlanta Braves 3-2 on Sunday night in the final regular-season meeting between the top two teams in the NL East.

Castellanos provided all the offense for the Phillies, helping them take three of four in the series to extend their division lead to seven games. He tied it in the sixth with a two-run double off Braves starter Spencer Schwellenbach, then ended the game with a two-out RBI single off Grant Holmes.

It was his fourth walk-off hit of the season. Both of Castellanos' hits came in at bats that started with 0-2 counts.

"It makes me want to take (pitches) so I have two strikes more often," Castellanos said, jokingly. "I think the thing that has gotten me the most comfortable in those spots is all the work I do on the field early. I don't feel like I'm searching for a swing. I think that since we started doing that in May, it's just built success slowly."

Atlanta leads the New York Mets by one game for the last National League wild card.

Carlos Estévez (3-4) pitched the 10th and 11th and retired all six batters he faced, stranding the automatic runner afforded the Braves in both innings. Estévez pumped his fists with excitement and received a standing ovation from the sellout crowd, which was buzzing with a bit of a playoff-like atmosphere.

"It's really cool, man" said Estevez, who has only faced two batters in the postseason in his nine-year career, that included stints with Colorado and the Los Angeles Angels. "It's one thing when you see (the Philadelphia crowd) from the other side, but when you live it here, it's really amazing."

Mets 2, White Sox 0: Sean Manaea (11-5) pitched two-hit ball for seven innings, Francisco Lindor belted his 29th home run and visiting New York beat Chicago to hand the White Sox their franchise-record 107th loss.

Chicago (31-107) broke the club mark for losses set by the 1970 team. The White Sox also completed the first 0-10 home-stand in franchise history, becoming the first team since the 1965 Mets to have three 10-game losing streaks in one season.

Reds 4, Brewers 3 (11): Santiago Espinal drove in Reese Hinds with an infield single in the 11th inning, and host Cincinnati stopped Milwaukee's five-game win streak with a victory over the Brewers.

Hinds began the inning on second as the designated runner. He advanced on Will Benson's groundout, and Reds manager David Bell sent Espinal up to hit for Noelvi Marte. Espinal hit a grounder back up the middle that went off reliever Bryse Wilson (5-4), and Hinds scored without a throw.

Cubs 14, Nationals 1: Dansby Swanson had four hits, Jordan Wicks (2-2) pitched five solid innings and visiting Chicago beat Washington for its season-high sixth consecutive win.

Chicago closed out an 8-1 road trip that also included stops in Miami and Pittsburgh. The Cubs (71-66), who are looking to rally into an NL wild-card slot, improved to 20-8 since July 31.

Cardinals 14, Yankees 7: Jordan Walker went 5-for-5, Lars Nootbaar hit a bases-clearing double in the seventh and added a two-run homer in the ninth as visiting St. Louis beat New York.

Walker hit a long two-run homer in the fifth and drove in three runs. He had the first five-hit game by a Cardinal since Matt Carpenter in 2018 af-

ter going 1-for-8 in his first two games after his recall from Triple-A Memphis.

Tigers 4, Red Sox 1: Spencer Torkelson and Riley Greene each hit a two-run homer, and host Detroit beat Boston.

The Tigers (70-68) earned their second series win in the last 13 against Boston and won the season series for the first time since 2017. They trail the Red Sox (70-67) by a half-game for fourth in the AL wild-card race.

Guardians 6, Pirates 1: Kyle Manzardo hit his first two major league homers, Alex Cobb (2-1) did not allow a baserunner through the first six innings and AL Central-leading Cleveland beat visiting Pittsburgh.

José Ramírez and Andrés Giménez also went deep as the Guardians hit four solo homers and improved their AL-best home record to 43-25.

Padres 4, Rays 3: Xander Bogaerts hit a go-ahead sacrifice fly in the ninth inning, and visiting San Diego beat Tampa Bay.

Jackson Merrill had a two-run homer for the Padres, who are in a close race with Arizona for the first NL wild card spot. The rookie has 79 RBIs.

Astros 7, Royals 2: Yordan Alvarez homered twice and Jon Singleton added a two-run shot as host Houston completed a four-game sweep of Kansas City.

The Astros extended their lead in the AL West to six games over Seattle, while the Royals fell to 3½ games behind first-place Cleveland in the AL Central.

Twins 4, Blue Jays 3: Royce Lewis hit a go-ahead three-run home run in the eighth inning and host Minnesota rallied to beat Toronto.

Bailey Ober started and pitched six solid innings, and Jhoan Duran earned his 20th save for Minnesota, which is 3½ games behind AL Central-leading Cleveland.

Rangers 6, Athletics 4 (10): Josh Jung hit a three-run homer off All-Star closer Mason Miller (1-2) in the 10th inning as host Texas beat Oakland.

The Rangers won in walk-off fashion for the second game in a row, and the fifth time in their six home wins since Aug. 5.

Orioles 6, Rockies 1: Zach Eflin (10-7) struck out nine in seven sparkling innings and James McCann homered, helping visiting Baltimore beat Colorado.

The Orioles (79-59) closed out a 3-3 trip and moved within a half-game of the AL East-leading New York Yankees, who lost 14-7 to St. Louis.

Marlins 7, Giants 5: Kyle Stowers hit a three-run homer, and visiting Miami beat San Francisco for its first series win in more than a month.

Nick Fortes had three hits and scored two runs for Miami, which won for the third time in four games.

Angels 3, Mariners 2: Los Angeles rookie Caden Dana became the youngest pitcher in team history to win his major league debut as the Angels rallied for a victory over visiting Seattle.

Dana (1-0) allowed two runs and two hits in six innings. At 20 years, 259 days old, the right-hander was the youngest Angels pitcher since reliever Francisco Rodríguez in 2002 and youngest starter since Frank Tanana in 1973.

Diamondbacks 14, Dodgers 3: Randal Grichuk hit a three-run homer in host Arizona's eight-run second inning, Brandon Pfaadt struck out 10 and the Diamondbacks routed Los Angeles.

Eugenio Suárez homered and had two RBIs, and Geraldo Perdomo hit a two-run double in Arizona's big inning. Pfaadt (9-7) was solid after being staked to the big early lead, helping Arizona move back within five games of the Dodgers in the NL West.