

Europe facing a Russian drone dilemma

Associated Press

VINSKI, Estonia — Estonia is extending a fence along its border with Russia and building anti-tank ditches and bunkers in preparation for a potential conflict with Moscow. But those defenses won't guard against the threat it and its NATO allies face from Russian drones and electronic warfare.

From the Baltic to the Black Sea, countries bordering Russia, Belarus and Ukraine are facing the spillover from Moscow's war in Ukraine.

The incursion of about 20 Russian drones into Poland this month shone a spotlight on holes in NATO's air defenses, as multi-million-dollar jets had to be scrambled to respond to drones that cost thousands and that ended up crashing into the Polish countryside. Russia denied that it targeted Poland, but Polish officials suggested it was intentional.

Faced with a growing prob-

lem, some EU defense ministers will meet Friday to discuss creating a "drone wall."

NATO warned Russia on Tuesday that it would defend against any further breaches of its airspace after Estonia said Russian fighter jets violated it last week.

But although the alliance knows how to identify threats from jets and missiles, dealing with drones is a greater challenge, officials said.

In Poland, "most of the drones were not detected," said Hanno Pevkur, Estonia's defense minister. "This is a real gap we have to solve."

Military and defense officials from the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — NATO and EU members that border Russia — told The Associated Press that defending against drones requires solving a complex set of technological, financial and bureaucratic problems.

Europe needs cheaper tech-

nology to buy and to speed up slow production and procurement cycles, they said. But even then, drone technology is advancing so quickly that anything bought now could be outdated in months.

"What I need," said Lt. Gen. Andrus Merilo, who commands Estonia's military, is technology that is "good enough, it's affordable and can be produced in mass."

"I don't need high-end capabilities of which I can fire only one, against targets which will be attacking in hundreds," he said.

Russia is using drones every night in Ukraine because each drone is a "lottery ticket that always wins," said Kusti Salm, a former top official at Estonia's Defense Ministry.

That's because a drone either hits something or, if Ukraine shoots it down with a missile, it drains Kyiv's air defenses and finances, since missiles are more expensive than drones, said

Salm, who now runs Frankenburg Technologies, a company developing low-cost anti-drone missiles.

Although NATO countries have a "very good understanding" of how to defend against conventional threats such as missiles and planes, they need to rapidly improve at dealing with drone threats, said Tomas Godliauskas, Lithuania's vice-minister of national defense.

When the Russian drones flew into Poland, NATO nations deployed fighter jets and attack helicopters and put missile defense systems on alert. But none of those options was specifically designed for drone warfare.

Although Russia and Ukraine have been firing more and more drones at each other, there has been less investment in counter-drone systems, said Salm. He suggested that's partly because it's easier to get a drone to fly than it is to develop something to detect or intercept it.

General: Next generation stealth fighter to fly in 2028

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

Boeing has begun building the U.S. Air Force's next generation stealth fighter and intends to fly it for the first time in 2028, Gen. David Allvin, the Air Force chief of staff, said Monday.

Allvin's announcement pushed the service's efforts to build its first sixth-generation fighter, known as the F-47, up at least several months from the Air Force's initial estimate that an F-47 would fly by 2029. The general said speedy development of the new aircraft is necessary to ensure combat competitiveness with the likes of China,

which has spent recent years developing new-age weaponry.

"We got to go fast," Allvin said Monday during his keynote address at the annual Air, Space and Cyber Conference in National Harbor, Md., just south of Washington. "I got to tell you, team, it's almost 2026. The team is committed to get the first one flying in 2028. ... We're ready to go fast. We have to go fast."

Allvin, President Donald Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced the Pentagon had awarded Boeing the contract to build the F-47 in March. That initial contract is worth an estimated \$20 billion

and could grow to be worth hundreds of billions of dollars over decades, Pentagon officials have said.

Details about the forthcoming jet have remained largely classified, officials said. To date, the Pentagon and Boeing have released only partial mockups of what the jet might eventually look like.

Air Force Secretary Troy Meink on Monday said the service would remain tightlipped about the F-47's design and capabilities going forward.

"I expect some of the Chinese intel analysts are spending a lot of time looking at [Boeing's F-47

mockup] picture," he said. "Good luck trying to dig something out of there."

What is known about the project is that it grew out of the Air Force's Next Generation Air Dominance program launched in 2018. The F-47 is expected to be a manned jet meant to replace the F-22 Raptor stealth fighter, which is primarily tasked with the air superiority mission. It is also expected to include advanced artificial intelligence capabilities and the ability to control new drones capable of penetrating adversaries' air defense systems undetected, officials said.

Navy doctor removed for trans reference

The San Diego Union-Tribune

A San Diego Navy doctor has been removed from her leadership role and is now under investigation after her social media profile caught the attention of a right-wing activist and the Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

U.S. Navy Cmdr. Janelle Marra, who has served on active duty in the Navy for 17 years, was the medical services director of Expeditionary Medical Facility 150 Bravo, a Navy unit in San Diego trained to provide medical care to support military operations.

Her LinkedIn profile was flagged in a post by a right-wing account on X — Libs of TikTok — on Sept. 4, calling out Marra for including her pronouns on the page and listing a job title of “Deputy Medical Director for Transgender Healthcare.”

The post tagged Hegseth and asked him to “look into” it. By that evening, Hegseth reshared the post with the message: “Pronouns UPDATED: She/Her/Fired.”

While Marra has not officially been fired and is still working as a physician at Navy Med-

ical Center San Diego clinics, she has been “administratively removed from her leadership position for a loss of confidence in her ability to lead” and is “under investigation for violating social media policy,” according to a U.S. Navy official.

The Department of Defense, also known as the Department of War, said it stands by Hegseth’s post on X that commented on Marra’s pronouns and indicated that she would be terminated.

“The War Department is not in the business of radical gender theory. We are in the busi-

ness of warfighting,” Pentagon Press Secretary Kingsley Wilson said in a statement. “Secretary Hegseth’s post on X reaffirms this.”

For Marra’s family, the experience has been shocking.

“I never thought that somebody so high in government would be willing to target individual people,” said Marra’s wife, Cassandra. “They’re willing to put somebody in the military on that front page and be like, ‘Get her.’”

Marra could not be reached for comment while she’s under investigation.

China: Electromagnetic catapult launches jets

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

China reached a milestone when its newest aircraft carrier successfully launched and recovered fifth-generation fighter jets with an electromagnetic catapult, possibly a global first, two defense experts say.

The 3-year-old Fujian, China’s third carrier, launched J-15T and J-35 fighters and a KongJing-600 early warning aircraft from its flight deck during recent training, the official Xinhua News Agency reported Monday.

China Central Television on Monday also released footage of Fujian deck operations and the launch and recoveries of the three aircraft.

The J-35 launch marks the first publicly announced use of an electromagnetic aircraft launch system, or EMALS, with a fifth-generation fighter on an aircraft carrier, said Sam Roggeveen, director of the International Security Program at the Australian think tank Lowy Institute.

The J-35 is China’s response to the American F-35 Lightning II stealth fighter.

“Clearly, China has won the race in terms of getting a fifth-generation [stealth fighter] to launch from an EMALS,” Roggeveen said Wednesday.

An F-35C test aircraft made an EMALS launch in 2011 from Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., but the Navy has not publicly disclosed a successful launch from the USS Gerald R. Ford, the only other carrier equipped with EMALS.

A spokesperson for the Department of the Chief of Naval Information did not immediately respond to a request for confirmation Tuesday.

The launch represents a “significant set of developments in the evolution of China’s navy,” said Lyle Goldstein, Asia program director for the Defense Priorities think tank in Washington, D.C.

Goldstein could not verify that China is the first to launch fifth-generation fighters by EMALS.

Hegseth cuts panel with focus on female troops

BY MATTHEW ADAMS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has decided to terminate the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, the Pentagon announced Tuesday.

“The committee is focused on advancing a divisive feminist agenda that hurts combat readiness, while Secretary Hegseth has focused on advancing uniform, sex-neutral standards across the Department,” Pentagon spokeswoman Kingsley Wilson posted on X.

The Pentagon did not have more information to provide on the decision.

The committee, known as DACOWITS, was established in 1951 and is one of the oldest advisory committees in the Pentagon. It was created following the passage of the 1948 Women’s Armed Services Integration Act to advise on strategies to improve the recruitment of women into the U.S. military during the Korean War, according to its website.

Its recommendations have long driven change in the military, including its suggestions that resulted in the Pentagon’s 2015 decision to open all military jobs and units — including front-line combat posts — to female troops.

Hegseth in April posted on X he ended the Defense Department’s Women, Peace and Security Program. He called it “another woke ... Biden initiative,” though President Donald Trump signed it into law in 2017. The president’s daughter and former senior adviser, Ivanka, spearheaded the policy.

Hegseth later backtracked in a follow-up post saying the initiative was “straightforward and security-focused” in 2017 but “ruined” by former President Joe Biden.

Hegseth denied at the time he ever disparaged women and said his concern was with what he believes are slipping standards and gender quotas. He said he would conduct a review of the requirements for combat positions if confirmed.

GSA rehires hundreds laid off by DOGE

Associated Press

MIAMI—Hundreds of federal employees who lost their jobs in Elon Musk's cost-cutting blitz are being asked to return to work.

The General Services Administration has given the employees — who managed government workspaces — until the end of the week to accept or decline reinstatement, according to an internal memo obtained by The Associated Press. Those who accept must report for duty on Oct. 6 after what amounts to a seven-month paid vacation, during which time the GSA in some cases racked up high costs — passed along to taxpayers — to stay in dozens of properties whose leases it had slated for termination or were allowed to expire.

"Ultimately, the outcome was the agency was left broken and understaffed," said Chad Becker,

a former GSA real estate official. "They didn't have the people they needed to carry out basic functions."

Becker, who represents owners with government leases at Arco Real Estate Solutions, said GSA has been in a "triage mode" for months. He said the sudden reversal of the downsizing reflects how Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency had gone too far, too fast.

GSA was established in the 1940s to centralize the acquisition and management of thousands of federal workplaces. Its return to work request mirrors rehiring efforts at in several agencies targeted by DOGE. Last month, the IRS said it would allow some employees who took a resignation offer to remain on the job. The Labor Department has also brought back some employees who took

buyouts, while the National Park Service earlier reinstated a number of purged employees.

Critical to the work of such agencies is the GSA, which manages many of the buildings. Starting in March, thousands of GSA employees left the agency as part of programs that encouraged them to resign or take early retirement. Hundreds of others — those subject to the recall notice — were dismissed as part of an aggressive push to reduce the size of the federal workforce. Though those employees did not show up for work, some continue to get paid.

GSA representatives didn't respond to detailed questions about the return-to-work notice, which the agency issued Friday. They also declined to discuss the agency's headcount, staffing decisions or the potential cost overruns gen-

erated by reversing its plans to terminate leases.

"GSA's leadership team has reviewed workforce actions and is making adjustments in the best interest of the customer agencies we serve and the American taxpayers," an agency spokesman said in an email.

DOGE identified the agency, which had about 12,000 employees at the start of the Trump administration, as a chief target of its campaign to reduce fraud, waste and abuse in the federal government.

A small cohort of Musk's trusted aides embedded in GSA's headquarters and pursued plans to abruptly cancel nearly half of the 7,500 leases in the federal portfolio. DOGE also wanted GSA to sell hundreds of federally owned buildings with the goal of generating billions in savings.

Man convicted of trying to kill Trump on golf course

Associated Press

FORT PIERCE, Fla. — After a two-week trial, a jury took just two hours Tuesday to convict Ryan Routh of trying to assassinate Donald Trump on a Florida golf course last year, a plot that was undone when a Secret Service agent spotted Routh and fired a shot that sent him running.

Chaos ensued in the courtroom shortly after Routh was found guilty on all counts by a federal jury of seven women and five men. Routh, 59, tried to stab himself in the neck with a pen and officers quickly dragged him out.

As he was removed, Routh's daughter, Sara Routh, screamed: "Dad, I love you, don't do anything. I'll get you out. He didn't hurt anybody."

The pen Routh used was flexible, a design to prevent people in custody from using it as a weapon, according to a person familiar

with the matter who could not publicly disclose details and spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity. Routh did not puncture his skin or otherwise hurt himself, the person said.

After order was restored, Routh was brought before U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon. He was shackled and no longer in the jacket and tie he wore while representing himself at the trial.

Cannon announced Routh will be sentenced on Dec. 18.

Following the verdict, Trump told reporters in New York that the case was "really well-handled."

"It's very important. You can't let things like that happen. Nothing to do with me, but a president — or even a person, you can't allow that to happen," Trump said. "And so justice was served. But I very much appreciate the judge and jury and everybody on that."

Shooter dead after killing at least 2 at ICE facility

Associated Press

DALLAS — A shooter with a rifle opened fire from a nearby roof onto a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement location in Dallas on Wednesday, killing two detainees and wounding another before taking his own life, authorities said.

The exact motivation of the attack was not immediately known. The FBI said at a morning news conference that ammunition found at the scene contained anti-ICE messaging. The head of the agency, Kash Patel, released a photo on social media that shows a bullet containing the words "ANTI-ICE" written in what appears to be marker.

"The shooter fired indiscriminately at the ICE building, including at a van in the sallyport where the victims were shot," the Department of Homeland Security said in a release.

The detainee who survived

was in critical condition at a hospital, DHS said.

The FBI said during the news conference that it was investigating the shooting as "an act of targeted violence."

Edwin Cardona, an immigrant from Venezuela, said he was entering the ICE building with his son for an appointment at around 6:20 a.m. when he heard gunshots.

An agent gathered people who were inside the building, took them to a more secure area and explained that there was an active shooter in the area, Cardona said.

"I was afraid for my family because my family was outside. I felt terrible because I thought something could happen to them. Thank God no," Cardona said.

Cardona said his family was brought into the building, and they were later reunited.

Iran leader: US, Israel hits dealt 'blow' to peace

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — Addressing the world's leaders, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Wednesday blamed the United States and Israeli attacks for "dealing a grievous blow" to peace negotiations as Tehran braces for the reinstatement of sanctions in the next week, barring a last-minute diplomatic breakthrough. Hours before his speech, Iran's rial currency fell to a new all-time low.

Pezeshkian's remarks before the U.N. General Assembly are the first in a global forum since the 12-day Israel-Iran war over the summer that saw the assassination of many of the Islamic Republic's highest military and political leaders and broke down weeks of negotiations with the U.S.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you all bore witness that this past June, my country was subjected to a savage aggression and flagrant contravention of the most elementary principles of international law," said the presi-

dent, who within Iran's political landscape is considered a moderate politician.

Pezeshkian is in New York as Tehran seeks to engage in last-minute talks with European nations to stop the coming reimposition of U.N. sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program. But before even landing in the U.S., any diplomatic efforts planned by Pezeshkian and Iran's foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, were overshadowed when Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei rejected any direct nuclear talks with America in a speech on Tuesday.

"The U.S. has announced the results of the talks in advance," he said. "The result is the closure of nuclear activities and enrichment. This is not a negotiation. It is a diktat, an imposition."

France, Germany and the United Kingdom triggered the so-called "snapback mechanism" to reinstate sanctions — barring a last-minute accord — over Iran's failure to comply with conditions of a 2015 nucle-

ar deal aimed at preventing Tehran from developing nuclear weapons.

"Snapback" was designed to be veto-proof at the U.N. It started a 30-day window for the resumption of sanctions, which ends Sunday, unless the West and Iran reach a diplomatic agreement.

European nations have said that they would be willing to extend the deadline if Iran resumes direct negotiations with the U.S. over its nuclear program, allows U.N. nuclear inspectors access to its nuclear sites, and accounts for the more than 880 pounds of highly enriched uranium that the U.N. watchdog says it has. Iran is the only nation in the world that enriches uranium up to 60% without a weapons program.

But Pezeshkian used his U.N. speech to criticize the E3 for having operated in "bad faith" for years to dictate Iranian compliance with a deal that the U.S. abandoned in 2018. "They falsely presented themselves as parties of good standing to the

agreement, and they disparaged Iran's sincere efforts as insufficient," he said.

If no diplomatic deal is found this week, the sanctions will automatically "snapback" on Sunday. That would again freeze Iranian assets abroad, halt arms deals with Tehran and penalize any development of Iran's ballistic missile program, among other measures, further squeezing the country's reeling economy.

Earlier this month, the U.N. nuclear watchdog and Iran signed an agreement mediated by Egypt to pave the way for resuming cooperation, including on ways of relaunching inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities. However, that agreement has yet to fully take hold.

In July, Pezeshkian had signed a law adopted by his country's parliament suspending all cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency. That followed Israel's 12-day war with Iran in June, during which Israel and the U.S. bombed Iranian nuclear sites.

Zelenskyy says world in 'most destructive arms race in history'

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told world leaders Wednesday that the world is in "the most destructive arms race in history" and called on the international community to act against Russia now, asserting that Vladimir Putin wants to expand his war in Europe.

"We are now living through the most destructive arms race in history," Zelenskyy said at the U.N. General Assembly.

"Ukraine is only the first and now Russian drones are already flying across Europe,

and Russian operations are already spreading across countries, and Putin wants to continue this war by expanding it," he added.

Zelenskyy's comments to the meeting of world leaders came a day after he met with President Donald Trump, who expressed support for Ukraine's efforts and criticized Russia.

Trump said Tuesday that he believed Ukraine could win back all territory lost to Russia, a dramatic shift from the U.S. leader's repeated calls for Kyiv to make concessions to end the war.

Man arrested in UK over airport cyberattack

Associated Press

LONDON — A man in his 40s was arrested in southern England over an alleged cyberattack that disrupted several European airports in recent days, including at London Heathrow, law enforcement officials said Wednesday.

The U.K.'s National Crime Agency said the suspect was held in West Sussex on Tuesday on suspicion of offenses involving the misuse of computers and was released on bail.

"Although this arrest is a positive step, the investigation into this incident is in its early stages and remains ongoing," said Paul Foster, head of the NCA's national cybercrime unit. "Cy-

bercrime is a persistent global threat that continues to cause significant disruption to the U.K."

Starting late Friday and lasting through the weekend, airports in Berlin, Brussels and London were hit by disruptions to electronic systems that snarled up check-in and sent airline staffers trying options like handwriting boarding passes.

The cyberattack affected the software of Collins Aerospace, whose systems help passengers check in, print boarding passes and bag tags and dispatch luggage. The U.S.-based company on Saturday cited a "cyber-related disruption" to its software at "select" airports in Europe.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

State inspectors confirm roller coaster status OK

FL ORLANDO — State investigators looking into the death of a 32-year-old man after he rode on a Universal Orlando Resort roller coaster said Monday that their initial findings align with that of the theme park's leaders who say the ride was working correctly.

Investigators with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services monitored tests of the Stardust Racers roller coaster at Epic Universe last week and reviewed the results before reaching that preliminary conclusion, but the investigation is continuing, department spokesperson Aaron Keller said in an email.

Kevin Rodriguez Zavala was pronounced dead Wednesday at a hospital after riding the dual-launch coaster, which reaches speeds up to 62 mph. Zavala's longtime girlfriend, who was with him, told deputies that he had a preexisting spinal condition, used a wheelchair and was taking medication, according to a report from the Orange County Sheriff's Office.

Court reinstates Christian school in state league

VT HARTFORD — A federal appeals court says a Christian school in Vermont can participate in the state's sports league, overturning a previous ruling that upheld a ban on the school after it forfeited a high school girls basketball game against a team with a transgender athlete.

In a Sept. 9 ruling, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit granted Mid Vermont Christian School a preliminary

injunction to rejoin the Vermont Principals' Association — also known as the state's executive council that governs school sports — as the legal battle continues in court.

"We conclude that plaintiffs are likely to succeed in showing that the VPA's expulsion of Mid Vermont was not neutral because it displayed hostility toward the school's religious beliefs," the appeals court wrote in their decision.

In 2023, the Quechee-based private school forfeited a game because officials believed the opposing teams' transgender player jeopardized "the fairness of the game and the safety of our players."

More shrimp recalled for possible contamination

WA SEATTLE — A Seattle seafood distributor has recalled more cooked and frozen shrimp sold at Kroger grocery stores across the U.S. because of ongoing concerns about potential radioactive contamination.

Aquastar Corp. on Saturday recalled nearly 157,000 additional pounds of shrimp because of possible contamination with cesium 137, a radioactive isotope. The new recall includes nearly 50,000 bags of Kroger Raw Colossal EZ Peel Shrimp, about 18,000 bags of Kroger Mercado Cooked Medium Peeled Tail-Off Shrimp and more than 17,000 bags of AquaStar Peeled Tail-on Shrimp Skewers.

The products were sold between June 12 and Sept. 17 at grocery stores in more than 30 states. They include Bakers, City Market, Dillons, Food 4 Less, Foodsco, Fred Meyer,

Fry's, Gerbes, Jay C, King Soopers, Kroger, Mariano's, Metro Market, Pay Less Supermarkets, Pick 'n Save, Ralph's, Smith's and QFC.

The company previously recalled shrimp products in August.

Coach who did naked fat tests receives probation

RI PROVIDENCE — A Rhode Island judge on Monday sentenced a former high school basketball coach to a year of probation after he spent decades asking hundreds of male student-athletes if they were "shy or not shy" before asking them to get naked so he could check their body fat.

Earlier this year, a jury found Aaron Thomas not guilty of second-degree child molestation and second-degree sexual assault in a case that scrutinized the so-called naked fat tests conducted by the once-beloved coach at North Kingstown High School. Instead, Thomas was found guilty of a lesser charge, two counts of misdemeanor battery.

Superior Court Judge Melanie Wilk Thunburg handed down the sentence Monday.

Throughout the nearly six-week trial, defense attorneys for Thomas argued the tests were wrong but not a crime.

The defense said Thomas didn't touch the boy athletes for sexual gratification or arousal, a key requirement under the charges he faced.

Prosecutors maintained Thomas created and implemented a program that allowed him to have unfettered access to young naked boys for decades.

During his testimony, Thomas told the jury that he likely

saw more than 600 students throughout his career, with "roughly 80%" of them taking their underwear off during the test. The tests involved Thomas pinching various areas of their bodies, including near the groin and buttocks. The tests were conducted behind closed doors, first in a small closet-like room and then eventually in Thomas' office.

Court: Man aimed laser pointer at Marine One

DC WASHINGTON — A man accused of shining a laser pointer at Marine One with President Donald Trump aboard the helicopter has been arrested on a federal criminal charge, according to a court filing on Monday.

Jacob Samuel Winkler, 33, of Washington, D.C., is charged with aiming the beam of a laser pointer at an aircraft, a felony punishable by a maximum prison sentence of five years. Online court records don't list an attorney representing him.

Marine One was airborne on Saturday near the White House when a U.S. Secret Service patrol officer spotted Winkler walking on a sidewalk, shirtless and loudly talking to himself, the officer wrote in an affidavit. The officer said he shone a flashlight at Winkler, who apparently retaliated by flashing a red laser beam at the officer's face.

As Marine One flew over their heads, Winkler looked up and shined the laser pointer at the helicopter, according to the officer. After the officer handcuffed him, Winkler repeatedly talked about apologizing to Trump, the affidavit says.

— From wire reports

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Yanks in playoffs again; AL East up for grabs

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The Yankees are headed to the playoffs for the eighth time in nine seasons. But first, there's plenty to play for over the final days of the regular season.

New York secured its spot in the postseason with a 3-2, come-from-behind win over the Chicago White Sox on Tuesday night on José Caballero's RBI single with two out in the ninth inning that scored team captain Aaron Judge with the winning run.

While the win clinched at least an AL wild card, the Yankees (89-68) closed within a game of AL East-leading Toronto (90-67) after the Blue Jays lost 4-1 to Boston. New York and Toronto, which won the season series over the Yankees, have five regular-season games remaining with the division crown very much up for grabs.

"Our ultimate goal is to win our division," Judge said. "It's still right there for us. So we're excited about getting in, but we got bigger things ahead of us."

If New York can win the division, it can also secure the best record in the AL for the second straight season, giving it home-

field advantage through the AL Championship Series.

The Yankees clinched a postseason berth for the 26th time in 31 seasons. They have the most postseason appearances since the playoffs were expanded in 1995. New York, the Houston Astros and Los Angeles Dodgers are the only teams with eight playoffs appearances in the last nine seasons.

The only time the Yankees missed the playoffs since manager Aaron Boone succeeded Joe Girardi in 2018 was the 2023 season. New York finished with 82 wins and lost Judge for nearly two months after the slugger fractured his toe in a game at Dodger Stadium.

Boone became the third manager in Yankees history to make the playoffs in seven of his first eight seasons, joining Casey Stengel and Joe Torre. Torre reached the playoffs in every season from 1996 to 2007, and Stengel made the playoffs in nine of his first 10 seasons from 1949 to 1960.

"It just shows you keep playing," said third baseman Ryan McMahon, who was acquired from the Colorado Rockies on July 25. "You never know what's going to happen. We got

to take things on our end and hopefully it goes in our favor."

This playoff berth didn't come easily — on Tuesday or throughout the season.

In the ninth inning against Chicago, Anthony Volpe and Austin Wells opened with singles off Brandon Eisert (3-7). After Trent Grisham bounced into a double play, Judge drew his second intentional walk of the game. Cody Bellinger followed with a walk and Volpe scored on a wild pitch by Eisert. Caballero then punctuated a nine-pitch at-bat against Steven Wilson by looping a single that dropped in front of center fielder Brooks Baldwin as Judge scored the winning run.

"We're just doing our part and we're just going to keep playing game by game, and if they fall we're going to be right there with them," Caballero said of the division race.

Caballero was mobbed at first base by his teammates and doused with water by Paul Goldschmidt and Austin Wells as he conducted his postgame interview.

"A great moment for him and it's great for us to check that box and know we're going back to October baseball," Boone said.

Shortly after the infielder's first career walk-off hit, New York celebrated by spraying champagne and beer on each other as they sported T-shirts printed with "October baseball." The celebration lasted for about an hour, and Judge was doused during his postgame interview as teammates chanted "MVP, MVP!"

After the clubhouse celebration ended, the Yankees moved the festivities to the field and posed for a group picture in center field.

After winning their first AL pennant since 2009 last season, New York won 35 of its first 55 games and built a seven-game lead in the AL East. The Yankees went 25-34 through Aug. 5, lost six of seven in Toronto between June 30-July 23 and dropped out of first place July 3.

"It's been a challenging year, no question about it," Boone said

New York fell 6½ games behind the Blue Jays following a 12-1 loss to the Red Sox on Aug. 23. The Yankees started a seven-game winning streak the next night and are 20-8 in their last 28 games that included a 7-5 stretch against Houston, Toronto, Detroit and Boston.

Sources: Giants to start rookie QB Dart against Chargers

Associated Press

More than a few Giants fans at the Meadowlands chanted, "We want Dart!" after Russell Wilson threw an interception during a third consecutive loss to start the season Sunday night.

Now they are getting him.

New York is turning to rookie Jaxon Dart to start at quarterback in its next game Sunday against the Los Angeles Chargers, according to two people familiar with the decision. The people spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity Tuesday because the change had not been announced.

Dart replaces Wilson with the Giants off to an 0-3 start and the unbeaten Chargers coming to town. Wilson is expected to dress as

the backup with journeyman Jameis Winston remaining third on the depth chart.

Coach Brian Daboll was noncommittal Monday about who his QB would be after Wilson threw two interceptions in a 22-9 defeat to the Kansas City Chiefs on Sunday night. Daboll said he and his staff were "evaluating everything," declining to answer who else might be involved in making a change at football's most important position.

Dart is set to make his first NFL start after getting a handful of snaps the past two weeks. He has yet to attempt a pass, while Wilson has thrown all of them so far, going 65 of 110 for 778 yards, three touchdowns and three picks.

New York traded back into the first round to select Dart with the 25th pick and see the

Mississippi product as its quarterback of the future.

"We put him in the game for the last two weeks," Daboll said Monday when asked about Dart. "We wouldn't put anybody in a game we don't feel confident with."

Dart is in line to be the Giants' sixth different QB to start a game going back to 2022, joining Wilson, Daniel Jones, Tommy DeVito, Drew Lock, Tyrod Taylor and Davis Webb.

New York also signed kicker Younghoe Koo to its practice squad, giving it some insurance after Graham Gano injured a groin muscle during pregame warmups Sunday night. Gano sat out the first half before making a 25-yard field goal early in the fourth quarter.

Guardians now tied for AL Central lead

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — José Ramírez drove in a run with a swinging bunt when Cleveland rallied in a strange sixth inning against Detroit ace Tarik Skubal, and the Guardians beat the Tigers 5-2 on Tuesday night to move into a tie for first place in the AL Central.

Cleveland caught Detroit after being 15½ games back on July 8. The Guardians, who were still 12½ games behind the Tigers on Aug. 25, have won 11 of 12. They are 17-5 in September.

The Tigers have dropped seven straight and 10 of 11 as their giant lead has shrunk to zero.

Skubal (13-6), the reigning AL Cy Young Award winner, fell apart in the sixth, becoming visibly shaken when Cleveland's David Fry was struck in the face by his 99 mph fastball. He also had a throwing error, a wild pitch and a balk in the inning.

With two runners on, Fry squared to bunt and Skubal's pitch drilled the designated hitter in the nose and mouth area.

Fry was driven off the field on a cart. The Guardians said he was being assessed at Lutheran Medical Center.

Gavin Williams (12-5) matched a career high with 12 strikeouts in six innings for Cleveland, which can eclipse the 1978 New York Yankees, who overcame a 14-game deficit, for the largest comeback since divisional play began in 1969.

Mets 9, Cubs 7: Francisco Alvarez hit a tiebreaking two-run homer in the eighth inning, Francisco Lindor and Brandon Nimmo went deep and visiting New York rallied to beat Chicago.

Alvarez gave New York a 9-7 lead when he connected with two out against Caleb Thielbar (3-4) after Brett Baty led off with a single, and the Mets came away with the win after trailing 6-1. It was the Mets' largest comeback win this season. They moved a game ahead of Cincinnati for the third wild card with the Reds losing 4-2 to Pittsburgh.

The wild card-leading Cubs lost their fifth in a row after dropping all four games at Cincinnati.

Pirates 4, Reds 2: Oneil Cruz hit a two-run homer and last-place visiting Pittsburgh beat wild-card chasing Cincinnati.

The loss, along with the New York Mets' 9-7 win over the Chicago Cubs, dropped the Reds a full game behind the Mets in the race for the third NL wild card.

Braves 3, Nationals 2: Michael Harris II homered twice, Hurston Waldrep pitched six innings of one-run ball and host Atlanta beat Washington for its 10th straight victory.

Six of those wins have come against the last-place Nationals, including Atlanta's first four-game sweep (from Sept. 15-17) of the Washington/Montreal franchise. Despite the longest active win streak in the majors, the Braves have already been eliminated from playoff contention.

Red Sox 4, Blue Jays 1: Carlos Narváez hit a two-run double in the sixth inning, Nathaniel Lowe had two RBI singles and visiting Boston beat AL-leading Toronto.

The slumping Blue Jays had just three hits and lost for the fifth time in six games. Toronto began the day with a two-game lead over the Yankees in the AL East. New York closed to within a game after rallying to beat the White Sox 3-2.

Orioles 6, Rays 0: Dean Kremer pitched 6½ innings of one-hit ball and Baltimore began its final home series of the season with a home victory over Tampa Bay.

Kremer (11-10) struck out four and hit one batter but walked none in his 30th outing. In a game between clubs already eliminated from postseason contention, he continued his dominance of the Rays, improving his lifetime ERA to 1.64 and record to 5-1 across 11 starts against Tampa Bay.

Twins 4, Rangers 1: Zebby Matthews allowed his only run on a leadoff homer while pitching seven innings for Minnesota

in a road win over Texas, who lost its eighth game in a row and were eliminated from the playoff chase.

The Rangers were within two games of the AL West lead on Sept. 13 and in the thick of the wild-card chase after a 13-3 span with a pair of six-game winning streaks.

They haven't won since and dropped to 5½ games behind Houston for the American League's final playoff spot with five games left.

Marlins 6, Phillies 5 (11): Xavier Edwards drove in the winning run with an 11th-inning sacrifice fly, Heriberto Hernández and Griffin Conine homered during a late rally and Miami kept its playoff hopes alive with a road win over Philadelphia.

Hernández, who had three hits, homered with one out in the ninth inning off Philadelphia closer Jhoan Duran to force extras. Conine homered in the eighth inning off David Robertson to start the comeback in which Miami scored all of its runs from the eighth onward.

Padres 7, Brewers 0: Ryan O'Hearn's grand slam was one of visiting San Diego's three homers and Randy Vásquez and two relievers combined on a four-hitter as the Padres beat NL Central champion Milwaukee in what could be a playoff preview.

The loss by the Brewers (95-63) assures no 100-game winners in consecutive seasons for the first time since 2012-14.

The Brewers' magic number for clinching the best record in the majors and homefield advantage throughout the postseason is down to two over Philadelphia.

Mariners 4, Rockies 3: Josh Naylor hit a two-out, bases-clearing double in the eighth inning to send Seattle to the playoffs with a home victory over Colorado.

The Mariners won for the 15th time in 16 games to secure the team's second postseason appearance since 2001. They can

wrap up the AL West title as soon as Wednesday.

Diamondbacks 5, Dodgers 4: Geraldo Perdomo hit a two-out, game-winning single in the ninth inning and host Arizona recovered from an early four-run deficit to beat Los Angeles, keeping pace in the NL wild-card race.

The D-backs are one game behind the New York Mets for the final NL wild card, tied with the Cincinnati Reds.

The Dodgers are now just 1½ games ahead of the San Diego Padres for the NL West lead.

Athletics 5, Astros 1: Slumping Houston managed just three hits against Jeffrey Springs and three relievers in a loss to the host Athletics and fell out of playoff position.

Houston (84-73) has lost four straight. The Astros dropped four games behind AL West-leading Seattle and a game behind Detroit for the third and final American League wild-card spot.

Royals 8, Angels 4: Bobby Witt Jr. and Adam Frazier each drove in two runs, Salvador Perez moved into second place on Kansas City's career RBI list and the visiting Royals beat Los Angeles, shortly after being eliminated from postseason contention.

The Royals (79-78) reached the playoffs last season, their only postseason appearance in the past 10 years.

Perez singled to center in the first inning to score Witt. It was the 35-year-old catcher's 1,013th RBI of his career, moving him past Hal McRae. The Royals' all-time RBI leader is George Brett with 1,596.

Cardinals 9, Giants 8: Alec Burleson hit a go-ahead RBI single with one out in the ninth inning as St. Louis rallied against San Francisco closer Ryan Walker for a road win.

Both teams were fighting to keep their slim playoff hopes alive, but San Francisco was eliminated.

Oklahoma State fires football coach Gundy

Associated Press

The Mike Gundy era is over.

Gundy, one of college football's most colorful coaches over the past two decades, was fired by Oklahoma State on Tuesday.

The 58-year-old Gundy had a career record of 170-90 at his alma mater, where he was a star quarterback in the late 1980s. He posted winning records every season from 2006 to 2023, but had losing records in his final two years. He entered the season ranked third among active coaches in victories at their current school, trailing only Iowa's Kirk Ferentz and Clemson's Dabo Swinney.

In all, Gundy spent well over 30 years with the Cowboys as a player, assistant coach and head coach. As a player, he was the undersized gunslinger who balanced Oklahoma State's offense when it featured star running backs Thurman Thomas and Barry Sanders. He ended his career as the Big 8's all-time leading passer, then had several assistant coaching roles at the school before reviving the program as head coach.

"Cowboy Football reached an unprecedented level of success and national prominence under Coach Gundy's leadership," Oklahoma State athletic director Chad Weiberg said in a state-

ment. "I believe I speak for OSU fans everywhere when I say that we are grateful for all he did to raise the standard and show us all what is possible for Oklahoma State football."

Gundy arrived as head coach in 2005, and the Oklahoma City native's charm and sense of humor appealed to fans and recruits and helped the Cowboys compete with and often surpass better-funded schools. As late billionaire T. Boone Pickens poured millions into the program, Gundy turned Oklahoma State into an unlikely powerhouse that often affected the national championship race. The Cowboys won the Big 12 in 2011 and played in the Big 12 title game in 2021 and 2023. He led them to five New Year's Six bowl appearances and eight 10-win seasons.

Gundy was capable of capturing the nation's interest at any time, whether it be with a quip or one-liner, or with his ability to break down complex issues. In his final two seasons, he emerged as an open and honest voice about the changes in the sport. During camp before the 2024 season, he'd had enough of talking about money.

"I told the players there's no negotiating now," Gundy said. "Portal's over. All negotiation's history. Now we're playing football.

Just coaching and playing football.

"The business side of what we do now is, we have to have those conversations with them," he said. "Tell your agent to quit calling us and asking for more money. It's non-negotiable now. Start again in December."

Gundy's personality wasn't enough as college football changed. The transfer portal and NIL made it more difficult for a coach who made his name mining diamonds in the rough. He lost 11 of his final 12 games with the program.

On Monday, Gundy said he wanted to stay.

"Ever since I was hired, I've put my heart and soul into this, and I'll continue to do that until I don't want to do it anymore, or until someone else says we don't want you to do it," he said.

For all his positives, Gundy came with quirks. He is known as much for his "I'm a man, I'm 40" rant that he made defending a player—a diatribe that remains a part of pop culture through a Consumer Cellular commercial—as for his success.

In 2020, he apologized for calling COVID-19 the "Chinese Virus," and again months later after he wore a T-shirt featuring the far-right One America News Network that created a disagreement

with running back Chuba Hubbard.

All those things were forgiven as the team won. But Oklahoma State lost its last nine games last season, the final defeat a 52-0 blowout at Colorado.

This season, the Cowboys struggled out of the gate against FCS program Tennessee-Martin, winning 27-7 but raising eyebrows with its struggles after quarterback Hauss Hejny went down with a broken foot in the first quarter.

The next week, they lost at Oregon 69-3. Ducks coach Dan Lanning said Gundy got his team fired up by talking about how much money Oregon had at its disposal.

After a bye week, Oklahoma State lost at home to Tulsa last Friday for the first time since 1951. The fans booed him during the loss, with some chanting "Fire Mike Gundy."

Doug Meacham, one of several coaches Gundy brought in after last season, has been promoted from offensive coordinator to interim head coach. His first game in that new role will be Saturday when Oklahoma State hosts Baylor.

Meacham, 60, will be in charge for the first time. He played offensive line for Oklahoma State from 1983 to 1987 and was an assistant at the school from 2005 to 2012.

Mercury erase 20-point deficit to beat Lynx in OT, tie semis

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Satou Sabally scored 11 of her 24 points in the fourth quarter and Alyssa Thomas had 19 points and 13 assists to help the Phoenix Mercury erase a 20-point deficit and beat the Minnesota Lynx 89-83 in overtime Tuesday night, tying the WNBA semifinal series at one game apiece.

Sami Whitcomb's 3-pointer from the wing with four seconds left in regulation evened the game at 79 after Thomas kept alive the possession following Whitcomb's airballed 3 from the top of the key, and Napheesa Collier's 18-footer for the win fell short at the buzzer to force extra time.

Thomas, who had a triple-double in the decisive Game 3 victory in the first round that

ousted defending champion New York, grabbed eight rebounds and ignited the rally with her intensity after a lackluster first half. Her three-point play with 3:32 left in the fourth quarter ended a stretch of 33:28 during which the top-seeded Lynx had the lead.

Collier scored 24 points on her 29th birthday, Kayla McBride had 21 points and Courtney Williams added 20 points, nine assists, seven rebounds and three steals for the Lynx, whose bench was outscored 25-3.

The Mercury, who played their fourth game in seven days, will host Game 3 of the best-of-five series Friday night.

Aces 90, Fever 68: A'ja Wilson bounced back from a rare off game with 25 points and nine rebounds, and host Las Vegas evened its

series with a convincing victory over Indiana.

The best-of-five series heads to Indianapolis, where Game 3 will be played Friday night.

Wilson made 10 of 18 shots to go with playoff career-high five steals, two nights after the four-time MVP made just 6 of 22 field goals. NaLyssa Smith added 18 points on 7-for-9 shooting and Jackie Young scored 13, and Jewell Loyd and Dana Evans each had 10 points. Chelsea Gray finished with 10 assists.

Odyssey Sims led the Fever with 18 points and Lexie Hull, who was questionable with a back injury and wore a brace while on the bench, scored 15. Kelsey Mitchell had 13 points and Aliyah Boston added 10.